

Tribhuvan University

**Between Apathy and Responsibility: Cinematic Representations of UN Peacekeeper's
Moral Dilemma in *Hotel Rwanda* and *No Man's Land***

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, T.U.,
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of
Master of Philosophy in English**

By

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled, “Between Apathy and Responsibility: Cinematic Representation of UN Peacekeeper’s Moral Dilemma in *Hotel Rwanda* and *No Man's Land*” submitted to the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University is an entirely original work, a product of scholarly research that I carried out as a MPhil scholar at the Central Department of English at Tribhuvan University. I have duly acknowledged and properly cited all ideas, concepts and information used from various sources in the course of writing this thesis, including the assistance from others in thesis design, conception and linguistic expression. The dissertation contains no material or conclusions that to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any degree at Tribhuvan University or any other educational intuitions, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. I shall be held solely responsible if any evidence is found against my declaration.

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This thesis titled "Between Apathy and Responsibility: Cinematic Representations of UN Peacekeeper's Moral Dilemma in *Hotel Rwanda* and *No Man's Land*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mr. Anand Gurung has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee:

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the moral dilemma faced by individuals and UN peacekeepers through an analysis of two films: *Hotel Rwanda* and *No Man's Land*. Although the institutional failures of the UN--caused by limited mandates, geopolitical interests and bureaucratic failures--during the Rwandan and Bosnian wars have been widely examined in scholarly literature, cinematic depiction of individuals caught between institutional orders and moral convictions in these two conflicts remains relatively underexplored. The analysis is carried out to do just that by using multidisciplinary theoretical lens such as Darley & Latane's Bystander Apathy Theory, which helps explain the passivity and inaction of individuals and institutions (like the UN) in the face of violence. Similarly, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) Doctrine, a global political commitment adopted by the United Nations in 2005 to prevent genocide, offers the critical tools for examining the bureaucratic complicity that gives the impression of apathy and failure in protecting vulnerable populations. The findings of this research reveal key similarities as well as differences in how the two films portray UN peacekeepers as both victims of and complicit in systemic failure and why the much vaunted UN neutrality, when devoid of moral courage, only contributes to the continuation of atrocity. Ultimately, by analyzing cinematic portrayals of peacekeepers caught in moral dilemmas, this study highlights the need for greater accountability and ethical responsibility within global institutions and calls for a renewed commitment to the humanitarian principle of protecting vulnerable populations.

Keywords: bystander apathy, genocide, humanitarian interventions, peacekeeping, UN

Table of Contents

	Page No.
Declaration	i
Approval Letter	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv
Table of Contents	v
Chapter I: War, Genocide, and Depiction of UN Peacekeeping in Cinema	1
Chapter II: Examining UN Inaction During the Rwandan and Bosnian Genocides	15
Chapter III: Peacekeepers or Bystanders—The UN in <i>Hotel Rwanda</i> and <i>No Man's Land</i>	31
Chapter IV: Individual Morality, International Mediation and Responsibility	55
Works Cited	57

CHAPTER I

War, Genocide and Depiction of UN Peacekeeping Forces in Cinema

Introduction

In an era marked by widespread conflict, wars and violence, it has become imperative to reflect on the role of the UN and the broader international community in preventing atrocities and promoting world peace. In *No Man's Land* (2001) directed by Danis Tanovic, and *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) directed by Terry George, this dissertation critically examines cinematic portrayals of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations during the Rwandan Genocide and the 3 Bosnian War that occurred during the 90s, though in very different regions and contexts. Further, this research work gives a critical appraisal of how these cinematic representations of human wars held in two different geo-political territories reinforce or challenge the general perception of UN peacekeepers as apathetic bystanders during violent armed conflicts and wars. More specifically, it aims to show how these films portray the moral and ethical dilemmas faced by UN peacekeepers when their official orders to be an impartial mediator goes against their natural instinct and moral responsibility to protect human lives in the course of performing their duties. Ultimately, the study demonstrates how the two films agree as well as diverge from each other on their depiction of UN peacekeeping role during conflict, including their limited mandate, bureaucratic inefficiency and lack of political will, and how their vastly different outcomes emphasize or critique its traditional role as an impartial mediator. Both films show the difficult moral decisions peacekeepers have to make, especially when their duty to stay neutral conflicts with their desire to protect innocent lives. The films also raise important questions about whether neutrality is still the right approach in the face of mass violence, suggesting that peacekeepers might need

to act more decisively to prevent continuation of atrocities. In the end, both films show the human and political difficulties of peacekeeping.

This study follows qualitative research method. Thus, narrative and interpretive analyses of the selected films are carried out in the following paragraphs as they provide cinematic portrayals of UN's real life peacekeeping operations in Rwanda and Bosnia. This depiction will help to understand how films try and does succeed in shaping public understanding of UN and international politics through plot, character, and inherent symbolism.

The research is structured as a comparative case study, allowing for an in-depth exploration of similarities and differences in the portrayals of institutional response of the two films to genocide and their contrasting outcomes. Secondary data has been drawn from a range of sources, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed academic articles, historical accounts of the Rwandan and Bosnian conflicts, and primary sources such as official UN reports, film reviews, and interviews in order to contextualize the cinematic representations within broader political, historical and ethical frameworks.

Previous studies on the UN's peacekeeping role during Rwandan and Bosnian conflict have largely been done from the lens of international political theory and history. There is limited academic research on cinematic portrayals of the UN's peacekeeping intervention using moral/ethical theories such as bystander apathy and international relation theories like Responsibility to Protect (R2P). This research aims to bridge that gap by bringing together interdisciplinary analysis - historical, cinematic, and moral/philosophical – in a focused, comparative case study. The study will apply these theories to understand the scope of agency, choice, and moral responsibility in contexts where UN

peacekeeping forces must navigate between their own ethical convictions and institutional mandates.

Some others have studied UN's perceived inefficiency, bureaucratic failures and institutional shortcomings in various conflicts and humanitarian situations, only few have examined how such shortcomings coupled with internal dissatisfaction and discord within UN are dramatized in cinema. However, this study seeks to go beyond institutional critique and focus more specifically on the moral dilemmas faced by UN peacekeepers in these narratives. It asks: As mediators, should UN peacekeepers adhere strictly to their mandate of neutrality and impartiality, even when it risks the loss of innocent lives? Or, defy orders to act on moral conviction? In either case, what are the ethical and existential consequence of such actions – or inaction?

However, it must be noted that the research is limited to *Hotel Rwanda* and *No Man's Land*, as case studies and books, reports, documents, and articles related to the actual Rwandan and Bosnian war have been taken as a reference so as to provide a historical context to the conflict the two movies deals with.

Also, the study, for better or worse, focuses specifically on the UN's peacekeeping role in the two conflicts, and no way the conclusions derived from it will be the same in its other peacekeeping missions in Somalia, East Timor, Syria and Lebanon where the UN has tasted both success and failures.

The study also doesn't delve into the peacekeeping and humanitarian work carried out by other international actors such as the U.S., NATO, International Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders. The focus of the research is solely on specific historical events

in Rwanda and Bosnia that through sheer coincidence occurred at around the same time in the 90s.

Overview of *Hotel Rwanda*

The film opens with radio broadcasts inciting hatred and violence against Tutsis, an ethnic minority, labeling them “collaborators with Belgian colonists” and “cockroaches,” while urging the Hutu community to “squash the invaders”, a veiled call for genocide. It is April 1994 and the tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi population in Rwanda is at an all-time high. The Hutu majority controls the government, while the Tutsi rebels—the Rwandan Patriotic Front—have launched an insurgency from neighboring Uganda to challenge and eventually overthrow the regime during the civil war. The protagonist, Paul Rusesabagina (Don Cheadle), is a Hutu manager of the luxurious Belgian-owned Hôtel des Mille Collines in Kigali, the capital city. He lives a rather comfortable life with his Tutsi wife, Tatiana (Sophie Okonedo), and their three children.

To secure favor with the Rwandan army when he would need it in the future, Paul maintains cordial relations with General Augustin Bizimungu through regular gifts and bribes. And despite escalating tension and unrest across the country, Paul remains confident that the international community will step in should things go out of hand and violence erupt.

The film reaches a pivotal turning point with the assassination of the Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana, a catalyst that plunges an already volatile situation into full-scale crisis. Things quickly deteriorate as this event unleashes a wave of violence and killing in Kigali. Hutu extremists like Interahamwe, including even military and

police begin massacring Tutsis. As the civil war descends into genocide, hundreds of desperate Tutsis and moderate Hutus, including those from overcrowded UN refugee camps and orphanages across the city, seek sanctuary at the Hôtel des Mille Collines. Paul finds himself increasingly in a difficult situation: he must protect this ever-growing population while simultaneously maintaining the illusion of a functioning luxury hotel to deter the Interahamwe and the Rwandan army. He constantly negotiates with the bloodthirsty militia and receives limited support from UN peacekeeping forces, led by Canadian Colonel Oliver (Nick Nolte), who are under strict orders not to intervene in the conflict and prevent the genocide.

