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Representation of Children and the 'Other' in Black Hawk Down (2001) and Hotel Rwanda (2004)

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REPRESENTATION OF CHILDREN AND THE 'OTHER'
IN *BLACK HAWK DOWN* (2001) AND *HOTEL RWANDA* (2004)

by

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B.A. University of Colorado 2003

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This thesis entitled:
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Representation of Children and the 'Other' in *Black Hawk Down* (2001) and *Hotel Rwanda*
(2004)

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Kathleen Ryan

During the early 1990s a humanitarian intervention for famine in Somalia turned warlike and influenced the decision by Western nations to not intervene during the genocide in Rwanda. In the early 2000s the films *Black Hawk Down* (2001) and *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) were made about their respective situations, each with their own ideological slants about whether or not intervention in African conflicts is the right America. Through textual analysis I examined both films to determine how their depictions of children and the 'Other' are used to promote each film's opinionated stories and paint a picture either in favor or against African intervention.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The early 1990s were a time of transition for the United States' armed forces from the traditions of the Cold War to a new frontier without a definitive enemy to oppose. At this time Somalia was in the midst of a civil war that, along with a drought and economic collapse, caused a massive famine to strike the East African country. The United Nations got involved in an attempt to provide aid for the famine victims, but the United States was reluctant to follow suite with any substantial show of support, in part because of the reelection campaign of George H. W. Bush. Finally, in response to the frustrations of the United Nations with Mohamed Farah Aidid's interference with the humanitarian mission the United States increased its involvement in late 1992 (Buam, 2004). The news media in the United States contributed to the pressure for intervention by showing images of suffering children in Somalia (Moeller, 2002). When the situation turned bad for the United States in late 1993, during what became know as the Battle of Mogadishu, the news media played a role in the withdrawal, this time showing images of a dead US soldier being dragged through the streets (Baum, 2004); it was now time for Americans to be upset about the treatment of their own sons and daughters. Less than a year later there was another occurrence of civil war in Africa; this time in Rwanda.

On 6 April 1994 the Rwandan Genocide started, and while it only lasted 100 days, more than 800,000 Tutsis were killed, representing 84 percent of their population in Rwanda. While this was happening the United States and the United Nations stood by and did little, in large part because of what had recently happened in Somalia (Cohen, 2007). The United States media covered the war, but instead of focusing on the suffering children as they had in Somalia they chose to frame it as a resurgence of ancient tribal hatred. The lack of images of children that

were in eminent threat of dying contributed to low levels of interest in intervening in Rwanda, and this ultimately caused a lack of response to the genocide (Shaw, 2007).

There have been many films made about both Somalia and Rwanda, including documentaries, independent films, and big budget Hollywood movies. They all have their own slants to the stories and focus on unique events, but two films have risen above the others in popularity, *Black Hawk Down* (2001) and *Hotel Rwanda* (2004). Directed by Ridley Scott, *Black Hawk Down* is at its core a no-holds-barred action film having little reference of the events leading up to the Battle of Mogadishu. It focuses on what went wrong during a mission to capture leaders of Aidid's militia. The mission was supposed to last about one hour, but it became a battle for survival lasting almost 17 hours. The only character types featured in the film are American soldiers and the Somalis, who are almost exclusively depicted as the enemy, with the only major exception being an opening scene of innocent unarmed Somali civilians trying to get food from an aid truck when they are fired upon by Aidid's men. Further, the cast is almost exclusively adult males, with the Americans being white, aside from one lone black US soldier, and the Somalis black. Overall, it gives the impression of a battle that was fought by the Americans against Somalia, not specifically Aidid's militia, which only represented part of the country's population.

Like *Black Hawk Down*, *Hotel Rwanda* is presented to the viewer with little background information of what led to the events depicted. What is shown is the heroic plight of a business-minded Hutu hotel manager that strives to first save his Tutsi family members and then over 1200 Tutsi and Hutu moderates. He accomplishes this by housing them in the hotel and intermittently bribing various nefarious people in order to maintain protection for the hotel

throughout the film. Unlike *Black Hawk Down* the people depicted in *Hotel Rwanda* are largely noncombatants, mainly woman and children, who appear to be both innocent and unable to defend themselves. They are simply trying to survive this atrocity and are desperately seeking help from an outside sources that cannot, or will not, provide it. The few white characters present are United Nations peacekeepers and Western journalists, both shown as well-intentioned yet helpless to make a difference due to political reasons that are not fully explained. In short, both the US and UN are depicted as standing by and doing little about the genocide, especially for the innocent children that need saving, without any explanation as to why this might be.

Both of these movies are historical in nature, which limits the impact that they can have on the events that they depict, but that does not mean that they cannot influence the opinions and future decisions of audience members. The fact that both of these films are simply based on true stories, and not documentaries, does not hinder this potential. Friend (2010) claims that fictional film can influence an individual's opinions about real world events through the manipulation of their emotions in ways that are similar to real life; emotions that Hollywood is known to play off of. "The classical Hollywood cinema, in particular, has developed certain conventions of storytelling — many, no doubt, based on older conventions in drama, literature, and oral traditions — which have clear functions in the manipulation of emotion" (Plantinga, 2009, p. 91). In the case of *Black Hawk Down* sympathetic emotion is clearly intended to be directed towards the American soldiers that were forced into an impossible situation helping a group of people that did not want assistance. *Hotel Rwanda* shows almost the opposite, a situation where the people of Rwanda desired and needed the West to help, but did not receive this support because the West simply did not care enough. It could be argued that both movies attempt to

shape the viewer's opinion about future African conflicts and the West's involvement in them through the manipulation of emotional attachment towards specific characters.

