Gazing at the Beast: Describing Mass Murder in Deepa Mehta’s *Earth* and Terry George’s *Hotel Rwanda*

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Deepa Mehta’s *Earth* (1998) deals with the 1947 partition of India, and Terry George’s *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) concerns the Rwandan genocide of 1994. *Earth* depicts violence through two sets of looks that are exchanged between the main characters and us. *Hotel Rwanda* depicts it through three motifs that utilize dark visuals, white spaces, and repeated images. In *Earth*, the first set of looks are those of horror and despair in the gang violence scene; in *Hotel Rwanda*, the first motif is that of witnessing, as seen in the mass grave sequence. In *Earth*, the second set of looks involves fear and betrayal in the scene in which Ayah is dragged off to be gang raped and brutalized; in *Hotel Rwanda* the second motif is the betrayal pictured in the foreigners’ evacuation sequence. The third motif in *Hotel Rwanda* is compassion, as revealed in the bribing sequence. Overall, *Earth* is less successful in educating about violence and more successful in generating voyeuristic pleasure, whereas *Hotel Rwanda* avoids overt voyeurism, relies on the audiences’ powers of imagination, and conveys how individuals and groups can respond to genocide.

This article examines the depiction of mass violence and genocide in two feature films and analyzes how they suggest connections between past and future atrocities. Deepa Mehta’s *Earth*,¹ based on Pakistani novelist Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* (1992),² deals with the 1947 partition of India. *Earth* is an independent feature film by a Canadian-Indian filmmaker that was controversial in Bollywood circles, where some criticized its depiction of that bloody chapter in Indian history. The Hindu victim in the story, Ayah, is presented very sympathetically; yet her trauma is presented in a way that distances us

¹*Earth*, directed by Deepa Mehta (India: 1998).  
²Bapsi Sidhwa, *Cracking India* (Minneapolis, Milkweed, 1992).
from her. The perpetrator in the film, the Muslim Ice-candy-man, becomes an objectified curiosity, rendering Ayah an object of compassion without proper agency. By contrast, Terry George’s *Hotel Rwanda* deals with a more recent trauma, the Rwandan genocide of 1994. It focuses on the inability of Western bystanders to intervene on behalf of the victims. Directed by an Irish filmmaker and cast primarily with Anglo-Americans, *Hotel Rwanda* targeted Western audiences and not Rwandans. It generated a nasty debate within Rwanda regarding the heroism of its main character, Paul Rusesabagina, who rescued many Tutsis and Hutus caught up in the conflict. Despite its drawbacks, however, the film succeeds in connecting its intended audience with the Rwandan victims of the genocide.

In *Earth* the deterioration in inter-religious friendship among the characters in pre- and post-partitioned India, and the consequences of unleashing the “beast” of mass violence, is told through two sets of looks exchanged between the main characters and the audience. By contrast, *Hotel Rwanda* depicts the violence of the 1994 genocide through three motifs that utilize dark visuals, white spaces, and repeated images. In *Earth*, the first set of looks are those of horror and despair as exchanged between Lenny, Ayah, and Ice-candy-man as they watch the gang violence in the streets just before the partition. In *Hotel Rwanda*, the first motif is that of witnessing, as seen in the mass grave sequence when Paul and Grégoire accidentally find thousands of corpses in the street. In *Earth*, the second set of looks involves fear and betrayal in an exchange between Lenny and Ice-candy-man in the scene in which they betray Ayah and send her off to be gang raped and brutalized. The second motif in *Hotel Rwanda* is betrayal, as depicted in the foreigners’ evacuation sequence, when Paul finds out that only white foreigners will be rescued from the carnage. The third motif in *Hotel Rwanda* is compassion, as revealed in the bribing sequence, when Paul bribes the militia to save the lives of his family and friends.

The two looks in *Earth* represent some of the complexities of the mass violence of the partition; however, *Earth* is less successful at educating us about the material conditions of the survivors and more successful in generating voyeuristic pleasure for the audience watching the impact the violence has on individuals. This is mainly because the film tends to focus rather obsessively on the abused body of Ayah, rendering the viewing experience erotic and voyeuristic. Thus, Ayah becomes the literal embodiment of what Ambreen Hai

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1 *Hotel Rwanda*, directed by Terry George (South Africa, U.K., Italy: 2004).
calls the "story otherwise too traumatic to be told," namely, mass murder, gang rape, and prostitution. By contrast, the three motifs in *Hotel Rwanda* avoid overt voyeurism and rely more on the audiences' powers of imagination to "work through" the trauma. George uses one man's moral dilemmas to stand in for the violence and trauma. This establishes a network of looks that call on us to "work through" the violence.5

*Earth* is a love story gone sour in 1940s Lahore (present-day Pakistan), in which Ayah, the protagonist Lenny's beautiful nanny and constant companion, is used and abused by the men around her, especially Ice-candy-man, even as she shares a loving relationship with Lenny herself. The Hindu Ayah's two Muslim suitors, Ice-candy-man and Masseur, are set up as contrasts, the former being at first carefree and funny but letting the beast within him surface when the violence and destruction starts later in the film; the latter being gentle and understanding and eventually killed for his efforts to help those in need of protection. Ayah's choice of Masseur as her man and the handing over of power by the British occur simultaneously, just as vicious religious violence breaks out in Lahore, traumatizing Lenny. Finally, Lenny plunges into despair when Ice-candy-man tricks her into telling him where Ayah is hiding and drags her off in triumph as the film ends.