In order to find safe passage for his family and the people sheltering at his hotel, Paul resorts to desperate tactics of offering bribes of money, expensive alcohol, and Cuban cigars to Hutu soldiers and officers. He pleads for assistance from his boss and hotel's owner who lives in Belgium over the phone, but the latter apologizes to him saying that there is nothing he can do in this situation.

UN peacekeeping force's Colonel Oliver reassures Paul that a European intervention force is on the way to evacuate all the residents of the hotel, but when it arrives, the joy is short-lived. Paul watches as Colonel Oliver angrily throw his UN beret during a tense exchange with the soldiers of the intervention force, signaling his disillusionment. It soon becomes clear that the intervention forces are only there to evacuate foreign (primarily white) guests, not the Rwandan refugees, who are to be left to fend for themselves. This moment symbolizes Colonel Oliver's anger at the West's shameful indifference to genocide and the predicament of the Rwandan refugees at the hotel.

A particularly harrowing scene shows Paul and Gregoire drive through a burning city to collect hotel supplies from Georges Rutaganda, the chief of the brutal Hutu militia. There they witness the horrific sight of the Interahamwe militia stripping, beating and raping Tutsi women they have held hostages. During their return journey to the hotel driving down a foggy, riverside road, Paul and Gregoire realize the "bumps" they are feeling are actually the bodies of hundreds upon hundreds of massacred people that line the entire roads. This horrifying encounter underscores the unimaginable scale of the slaughter happening outside the hotel's walls.

In a climactic moment, when the UN forces led by Colonel Oliver attempt to evacuate a group of refugees, including Paul's family, in a rescue convoy, they are betrayed by Gregoire to the Interahamwe, who use radio broadcasts to target them. With his bribes no longer effective, Paul resorts to blackmailing General Bizimungu. He warns the general that the international community is watching and that Bizimungu will be tried as a war criminal in the International Criminal Court for his actions. But in exchange for his help to evacuate the refugees, Paul will testify on behalf of General Bizimungu. This desperate gamble, combined with the gradual advance of the Tutsi rebel army, eventually leads to a final UN convoy being dispatched to evacuate the remaining refugees from the hotel. The film concludes with the refugees, including Paul and his family making it to the safety behind Tutsi rebel lines.

Empirical Review

Although *Hotel Rwanda* is based on real individuals and was inspired by events that occurred at the besieged Hotel des Mille Collines in Kigali, Rwanda, in his insightful study, *Hotel Rwanda – The challenges of historicizing and commercializing Genocide*,

Mohamed Adhikari critiques the film for focusing on emotional drama at the expense of historical and political understanding. He maintains that:

Hotel Rwanda makes little more than a cursory attempt to explain why the genocide happened or to sketch the political and historical context in which it unfolded. The film focuses instead on the intense drama around Rusesabagina's heroic attempts to save his charges. The choice of a strong dramatic center clearly did not preclude the director and scriptwriters from providing sufficient background to make the reasons behind the slaughter easier to comprehend. This disembodiment of Rusesabagina's story from the complexity of its context is a central weakness of *Hotel Rwanda*. (175)

This paragraph argues that the film offers a superficial explanation of the causes behind the Rwandan Genocide without providing an in depth understanding of the complex political, ethnic and colonial history that led to such gruesome violence. The film instead prioritizes Paul Rusesabagina's heroic efforts to save lives amid widespread atrocities. Although this may make the story emotionally powerful and invigorating, this narrative choice comes at the expense of broader understanding.

Additionally, in a clear case of cinema's fascination towards depicting individual heroism to personalize the genocide and resonate with the audience emotions, Jonathan D. Glover notes the suggestion made by Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire, the Force Commander of United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), that *Hotel Rwanda* exaggerates Paul's actions at the expense of the UN peacekeepers stationed at the hotel who worked to protect the Hotel des Mille Collines. "[I]t seems the filmmakers downplayed the eight UN observers who protected people in the Hotel. The Manager was

there, I was aware of him, but that's it" (Adhikari 298). As a result, the movie has faced criticism that it may not fully capture the complexities of the historical context.

Calling him the "African Version" of Oscar Schindler, who also saved an estimated 1200 Jews from the Nazis during the Holocaust, Jonathan R. Beloff criticizes the movie of elevating Rusesabagina's acts during the genocide while overlooking what had actually occurred within the hotel, resulting in great resentment among the genocide survivors (41). He mentions that some survivors and researchers have contested the film's portrayal and suggested that Paul may have charged refugees for shelter and protection, with some alleging that inability to pay led to expulsion from the hotel, exposing individuals to danger:

Life within the hotel's compound was difficult with the constant threat of removal if one could no longer pay Rusesabagina. One survivor described, "If you could pay, you would stay in a room. If you couldn't pay for a room, you could pay to stay in a hallway. If you couldn't pay that, you could pay to stay by the pool. If you couldn't pay that, he [Rusesabagina] would demand you to leave" (42).

In the above extract, Beloff describes the unforgiving conditions that refugees faced while seeking sanctuary in the Hôtel des Mille Collines after fleeing the Rwandan Genocide. The hotel, under the management of Paul, was a refuge for many people trying to escape the violence and chaos outside, but it wasn't a place of safety for everyone equally, as Beloff talks about another survivor, who was a child during the genocide, describing how while residing by the pool waiting for his parents, he encountered Rusesabagina who demanded to know if he had paid to stay there. Standing next to

Rusesabagina was a Hutu genocide leader who insisted to Rusesabagina to leave the boy alone as he would “be killed at another time (42).”

Apart from the contradictions between real and fictional portrayals, filmmakers have also examined the institutional shortcomings through powerful cinematic narratives seen in *Hotel Rwanda*, unveiling the complexities of what goes behind international intervention, media coverage and peacekeeping initiatives for public consumption.

The cinematic representation of UN’s peacekeeping mission in Rwanda has been so lifelike that the character of Canadian Colonel Oliver, who leads the UN peacekeeping forces that is forbidden to intervene in the conflict in *Hotel Rwanda*, was in fact based on Dallaire, the real force commander of UNAMIR that was tasked to monitor the ceasefire agreement between the Rwandan government and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels.

In the film, the UN peacekeeping forces are shown afflicted with institutional constraints and alleged bias as they hastily extract foreign guests (mostly white) from the besieged hotel while abandoning Rwandan refugees. Reviewing *Hotel Rwanda* for a *Cineaste*, an American Magazine on the art and politics of the cinema, Leshu Torchin writes:

Staging news media operations and exposing U.N. ineffectuality has been a recent trend in films representing the humanitarian crises of the 1990s...*Hotel Rwanda* continues this trend by depicting radio and TV news media as an integral part of the genocide. Cameras of international journalists capture the atrocities, but the U.N. withdraws, the U.S. waffles (demonstrated in actual radio clips of

U.S.State Department quibbling on the use of the word 'genocide,' a word whose utterance mandates political intervention), and the world returns to its dinner. (47)

This passage argues that *Hotel Rwanda* followed the trend in post-1990s cinema that critiqued the failure of international institutions, particularly the UN, and the performative role of news media during humanitarian crises. The reference to journalists filming mass atrocities while the UN withdraws and US hesitates and the “world return to its dinner” is a testimony to global apathy towards genocide.

Overview of *No Man's Land*

Set in the midst of the Bosnian War, *No Man's Land*, a satirical war film, begins with a group of Bosniak soldiers attempting to navigate through a dense fog at night to reach their lines. However, their guide gets them lost, and by daybreak, they find themselves trapped in "no man's land", the dangerous strip of ground between the Bosniak and Serbian front lines. They become sitting ducks for the Serbian forces.

In the ensuing chaos, most of the Bosniak soldiers are killed, except for Čiki (Branko Đurić), a cynical and quick-witted veteran. Čiki takes refuge in a trench, which is then approached by two Serbian soldiers sent to confirm the kills. Čiki manages to kill one of the Serbs and wounds the other, a young, inexperienced soldier named Nino (Rene Bitorajac).

Now Čiki and Nino, enemies from opposing sides, find themselves trapped together in the same trench between their lines in no man's land. These two wounded soldiers are forced into an uneasy standoff in the trench. The situation becomes more precarious when another wounded Bosniak soldier named Cera, who was presumed dead,

regains consciousness. A “bouncing land mine” has been buried beneath him by the Serbs. If he makes any move, the mine will explode.

Confounded by their situation, Ćiki and Nino wave white flags to their respective sides in a desperate move to signal for help. This draws the attention of the warring sides, but they do nothing. A French Army sergeant named Marchand of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) gets involved in an effort to help the trapped soldiers despite the orders to the contrary by his superiors. He speaks with Ćiki and Nino, learning that one is Bosniak and the other Serb. They guide him to Cera, who is critically injured and needs urgent medical care. However, when Marchand attempts to move Cera, Nino warns that he’s lying on a mine that could detonate if disturbed. Realizing the danger, Marchand calls for a mine-clearing team. At that moment, he receives a radio call from his superior and retreats to the armored vehicle to respond. Angry at his superiors' explicit orders not to intervene, Marchand tells Nino and Ćiki that he must leave but will try to return with help.