Through a thorough textual analysis I will investigate how *Black Hawk Down* and *Hotel Rwanda* use stereotypes of Africa and Africans, along with depictions of "innocent children" to paint a sympathetic picture for specific groups or individuals, and anger towards others. Many of the scenes covered in this paper were viewed more than 15 times to come to the conclusions that are written in order to establish a firm understanding of the details contained in each film. An examination of the historical situations that led to the two conflicts depicted will be outlined in order to place the films and the real world situations in their proper context. A discussion of historical depictions of Africans by Westerners will also be included for the reader to have an understanding of the historical origins and continued use of specific stereotypes, both in vilifying and victimizing Africans. To understand the role that depictions of children play in establishing sympathy, a historical look at the role children play in American culture and film will be included. My analysis for both films will be split into two sections, with the first focusing on how each film creates an "Other" that is positioned in opposition to Western norms and ideals, and subsequently vilified. The second section will examine the use of children, and creation of symbolic children, in order to promote sympathy for certain groups and anger towards others. Combined these tactics paint a picture of Somalis and Rwandans steeped in Western ideologies and stereotypes that promote the specific agendas of each film.

The two films that I use for this study were chosen because of the similarities in their outward appearance, yet fundamental differences in their messages. While both films depict stories based on actual events during the early 1990s in Africa, they paint drastically different

pictures of Africans and Westerners, and specifically the role that the West should play in Africa. *Black Hawk Down* almost exclusively depicts Africans as the villainous “Other” in contrast to the heroic Americans. *Hotel Rwanda*, on the other hand, casts Rwandans as both the villains and the heroes by portraying one segment of the population as familiar and Western-like and the other as more stereotypically African. Further, it portrays the Western leaders, although not shown in the film, as unsympathetic “Others” in contrast to the more Western like Rwandans. The use of children in each film also provides a nice contrast to each other. *Black Hawk Down* elected to forgo traditional depictions of children, instead simply alluding to American children throughout the film, both in reference to soldier’s children and the soldiers themselves. *Hotel Rwanda* takes a more in your face approach by including children throughout most of the film, and weaving them in to the main plot points. These different approaches allow the examination of the use of children in various ways. It is my understanding that *Black Hawk Down* is fundamentally a film against intervention in African conflicts, as it is not worth the risk to American lives. This is demonstrated by the exclusive portrayal of Somalis as the “Other” and the absence of Somali children. This is emphasized by the focus on American heroism and the shooting of the film entirely from an American perspective. Ultimately the film is about the consequences of intervening in Somalia. *Hotel Rwanda*, in contrast, is decidedly in favor of intervention, as it focuses on a segment of the Rwandan population that is made to appear Western in nature and sympathetic to the viewers. This is done with the exclusion of many stereotypes and the inclusion of their children. The film is not without stereotypes, but mainly reserves them for the villains. Further, the Westerners as shown in a light that places them

outside what would be expected of decent behavior, further emphasizing the consequences of not intervening.

This study could have been done with any number of films, with any number of focuses. The use of children and the “Other” in these ways is not unique to these films or films set in Africa. It is my belief that one or both of these tactics is used in most films depicting war or conflict, but again this is not a limiting factor as it appears to be prevalent in many films across all genres. There are many opportunities to continue this line of inquiry to movies of all genres and across time. Further, it is not simply the use of children and the “Other” than can be examined in this fashion. Women could have easily been substituted for the sympathetic children, and were treated in much the same way in both films I examined. The treatment of animals could also be looked at, as often those that harm animals in films are looked at with more distain than those that kill other humans. The choice to focus on the “Other” and children was primarily because they stood out to me as the most obvious, and this paper presented me with an opportunity to research these topics in unique ways.

This paper is aimed at providing some of the first analysis into the ways that children are used in media to influence adults, as opposed to how media influences children which is the preferred topic of study. Further, the ways in which I examine the “Other” goes beyond the traditional focus on how these uses promote stereotypes and attempts to explain how these stereotypes promote certain views or emotions towards groups of people in these films.

Chapter 2: A Brief History of Somalia and Rwanda

Neither *Black Hawk Down* nor *Hotel Rwanda* offer much historical context for the stories they tell. *Black Hawk Down* offers just enough information for the viewer to know that there is a famine occurring in Somalia and that warlords control much of Mogadishu. *Hotel Rwanda* intersperses a few more historical details throughout the film, but only mentions them in passing. The film explains that the division between Hutu and Tutsi was created through preferential treatment of the Tutsi by the Belgian colonialists, but does not give an explanation as to why that occurred. In order to fully understand and analyze the films it is first necessary to investigate the circumstances that led to the situations depicted in each film, especially because of the major role played by Western intervention, or lack thereof. The full context of the films would be incomplete without establishing the role that Western countries played prior to their depictions in both films.

Somalia and Operation Restore Hope

Somalia was once filled with nomadic peoples that, apart from minor inter-clan skirmishes over resources, co-existed prior to colonialism (Hirsch & Oakley, 1995). The clans were based primarily on paternal kinship, and their nomadic nature prevented the rise of a hierarchical society. The conflicts that did occur were limited in severity because of the existence of conflict a resolution mechanism known as *xeer*. This prevented extensive economic disparity, thereby minimizing the escalation of conflicts. There was no common Somali identity or centralized control of territory, although they did share a common language, ethnicity, culture, and religion (Weiss, 2005). It was not until the creation of the Suez Canal, constructed between 1859 and 1869 that the colonial powers paid attention to the region, and in the 1880s it was

divided into areas of British and Italian control (Hirsch & Oakley, 1995). According to Weiss (2005):