*Hotel Rwanda* is the story of one man, hotel manager Paul Rusesabagina, in 1990s Kigali, and his heroic efforts to save the lives of his family, friends, and acquaintances from the Rwandan genocide unfolding all around him. At first disinterested in politics and careful to maintain good relations with important

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5 In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), historian Dominick LaCapra defines “working through” trauma as an “articulatory practice,” or one in which “one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one (or one’s people) back then while realizing that one is living here and now. . . . [This includes] mourning and modes of critical thought and practice” (p. 22). LaCapra points out, on page 42, that in the process of working through, one tries to represent the trauma in a way that doesn’t ever transcend it but can counteract the compulsion to re-enact it. Working through also involves “empathy” or, as LaCapra argues on page 40, the attempt to “recapture,” in a “limited way,” the “possibly split-off, affective dimension of the experience of others.” Such empathy can “counteract” victimization or “numbing” to become a sort of “virtual, not vicarious, experience related to what Kaja Silverman has termed heteropathic identification, in which emotional response comes with respect for the other and the realization that the experience of the other is not one’s own” (p. 40).
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businessmen and officials, he is drawn into the violence when an armed militia demands that he hand over all the Tutsis in his hotel. As his hotel fills up with fleeing Rwandans and foreigners, he devises many different ways to keep them alive. When UN personnel evacuate most of the foreigners, Paul remains to care for the Rwandans and find a way to help most of them make it out alive.

Mehta grew up in Lahore, Pakistan and personally related to the film’s events. She claimed she made the movie partly because she wanted to destroy exotic stereotypes about India and partly because she wanted to ask “dark political questions about the partition that the British establishment has not wanted brought to light” including the tendency to “romanticise Gandhi and Lord Mountbatten.” Accordingly, the violence of the 1947 partition of India into India and Pakistan is depicted in a personalized way, as events in the background of the lives of the main characters, who at first look on in disbelief and then are slowly drawn in. That violence itself had no parallels in Indian history. Indeed, G. D. Khosla claims that “history has not known a fratricidal war of such dimensions in which human hatred and bestial passions were degraded” to such levels. One of the reasons it was such an unprecedented tragedy was the number of people who died in six months: anywhere from 200,000 (at a conservative estimate) to 250,000. As Ian Talbot indicates, two states in particular were divided up: Punjab (where the city of Lahore is located) and Bengal. In both states, 12 million people became homeless refugees, and some of these refugees remained in camps for years. In Punjab, 11 million people fled their homes, leading to great losses, especially for Sikh culture and religion. In general, as Ishtiaq Ahmed has shown, the only groups benefitting from the partition were the criminal elements among the Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh populations because they exploited the breakdown of social structures to enrich themselves.

A subjective view of how those social structures broke down is shown in one scene of Earth, in which Ayah (played by Bollywood starlet Nandita Das), Lenny (played by Maia Sethna), Ice-candy-man (played by then Bollywood

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The interview, entitled “An Interview with Deepa Mehta, director of Earth,” was conducted by Richard Phillips in World Socialist Website, 6 August 1999.

7G. D. Khosla, Stern Reckoning (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1951, 1989), p. 3.


superstar Aamer Khan) and Masseur (played by Rahul Khanna) appear on a roof-top in a working-class part of Lahore watching the violence below.\textsuperscript{10} Lenny watches from Ice-candy-man’s lap, while Ayah and Masseur look on. High angle shots reveal what they are watching on the streets far below. At first the camera picks out flaming torches carried aloft, and then pans down to reveal angry gangs of young men with machetes and torches, running wildly down the streets. The angle of vision makes the gangs resemble a misshapen, unruly beast, and this impression is sustained with medium shots of conflagrations and loud explosions emanating from buildings going up in flames. Then the camera focuses on a gang that has managed to capture one enemy and is now engaged in torturing him. The camera reveals the man being dragged to the center of the circle as his wide eyes and mouth scream and plead for mercy. When a police jeep appears, the gang ties one hand and one leg of the man to it, while his other leg and hand are tied to a different vehicle. As both vehicles pull in opposite directions, the shot closes up on the man’s agonized, screaming face with spurts of blood flowing upon it.

At this point the camera reverses to the roof-top, with Ayah and Lenny turning away in horror, while Ice-candy-man looks on in fascination. The camera follows his angle of vision and reveals buildings bursting into flames, and a fire truck appearing. Ice-candy-man’s face turns incredulous as he watches the fire fighters train their hoses on the building. Later, as they pull away from the building and bursts of fire engulf it, his face appears exhilarated as he tells Ayah: “They’ve sprayed the building with petrol instead of water. Great! The fire-fighters must be Muslim!” In a series of medium shot-reverse shot sequences, Ayah’s shocked and horrified face is juxtaposed with Ice-candy-man’s excited one, both of which alternate with long shots of people on the street.