Fortunately, the presence of a British journalist, Jane Livingstone (Katrin Cartlidge) proves to be the catalyst for action. Her sensationalized reporting of the "man on the mine" story creates international media pressure, forcing the UN high command to swing into action in order to save the trapped soldiers. A German deminer is brought in to try and defuse the mine, but it's a complex and dangerous task.

Even after being rescued at the behest of the UN, the animosity between the angry and stressed out Ćiki and Nino remains unresolved. Their arguments continue to escalate, fueled by mutual distrust and the deep-seated hatred that defines the conflict between

their two communities. In a shocking act of impulsiveness, Ćiki shoots Nino and in turn is shot by a UN peacekeeper in retaliation.

Meanwhile, the German deminer eventually determines that the land mine underneath Cera cannot be defused without a high risk of explosion. Faced with this insurmountable problem, and with media attention waning, the UN high command decides to prioritize damage control and public image over Cera's life. They stage a fake rescue operation, lying to the press that Cera has been saved, and leave the area with the journalists and everyone else.

The film ends on a melancholic and haunting note, with Cera left alone in the bleak trench, still immobilized by the undetonated mine. The UN command, to ensure no evidence remains and to maintain their fabricated narrative of success, arranges for both Bosnian and Serbian forces to be given false intelligence, leading them to believe the opposing side will try to reoccupy the trench that night. This will ensure an artillery barrage from both sides, which will undoubtedly kill Cera and destroy the evidence of the UN's abandonment. In this bleak and darkly comic manner, *No Man's Land* highlights both the absurdity of war and the inherent futility of attempts to resolve it.

Empirical Review

Danis Tanovic's *No Man's Land* is a fictional story set against the backdrop of the Bosnian war and has no correlation to actual events or features any real life figures. In contrast to the narrative trope of emotional realism and heroic actions employed by *Hotel Rwanda*, *No Man's Land* offers a more cynical perspective on the role and power of institutions. It depicts a UN that despite being present accomplishes nothing of substance and may even have worsened the outcome.

Calling it an 'unusual anti-war film' in his journal article titled *Beyond No Man's Land*, Andrew Horton reveals the inherent contradiction that defines the United Nations, which surrounds the warring sides with peacekeeping troops, while continually offering the explanation: "We are here to keep the peace but we are not allowed to do anything or get involved."

Tanovic's deftly executed film should make viewers everywhere uneasy about even those UN members who wish to be active in keeping peace rather than passively "camping out" in a troubled land. The film clearly echoes the tragedy of Srebrenica, for instance, where thousands of Bosnian prisoners were allowed to be taken by Serbs, without protest, from UN camps to their execution and disposal in mass graves. Through the French actor Georges Siatidis, who plays a soldier in the UN patrol who attempts to help the three men in the trench, Tanovic appears to reference the well-meaning efforts of an actual French officer, Lieutenant General Philippe Morillon...Commentators have made clear that no one's hands were clean in Bosnia, including those of the UN troops (31).

On the other hand, Amy Corbin argues that *No Man's Land* flips the narrative of war films through Tanovic's refusal to designate a true war hero, and portrays Sgt Marchand as a potential hero in contrast to the blundering bureaucratic UN. She states that the film does this by presenting two adversaries who are paralyzed and unable to fight and then by revealing the creation of false narratives to hide the inability of powerful institutions (meaning UN) to make progress (48).

In fact, Danis Tanović, the director of *No Man's Land*, scathingly criticizes the superficial nature of humanitarianism displayed by UN which is ineffectual when it

comes to making the real difference when situation calls for it. The character of British Army General Soft, the commander of UNPROFOR, is portrayed as comical while being engrossed in bureaucratic dealings and public relations to save the image of the organization he represents. Despite appearing sympathetic to the perils the soldiers from two warring sides find themselves in, he is ultimately shown to be powerless to diffuse the situation, presenting real-world critiques of the UNPROFOR whose presence in Bosnia failed to prevent atrocities such as the Srebrenica massacre. Scholars have interpreted the film as a scathing indictment of international neutrality, particularly in the face of violence and ethnic cleansing.

While extensive scholarly literature has examined the international community's failure during the Bosnian War and Rwandan Genocide, particularly the indifference and inaction of the United Nations and the reluctance of powerful states like the US, France and UK to intervene, less attention has been paid to how these institutional failures and global apathy have impacted individuals (including UN peacekeepers) caught between the orders of their superiors to remain neutral and their natural instinct to protect lives in popular cinema. *Hotel Rwanda* and *No Man's Land* offer not only a compelling human story of this moral duality, but also a cinematic critique of global indifference. This thesis departs from traditional historical or policy-based analyses by examining the two films as a formidable socio-cultural text that help explain the both the inaction of institutions like the UN and moral dilemma faced by individuals in the face of violence and mass atrocities.

CHAPTER II

Examining UN Inaction During the Rwandan and Bosnian Genocides

Through the Lens of Bystander Apathy and Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

The inaction and institutional failures that plagued the UN during the Rwandan Genocide and the Bosnian War—due mainly as a result of limited mandates, geopolitical interests and bureaucratic inefficiencies—are examined by using multidisciplinary theoretical lens. One such framework is Bystander Apathy Theory (Darley & Latané) which explain how individuals and institutions (like the UN), often remain passive in the face of escalating violence due to diffusion of responsibility and uncertainty. Similarly, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) Doctrine asserts that international community has a legal and moral obligation to protect populations from atrocities and genocide. Analyzing *Hotel Rwanda* and *No Man's Land* through these lenses can help explain institutional apathy and inaction as well as the dilemma of individuals caught between their official orders to remain neutral and moral conviction that demands that they do something to protect vulnerable lives.

First popularized by social psychologists John M. Darley and Bibb Latane in 1968, Bystander Apathy--or the bystander effect--is a social-psychological theory that holds that individuals are less likely to offer help to a victim in the presence of other people. The concept has been used to analyze both the actions and inactions of the international community, particularly the United Nations and its Security Council, in situations such as the wars, massacres and genocides that have taken place in countries like Rwanda and Bosnia. These institutions have faced severe criticisms for their perceived institutional indifference and apathy towards the violence and conflict in those

two countries. They are alleged to be--like an individual witnessing a crime and doing nothing about it--of remaining passive or acting as 'bystanders' by neither intervening nor preventing the atrocities, despite evidence showing they could have made a difference.

Irish-American diplomat Samantha Power echoes this critique in her seminal book *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, where she lambastes U.S. inaction during genocides from Armenia (1915) to Kosovo (1999). She concludes that the sharpest challenge to the world of bystanders "is posed by those who have refused to remain silent in an age of genocide (Preface, sviii))." Suzanne Soo Hoo, an academic, similarly highlights an essential characteristics of bystanders, describing them as someone who plead ignorance and try to escape responsibility by hiding behind the banner of innocence. She further rejects this excuse of innocence, adding that should one choose to do nothing, or be silent and thus permit the oppressive act to occur, one is as guilty of the crime as the perpetrator (206). Meanwhile, Michael N. Barnett, a professor of International Affairs and Political Science at George Washington University, argues that 'bureaucratization of peacekeeping' contributed to this indifference that can be perceived as 'bystanderism'.

I am increasingly drawn to the conclusion that the bureaucratization of peacekeeping contributed to this indifference to the suffering of the very people peacekeeping is mandated to assist. As I, for one, more closely identified with the United States and the UN, I found it easier to remain indifferent to the occasional evil in deference to their "interests." There is, in my experience, an intimate connection between the discourse of acting in the best interests of the

international community, the bureaucratization of peacekeeping, and the production of indifference. (562)

The theory of bystander apathy became prominent following the infamous Kitty Genovese case in New York in 1964, where many witnesses failed to intervene even when they saw 28-year-old Kitty being raped and stabbed to death outside the apartment building where she lived in one of the neighborhood of the Queens borough of New York City, United States(newspapers erroneously reported that 37 bystanders saw the attack without coming to her assistance or calling the police).However, later investigations discovered that the extent of public apathy was exaggerated.

However, scholars like Michael Stohl have since clarified that the phenomenon that sparked huge interest among psychologists of that time was mislabeled because it was soon determined that the problem was not apathy and disinterest but non-intervention (158). In fact, Latan and Darley explored the nature of the decision-making and intervention process a bystander undergoes, arguing that there are four steps necessary before individuals decide whether or not to help in an emergency situation. First, a bystander must first notice the event. Second, he must interpret that the event is an emergency. Third, he must decide that it is his responsibility to react or help, even when others are present. And finally fourth, bystanders must decide what course of action to take in order to help (769).