The first protectorate, known as British Somaliland in the North, was not established until 1896. Soon after, most of southern Somalia became colonized and evolved into [sic] Italian Somaliland. There was no overarching perception among the Somali nomads concerning the geographical breadth of the ethnic population, but the distribution of these areas further divided the Somalis among the northern frontier of Kenya, the Ogaden and Haud regions of Ethiopia, and areas of Djibouti. (p. 58)

These new names for the geographic areas created by the colonialists had little effect on the society of Somalia, but:

Other factors more substantially eroded the nomadic cultures' traditional bases of stability. Possibly the largest was the introduction of consumer goods into the local market, with accompanying monetization and other changes in the economy. A fundamental shift from an egalitarian culture resulted, with an urban migration . . . therefore ending the nomadic lifestyle for many. (Weiss, 2005, p.58)

As a result of these divisions, and the colonial interests primarily lying in the Kingdom of Ethiopia as was demonstrated by Britain ceding control of the Ogaden region to Ethiopia in 1897, the stage was set for later conflicts. A unified Somali Republic was created on July 1, 1960, but the colonialists had failed to prepare the newly formed country for self-governance (Hirsch & Oakley, 1995). Immediately following the colonial period there were signs that a Somali identity was forming, but that was to be short lived (Weiss, 2005). The democratic government of Somalia turned to the Soviets for military arms, and after the assassination of

President Abdi Rashid Ali Shermarke the military took over control of the country (Hirsch & Oakley, 1995).

Major General Siad Barre took control in the form of a military dictatorship in 1969. Barre implemented a policy of “scientific socialism¹” which was supposed to eliminate “clanism,” but instead resulted in the strengthening of clan-based politics during Barre’s twenty-two-year rule. “With harsh repression, his primary method of maintaining power was to channel resources such as arms, money, and land to his own clan and to those linked by lineage, and pit other clans against one another” (Weiss, 2005, p. 58). Scientific socialism did, however, gain Somalia more support from the Soviets:

Cold War geopolitical competition between Washington and Moscow provided resources . . . Scientific socialism had, at first, made the regime a major recipient of Soviet aid. In addition to providing \$55 million loan to strengthen the Somali army, the Soviet Union also supplied tanks, aircraft, and ammunition, and they trained many of the pilots and officers. (Weiss, 2005, p. 58)

In 1977, bolstered by the apparent support of the Soviet Union, Barre attempted to regain the Ogaden territory that had traditionally belonged to the nomadic Somali people, but was now part of Ethiopia, in an attempt to unify all Somali-speaking areas. Barre miscalculated the support from the Soviets as they instantly withdrew military backing from Somalia, and instead sided with the Marxist government of Ethiopia. Barre subsequently turned to the United States and the West for aid, and while they did not offer much military support they did provide economic

¹ A term used by Friedrich Engels to describe Karl Marx’s theory of using the scientific method to determine probable outcomes of social and economic events based on historical trends.

assistance through the 1980s (Hirsch & Oakley, 1995). The Somali economy was supported primarily by outside actors: “International assistance accounted for 57 percent of Somalia’s gross national product (GNP) in 1987, 100 percent of its development budget, and 50 percent of its annual budget” (Weiss, 2005, p. 59). This would prove to be a major problem for the Barre regime, as did their defeat by Ethiopia in the Ogaden War:

The stunning defeat of Somalia during the Ogaden War sowed the first seeds of discontent within Somalia against the Barre regime, culminating with a failed coup attempt in 1978 and the resulting formation of the Somalia Democratic Front (SSDF), a Majerteen-based faction. Barre’s power steadily declined in the following decade. The combination of food crises, economic collapse, and the end of the Cold War competition began to erode Barre’s base. Furthermore, the traditional pretext to mobilize nationalist sentiments, Ethiopia, was removed when Mengistu Haile Mariam and Barre agreed to recognize their borders and stop supporting insurgent groups operating within the other’s country. (Weiss, 2005, p. 59)

Scientific socialism had been an attempt to form unity in Somalia and to eradicate traditional clan identities. This strategy did not work, and in essence had the opposite effect, as Barre’s oppression of certain clans led to clan-based insurgencies that broke out into a full civil war in 1988 (Hirsch & Oakley, 1995). The Somali National Movement (SNM), seeing a weakness as the primary support for the Barre regime disappeared (unification of all Somali-speaking lands), revolted in the North and captured the cities of Burao and Hargeysa. “Barre’s son-in-law, General Mohamed Siad, who went by “Morgan,” was sent to retake the areas. Morgan’s brutal tactics included the complete destruction of Hargeysa, attacks on defenseless

refugees, and indiscriminate bombing of civilians” (Weiss, 2005, p. 59). The United States gave the Barre controlled government a \$1.4 million dollar grant for defense purposes following the onset of the revolt, many of the weapons purchased were used against the civilians. During the civil war that followed:

Somali defense spending increased from \$25 million to \$70 million. With opposition rising in the U.S. Congress as a result of human rights abuses, Washington cut foreign assistance, thus ending Somalia’s reign as the largest aid recipient in the horn of Africa. However, the government continued to receive military aid from Italy until 1990 and from Libya until Barre’s fall, in January 1991. (Weiss, 2005, p. 59)

Due to the clan-based nature of the civil war there was formation of multiple factions. Each group feared that assumption of power by another would result in detrimental consequences for their own. The now extremely fragmented society was only held together because of one purpose, “The violent overthrow of Barre” (Weiss, 2005, p. 60). Mogadishu was the last holdout for Barre and his military, but it erupted in violence November 1991:

By this time, most of the factions had transformed themselves from political parties to military factions, supplied with many of the arms captured from defeated government forces. The fall of Barre in January 1991 was accompanied by an estimated 4,000 deaths. (Weiss, 2005, p. 60)

Barre maintained his rule until 1991 when he fled the country. In his absence power shifted to the local opposition leaders with no central commander.