\textsuperscript{10}In Lahore, during the partition, the violence was quite widespread. Lahore was called West Punjab at that time. As Mohammad Waseem has indicated (in “Partition, Migration and Assimilation: A Comparative Study of Pakistani Punjab,” in Talbot and Singh, Region and Partition, pp. 203–227), 73\% of the refugees from India (or 5.3 million refugees in total) ended up in Lahore, and ultimately constituted 25.6\% of Pakistani Punjab’s population. According to Richard McGill Murphy (in “Performing Partition in Lahore,” in Suvir Kaul ed., The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India [Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001], pp. 183–207), nearly all the city’s Hindu and Sikh population left for India, replaced by Muslim families from east Punjab, Delhi, the United Provinces, and other areas, and this fact, according to Waseem, ultimately made 43\% of the population of Lahore a migrant/refugee population (p. 217). This influx of refugees was accompanied by a hitherto unparalleled degree of organized violence, including acts of vandalism (attacking trains carrying refugees) and mass murder. These attacks were carried out with military precision.
below, engulfed in flames, screaming, and running out of the buildings as they
burn fiercely. As Masseur runs off to help, the camera moves in medium close-
up to Ice-candy-man's face as he finally turns his eyes away from the street
below. It follows him as he settles himself next to the trembling Ayah and
Lenny and as he tells Ayah, "This is not only about Hindus and Muslims. It's
about what's inside of us. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs—we are all bastards, all
animals. . . . Marry me. If you are with me, then the animal that's within me
will be controlled." The scene ends as Ayah shakes her head slowly and sadly
and Ice-candy-man's face becomes sorrowful.

The significance of this scene of violence cannot be understated. It depicts
the violence in terms of the "animal within" Ice-candy-man who, after he has
been rejected by Ayah here then goes on (in later scenes) to witness the bru-
tal killing of several of his family members. While these experiences slowly
make him vicious and ruthless, he is perpetually haunted by Ayah's beauti-
ful body. Her rejection of him, therefore, fuels his cruelty in later scenes. An
example of this is revealed in a later scene that lasts for about eight minutes.
The scene opens with a shot of Masseur and Ayah embracing in Ayah's dimly
lit room. There is a weak spotlight behind Ayah's back, which is turned to-
w ard the camera. Masseur faces the camera, looking directly at her. They kiss
each other passionately and a man's voice is heard singing in the background.
Slowly, Masseur begins to undress Ayah and then pushes her gently on to
the bed. The spotlight now "looks" directly at her breasts, partially uncovered,
heaving with emotion, just as Masseur lowers his own body on hers. The cam-
era watches as Masseur slowly undresses himself and then finishes undressing
her, with slow pans up and down their bodies. The overall impression is that
the camera is slowly caressing their bodies as they make love.

Suddenly, the camera shifts its attention to a small window which looks
down on the lovers in the bed. After a few seconds of looking at the empty
window framing the scene, Lenny's face appears with a troubled look in her
eyes, in medium close-up. Her expression suggests that the sight of the lovers
is upsetting to her. Just as suddenly as the camera focused on her face, it now
moves to another empty window in another part of the room which forms a
frame around the tense face of Ice-candy-man, also in medium close up, look-
ing down at the lovers. His face and eyes reflect bitterness and impotent rage.
Abruptly, his face leaves the window, and the camera follows him outside the
building where he shakily lights a cigarette. A close up of his face reveals a
range of conflicting emotions: anger, sadness, rage, and resignation. He wipes
away a few tears as the camera slowly settles on his face. He looks back at the
bedroom a few times before finally putting his hat on and stalking out.
Almost immediately, the camera moves back to the lovers inside, who have now finished making love and are getting dressed. In a series of close up shot-reverse shot sequences, we see them discussing marriage and the prospect of settling in Amritsar, India. Masseur even offers to become a Hindu to make her happy. When he ends asking whether she will marry him, she answers ecstatically, “yes” while light romantic music is heard in the background. Finally, the scene concludes with Lenny walking sadly away from the window. This scene, with its spotlights on Ayah’s back and breasts, its slow pans up and down Ayah’s and Masseur’s bodies, and its frames created by Lenny’s and Ice-candy-man’s voyeuristic gazes from nearby windows, encourages us to view Ayah as a sex object rather than a person, anticipating her subsequent transformation into a helpless victim of the beast.