This passage illustrates that the preliminary understanding of bystander behavior--as mere apathy--was erroneous. The issue was not a lack of concern but rather a complex decision-making process that can inhibit intervention.

In the same way, neuroscientists Rudd Hortensius and Beatrice de Gelder add that three psychological processes are thought further reinforce bystander apathy, and they are: the feeling of having less responsibility when more bystanders are present (diffusion of responsibility), the fear of unfavorable public judgment when helping (evaluation apprehension), and the belief that because no one else is helping, the situation is not actually an emergency (pluralistic ignorance). They conclude that in group situations, individuals often feel less compelled to act and presume others will respond--even if no one does (249).

Shifting from individual apathy to the phenomenon of ‘institutional bystanderism’ has profound implications for global governance. In their journal article on the UN role in Bosnia, analysts like Noman Sattar and Louise Liu conclude that the UN presence (in Bosnia) was “neither able to check the conflict nor resolve it, leading to great disillusionment over its role (48),” and questioned whether the UN guaranteed a Serb victory and the completion of the campaign of ethnic cleansing, effectively becoming a bystander to the genocide.

This growing understanding of how bystander behavior functions at the personal level provides an essential foundation for scrutinizing how similar dynamics may play out on a larger scale.

Likewise, Michael Barnett, who worked at the U.S permanent mission to the UN from 1993 to 1994 and closely monitored the genocide taking place in Rwanda, directs his critique to the Security Council’s inaction that made UN a bystander and morally culpable for the thousands of dead. In his acclaimed book, *Eyewitness to a Genocide: The*

United Nations and Rwanda, he squarely blames Security Council's indifference and apathy that led to the Rwandan genocide.

Under the watchful eyes of the Security Council 800,000 Rwandans fell victim to genocide. No one can be certain that a modest intervention at the outset of the crisis might have halted this tragedy, but the record is that the Security Council did little until it was too late and safe.... In this regard, the UN's indifference reflects the indifference of the member states. Yet the bureaucratization of peacekeeping shaped the Security Council's debates and contributed to the production of indifference. (575)

In the extract above, the writer critiques the UN Security Council's failure to act during the Rwandan Genocide, emphasizing that while it's uncertain whether early intervention could have prevented the tragedy, the Council did too little too late. This inaction is attributed to the indifference and apathy of both the Security Council and the member states, whose priorities and lack of urgency shaped the outcome.

Such failures compelled the UN to formally adopt the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine in 2005, which asserts a state's primary responsibility to protect its own population from war crimes, ethnic cleansing, genocide and crimes against humanity. According to R2P, if a state fails to uphold this responsibility, the international community has a responsibility to intervene. Stating that the international community in the last decade repeatedly made a mess of handling the many demands that were made for "humanitarian intervention" in Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo, seasoned diplomats like Gareth Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun, who co-chaired the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, are of the opinion the responsibility

to protect implies a duty “to react to situations in which there is compelling need for human protection and that if preventive measures fail to resolve or contain such a situation, and when the state in question is unable or unwilling to step in, then intervention by other states may be required” (102). According to Evans and Sahnoun, coercive measures then may include political, economic, or judicial steps and “in extreme cases-but only extreme cases-they may also include military action”. And to justify military intervention, they argue, six principles have to be satisfied: the “just cause” threshold, four precautionary principles, and the requirement of “right authority” (5). “Just cause” threshold states that military intervention is only justified either by serious, large-scale loss of life or irreparable harm caused by ethnic cleansing, even though they may be actual or anticipated. On the other hand, Evans and Sahnoun also conclude that military intervention requires four “precautionary principles”: right intention (whose primary goal is to avoid suffering), last resort (all non-military options are exhausted), proportional means (use of minimum force to fulfill objective), and reasonable prospects where success is likely (103-106).

In addition to these criteria for legitimate military intervention, scholars have also stressed on the importance of proactive measures to prevent conflict before it escalates to extreme level. Academics like Alex J. Bellamy also believe that prevention of deadly conflict is one of the fundamental goals of the UN, and cite the preamble to the UN Charter which commits organization to “saving future generations” from the “scourge of war”. In his article titled “Conflict Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect”, he presents the view of former Secretary General of United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld’s to support his argument:

In 1955, Dag Hammarskjold identified the prevention and solving of conflicts as the organization's most significant function. Indeed, UN peacekeeping itself grew out of Hammarskjold's belief that the primary contribution that the world organization could make to international peace and security was in the prevention and resolution of conflict, and not in the enforcement of collective will as envisaged by the drafters of the Charter.

(136)

The passage above suggests that Hammarskjold, a key figure in UN history shifted the focus from UN Charter's initial emphasis on enforcing collective will through military action to preventing and resolving conflicts through the means of peacekeeping with responsibility to protect as its primary function.

While Bellamy also argues that Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) adds value to international efforts to protect populations from genocide and mass atrocities, Thomas G. Weiss goes a step further to add that determining whether, when, where and why to intervene to protect civilians caught in the crosshairs of war and violence increasingly is guided by the "responsibility to protect" (322). He, however, is also a staunch critique of R2P, stating that between NATO's 1999 intervention in Kosovo and Libya last year, the sharp end of the R2P stick – the use of military force –“ had been replaced by skittishness from diplomats, UN staff, scholars, and policy analysts. In his article titled “On R2P, America Takes the Lead,”, Weiss writes:

The intergovernmental agreement on the occasion of the UN's 60th anniversary at the 2005 World Summit to halt ‘genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity’ marked a turning point in R2P's crystallization - though

not quite the "international Magna Carta" hyperbolically proclaimed by the (US) State Department's former director of policy and planning.” (322)

The passage exemplifies the debate within the scholarly community regarding the effectiveness and practical application of R2P doctrine in the context of international interventions, particularly those involving genocide and mass atrocities.

Historical Perspectives

The United Nations (UN) was established in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War with a clear objective to maintain international peace and security, promote human rights, and provide member states with aid and support in cases of famine, natural disasters, and conflict, among others. But the inter-governmental organization's performance during humanitarian crises and conflicts – particularly during the Rwandan Genocide (1994) and the Bosnian War (1992-95) – has drawn extensive criticism and remains a subject of intense debate and controversy.

International political scholars like Michael Barnett and military figures such as Roméo Dallaire (in his book titled *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*) provide firsthand accounts of constrained mandate, bureaucratic inaction, and institutional paralysis within the UN that led to violent outcomes during the Rwandan crisis. Barnett, who was closely monitoring events in Rwanda while working at the UN headquarters in New York, argues that the institution's failure was not solely a result of ignorance or evil, but a consequence of bureaucratic caution, political disinterest, and structural dysfunction. In the introduction to his book titled *Eyewitness to a Genocide: The United Nations and Rwanda*, Barnett writes:

The UN's languid response to the Rwandan genocide has produced countless studies, reports, and commissions that attempted to piece together what happened and, ultimately whom to blame for the cowardly act of abandonment. Many of the early investigation effected a diplomatic version of racial profiling and used circumstantial evidence to create a simplistic story that indicated the usual suspect—the United States....The United States used its considerable power in the Security Council to help muzzle the call for intervention and later obstructed those who wanted to intervene...Later President Bill Clinton insisted that he was unaware of the genocide and would have acted had he known. (2)

The passage critically examines and sharply condemns international—and particularly American—failure to act in Rwanda. It points to systemic problems in international governance, including selective morality, vested political interest, and a tendency to avoid accountability. Through historical reflection, the passage raises a difficult question about how powerful nations like the United States use their influence for their own political self-interest in moments of humanitarian crisis.

Samantha Power further corroborates the failure of the international community—particularly the UN and the U.S.—to act on the early warning of genocide:

Romeo Dallaire, a Canadian major general who commanded UN peacekeeping forces in Rwanda in 1994, appealed for permission to disarm militias and to prevent the extermination of Rwanda's Tutsi three months before the genocide began. Denied this by his political masters at the United Nations, he watched corpses pile up around him as Washington led a successful effort to remove most

of the peacekeepers under his command and then aggressively worked to block authorization of UN reinforcements. The United States refused to use its technology to jam radio broadcasts that were a crucial instrument in the coordination and perpetuation of the genocide. And even as, on average, 8,000 Rwandans were being butchered each day, the issue never became a priority for senior U.S. officials. Some 800,000 Rwandans were killed in 100 days. (Preface, xx)

The passage above exposes how institutional neutrality and impartiality without moral courage becomes a form of collusion in mass killing and atrocity and demonstrates the catastrophic failure of international community during the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

Meanwhile, UN's own assessments in the report *The Fall of Srebrenica* shed light on how the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) mission in Bosnia was stricken by issues of neutrality, institutional paralysis, and the failure to prevent the Srebrenica massacre which claimed the lives of more than 8000 Bosniaks. Its cinematic representation in the satirical war film *No Man's Land*, which is set during the height of the Bosnian war, show the UN forces deployed there severely underpowered with dwindling morale as they are not allowed to effectively intervene in the conflict.