Many of those prominent in the rebellion saw this as an opportunity to seize control, especially Ali Mahdi Mohamed and Mohamed Farah Aidid (Hirsch & Oakley, 1995). “Aideed

[sic], a former Barre supporter, was directly responsible for Barre's defeat and expected to become president. While he was pursuing Barre in the South, however, Ali Mahdi was elected interim president" (Weiss, 2005, p. 60). Conflict escalated in the months that followed, and any attempts to mediate broke down into "interclan disputes over property rights and blood debts" (Weiss, 2005, p. 60). This new struggle grew between Aidid and Ali Mahdi until they "effectively split Mogadishu into two heavily armed camps" (Weiss, 2005, p. 60). Aidid had the military superiority as he was a former general in Barre's army, while Ali Mahdi was a business man and farmer who had no political aspirations until he became involved in the civil war. Despite this discrepancy, their armies battled for control of Somalia and the capital of Mogadishu (Hirsch & Oakley, 1995), which along with the 'scorched-earth' tactics of Barre as he retreated, (Weiss, 2005) and an untimely draught, caused a widespread famine in the region.

Between 1985 and 1992, 90,000 Somalis died in military conflicts of one sort or another. Another 350,000 civilians died as a result of the famine. The situation was unstable and, "With insecurity increasing in 1991 and 1992, most governmental, nongovernmental, and UN humanitarian organizations evacuated staff and suspended programs" (Weiss, 2005, p. 61). The third wave of the famine hit in 1992 and resulted in increased media coverage as the number of NGOs again increased, peaking around 50 (Weiss, 2005). The United States provided some humanitarian support in 1991 with an increase in 1992:

Financial support for civilian airlifts was the first involvement by the United States . . .

The U.S. supplied 12,210 metric tons of food in 1991 and 79,883 metric tons in 1992.

The first U.S. direct response was Operation Provide Relief (OPR), an airlift used as a

quick response to the humanitarian crisis that began during the third phase of the famine in August 1992. (Weiss, 2005, p. 62)

There were calls for the United States and the United Nations to provide additional support and relief for the victims of the war and famine. President George H. W. Bush was reluctant to involve the US, especially during his bid for reelection (Baum, 2004). However, on 25 April 1992 United Nations Operations in Somalia I (UNOSOM I) was created by the UN in an attempt to maintain the recent cease-fire agreements and to provide additional humanitarian aid.

“Through this agreement, fifty military observers, unarmed and dressed as civilians, were deployed to monitor the ‘Green Line,’ splitting the Ali Mahdi- and Aideed-controlled areas but not preventing chaos within the zones” (Weiss, 2005, p. 63). After incrementally increasing the US military’s involvement in the United Nations-led mission, President Bush approved a plan to provide security, of any fashion, to the humanitarian mission (Baum, 2004). “On November 25, the U.S. president, who had only weeks earlier been defeated in the 1992 election, proposed to the secretary-general that Washington lead the interventionary force” (Weiss, 2005, p. 64). This was in large part a response to the United Nations’ increasing frustration with ongoing interference by the supporters of Aidid in distributing the much needed aid (Baum, 2004), along with increased news coverage of the starving children that had become the primary story of the civil war (Moeller, 2002). Kareithi and Kariithi (2008) put it succinctly:

Television images told the grim story. The land: barren, sucked dry by scorching sun, buzzards gnawing at decaying carcasses of camels and goats strewn over the landscape. The people: malnourished children with flies in their noses and open mouths, adults with

stray dogs. And men and boys with AK47s shooting at vehicles delivering food to the dying. (p. 2)

According to Carter and McCormack (2006) President Bush had no possible action except to send United States troops to help the United Nations humanitarian mission.

Twenty-eight-thousand American troops were authorized to be deployed to Somalia, with 26,000 going. They were joined by 10,000 additional troops from more than twenty nations (Weiss, 2005). This was now UNOSOM II, and it was designed to continue to monitor the cease-fire agreements, but also to more actively “prevent any violence; to seize all small arms and guard heavy weapons cantonment areas; to protect all ports and airports for humanitarian delivery; and to assist in repatriation of refugees and the displaced” (Weiss, 2005, p. 67). When 24 Pakistani soldiers were killed and 50 more wounded by Aidid’s men after making a routine weapons cache inspection, the United States increased its military efforts, now with incentive to capture or kill Aidid:

Primarily driven by Washington, resolution 837 called for the arrest of those responsible for the attack — namely, Aideed [sic]. Between June and October, UNOSOM II engaged in war against Aideed, in a Wild West style that included a reward poster. On June 12, the U.S. air attack on Aideed’s headquarters left the warlord unscathed, but it bombed a group of elders discussing reconciliation. (Weiss, 2005, p. 67-68)

On 3 October 1993 the issue came to a head with the United States mounting a raid to attempt to capture Aidid, and his top officials, in the heart of Mogadishu. Instead of capturing Aidid, the mission resulted in the capture of US soldier Michael Durant by Aidid’s men, the deaths of 18 United States soldiers, and the wounding of 78 others. It also resulted in the deaths of between

500 and 1000 Somalis. The focus now turned to the dead and captured “children” of the United States:

Media coverage of the firefight was intense, and harshly critical. Videotape of the interrogation of an apparently mistreated Durant, combined with video images of a dead U.S. soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu as crowds of Somalis cheered, produced intense shock and outrage among the public. (Baum, 2004, p. 218)