Beasts that wreak havoc on victims are somewhat absent in Hotel Rwanda. Terry George’s screenwriter, Keir Pearson, spent a year writing the first draft of the script. During that process, he called the Rwandan embassy in Washington, DC. The woman who picked up the phone was a survivor who stayed at the Milles Collines Hotel in Kigali, during the genocide. George himself did extensive research on the genocide and went to Rwanda several times, sometimes accompanied by the real Paul and Tatiana Rusesabagina. In an article, George claimed that he believed he had “found a story that showed that even in the midst of such horror [as the genocide] the human capacity for good can triumph.” Some reviewers have even gone so far as to compare the movie to Schindler’s List, and indeed there are similarities between the two films. Both have as protagonists heroic businessmen who use bribery and flattery to save others’ lives (where a different man might have used a gun), and both have upbeat messages in the face of unbelievable tragedy. Ultimately, however, the two movies are very unlike each other. As Ty Burr indicates, Schindler’s List was artistically and stylistically much more sophisticated than Hotel Rwanda, and Hotel Rwanda is not the story of one great man. Moreover, Hotel Rwanda generated a controversy in ways that Schindler’s List did not. The then

15Burr, “Cheadle brings quiet power to Rwanda.”
President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, disliked *Hotel Rwanda* for being an inaccurate depiction of the conflict. During the genocide, Kagame was the leader of the RPF forces that eventually brought the bloodshed to an end. While deeming the film “useful in bringing up the plight of Rwanda” to the attention of the world community, he disputed “the claim that Paul Rusesabagina having saved so many [became] . . . like a hero. Paul Rusesabagina did not save people. He had no means to do it, and he did not do it.” Kagame went on to claim that a trade-off was negotiated by which his [Kagame’s] forces allowed those stranded in the hotel to go. “He himself tried to escape and was turned back,” he added of Rusesabagina. Kagame’s remarks represent a growing sentiment among some people in Rwanda who reject the notion that Rusesabagina is a hero. Several other Rwandan diplomats later echoed the President’s words, charging that Rusesabagina was not a hero but a criminal. Yet despite this controversy, and notwithstanding some of *Hotel Rwanda’s* drawbacks (director George’s lack of familiarity with Rwandan culture, his focus on only one man’s heroism, and his tendency to vilify all major Hutu characters), the film does give a fairly nuanced view of the actual carnage of the genocide.

That carnage had its origins in what Johan Pottier calls the “modern struggles” in both Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (then Zaire) for power and wealth. As he indicates, it was not a “tribal conflict,” rather it was “a class conflict minutely prepared and callously executed.” At its basis, it was an “explosive struggle for resources . . . a crisis rooted in class and regional interests was turned into a conflict for which an ethnic minority, the Tutsi, were held responsible.” From 1860 onwards, the Rwandan King Rwabugiri, a Tutsi, began a process of ethnic polarization that hitherto had been absent. Hutu peasants were forced into agrarian labor and exploited, as were, to a lesser extent, Tutsi commoners. Even then wealth, not race, was the basis of division. In 1926 the new Belgian colonial administration “racialized” the Hutu-Tutsi division, in particular, by supporting the Tutsi royal court and aristocracy until independence. In the early twentieth century, Rwanda had a series of famines

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and its population migrated a lot. Some 150,000 Tutsis fled from Rwanda to Uganda in 1959.22

Rwanda became independent in 1962 with a Hutu President, Grégoire Kayibanda. In 1963, exiled Tutsi launched a military invasion and were beaten back. Around 10,000 Tutsis were killed in the process.23 In 1973 Kayibanda was deposed in a bloodless coup by Major-General Juvénal Habyarimana, who brought both peace and some amount of prosperity, but also instituted a one-party dictatorship and ignored Tutsi exiles.24 In the 1980s to 1990s, Rwanda was hit by acute land shortages, and wealthy Rwandans tried to bar others from land ownership. All these led to economic collapse in the late 1980s. Thus, as Pottier indicates, “acute poverty, externally induced economic malaise and the ruthlessness of embattled politicians gave rise to a restless, deadly social layer of desperately poor, easy-to-manipulate young thugs.”25 In 1991, politicians faithful to Habyarimana organized a structure called “Hutu Power” which defined enemies of the state as the Tutsi. In 1992–93 a series of massacres took place in Bugesera.26 In 1993, Habyarimana negotiated peace with exiled Tutsi in Uganda, who had formed an army (the RPF), but he failed to implement it. In 1994 his plane was shot down as he was returning from Tanzania,27 and that event immediately triggered the genocide.

The genocide itself is represented in Hotel Rwanda in the “mass grave” sequence, in which Paul (played by Don Cheadle) first discovers the extent of the violence. In this scene, which lasts 15 minutes, Paul is returning from a meeting with Major Georges Rutaganda (played by Hakeem Kae-Kazim) at his military camp in what is now a devastated part of Kigali after most of the killings have already taken place. It is significant that this is the first time Paul has ventured outside the hotel since the genocide began. Indeed, it is in receding daylight at the camp that he witnesses with anguish the horror that men like Major Rutaganda have wrought (although the real Rutaganda later claimed he was not entirely responsible for the carnage in his area). George chose Johannesburg, South Africa as the locale for most of these outdoor