Samantha Power maintains that deliberate inaction by the international community in Rwanda was not simply a policy failure but a reflection of Western governments' reluctance to label the crisis as genocide, thereby avoiding moral and legal obligations to intervene. *Hotel Rwanda* captures this very argument in a dramatic scene where the realization dawns on Paul Rusesabagina that the world knows of the ongoing violence and slaughter but chooses not to do anything about it.

In reality, UNAMIR was deployed with a Chapter VI peacekeeping mandate. This UN Charter outlines the procedures for the peaceful resolution of disputes, emphasizing the use of diplomatic measures like negotiation, mediation, and arbitration to prevent conflicts. This meant UNAMIR's role was primarily to monitor the ceasefire agreement between the Rwandan government and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels, and to support the implementation of the Arusha Accords, the peace agreement. They were not allowed to use force except in self-defense. Preventing widespread violence and genocide would have required offensive military action, which was explicitly outside their mandate or even capability: Colonel Oliver's repeated requests for a stronger mandate and more troops were denied by the UN Security Council.

Furthermore, powerful member states of the UN Security Council--permanent seat holders United States, United Kingdom and France--were reluctant to define the killings as "genocide." This was partly due to the legal obligations that term would have triggered under the Genocide Convention, potentially requiring intervention. Formally called the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, or the Genocide Convention, it is an international human rights treaty that criminalizes genocide and obligates state parties to pursue the enforcement of its prohibition. However, there was a general lack of political will to commit significant resources and risk the lives of their personnel in what was perceived by some as an internal conflict in a distant African nation. This international (read western) indifference is powerfully dramatized in *Hotel Rwanda*, particularly in a scene where Paul Rusesabagina speaks with his boss in Belgium over the phone:

In a desperate attempt to save those sheltering at the Hotel des Mille Collines, Paul makes an urgent call to the President of Sabena, the Belgian airline that owns the hotel. He informs him that the Hutu army has arrived, ordering all 100 staff members and over 800 Hutu and Tutsi refugees—referred to as "guests"—out of the hotel with the intent to kill them. Paul grimly states he has little time left, sarcastically thanking Sabena for everything they've done for him, his family, and the refugees.

Aghast, Paul's boss immediately orders his team to contact the UN and relay the dire situation at the hotel. He also instructs his secretary to call the Belgian Prime Minister's office, demanding to speak with him at once. He then asks Paul whom he can call to intervene. Paul suggests the French government, as they supply the Hutu army. Paul's boss agrees, urging him to do everything possible to buy time while he tries to resolve the situation.

Paul acts quickly, distributing more beers to the Hutu army terrorizing the hotel residents. He also provides old guest lists to avoid identifying Hutus among the refugees, claiming the hotel stopped recording names after the Rwandan president's murder. Despite threats from the Hutu army commander to kill everyone, Paul steadfastly refuses to produce a current guest list.

Suddenly, the Hutu army commander receives a call and is ordered to leave the hotel. Paul, bewildered, receives a call from the President of Sabena, who explains he managed to reach the French President's office, which led to the Hutu army's departure.



Figure 1. The President of Sabena speaks with Paul over the phone. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 1:04:11

Paul, incredibly grateful, thanks him for saving their lives. His boss, however, conveys a somber truth: he pleaded with the French and Belgians to return and rescue them all, but it won't happen. He tells Paul, "They're cowards, Paul.

Rwanda is not worth a single vote to any of them. The French, the British, the Americans. I am sorry, Paul."

(1:00:02 -- 1:04:32)

The scenes bring to the fore the western indifference vividly, revealing the reason for their unwillingness to intervene in the Rwandan genocide that led to the failure of the international community in preventing a genocide happening right before their eyes in what was a grim chapter in modern history.

After ten Belgian peacekeepers were viciously murdered in the early days of the Rwandan genocide, Belgium, a key contributor to UNAMIR and former colonial masters of the country, decided to immediately withdraw its forces. This significantly weakened

the already understaffed mission and further reduced its capacity to act. Other nations followed suit, leaving Colonel Oliver with a drastically reduced contingent.

Similarly, in the initial stages of the genocide, the international community failed to fully grasp the full scale and nature of the atrocities unfolding in Rwanda. The conflict was often portrayed as a civil war rather than a systematic extermination of a population.

Meanwhile, the memory of the UN's disastrous intervention in Somalia (UNOSOM II) in 1993, which resulted in the deaths of American soldiers, was still fresh and this heavily influenced the international community's reluctance to get involved in another complex and potentially dangerous African conflict. International relation experts believe that this "Somalia syndrome" contributed to a risk-averse approach to the Rwandan crisis.

The 1995 Human Rights Watch Report, "The Fall of Srebrenica and the Failure of U.N. Peacekeeping," paints a grim picture of what happened when UN-designated "safe areas" collapsed under Bosnian Serb assault. It called the fall of the town of Srebrenica and its environs to Bosnian Serb forces in early July 1995 "a mockery of the international community's professed commitment to safeguard regions it declared to be 'safe areas; and placed under United Nations protection in 1993. "The report found U.N. peacekeeping personnel, particularly the lightly armed Dutch battalion, were unable—or unwilling—to resist the attackers or call in support. This failure permitted systematic mass executions of thousands of Bosniak men and boys, as well as widespread terror, rape, and abuse of civilians during and after the enclave's capture.

The Human Rights Watch report details how the trek through Bosnian Serb-controlled territory that men fleeing the enclave hoped would lead them to safety instead

led to ambushes and executions of hundreds and possibly thousands of men in numerous locations. It further details the mishandling of the crisis by the U.N.'s Bosnia peacekeeping force UNPROFOR/UNPF-- "from the craven decisions of its field commanders prior to the fall of Srebrenica, to its apparent suppression and destruction of evidence of massive human rights abuses immediately after the fall of the safe area." The Dutch Defense Ministry's "mislaying" of a crucial list of missing Bosnian men and boys and its destruction of a video tape showing Bosnian Serb soldiers engaged in extrajudicial executions as Dutch U.N. troops looked on is also criticized by the report.

The report by HRW, an international NGO that conducts research and advocacy on human rights, concludes that the fall of Srebrenica exposed the inadequacy of the U.N.'s lightly armed peacekeeping missions in active war zones and the failure of international will. It called for accountability, justice for victims, disarmament of forces, and major reforms in U.N. mandates and response capacity to prevent such tragedies in the future. Last but not the least, Human Rights Watch demanded investigation into the role of UN officials and disclose all available information pertaining to the United Nations' response to the military offensive against the so-called "safe area" of Srebrenica. "Such investigations and disclosures should be aimed at and forthcoming not only from the Dutch government, but also senior military and civilian officials at UNPROFOR/UNPF headquarters in Zagreb," the report stated, adding that an independent investigation should be conducted into the U.N.'s role before, during and after the fall of the Srebrenica enclave, and disciplinary action should be taken against all those - irrespective of rank - who destroyed or withheld information that provides evidence of human rights abuses. The report basically exposed the vulnerabilities of

lightly armed and politically constrained UN peacekeeping missions and demanded accountability and sweeping reforms.

Bystander Apathy and Responsibility to Protect (R2P) are two concepts that help clarify why, despite having the authority to protect, international organizations like the UN did nothing to prevent violence and atrocities during the Rwandan Genocide and the Bosnian War. These two concepts explain the ethical dilemmas of inaction faced by Colonel Oliver in *Hotel Rwanda* and Sergeant Marchand in *No Man's Land* as they observe the violence going on around them, but are too powerless to stop them because of the orders of their superiors not to intervene. Their experiences transform the abstract concepts into gripping emotional narratives that put the blame squarely on international institutions for failing to halt atrocities when they had the opportunity, allowing us to empathize with the moral dilemma they faced while being plagued by limited mandate, bureaucratic inefficiency and institutional failures.

CHAPTER III

Peacekeepers or Bystanders--UN in *Hotel Rwanda* and *No Man's Land*



Figure 2. Posters of the films *Hotel Rwanda* (left) and *No Man's Land* (Right). Source: Researcher's Screenshot

Despite being governed by the core principles of impartiality and neutrality, the UN peacekeeping forces are initially portrayed by both the films as being, either voluntarily or involuntarily, “apathetic bystanders” in the conflicts in Rwanda and Bosnia as they remain constrained by limited mandate, lack of political will and bureaucratic inaction. This is shown through a particular scene in *Hotel Rwanda* where Canadian Colonel Oliver, who leads the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), is asked by a foreign journalist who has flown into Kigali to specially cover the ongoing conflict between Hutus and Tutsis: In light of various reports of reprisal massacres being heard, “Will the UN intervene to stop the bloodshed?” Standing in front

of the TV camera crew, Colonel Oliver replies with a straight face without mincing any words, “We’re (UN) here as peacekeepers, not as peacemakers. My orders are not to intervene” (00:37:40 –00:37:50).