Following this coverage, public opinion for recently inaugurated President Bill Clinton’s handling of Somalia plummeted to 21 percent in a CBS survey (Baum, 2004). A mere four days after the tragic events President Clinton announced that US forces would withdraw from Somalia by 31 March 1994 (Hirsch & Oakley, 1995). The Battle of Mogadishu, as the events of that day have become known, is the basis for the film *Black Hawk Down* (2001). The final troops withdrew on 25 March, leaving behind 50 Marines to guard the U.S. Liaison office. The affect of the events in Somalia, however, were not over:

The impact of American fatalities in Somalia on U.S. policy toward peacekeeping and the United Nations in general can be seen in Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD-25), issued May 1994. Under order, the United States would not become involved in any peace operation that was not judged doable or within U.S. strategic interests. The long list of seventeen qualifications sharply limit U.S. participation in armed humanitarian intervention. The notion that troops should not be deployed unless an administration could predict the precise cost, duration, and end results represented, in the words of Gideon Rose, ‘a Somalia corollary to the Vietnam syndrome in American foreign policy.’ (Weiss, 2005, p. 68)

The Rwandan Genocide

Like Somalia, Rwanda has had minor tensions between its two major ethnic groups, the Hutu and Tutsi, since pre-colonialism. Likewise these tensions did not reach the level of serious violence until the colonial powers withdrew from the country in 1959, at which point the Hutu moved to seize power from the Tutsis who had been favored and educated by the Belgians during colonial rule (Kuperman, 2001). Much of this historical hatred, however, was simply the invention of the European priests and scholars:

In particular, the astute manipulation of precolonial ethnic and social constructions within Rwanda originates from the ethnic favoritism toward the Tutsi, exhibited first by German and subsequently by Belgian colonizers. There is no documentation of any significant armed conflicts between Hutus and Tutsis of the same magnitude as that of the post colonial period. Decades of European colonialism reinforced the social bases of differences in the society to such an extent that a convincing case can be made for its transformation. (Weiss, 2005, p. 97)

What is now Rwanda and Burundi were colonized by the Germans in 1899, creating German East Africa, and occupied until 1918. Following Germany's defeat in World War I, the League of Nations turned over control of the region to Belgium as part of the war settlement. Belgium continued the German favoritism towards the Tutsi until shortly before Rwanda's independence:

When the balance dramatically shifted to the Hutu majority. While Rwanda-Burundi was no longer a Belgian territory after World War II, it was placed under Belgian-administered UN trusteeship until 1961, when a referendum ended the monarchy and established a republic. (Weiss, 2005, p. 97-98)

In 1963 more than twenty-thousand Tutsi were killed, and thousands more displaced, when Rwanda transitioned from a monarchy to an elected, although ethnically based, government (Weiss, 2005). Rwanda elected President Gregoire Kayibanda, who subsequently rigged the elections in 1969 to allow for an overwhelming victory for his party. “In a move to consolidate his power base, Kayibanda purged Rwandan political society of any dissident voices who had opposed him or his party during elections” (Weiss, 2005, p. 98). His party soon became the only political party legal throughout his twelve years of rule. By the early 1970s Kayibanda’s power gradually weakened because of “regional competition between the north and south for political positions and favors” (Weiss, 2005, p. 98). In an attempt to strengthen his authoritarian hold on the country he resorted to anti-Tutsi propaganda. Poverty was growing along with the population, and most civil institutions purged their Tutsi employees, resulting in a continued rise in ethnic violence, especially in rural areas. This led to “a bloodless military coup by Major General Juvenal Habyarumana — whose power base was in the north — on July 5, 1973” (Weiss, 2005, p. 98).

When Juvenal Habyarumana, a Hutu army officer, gained control of the presidency he tried to put an end to the ethnic conflicts (Kuperman, 2001), however, “institutional discrimination” still lingered, eliminating Tutsis from every arena except the private sector. Meanwhile, Rwandan Tutsi expatriates were establishing a community in Uganda, which eventually rose to around two hundred thousand people. There were other mounting problems in Rwanda as well, “In the 1980s, Rwanda became one of the most aided countries in the world: 11.4 percent of its GNP originated from development aid in 1986 and 22 percent in 1991” (Weiss, 2005, p. 98). In the late 1980s, a weakening economy and international pressure to

form a democracy started destabilizing the country. It was at this point that armed Tutsi refugees, backed by the Ugandan Army, invaded Rwanda from Uganda in 1990 under the banner of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA). They were able to penetrate to within twenty miles of the capital city of Kigali. “This guerrilla campaign served as one of the causes of the 1994 genocide because it provided the occasion for the constant manipulation of fear among Hutus by the media and governmental extremists” (Weiss, 2005, p. 99). Battles of this sort continued off and on for the next several years. Meanwhile, a group of Hutu extremists that were part of the ruling clique began to devise a plan to eradicate all civilian Tutsi that were living in Rwanda, thinking that this would stop the RPA attacks (Kuperman, 2001). President Habyarumana was not about to cede power just yet, although he was ready to compromise:

Under increased international pressure and RPF demands for democratization, President Habyarumana enacted a series of power-sharing agreements in 1990. The reforms incorporated moderates and some coalition parties into his government, while simultaneously, solidifying his own power. These reforms also strengthened extremist Hutu groups, the most serious being the Coalition pour la defense de la republique (CDR) and eventually the *akazu*, which included the president’s wife and a small elite of extremists from the army . . . By 1992, the MRND and the CDR had each formed its own militia. The MRND’s was known as the *interahamwe* and the CDR’s as *impuzamugambi*. Their combined strength was estimated at 30,000-50,000 soldiers . . . Rwandan military expenditures grew rapidly in preparation for the 1994 bloodbath: between 1990 and 1991, they increased 40 percent and another 20 percent in 1993.