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22Pottier, Re-Imagining Rwanda, pp. 11–15.  
24Prunier, The Rwanda Crisis, p. 76.  
25Pottier, Re-Imagining Rwanda, pp. 21, 10.  
26Pottier, Re-Imagining Rwanda, p. 22.  
27Prunier, The Rwanda Crisis, pp. 198–211.
shots, and there is a quick montage of medium shots of houses and shops completely razed to the ground. This is followed by small piles of bloodied corpses at every street corner and, inside the camp itself, naked, traumatized women are shown enclosed in a pen being baited and sexually abused by the soldiers as if they were so many mules. Here George represents in a quick series of pans the brutal fact that during the genocide, thousands of Tutsi women were gang-raped, raped with objects such as sharp sticks and gun barrels, held in sexual slavery, or sexually mutilated. Many of the raped women were then brutally killed.\(^{28}\) Faced with these scenes of horror, Paul masks his outrage because Major Rutaganda is present. He quietly collects the supplies he had come for and leaves.

Even later, when he is alone in his car with his chauffeur, Grégoire, Paul sets his face in a mask. George uses several close ups of Paul’s face in which we can clearly see that he is hiding his emotions with difficulty. Soon, it is even harder for us to gauge his emotions because the environment outside the car becomes diffuse and murky, with a perpetual thick white fog rolling out before and after the car. The overall impression is that we are witnessing Paul having a horrible nightmare.

The car moves into the middle of the fog until Grégoire (played by Tony Kgoroge) loses control, and the car lurches and stops. Cursing Grégoire, Paul steps out to investigate and falls on his face tripping over what he thinks are rocks or roadblocks. As the fog rolls out slowly, he gazes into not rocks but the frozen faces of corpses. The lighting and movement preclude an estimate of how many bodies there are. This is George’s method of representing the nearly one million predominantly Tutsi victims, killed in about one hundred days, comprising one-third of all Tutsis on earth, or 11% of the population of Rwanda.\(^{29}\) As Paul sees the corpses his face freezes into an expression of

\(^{28}\)“Rwanda: Genocidal Rape Conviction,” *Off our backs*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (January 1999): 4. On this note, in 1998, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda concluded that the rape of Tutsi women had been “systematic and was perpetrated against all Tutsi women and solely against them” and also that the rapes were accompanied by a “proven intent to kill their victims” (“Rape Defined in International Law,” *UN Chronicle*, Vol. 35, No. 3 [1998]: 7). Numerous Tutsi women who fled from the killings in the city of Taba were systematically raped and regularly subjected to “multiple acts of sexual violence by armed local militia” (p. 7). Many women were taken away and raped by members of Hutu death squads, *Interahamwe*.

\(^{29}\)As regards George’s depiction of the corpses, most of the dead were killed by machetes and guns. The early killings were carried out by Habyarimana’s presidential guard, and the victims were those Rwandans who were outspoken about human rights (Pottier,
terror. The camera pans very slowly over the corpses that are heaped together haphazardly. It reveals bloodied heads, bodies, and legs stretching as far as the fog enables Paul and the audience to see. There are men with missing body parts, naked women, children with their bodies cut open, and other bodies completely drenched with congealed blood. The camera cross cuts between the bodies and Paul’s agonized face, and slowly moves from close up to a medium range shot of Paul swirling around looking at the scene. As soon as he stops turning, he doubles over and is violently sick. After a few minutes he gets back to the car and tells Grégoire to drive as fast as he can away from there. After several bumps, Grégoire finds his way out of the field of bodies back to the hotel.

Despite the graphic visuals of this scene, the diffuse lighting and the emphasis on Paul’s reactions makes this a “darkened gaze.” Unlike the rooftop scene in Earth, the murders here are never shown taking place, nor is there much time to gaze at the corpses in detail. Showing them in close up in murky light makes the corpses seem unreal, like automatons in a nightmare, rather than recently killed human beings. This would otherwise objectify them were it not for the fact that the camera returns to Paul looking at them in horror and then having to look away. The focus is on Paul’s compassion and sympathy rather than the spectacle of “objectified” corpses.

While Paul is depicted as compassionate and sympathetic, Ice-candy-man (in Earth) seems already less than human. He often refers to himself as an “animal” or beast that is ready to attack and prey on weaker beings. Mehta’s depiction of his character underscores how the violence unleashed the beast within Ice-candy-man and turned him into a coward who preyed on those he otherwise would have no power over. The power he eventually assumes over Ayah derives from the confusion of the partition. Many historians have shown how the sudden and arbitrary nature of the decision about where the national borders would be demarcated (it took just six months to divide the subcon-

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Re-Imagining Rwanda, p. 30). Two years before the genocide, the national army had distributed one gun among every ten houses, as defense against the Tutsi RPF (Rwandese Patriotic Front). The national army, the Forces Armées Rwandaises (FAR) also trained unemployed youths into death squads known as interahamwe, almost exclusively Hutu men. These preparations were all part of a master plan for the elimination of Habyarimana’s opponents and all Tutsis (pp. 30–31). Most of the later victims were killed with machetes by slowly and painfully hacking them to death. Many victims were mutilated both before and after their deaths (Prunier, The Rwanda Crisis, pp. 255–256).
tinent) led to wild rumors and panic, as ordinary people scrambled to cross from one country to another. In the confusion and fear, the approximately 10 to 12 million distraught refugees rushing from one country to another were attacked by roving gangs of armed men, so that eventually between 200,000 and 360,000 people died. Some of these gangs had access to military weapons, and they terrorized, kidnapped, raped and murdered members of religious groups other than their own, so that they could carve out areas for their own religious communities.