*Figure 3. Colonel Oliver talks to journalists, explaining why his UN troops cannot intervene to stop the genocide.
Source: Researcher's Screenshot from Hotel Rwanda at 00:37:43*

This scene illuminates UN's modus operandi as Colonel Oliver is explaining the limited mandate and powerlessness of the UN mission during the Rwandan genocide. As peacekeepers deployed after the peace agreement was signed between the Hutu-led government and Tutsi rebels, UNAMIR mandate was to observe and monitor ceasefires, and was prohibited from using force to stop the genocide. It operated under strict rules of engagement, which meant it couldn't use force unless directly attacked. But the peacemakers Colonel Oliver was referring to could actively intervene to stop conflict, even if it meant through military force, and hence effectively, impose peace. However, this was not what the UN force was authorized to do in Rwanda as even when UN soldiers witness mass killings, they were ordered to stand down in keeping with the limited UN peacekeeping mandate.

In the meantime, French Army sergeant Marchand of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in *No Man's Land*, is similarly ordered by his senior commander to not get involved in an effort to help the trapped soldiers, reminding him that the UNPROFOR's mission in Bosnia is to guard humanitarian aid convoys while remaining neutral in the conflict. Upon receiving this orders, a visibly outraged sergeant Marchand asks aloud, "Why the (expletives) are were here? To which his fellow UN peacekeeper retorts, "To stop the local from killing each other." Then after a brief pause he adds, "Except we can't use force or get into dangerous situations." (00:40:04 – 00:40:16)



Figure 4. Marchand (in the foreground) vents his frustration to his fellow soldiers. Source: Researcher's Screenshot from *No Man's Land* at 40:16

These two scenes clearly depict the UN peacekeepers as hamstrung by a limited mandate, lack of political will from the international community and bureaucratic inertia. Still Colonel Oliver appears to maintain a calm and composed demeanor (at least at that moment) even amidst escalating violence. This could be because he is a senior UN peacekeeping commander trying to maintain an image of being in control of the situation.

It may be also because he is in front of the camera answering difficult questions from journalists for the whole wide world to see. Colonel Oliver, however, lets his guard down for a moment during the interview when he checks his watch, an indirect body language of his growing impatience and unease with the deteriorating security situation. (00:37:45–00:37:50)



Figure 5. Colonel Oliver checks his watch while talking with journalists. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00:37:48

Sergeant Marchand, in contrast, is a much younger UN peacekeeping officer who is frustrated with his superiors who keep on telling him to stay put and avoid direct intervention, which only adds to his visible outrage and despair. Both these scenes only work to strengthen the general (may be even clichéd) impression of UN peacekeepers as apathetic bystanders in active conflict zones, as per the UN principles of peacekeeping for maintaining international peace and security, which are as follows: Consent of the parties (in a conflict or situation), Impartiality (no bias or favoritism towards any party), and Non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate impartiality.



Figure 6. French Sergeant Marchand speaks with a Serbian soldier. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00:43:02

Despite this, the scenes only expose the impotency of UN in its attempts at intervention and mediation, and thus reinforce the perception that it is acting as “complicit bystanders” by not intervening to the massacres and bloodshed (in the case of *Hotel Rwanda*) or not taking any action to save the trapped soldiers (in the case of *No Man’s Land*).

From this pivotal moment onwards, the two films start to diverge sharply in their portrayals of UN peacekeepers role in conflict. *Hotel Rwanda* continues to depict the UN as an impartial mediator constrained by limited mandate (to adhere to a neutral stance) because of which it is unable to intervene to prevent the atrocities happening around them that is rapidly taking the shape of a genocide. This cinematic depiction of the tragic consequence of UN’s impartiality and inaction shows the cost of its failure to use military force to prevent the mass atrocities or convince the international community, particularly the western powers, to act decisively to stop the genocide. In contrast, *No Man’s Land* highlight how that very impartiality and inaction can become a catalyst for deliberate tactic to save the lives of trapped soldiers. Set during the Bosnian war, Sergeant Marchand, a UN peacekeeper, connives with a journalist to protect vulnerable soldiers

caught in the trenches of the front lines even as his cynical and self-interested superiors uses UN impartiality and neutrality to avoid responsibility and protect their organization's interests. These differences in the tactics of the two movies leads to vastly different outcomes that both emphasize and critique the complexities of the UN's traditional role in conflict situations.

The plots branch out into two distinct tangents – heroic in the case of *Hotel Rwanda* and satirical in the case of *No Man's Land*. Despite his strong reservations, Canadian Colonel Oliver largely follows the orders from his superiors and restrict his peacekeeping troops to monitoring the ceasefire between government and rebel forces and coordinating humanitarian efforts.



Figure 7. Sergeant Marchand alongside the English journalist. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00: 55:33

Conversely, French Army Sergeant Marchand is ordered not to intervene to save three soldiers from the warring sides trapped in the trenches of the no man's land. But in an act of insubordination and moral defiance (as depicted in the screenshot above), he tells his superiors that a persistent English journalist with the Global New Channel 'knows everything' about the trapped soldiers caught in the trenches between the two fronts,

having intercepted their radio frequency. Sergeant Marchand indulges in this deception believing (and rightly so) that news about the trapped soldiers will generate public pressure and compel the UN command to intervene and rescue the trapped soldiers who are now beginning to turn on one another.

These contrasting narratives illuminate both disobedience and disillusionment within peacekeeping forces. While both films critique the UN's structural powerlessness, the following analysis will focus more specifically on how each film explores the moral dilemmas faced by individual peacekeepers.

UN in *Hotel Rwanda*: Betrayal and Abandonment



Figure 8. Colonel Oliver tells Paul he's overwhelmed at the UN refugee camp. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00:38:46

In the scene above (figure 8) in *Hotel Rwanda*, we see UN so helpless that it cannot even provide shelter to the refugees fleeing the conflict. Paul pleads with Colonel Oliver that he has no way to protect these people as the hotel has more refugees than rooms to shelter them, and asks, "Can you not take them with you to your facilities?" To this the latter

replies outright that he is sorry he can't do that as he is already overwhelmed at his (UNAMIR-run) refugee camp which is constantly being attacked.

“As soon as we can stabilize this situation, then I'll take ‘em,” Colonel Oliver assures a concerned looking Paul. (00:38:40 – 00:38:52) This scene can be interpreted as another instance of UN bystander apathy reflecting how adherence to impartiality and non-intervention can leave the UN appearing passive, unable to provide aid or moral clarity. Looking from a broader cinematic and cultural perspective, one can find an apparent symbolism in this scene: the blue UN beret badge worn by Colonel Oliver (a white officer from an affluent Western country) is visually prominent in the frame and becomes symbol of global authority rooted in western power. When Paul – a black man from a war torn, post-colonial nation –begs for assistance, he represents the subaltern seeking help from a historically privileged white person the likes of whom colonized his nation and much of Africa. Through this cinematic technique, the film critiques how imagery and dialogue can even inadvertently perpetuate systemic bias.



Figure 9. Paul appeals to Colonel Oliver. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00:38:38

Hotel Rwanda not only does show UN's failure to prevent the genocide as merely an operational failure caused by its limited mandate and bureaucratic shortcomings, but a reflection of global apathy to the catastrophe. A scene involving a short exchange between Paul and cameraman Jack Daglish (Joaquin Phoenix) makes it pretty evident. Paul is glad that Jack has shot a footage of the horrid massacre of Tutsis by Hutu militias on the streets of Kigali and that the world will see it. "It is the only way we have a chance that people might intervene," Paul tells Jack, apparently hopeful that the gruesome footages would persuade the world, especially the UN and the western powers like US, UK and France, to intervene when they witness such atrocities. But to Paul's dismay, Jack wearily suggests that, "I think if people see this footage...they'll say 'Oh, my god, that's horrible' and then go on eating their dinners." (00:43:30—00:44:04)



Figure 10. Paul speaks with cameraman Jack Daglish about the massacre footage. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00:43:50

This particular scene induces viewers to reflect on their own role as potential bystanders, drawing the audience into the film's moral universe.

As the story progresses, one learns from Colonel Oliver that the brutal Interahamwe Hutu militias, have surrounded the whole town and a melee of terrorized people, including some who are seriously injured, arrive at the hotel as civil war erupts. A rowdy group of militias wielding machetes and guns come in pursuit in their vehicles with the clear intention to kill the people fleeing the carnage, and almost engage in direct confrontation with armed UN peacekeepers guarding the hotel.

A quick thinking Colonel Oliver repeatedly orders his men not to open fire so as to avoid escalating the already tense situation and the Hutu militias leave with threatening words and throwing a blue UN helmet at the peacekeepers in a clear, defiant rejection as well as mockery of the UN's peacekeeping authority. By displaying and throwing the bloodied UN helmet, the militias are also warning that any kind of resistance leads to dead peacekeepers.