Armaments were supplied mainly by France, which had become the mainstay for supply and training throughout the Habyarumana era. In fact, the government continued to receive arms and distribute them to civilian militias, even after the Arusha Accords in 1993. (Weiss, 2005, p. 99)

The RPF invasion had provided the Hutu extremist groups with plenty of evidence that their fears were true. They were able to make the entire Tutsi population their “enemy,” despite the propensity for intermarriage and other social mixing between civilian Hutu and Tutsi populations. “Between 1990 and 1993 at least two thousand civilians were victims of politically motivated killings” (Weiss, 2005, p. 99).

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was the first to attempt to mediate the crumbling situation. They failed to send any groups of observers because the only countries that volunteered to participate had close ties with at least one side of the dispute. “However, after negotiating a cease-fire between the two parties in July 1992, the OAU placed a fifty-man Neutral Military Observer Group; in the end, forty observers were deployed” (Weiss, 2005, p. 99).

The United Nations eventually got involved by attempting to halt the distribution of military supplies to the RPF by the Ugandan military:

The Security Council authorized the UN observer Mission in Uganda-Rwanda (UNOMUR) on June 22, 1993. This operation arose from the two-year regional negotiation that had resulted in the 1993 Arusha Accords. The pact incorporated what would prove to be unworkable national reconciliation and power-sharing measures, including provisions for the repatriation of the Tutsi refugee populations; incorporation of

the Tutsi minority into the government power structure, through ministerial and legislative positions; and the integrations of the RPF into the regular army. (Weiss, 2005, p. 99-100)

The UN later created the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR). The first phase of the operation included 1,217 troops to moderate the cease-fire, provide security, and take steps to integrate the RPF soldiers into the national army. “The integration process quickly stagnated. By the time of the genocide, 2,548 peacekeepers were on the ground, the total number authorized by the original mandate” (Weiss, 2005, p. 100). President Habyarimana met with members of the RPF and President Ntaryamira of Burundi in Tanzania attempting to save the objectives of the Arusha Accords. Their plane was shot down on the return flight, sparking the events that led to the genocide (Weiss, 2005).

On 6 April 1994 the Rwandan Genocide began when the Presidential Guard, parts of the Rwandan Army, the interahamwe, the impuzamugambi, and many ordinary citizens began to massacre Hutu opposition leaders. The violence escalated:

Roadblocks were established, and armed gangs with hit lists systematically worked their way through Kigali . . . Within a week, over 20,000 victims had been slaughtered as the killings spread to the east and the southwest. Among those that died in the initial rampage were the prime minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimara, and ten Belgian peacekeepers who were guarding him. (Weiss, 2005, p. 100)

By the end of April 200,000 people had been murdered. Six weeks in, the estimate had reached 500,000 civilians (Weiss, 2005). The entire genocide lasted 100 days with more than 800,000 Tutsis killed. This represented 84 percent of their population in Rwanda. Approximately 200,000

killers took part is the massacre (Waldorf, 2009), which is what enabled it to happen with such shocking speed. There was an attempt to maintain control of the government by the Hutus, “After Habyarumana’s death, extremist Hutu groups quickly established an interim government. Composed of several parties, their shared purpose was simple: Tutsi extermination . . . However, by late May, the interim government had fled Kigali after the RPF’s successful invasion” (Weiss, 2005, p. 100). The RPF did not stand by and let the genocide happen, and in fact, there were two phases of the violence in Rwanda:

The first was the systematic genocide carried out by Hutu Extremist groups and the government against Tutsis as well as moderate Hutus. The second was the ultimately successful invasion by the RPF forces, initiated immediately after the massacres had begun. (Weiss, 2005, p. 100)

While this was happening the United States and the UN stood by and did little, in large part because of what had recently happened in Somalia (Cohen, 2007). According to Patman (2010):

It is no exaggeration to say that the loss of American lives in Mogadishu in October 1993 was a deeply shocking event for Washington, and one that was to play a key part in framing U.S. foreign policy decision making for the rest of the 1990s and beyond. (p. 80)

The United States was not the only entity that was aware of the carryover from Somalia:

The Belgian contingent withdrew following the massacre and dismemberment of ten soldiers. Feeding on the earlier reaction in the United States after the deaths of eighteen marines in Somalia, targeting the Belgian contingent was a deliberate and successful tactic to create the conditions for a UN withdrawal. (Weiss, 2005, p. 102)

The Belgian withdrawal caused the UN to reduce its forces down to a mere 270 before later increasing troop numbers to 5,500. This was not to say that the UN did nothing. “Daily patrols by UNAMIR sought to deter human rights abuses. They escorted convoys and transported 5,000 - 6,000 civilians to safe locations.” (Weiss, 2005, p. 102) Overall, the UNAMIR troops are credited with saving 25,000 lives (Weiss, 2005). For the most part, however, the major international powers remained silent on the genocide:

Washington was the primary obstacle, as it continually blocked attempts to respond. Its position was based on two points of contention: First, a desire to avoid paying for an operation that it believed would inevitably fail; second, the new U.S. policy under PDD-25, which argued against intervention in areas and countries outside of U.S. strategic interest . . . approved at the beginning of May, halfway through the genocide. The costs in Rwanda should at least partially be reflected in the balance sheet for Somalia. (Weiss, 2005, p. 103)

Presidential Directive Decision 25 (PDD-25) outlined the conditions that must be met for the United States to get involved in a foreign conflict. It was created in direct response to the events that unfolded in Somalia and the accompanying media attention. It was not a statement that condemned involvement, but rather served as a guide for what should be looked at (Cohen, 2007). While this made it more difficult and time consuming for the United States to get involved it was not the only reason, nor connection to Somalia, that led to the lack of action. “Events in Rwanda were viewed in Washington through the prism of Somalia. The two situations were viewed as similar — both were seen as failed states” (Patman, 2010, p. 91).