The ensuing violence brought with it widespread feelings of betrayal and helplessness, especially with regard to women. As Jill Didur suggests, patriarchal notions of women’s identities and their sexual “purity” made them vulnerable to what she calls “particularly gendered and humiliating acts of aggression as India and Pakistan sought to establish their sovereignty.” So too, Suvir Kaul points out that during the partition, women were targets of very visible forms of public violence and their subsequent homelessness, rape, and abduction were “at once the most visible, and the most repressed, index of the social, cultural and familial fragmentation that constituted Partition.”

30Joya Chatterji, “The Making of a Borderline: The Radcliffe Award for Bengal,” in Talbot and Singh, Region and Partition, pp. 168–202. In this regard, the six months started, as Ahmed indicates, in March 1947, when the plan was announced by then Viceroy for India, Lord Mountbatten (p. 118). In June, Sir Cyril Radcliffe, a member of the Bar in England, was chosen as the chairperson of the newly constituted Boundary Commission. He arrived in India for the first time in July, and Mountbatten left it up to him to come up with a proposal. In August Radcliffe drew up a report in which the basis for division was quite arbitrary, including giving Lahore to Pakistan and Amritsar to India even though it was unclear whether either city had a clear majority of either religious group (p. 159), relying on the principle of Muslim and non-Muslim majority contiguity as the guiding principle, and ignoring claims to property (p. 160). Even when the report was ready, Mountbatten delayed announcing the location of the border for five days. Thus, the partition was enacted without the majority of the people knowing where the borders were to be. Had it been planned and executed better, many deaths could have been avoided.


33Suvir Kaul, The Partitions of Memory, p. 11. On this note, several scholars have described at length how systematic the violence against women of all religious groups was during the partition. Veena Das (in “National Honor and Practical Kinship: Unwanted
In the film there are several scenes which depict violence against Ayah, and these suggest, as Didur points out, that after the partition, Ayah’s body is “sexuality exploited, policed, and made emblematic of the national imaginary.”

Lenny and Ayah undergo feelings of betrayal in the scene of Ayah’s kidnapping. It occurs near the end of the film. Although it is fairly lengthy, the film ultimately remains silent about the true horror of the scene, namely, what will happen to Ayah after her abduction. As Ambreen Hai suggests, “the narrative cannot report what will happen to Ayah; it directs the imagining of horror in her direction but refuses to follow; redirecting the attention instead to its own stance of separation.”

Gang rape and prostitution, then, are replaced by Lenny’s feelings of guilt. In the film, Ice-candy-man’s look at Lenny is the main focus of the scene, tempting, caressing, and persuading her to tell him where Ayah is hidden. At first, of course, Ice-candy-man is absent, and the scene unfolds in a series of medium shot-reverse shot sequences with a gang appearing on the driveway to Lenny’s house, comprising mostly working class men in dirty shirts, lungis (long robes) and skull caps. As they lurch up her driveway, they are met by Lenny’s mother and her children, immaculately dressed, flanked by all their loyal servants and followers. Imam Din (Lenny’s cook, played by veteran Bollywood character actor Kulbhushan Kharbanda) and his courage and integrity become the main focus of the first part of the scene, with frequent close-ups of his face as he tries to reason with, and pacify, the gang. Although he is dressed simply like them, his white clothes are neat and clean and his face is full of compassion. As the crowd compels him to swear that the secretly hidden Ayah is no longer in the house and has fled La-

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Women and Children,” in Faye D. Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp, eds., Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995], pp. 212–233) argues that at that time, women were the main focal points of collective violence, and that the political process of creating two nations was “inscribed” on their bodies. Therefore, the violence itself was part of both “the domain of kinship” and “the domain of politics.” Based on government sources, G. D. Khosla estimated that almost 100,000 women were raped and almost 83,000 women were abducted, of which 33,000 were Hindus and Sikhs and 50,000 were Muslims (quoted from Das, “National Honor,” p. 215). Government sources also claimed that of the 83,000 women who were abducted, 12,000 were recovered in India and 6,000 in Pakistan and returned to their families across the border. However, this took quite a bit of time, so many of the abducted women had children or were pregnant when they were returned, which made their return problematic (Das, “National Honor,” p. 215).

34Didur, “Cracking the Nation,” p. 44.
35Hai, “Border Work, Border Trouble,” p. 399
hore, the camera gets closer and closer to his face. Sweating profusely, he puts his hand on his neck and swears that she has, indeed, left Lahore.