Figure 11. Hutu militias confront UN peacekeepers at the hotel. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00:44:52



Figure 12. A UN helmet is thrown to the ground by Hutu Militias. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00:45:02

The throwing of the UN helmet could also be construed as a deliberate act of provocation aimed at humiliating the UN and dehumanization of peacekeepers. This forces Colonel Oliver and his peacekeepers into a moral quandary: if they open fire, they risk escalation, brutality and reprisal attack; if they remain silent, they appear powerless. By undermining the UN in this manner the militia claims victory and forces a stalemate that allows violence to continue.

In the following scenes, Colonel Oliver informs Paul that the militias murdered 10 of his Belgian UN soldiers while protecting the Prime Minister. The brutal murders of the Belgian peacekeepers actually took place in the early days of the genocide, after which Belgium, a key contributor to UNAMIR, decided to withdraw its forces. This further weakened the already understaffed peacekeeping mission and caused other nations to follow suit, leaving Colonel Oliver (and Colonel Daliere) with a drastically reduced and demoralized peacekeeping contingent. Colonel Oliver, however, assures Paul that help is on the way as the Europeans are

putting together an intervention force that will be in the country in a few days.



Figure 13. Colonel Oliver engages in a heated exchange with the French soldiers. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00:49:07

When the promised intervention force finally arrives at the hotel, much to the joy of its foreign residents, refugees, and staff, and especially Paul and his family, who feel their prayers have been finally answered. But their relief is soon cut short when Paul witnesses Colonel Oliver angrily fling his UN beret to the ground during a tense exchange with the arriving French soldiers of the intervention force. In this powerful scene, the camera shifts between Paul's point of view -- watching Colonel Oliver argue with the French soldiers -- and the audience's perspective, as the camera lingers on Paul coming to a silent realization that their relief maybe short-lived. And true to Paul's suspicion, it is later revealed that the French soldiers are there for the evacuation of only foreign guests of the hotel (primarily white) and not the Rwandan (or black) guests. And, while the hurling of the helmet by Hutu militias is a calculated act of rejecting UN authority, Colonel Oliver's act of angrily throwing his UN beret to the ground is a dramatic expression of his moral outrage at the UN and western power for abandoning

the Rwandans and the global indifference to the ongoing genocide. The gesture can also be taken as a protest against the failure of the international community in its responsibility to protect (R2P) those under threat.



Figure 14. The bar scene where Colonel Oliver tells Paul what the West really thinks of Africa and Africans. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00:50:14

One of the main themes of *Hotel Rwanda* is betrayal, as depicted later in the hotel bar scene in which Colonel Oliver tells Paul while the latter is serving him scotch whisky that the French soldiers are not there to stop the slaughter but only evacuate the foreign guests, adding with great bitterness that “the West, all the great superpowers, everything you believe in, Paul...they think you’re dirt, they think you’re dung. You’re worthless.” (00:50:00 –00:50:16) Paul looks visibly upset and a sense of betrayal appears on his face as he listens to the Colonel hinting that Africans, the blacks are not considered worth saving by the West.

In the next scene, Paul is seen telling his wife Tatiana that all the white guests of the hotel are being evacuated, even the UN Belgian soldiers guarding the hotel and that they, the Rwandans sheltering at the hotel, are now abandoned. The only words of

consolation he has for his wife are that Colonel Oliver has only 300 UN peacekeepers for the whole country and that the most he can spare for the hotel are four men who are not allowed to shoot. He then considers himself a fool for seemingly being hopeful that his foreign contacts will come to their rescue.

As the white guests leave the besieged hotel on a convoy protected by French soldiers on a rainy morning the next day, a report being readout by a newscaster in the background cites a UN source that the US and British representatives on the Security Council will lobby for the removal of all UN peacekeepers from Rwanda. This betrayal and abandonment of Rwandans in their most desperate hour makes UN look like an apathetic bystander, even complicit through inaction, and reinforces the belief that UN values Western interests over African lives.



Figure 15. Paul engages in a tense conversation with his wife. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00:51:45

Terry George, the director of *Hotel Rwanda*, also echoes this sense of betrayal in Paul:

He (Paul) is probably the best example of the surrogate for the audience, because he led this European-style, middle-class life in Kigali, and his career, his training,

all taught him to accommodate Europeans and Westerners... He doesn't want to listen to hate radio. He's hopeful about the UN and clearly dismissive about the militia. Then, as the genocide starts to unfold, he's completely knocked sideways and has to fall back on his resources, basically taking the talents of his job and suddenly putting them to this monumental use. (Motskin 75)

This paragraph shows Paul Rusesabagina's transformation in *Hotel Rwanda* and his role as a 'surrogate for the audience'. He begins as a figure of the educated, middle-class African who has adopted Western values. He has high hope and regard in institutions like the UN and its ability to solve his country's problems and is dismissive about the militia, thinking that where peace and diplomacy would eventually prevail. However, as the genocide unfolds, Paul is completely taken aback and forced to change his worldview after being confronted with a brutal reality far removed from the civilized world he once knew. He must now use all his personal and professional resources to survive and protect his family and those who seek sanctuary at his hotel. Whatever moral authority that the UN and the global community held lay completely in shambles before him and other Rwandan victims and its much talked about neutrality and impartiality is found to be just a cover for powerlessness, or worse hidden bias against Africans.

UN in *No Man's Land*: Bureaucracy and Absurdity

If a sense of betrayal looms large over the movie *Hotel Rwanda*, the pitfalls of layered bureaucracy hangs heavy on *No Man's Land*. Both films show a constrained UN peacekeeping force commanders or distant bureaucrats and powerful men who play by the book and are, willingly or unwillingly, resolute on UN's neutrality and impartiality even if it means untold misery and carnage on the ground.



Figure 16. UNPROFOR headquarters in Zagreb. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00:46:24



Figure 17. Colonel Soft at the UNPROFOR headquarters. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00 46:58

In *No Man's Land*, the film oscillates between the cozy, bureaucratic orderliness of UNPROFOR headquarters in Zagreb and the chaotic yet picturesque war-ravaged terrain of the Bosnian countryside. In one darkly comic scene (figure 17), Colonel Soft (Simon Callow), the UN Force Commander in Zagreb, receives a call from a peacekeeper in Sarajevo. For the first time, both Bosniak and Serb forces are requesting for the same thing: a rescue of two soldiers stranded in the trenches between the two front lines.

Sitting behind a large wooden desk adorned with a prominent UN flag, Colonel Soft asks why the captain did not channel the request through proper command channels—only to learn that all his supervisors are in Geneva for a media-relations seminar.



Figure 18. UN Peacekeepers operate in Sarajevo amid the ongoing conflict. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00:39:17

Then Colonel Soft launches into a lengthy diatribe: he cannot risk the lives of his own troops to save soldiers belonging to the warring sides. With a woman provocatively perched on his desk, he reiterates—before even allowing the captain to finish—that rescuing ‘two unknown individuals’ would require approval from the UN General Assembly, which he doubts would reconvene for such a task. He ends the call abruptly, citing his lack of authority. Throughout, he flirts with the woman, plays chess against himself, and gestures that she should not touch the pieces—all while continuing to read.

The scene satirizes how peacekeeping missions can become engrossed in bureaucratic red tape, with high-ranking officials more focused on procedure and taking precaution than on saving lives. In essence, this scene critiques the UN’s structural paralysis and detachment from the ground realities of war. Also, because of his blind adherence to protocols and procedural obedience, ‘banality of evil’--a phrase coined by

Hannah Arendt to define modern bureaucratic systems, where individuals acting under orders and protocols commit grave wrongs, best resonates with characters like UNPROFOR's Colonel Soft.



Figure 19. Ciki and Cera engage in conversation with Sgt. Marchand. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00:49:31

Immediately in the next scene, the audience is taken back to the trenches where Ciki assures Cera, who is lying directly on a mine, that they will get a mine expert to diffuse the mine and their ordeal will soon be over. As if on a cue, Ciki hears sound of a vehicle approaching their trenches and soon enough an armored vehicle with a UN emblazoned in it stops on the parapet. Ciki cries with joy, “Here comes the smurf! Cera! The Smurfs.” (00:48:39 – 00:48:45)

The scene show UN peacekeepers being jokingly called Smurfs (by Ciki) as their distinctive light blue helmets and berets have the same hue associated with the beloved cartoon characters. In the scene, Nino appears equally happy and is hopeful that they will now be rescued.



Figure 20. Sgt Marchand makes his way toward the trenches. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00:43:38

Frustrated by his superiors' bureaucratic indifference and strict instructions not to go check on the trapped soldiers, Sergeant Marchand (George Siatidis) defies orders and ventures into the trench with a small team of UN peacekeepers. He speaks in English with Ciki and Nino and immediately learns that one is a Bosniak and the other a Serb. The two guide Sergeant Marchand to Cera, who is critically wounded and is in urgent need of medical attention. But when Marchand attempts to move him a little, Nino warns that Cera is lying on a 'bouncing' mine that could blow if he is shifted. Marchand realizes the danger and calls for a mine-clearing squad. Just then, he gets a radio call from 'Charlie Tango' (his superior, likely to be Captain Dubois), and he gets inside the armored vehicle to respond.