The media said nothing to suggest otherwise and focused on the conditions of the refugees during the civil war and tended to label the fighting as ongoing ethnic disputes that had been present in the region for ages (Shaw, 2007). Even once the genocide started it took two weeks for the NGOs to start calling for international military action (Kuperman, 2001). The Clinton Administration was facing an upcoming election and made the choice to go with the safest political strategy available to them:

(U.S.) officials simultaneously believed that the American people would oppose U.S. military intervention in central Africa and feared that the public might support intervention if they realized a genocide was underway. As always, they looked to op-ed pages of elite journals, popular protest, and congressional noise to gauge public interest. No group in the United States made Clinton administration decisionmakers feel or fear that they would pay a political price for doing nothing to save Rwandans. Indeed, all the signals told them to steer clear. (Power, 2002, p. 374)

This was in stark contrast to the attention that the media gave to the war in Bosnia. For Bosnia, “the op-ed pages of America’s newspapers had roared with indignation; during the three-month genocide in Rwanda, they were silent, ignorant, and prone fatalistically to accept the futility of outside intervention” (Power, 2002, p. 374). It was not until after the Rwandan genocide was over that the media started to focus on the victims, and especially the innocent civilians and children. This led to widespread condemnation of the international community for a failure to act (Kuperman, 2001).

While both the United States and the UN have been criticized for failing to attempt to stop the mass killings, it has been argued by Kuperman (2001) that there might not have been

much that either could have done. Kuperman claims that because of the speed at which the killings took place foreign intervention could have at best saved about a quarter of those killed. While this is still something that would have been worthwhile, as it represents up to 125,000 lives that could have been saved, when combined with the fact that the standing policy of the United States at the time was to avoid deploying ground troops during ongoing civil wars (Kuperman, 2001), it becomes clear that there was not much that could have been done. Even though the presidential order does give an exception for the case of genocide, by the time the political maneuvering would have been completed it most likely would have been too late.

Chapter 3: Semiotics and Representation

No social group can afford to ignore the importance of the cinema. Although perhaps eclipsed today by television, it has been for most of the century the mode of communication, expression and entertainment - the 'signifying practice' - *par excellence*. It has acted as a repository of images of how people are and how they should be, images that are both produced by and help produce the general thought and feeling of our culture. (Dyer, 1982, p. 1)

While Dyer was writing in the early 1980s I feel that his statement holds true today as much as it did 30 years ago. It is not simply the images of social groups from our own society that are shaped by their depictions in film, but entire societies and foreign cultures. Regardless of who is being represented, there needs to be an understanding of how the cinema can influence our understanding of others. I will start by outlining the origins of traditional linguistic semiotics of written and spoken language and how it evolved to include visual languages as well. This will later be connected to representation and how symbols and stereotypes can be used to control the depictions of certain peoples for the benefit of storytelling.

My analysis begins with Saussure and his theory of the sign, which originated from his dissatisfaction of linguistics in the early 1900s. In *Course in General Linguistics* (2011) Saussure's lectures are compiled into a book and his concept of the linguistic sign is detailed. For Saussure, the *sign* is made up of two parts, the *signifie* and the *signifiant*, and only when these are combined do they produce meaning (2011). According to Culler, "The sign is the union of a form which signifies, which Saussure calls the *signifiant* or signifier, and an idea signified, the *signifie* or signified" (1976, p. 19). Culler continues that while the signifier and the signified are

often talked about separately, they only exist in relation to one another and as “components of the sign.” For Saussure (2011), as he was only concerned with the written and spoken language, signs were completely arbitrary. There is no reason, other than convention, for what we know of as a “cat” to not be referred to as a “dog.” These conventions make up what he called *la langue*:

La langue is the system of a language, the language as a system of forms, whereas *parole* is actual speech, the speech acts which are made possible by the language. *La langue* is what the individual assimilates when he learns a language, a set of forms or “hoard deposited by the practice of speech in speakers who belong to the same community, a grammatical system which, to all intents and purposes, exists in the mind of each speaker.” (Culler, 1976, p. 29)

Paired with *la langue* was another component to Saussure’s analysis, *parole*, or the “executive side of language.” For Saussure *parole* is the way that *la langue* is used, the concrete instances of speech or text that form meaning. “In the act of *parole* the speaker selects and combines elements of the linguistic system and gives these forms a concrete phonic and psychological manifestation, as sounds and meanings” (Culler, 1976, p. 30).

Since Saussure, the concepts of *la langue* and *parole* have been applied to many different “language systems,” including the visual, by other scholars. The basics of these applications rely on the “distinction between institution and event, between the underlying system which makes possible various types of behaviour and actual instances of such behaviour” (Culler, 1976, p. 33). Of most importance are the distinctions and relations, referred to as ‘signs’ that have been created by society to contain meaning. The challenge of the analyst is to identify what these are, and how they are viewed by various members of a society. These signs may have various

meanings, either in different contexts or as interpreted by various cultural groups or individuals. This is in large part due to a unique ‘social reality’ that every individual develops over the course of their lives (Culler, 1976).

If one wishes to study human behaviour one must grant that there is a social reality.

People live not simply among objects and actions, but among objects and actions which have meaning, and these meanings cannot be treated as a sum of subjective perceptions.

They are the furniture of the world. (Culler, 1976, p. 71)

Thus semiology, or the study of signs, is “based on the assumption that insofar as human actions or productions convey meaning, insofar as they function as signs, there must be an underlying system of conventions and distinctions which makes this meaning possible” (Culler, 1976, p. 91).