Just as he does so a disturbance is heard in the background and the camera moves away from Imam Din’s face to a medium shot of a man in a dazzlingly clean white kurta or long shirt and orange scarf pushing his way through the crowd. It is soon apparent that he is Ice-candy-man. The camera moves back to Lenny’s mother and we see Lenny running up to Ice-candy-man, very relieved to see him. Since Lenny’s back is toward the camera, only Ice-candy-man’s face is visible, gently reassuring her. Quickly, he picks her up and the camera moves partly to the side, revealing less than half of each of their faces, looking at each other. He looks directly at her and asks, “Tell me where Nanny [Ayah] is . . . she’s here isn’t she?” Now the camera moves quickly to the side of their faces in profile as he repeats, “Where is she?” At this point their faces are so close together they almost touch each other’s noses and Lenny tells him softly that Ayah is hiding in her mother’s bedroom. Almost immediately Ice-candy-man puts Lenny back on the ground and the camera stays on his face, so that now Lenny is now invisible. The camera closes up on his face, which now has a vindictive look of triumph on it, as he turns to the gang and tells them quietly where Ayah is. While the gang rushes off to find her, the camera slowly pans his face as he finds and lights a cigarette and calmly smokes it. As Ayah is brutally dragged out with her body trailing on the floor, the camera only briefly remains on her and the now agonized Lenny, before returning to Ice-candy-man as he picks up the reins of the horse carriage and drives off with his load: the petrified, screaming Ayah and the jeering, jubilant gang. Overall, then, the focus in this scene is unmistakably on Ice-candy-man, as if to prove what the beast unleashed looks like. His role as betrayer and beast becomes the highlight of the film (since this is almost the last scene in the movie) and the emphasis remains on his personal failings and lapses.

In Hotel Rwanda, Paul’s role is not that of betrayer but of the betrayed. George went to Rwanda after the genocide was over and interviewed survivors. These were people who remained in or near Rwanda, suffering from trauma and shock, especially the women, many of whom had been raped and were now pregnant. Many survivors were forced to continue living side by side with the killers of their loved ones. George stresses the lack of concern

36Prunier, The Rwanda Crisis, p. 299.
37As Pottier has pointed out, even when French troops supporting the incoming RPF halted the genocide, they ended up protecting the killers (fleeing Hutu génocidaires), and the same was true of international aid agencies that tried to help the massive influx of refugees.
by the rest of the world for the victims and the survivors. The outside world, as many historians have shown, turned a blind eye to the killings, and this is powerfully illustrated in the foreigners’ evacuation sequence of Hotel Rwanda.

This scene takes place well before the RPF (with French help) intervened to stop the genocide. It occurs just after several foreign reporters have arrived at the hotel shocked by what they have witnessed in the city and rural areas. Paul still remains hopeful that his foreign contacts will come in handy. Suddenly, a UN intervention force arrives and all the hotel guests rejoice. However, as Paul is running out to greet the forces with his staff, he sees the UN commander, Colonel Oliver (played by Nick Nolte) throwing his blue UN beret on the ground and stomping on it.

Hotel Rwanda’s Colonel Oliver is based on the real UN commander Lt. Gen. Roméo Dallaire, about whom the thought-provoking documentary, Shake Hands With the Devil: The Journey of Roméo Dallaire (2004), was made. In Hotel Rwanda, he plays a minor though significant role.38 Inside the hotel, over drinks, he tells Paul bitterly that he only has a mandate to evacuate the foreign (primarily white) guests, not the Rwandan (or black) guests. Close ups reveal despair and anger on his face as he tells Paul that the UN clearly only values the lives of white people. The color drains out of Paul’s face as he listens, and then there is a cut to the next scene in which he grabs his wife Tatiana, makes her sit down at a table with him, and repeats over and over again, “I am a fool.” The sense of betrayal and sadness in his face are palpable.

If Paul experiences a sense of betrayal in this scene, the movie also repeatedly emphasizes his compassion, as if to underscore the fact that an important aspect of the Rwandan genocide in general was a complete lack of compassion.

38Dallaire was the Canadian commanding officer of the UN peacekeeping mission in Rwanda. He attempted to interfere with the early violence despite his superiors’ indifference to it. Shake Hands with the Devil won an audience award at Sundance in the documentary category, primarily for its depiction of his severe post-traumatic stress disorder. Despite these facts, Oliver is the only fictional character (name and facts) depicted in the film (“Hotel Rwanda Trivia” [http://imdb.com/title/tt0395169/trivia]).
In *Hotel Rwanda*, the motif of compassion appears in the bribing sequence. Before the bribing takes place, there is a repeated montage of scenes of massacres and of members of an *interahamwe* (Hutu death squad) dancing for joy. Then, *interahamwe* militia show up at Paul’s house and threaten to kill everyone in it. (By then many of Paul’s friends and acquaintances had taken shelter at his house because of their faith in Paul’s contacts among the army officers.) In a series of quick cuts, twenty or so men, women, and children, including Tatiana (Paul’s wife, played by Nigerian-British actress Sophie Okonedo) and their three children, Elys (played by Mosa Kaiser), Diane (played by Mathabo Pieterson), and Roger (played by Ofentse Modiselle) are prostrate in Paul’s garden, at the feet of half a dozen rifle-wielding guards.

