



Roméo Dallaire in *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*.

# LISTEN TV

By Lindsay Gibb

ONE of THE most HAUNTING moments in Peter Raymont's latest film *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey of Roméo Dallaire* is in an old church in Rwanda that now holds the skulls of hundreds of people who were brutally murdered during the 1994 genocide. Some skulls were missing chunks as a result of the cruel force used in their deaths, while others were the smaller skulls of children. Throughout his long career as a socially committed documentarian—Raymont estimates he has completed over 100 films—he has found himself in many disturbing locations. Of all the places he has visited, the trip to Rwanda with Roméo Dallaire was the hardest.

When Raymont returned from his trek to Africa for the film *Rwanda: In Search of Hope* (1999), he knew there was more to be told and that Lieutenant General Dallaire—the man who was sent by the UN to head a peacekeeping mission in Rwanda before the genocide—was the key to that story. Unfortunately, at that time, Dallaire was in no shape to be the subject of a film. Upon his arrival home after witnessing the massacre, Dallaire suffered from post-traumatic stress syndrome as a result of the horrors he saw and the guilt he felt over

the deaths of over 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus. It wasn't until 10 years after the fact that Dallaire completed a book about his experiences, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, which Salter Street Films purchased the rights for a documentary and a television feature. Michael Donovan of Salter Street chose Raymont to direct the documentary. His years of making films for his own production companies, Investigative Productions and White Pine Pictures, have taken Raymont to Nicaragua during the Contra war (the resulting film was the Genie-winning *The World Is Watching* [1988]), to some of the most remote parts of the Arctic and to Rwanda five years after the genocide. After completing one film he usually moves right on to the next, but this time it was different. "When I came back I was quite shaken up," says Raymont. "I was going to go almost immediately to India to make a film about Bhopal, but I couldn't go. We weren't seeing dead bodies or seeing horror in any way, but we were kind of reliving the experience through our close association with Dallaire."

The film follows Dallaire during his return to Rwanda on the 10th anniversary of the genocide. While the Lieutenant General's goal is to let the world know what happened and to make sure it never happens again, both his book and this film tell his story rather than focusing directly on the victims. Raymont says the reason for this is twofold. "The way to get through to people, especially Canadians, is through him and his experience," says Raymont. "He is our window into that horror." The other reason is that documentaries that focus on people are more interesting than those that rely on events, something Raymont is only just beginning to realize. "The other day I was reading something that John Kerry said. He said, 'I thought it [the election] was all about issues, but it's not. It's all about people,'" says Raymont. "Sounds like a simple thing to say but it's actually very profound. Life is not about issues; it's about people and human relationships. That's taken me awhile to figure out."

Documentary characters are more dramatic than those found in Hollywood movies. At least this is Raymont's belief. He also believes in John Grierson's definition of documentaries as being "the creative treatment of actuality." Given his interest in making serious films rather than frivolous ones that offer nothing more than entertainment value, it's Raymont's goal to find the drama in life. "The human condition fascinates me," he says. "It's a lifelong fascination. What makes people tick? What makes a 14-year-old kid in a little village in Rwanda pick up a machete and hack his mother to death. Just how can you possibly understand that?" Continuing his legacy of producing and directing films on intense subjects such as the Rwandan genocide, Raymont strives to make us understand.