Up to this point, if there is any real hero in this film, then it has to be Marchand. His decision to defy orders of his superiors and enter no man's land despite the possibility of attack from one or both warring sides shows his courage driven by compassion and his natural instinct to protect and save lives. But the fact that he still

needs to seek clearance of his superiors for life-saving decisions while Ceralie helpless speaks volumes about UN's bureaucratic procedures that impede rather than facilitate humanitarian work.



Figure 21. Sgt Marchand speaks with his superiors from his UN armored vehicle. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00:50:10

Sergeant Marchand is told by his superior that the orders are not to move as things are too risky, but he informs that his team are already on the spot and that everything's under control as both sides are respecting the ceasefire. "We have three evacuees and need a mine expert," Sergeant Marchand informs his superior and asks (00:50:01—00:50:15). To this the man on the other end of the radio call strictly tells Sergeant Marchand that he has five minutes to pull out of that place, 15 minutes to call him from the checkpoint of his team's safe return and report to the duty officer on his return. Failing to do so will have him arrested.

Angry and appalled by his superiors' strict orders not to intervene even to save lives and return immediately, Marchand starts to leave and informs Nino and Ciki that it is his boss's order and he will try to be back with help. While leaving Marchand, defying orders, makes a fatal error of telling a visibly angry Ciki that if they want he can take

them with him. Nino considers the offer as a way out of the predicament he is in, but Ciki contemptuously asks Nino to thank the UN peacekeeper nicely and “tell him he can fuck off” right to his face (00:51:50 –00:52:01).

A fatigued Cera also tells Ciki that he shouldn’t be so stupid and should go and bring back help. Nino, however, proceeds to go with the UN troop, but Ciki, with his gun in his hands, threatens the latter that he is going nowhere (he had promised Cera earlier that they are not going anywhere without him). This is all Nino’s fault (Nino had planted the mine underneath a wounded Cera) and that until the time Nino is in the trenches, his side (Serbs) will not shoot. Nino swears that his side will not shoot, but Ciki is adamant that Nino stays in the trench with him.



Figure 19 Ciki fires a shot at Nino. Source: Researcher’s Screenshot at 00:52:22

Taking it to be a bluff, Nino tells Ciki that he can go ahead and shoot him and starts to leave. Ciki warns Nino not to fool around, but seeing that this has no effect on the latter, he fires even as Sergeant Marchand yells at him not to shoot. Nino has been hit on his legs and is crying in pain. A UN peacekeeper trains his gun at Ciki while Sergeant Marchand shouts all to halt fire and lower their weapons in order to deescalate the

situation. Sergeant Marchand and his men get inside their armored vehicle with Nino's cries of pain still reverberating in the background. One peacekeeper mutters that the warring sides are maniacs and they should all leave the place.



Figure 23. UN peacekeepers find themselves stunned in the aftermath of the the shooting. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00:52:46

The preceding scenes highlight the absurdity of war, where sworn enemies like Ciki and Nino collaborate to seek help from Marchand for themselves and their fallen compatriot reveals shared humanity beneath conflict. But the senseless, irrational actions of armed conflict that soon follow emphasize the complex dangers, unpredictability and cruelty of war which is often undistinguishable from cooperation, individual heroism and courage, leading to military chaos with often tragic, darkly ironic outcomes.

After conspiring with the English journalist Jane Livingstone to compel the UN high command into intervene, Marchand is asked why he's taking such a risk. The UN peacekeeper replies that he is sick of being a bystander and wants to stop the madmen tearing Bosnia apart. When the English journalist counters him by asking him that as a UN peacekeeper shouldn't he remain neutral. Marchand responds, "You can't be neutral

in the face of murder. Doing nothing to stop it (the massacre) is taking sides.” However, he refuses to say this on camera, admitting that he may be mad but not stupid. (00:57:40–00:58:01)



Figure 24. Sgt. Marchand tells the English journalist that one can't be neutral in the face of murder. Source: Researcher's Screenshot at 00:57:52

This scene powerfully exposes the impossible position UN peacekeepers often find themselves in during humanitarian crises like the Bosnian War. Simultaneously, it carries profound moral and political significance, revealing the ethical tensions and contradictions within UN peacekeeping operations. However, by not adhering to the principles of neutrality and impartiality that only makes him look like a bystander, Marchand acts decisively on his moral conviction for the protection of the soldiers whose lives are at peril.

Between Mandate and Morality: Cinematic Description of UN Inaction

This analysis of *Hotel Rwanda* and *No Man's Land* has offered a compelling portrayal of UN's failure during the Rwandan Genocide and Bosnian War and can be taken as an indictment of its role in the two humanitarian crises of the 90s. The cinematic

depictions of UN not as a proactive international peacekeeping force but as an apathetic bystander constrained by limited mandate and lack of political will of the western powers (which support it both financially and militarily) can be easily verified by the fact that in reality UN peacekeeping efforts did fail in preventing mass atrocities, ethnic cleansing and genocide in both Rwanda and Bosnia. So much so that the principles of neutrality and impartiality, which the UN staunchly upholds and offers as a reason for not intervening, has made it appear as if it has a hidden bias against Africans and Muslims (8000 Bosniaks, or ethnic Bosnian Muslims, were killed during the infamous Srebrenica massacre during the Bosnian war), or worse complicit in such crimes against humanity. The exploration of characters like Colonel Oliver in *Hotel Rwanda* and Sergeant Marchand in *No Man's Land*, who are caught between institutional orders and their moral convictions, illuminate how peacekeepers can become cynical and disillusioned in the face of UN's neutrality verging on bystanderism and global apathy. While *Hotel Rwanda* depicts betrayal and abandonment symbolized by the evacuation of mostly white guests of the Hotel des Mille Collines and desertion of Black Rwandans left to fend for themselves amid ensuing genocide, *No Man's Land* portrays the absurdity of war and international peacekeeping interventions, where bureaucratic procedures supersede urgent humanitarian needs. In doing so, both films reveal the same uncomfortable truth: international organizations like the UN often serve the interests of their most powerful member states, particularly western powers, rather than those who are actually in need of help. In summation, both films show that UN neutrality, when devoid of moral courage, only contributes to the continuation of atrocity.

CHAPTER IV

Individual Morality, International Mediation and Responsibility

The UN's performance in responding to both the Rwandan Genocide and the Bosnian War has been critically analyzed by a large body of literature and scholarly writings. As a result, the films *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) and *No Man's Land* (2001) have received substantial scholarly attention for their unique perspectives on conflict. This dissertation builds on that body of work by evaluating how these two films critique UN's institutional failure, lack of political will of western powers and bureaucratic inertia through visual method.

There was also lack of interdisciplinary work on how cinema depicts individuals, especially UN peacekeepers, caught between institutional mandates and personal moral convictions. This dissertation has filled that gap by combining textual analysis with political theory and moral philosophy to assess how the UN's role in genocide is represented—and morally condemned—through cinema. The analysis is carried out by using multidisciplinary theoretical lens such as Darley & Latane's Bystander Apathy Theory, which helps explain the passivity and inaction of individuals and institutions (like the UN) in the face of violence. Similarly, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) Doctrine, which asserts the international community's duty to protect populations from genocide, offers the critical tools for examining the bureaucratic complicity that gives the impression of apathy and failure in protecting vulnerable populations.

The findings show that both films depict UN peacekeepers as both victims of systemic failure and, at times, complicit actors in sustaining that failure. While *Hotel Rwanda* relies on a heroic narrative to humanize the costs of genocide and evoke

empathy, *No Man's Land* adopts a satirical and cynical tone that questions the very foundations of neutrality and bureaucratic protocol. Together, they demonstrate that neutrality, without moral conviction and courage, can serve to legitimize inaction and prolong atrocity.

In conclusion, this study argues that these cinematic portrayals are ethical commentaries on the responsibilities of global institutions. By highlighting the moral ambiguities faced by individuals within the UN system, the films challenge audiences to consider the ethical shortcomings of international peacekeeping and the urgent need for greater accountability, responsiveness, and a recommitment to the humanitarian imperative of protecting the vulnerable. T

his research has shown how the two films interrogate the moral and ethical conflicts that are integral to international peacekeeping operations. It can be an interesting study on duty, responsibility, natural instincts, and morality of a mediator in a conflict, while also providing a unique perspective on conflict studies and international peacekeeping. This study is especially pertinent at a time when the world is witnessing never ending violent skirmishes, war-induced famines and armed conflicts in places like Kashmir, Gaza, Israel, Iran, Ukraine, South Sudan and beyond, and the UN's peacekeeping and humanitarian role has become even more vital to safeguard people, protect human rights and prevent large scale displacements, killings and genocide.

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