

Culture, Race and the Global Imaginary in Canadian Defence Policy: A Case Study of Roméo Dallaire's "Shake Hands with the Devil. The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda"

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As a humanities scholar of English Literature, I am generally concerned with the critical analysis of literary and non-literary texts as a way of examining the cultural, social, and individual contexts through which people imagine and build their life worlds. In fact, literature and other forms of cultural production constitute a vital part of what some scholars call a national imaginary. The latter term refers to the dominant and culturally homogenizing narratives through which a nation imagines itself and presents itself to others. Throughout the history of colonialism, imperialism, and nation formation in a multicultural age, the making of a national imaginary has been a highly racialized and contested process. Thus, I asked myself how do nations such as Canada translate their perceived national imaginary as a peacekeeping "middle power" into a global imaginary? If one aspect of culture consists in the making of identities through particular politics of representation, then it seems paramount to question how we may understand the underlying ideological narratives of globalization and the ways in which they represent and shape Canada's global imaginary. For example, is a global imaginary immune to the politics of race? To what extent, for whom, and at whose expense does the cultural construction of Canada's global imaginary enhance or impede the country's political autonomy?

To engage with these questions, I find it instructive to examine General Roméo Dallaire's bestselling and critically acclaimed memoir *Shake Hands with the Devil* and to juxtapose it to *Canada's International Policy Statement: A Role of Pride and Influence in the World*. Jointly written with Brent Beardsley, Dallaire's book traces the United Nation's failure to intervene into the mass killings of 800,000 Rwandan Tutsis and moderate Hutus in 1994, and thus to avert what was a preventable genocide. Yet, Dallaire's memoir of personal trauma and collective failure remains a controversial narrative that seeks to salvage global humanitarianism as a guiding political ideal and practice for the twenty-first century while repressing the imperial psychology that underlies the desire for a new humanitarianism. My reading of Dallaire's memoir therefore asks how the book charts a political process of working through Canada's perception of itself as an autonomous nation standing outside imperial history, totalitarianism, and racist practices of governing, in both its national and global manifestations. Furthermore, I argue that Dallaire's plea for a global humanitarianism resonates with the articulation of so-called failed or rogue states put forth in *Canada's International Policy Statement* and the subsequent need to step up the nation's security politics and promote Canada's international "responsibility to protect" in the name of global development and relative national autonomy.

Shake Hands with the Devil presents itself as a "*cri de coeur*," that is, as a narrative of affect and compassion, and calls for a global "century of humanity." While the *cri de coeur* commemorates the African victims of the genocide, it is also addressed to those, as Dallaire writes, who were condemned to watch "as the devil took control of paradise on earth and fed on the blood of the people we were supposed to protect." Thus, the failure of the mission consisted primarily in the inability to

protect those who ostensibly can not protect themselves and to carry the "white man's burden." As a corollary, peacekeepers turn from protectors into traumatized victims. Here, the rhetoric of protection uncannily and unwittingly echoes earlier legitimizing narratives of imperial conquest. But more importantly, the *cri de coeur* invests in a discourse of pain and empathy through which Canadians come to understand and define their national identity. Indeed, it is the very capacity for compassion, sensitivity, and vulnerability that lies at the heart of the Canadian identity. Here, vulnerability becomes an affect that seeks to distinguish Canada's aptitude for compassion from those who are deemed less refined and, therefore, capable of such emotions. Yet, politicized notions of vulnerability and compassion constitute racialized concepts of identity designed to legitimize and even necessitate global humanitarian intervention while safeguarding Canada's national identity. Dallaire's reading of global conflict and Canada's ethics of peacekeeping privilege a politics of affect over a political and historical critique of Rwanda's genocide, its colonial and national origins, and Canada's complicity with the racialized history of modernity.

Dallaire's *cri de coeur* employs a binary rhetoric of good and evil, right and wrong. Such a discourse is dangerous not only because it moralizes — rather than carefully investigates and contextualizes — the question of the human and humanity, but it also partakes in the imperial logic through which the West abuses Africa as a symbolic and physical space of pathological deviance, incommensurability, innate violence, and moral wilderness. Moreover, if Dallaire's belief in "doing good" by way of peacekeeping failed in the face of his encounter with "evil," it is nevertheless his narrative of the Rwandan genocide that allows him to reconstitute himself as a global humanist and protector of the weak. Thus, Africa enables the West to reinvent itself in the age of globalization. Dallaire's rhetoric of good and evil also produces a sense of fear that underlies his call for a "century of humanity." What he fears most is retribution brought about by the "rage" of failed nation-states and the dispossessed masses of the Global South. Thus he foregrounds the need to restructure the UN, pronounce a stronger commitment to human rights and security, and develop new forms of conflict resolution and leadership. In particular, Dallaire calls for the training of "multidisciplinary, multi-skilled and humanist senior [military] leaders." Dallaire's account, then, denies rational political agency and relative autonomy to economically ravaged African countries and, instead, urges increased global security, the protection of those who can not protect themselves, and the implication of a universal human rights discourse. The normative and altruistic thinking of Dallaire's vision of humanity consists in its blindness towards the ways in which race inflects and shapes any evocation of humanity.

Echoing Dallaire's fears of Third World rage and global disorder, Paul Martin's "Foreword" to *Canada's International Policy Statement* (2005) invokes the chaotic, uncontrollable, and emasculating operations of globalization through which "independent countries like Canada risk being swept aside, their influence diminished, their ability to compete hampered." Improving prosperity and security at home not only means considering North America as an active theatre of war and stepping up one's relations with the United States, but also preventing global conflict "and improving human welfare around the world." After all, there is, he states, "no contradiction between Canada doing well and Canada doing good." Martin legitimizes his stepped-up security and military spending (\$13 billion increase of Canada's defense budget) by invoking Canada's national myths of compassion and peacekeeping — that is, Canadian exceptionalism. Once again, Canada is asked to take up the white man's burden — now called global responsibilities: "The people of our country have long understood that, as a proud citizen of the world, Canada has global responsibilities. We can't solve every problem, but we will do what we can to protect others, to raise them up, to make them safe." The rhetoric of "us and them" as well as the emphasis on Canada's global mission to "raise" and protect those who cannot protect themselves clearly point to the racialized and neo-imperial undercurrents of the policy document. Similarly, the document's three-part strategy of global peace-building — the

three "Ds" of defense, diplomacy, and development that uncannily mirror the three Cs of colonialism, namely, civilizing, Christianizing, and commerce — engages in a racialized politics of protection that may easily shift into a politics of containment and policing.

In light of Dallaire's text and *Canada's International Policy Statement*, we may suggest, then, that global security politics, tabled, as they are, in the Global North, are governed by what I call the desire for racial autonomy. The latter term suggests that globalization is a deeply racialized process. In the Canadian context, it refers to the normalization of race as an affective and moral discourse that tends to disavow Canada's imperial and racist modernity in favour of a national narrative of civility and compassionate peacekeeping that endows the country with relative political autonomy on the global stage. The desire for racial autonomy obscures the imperial legacies that underpin the politics of protection and compassion. Reading Dallaire's text alongside *Canada's International Policy Statement* makes legible the conversion of populist and government texts into a de-racialized global Canadian imaginary. Such an imaginary evolves out of a seemingly historical vacuum and an imperial psychology that embraces sites of dissent to reinvigorate a dominant narrative of the Canadian nation-state in the name of global humanitarianism. It is an imaginary that represses the ways in which the new global order is, in fact, an older moral order of racialized hierarchies that harnesses various discourses of fear and Otherness to a politics of compassion and protection.