At this point, high-angle shots are used to give us a sense of the power that the men have to shoot and kill at will. The camera focuses on their faces as an unnamed Hutu Captain (played by Simo Mogwaza) marches up to Paul (also prostrate) and snarls at him. Parroting extremist Hutu propaganda, the Captain uses the word “cockroaches” several times to refer to Paul’s friends and family. As several historians have pointed out, commonly used hate words that Habyarimana’s men used to refer to Tutsi civilians were “evil,” “snakes,” “cockroaches,” and “sneaky.” The Captain then aims his rifle at different people’s heads, and the camera now focuses in on Paul’s face as it twists upwards pleading with him and assuring him that if he lets them all go he will personally hand over much of the savings that are in the safe of the hotel. Then there are a series of cross cuts between the two men’s faces after which the Captain finally agrees. His men hustle the “prisoners” into several police vans and follow Paul to the hotel. With trembling hands and a flushed face Paul rushes out of the van into the hotel, while the Captain waits outside. Several tense moments follow as Paul ignores his gawking hotel employees and rushes over to the safe and hands over large amounts of money. There are brief cuts away to the outside of the hotel where the others remain in the police vans until the Captain slowly counts the money. He snarls again that the amount is less

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39 Behind this hate terminology are years of propaganda about how evil and demonic the Tutsis were. In a documentary film, *Forsaken Cries*, directed by Andrea Torrice (New York: Amnesty International USA, 1994), a historian on Rwanda tells us that the commonest words that extremist Hutu politicians used to refer to the Tutsi were “evil,” “snakes,” “cockroaches,” and “sneaky.” Torrice’s film makes a point of stressing that the propaganda was especially forceful about the necessity to kill children, telling Hutu farmers that it was the Tutsi children who were spared in the 1959 killings who later formed the RPF and attacked them. Thus, even children were vilified as violent criminals.
than that agreed upon till Paul convinces him that that is all there is. With a brief twist of his head, the Captain tells his men to let the “prisoners” go. The scene ends with the men, women, and children rushing joyfully into the safety of the hotel.

As in the witnessing scene, this scene too, is significant for what the camera does not show. Instead of terrified victims blinded by terror in the anticipation of being shot, Paul is seen frequently “looking back” into the rifle barrels of the Captain as he slowly masters the situation. Although the Hutu captain is presented in overdone, stereotypical “Hutu bad guy” terms, the focus is again on Paul’s inner conflicts: should he embezzle money from his office or see two dozen people, including his own family, shot? The camera angles and editing are used to highlight not wanton cruelty, but Paul’s moral dilemma and inner strength, in particular, his ability to take control of a situation under tremendous pressure. Even as the world ignored the genocide, the scene suggests that men like Paul stood firm.

So to come back to my original question: how do looks operate in these two texts in terms of representing the horror and bestiality of mass violence? In terms of the looks and motifs I have just described, the answer is that, in Earth, the gaze is used to render Ayah as a passive victim or an erotic spectacle in need of our sympathy and compassion. This is true despite the movie’s attempt to show the futility of dividing up a subcontinent. As Mehta claimed in an interview, Earth was meant to “produce a dialogue and force people to think more deeply about the cost of such [political] divisions. If people want to separate they should understand what it would really mean. . . . I think I have made a film that shows the futility of sectarian war, a film that is anti-war.” However, in focusing on the personal failings of Ice-candy-man and the physical attractions of Ayah, the film does not promote an understanding of the complexities of sectarian war. By contrast, in Hotel Rwanda, the focus is on individuals who resist the systemic violence, and that leads to hope at the end of the movie. This is true despite the commercialization of the movie (its box office earnings totaled approximately $23,472,900 in the U.S. alone) and its tendency to depict all the Hutus as the “bad guys” and all the Tutsis as the “good guys.”

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with Tatiana on the roof of the hotel. Their ability to express their love for each other and enjoy the sunset on the roof, despite its incongruity with the perpetration of massacres, does express hope for the future. As the real Paul Rusesabagina said in an article he wrote after President Kagame had vilified him:

The Rwandan people are not fools—they just need accurate information about their history. They need to be free and live freely. . . . President Kagame . . . [is] unabashedly exploiting politically and economically this humanitarian tragedy. . . . The ultimate goal of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Rwanda initiated by my foundation, The Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation, is not to continue the war of words between two men, but to end Rwanda’s social injustices and to heal our shattered nation.42

In the final analysis, Hotel Rwanda remains a powerful statement about the responses of individuals and groups to organized violence because of its use of both presence (facts and images) and absence (fictionalizations and darkness), and its ability to both bear witness and share compassion. The darkened gaze, as represented in the three motifs listed above, fix, in our memories, haunting images by which we may examine both our own involvement in the genocide, and ways to hope, with Paul, for a better future for all.