It is not that humans simply create signs when they need them. Signs are constructed over time and become part of society because of traditions and conventions, not because an author needs to convey a certain meaning in a text. The author cannot control how the text will be interpreted by any given individual, or even by society as a whole. After a text is read the authors’ intentions and interpretation of any given sign becomes irrelevant, only the meaning that is constructed by the reader matters, and the reader might have a drastically different social reality than the author.

Further, the meaning of a text might change over time as society evolves and shifts:

In the case of literature, as in that of language and other semiotic systems, the fundamental problem is identity. One is not dealing with fixed signs such that a given form will always have the same meaning whenever it appears. On the contrary, the literary work is always drawing upon signs which exist prior to it ‘combining them and continually drawing from them new meaning.’ (Culler, 1976, p. 105-106)

Barthes describes *langue* as a social system of values, which he simplifies to simply calling it “language minus speech.” Put another way:

As a social institution, it [*langue*] is by no means an act, and it is not subject to any premeditation. It is the social part of language, the individual cannot by himself either create or modify it; it is essentially a collective contract which one must accept in its entirety if one wishes to communicate. (1968, p. 14)

Parole, which Barthes calls *speech*, is described as individual speech acts made with the guidance of *langue*. That is, *parole* is simply how a person decides to use *langue* to get their message across, and includes the way in which a person speaks, not simply the system that their speech is based on. Barthes continues, while any individual act of *parole* does not influence *langue*, it is repeated uses of signs, *parole*, in similar ways that the basis of *langue* is created (Barthes, 1968, p. 14-15).

For Barthes, the terms *langue* and *parole* are deficient in their description of what they truly represent, but he claims to know no better terminology, so he continues their use. They are lacking because they insinuate a reference to spoken and written language, and do not hint at the depths to which they can be applied to nonverbal communications (1968, p. 24). It is when these theories are applied to images, specifically, that Barthes felt the terminology was missing the point.

Barthes felt that the study of signs, or semiotics as it had become known, was easily applied to any form of communication, be it written, spoken, body language, or more specifically photographic images. Images, according to Barthes, were full of signifiers adding meaning, even if the consumer was not aware that it was happening. Further, specific features of images were

able to portray meaning well beyond the basic contents. For example, a photograph of a man kneeling with his hands clasped in front of him and his head lowered leads a viewer of such image to understand that the man is praying (Barthes, 1977). One can only come to this conclusion because of those images signify the act of prayer, which has become part of the American *langue*. This becomes important because Barthes feels that, “In cinema, television and advertising, the senses are subjected to the concerted action of a collection of images, sounds, and written words” (1968, p. 30). In other words, consumers of cinema are presented with signs from a variety of different communicative languages, making the interpretation more complex than most forms of communication.

The signifier is the sensible, material, acoustic or visual signal which triggers a mental concept, the signified. The perceptible aspect of the sign is the signifier; the absent mental representation evoked by it is the signified, and the relationship between the two is signification. (Stam, Burgoyne, & Flitterman-Lewis, p. 8)

Returning to the photograph for now, it should be noted that while the image is not the reality of the subject that is contained, it is, according to Barthes, a perfect analogon. That is, a direct representation of the scene that was captured, one that does not need a code to translate from reality to photograph. In essence, one should interpret a photograph the same that they would if it was the real world (Barthes, 1977, p. 17). It might seem obvious that video would be the same as photography, a message that does not require a code. After all, film is simply the projection of a series of photographs. Film is not, in fact, just a set of images, it is made up of much more including the score, the dialogue, and even the movement itself. Therefore, cinema, along with drawings, paintings, and theater, according to Barthes, develop “in an immediate and

obvious way a supplementary message, in addition to the analogical content itself (scene, object, landscape), which is what is commonly called the style of the reproduction” (1977, p. 17).

In this “second meaning” of the message there are signifiers that have been placed by the creator, intentionally or not, that reference cultural codes and develop further meaning than simply the analogical. It should be noted that when Barthes referred to photographs, he was specifically talking about press photos, ones that the photographer had no control over the actions taking place in the image. It can be argued that the photographer has other influences, such as cropping and angle, but it is fair to say that what is depicted in the photograph actually happened, at least from that specific angle and in the context provided by the cropping. These photos, again arguably, are not considered art, and it is when art is created that Barthes considers this second meaning to be present. “In short, all these ‘imitative’ arts comprise two messages: a denoted message, which is the analogon itself, and a connoted message, which is the manner in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it” (Barthes, 1977, p. 17).

Paradoxically, this does not mean that there are not connoted messages in photographs. Barthes chalks this up to the issues of obtaining true photographic objectivity, in part described above, but dodges any attempt to fully answer this question. I, on the other hand, think that there is more to it than simply an idealization of photographic objectivity. While that does play a large part, there is also the fact that the real life scenes depicted have connotations of themselves. As described above, an image of a man on his knees, hands clenched in front of himself, connotes a man that is praying. This connotation is present for christian cultures, no matter what form of art the image takes. It could be a staged photograph or one shot without the knowledge of the subject and it would mean the same thing. This is because the scene depicted would connote the

same message if you saw it in real life. It is the body language of the man that makes the connotation possible, not the mode by which one witnesses him. The *parole* of this man's actions are referencing the *langue* that indicates that we should think of this man as being in the midst of prayer, just as we would if someone told us that the man was praying.

To further build on this idea, it should be pointed out that it is not just the subject of an image that can disseminate a message. Any object present in the scene can connote something. For example, if you add a cross to the background of the man on his knees then it would make one assume that this man was Christian. Likewise, although not completely accurate, if the man was on a prayer rug or there was indications that he was facing east, then one might come to the conclusion that he was a Muslim. These interpretations are only possible because of an established visual *langue* that has been created in the viewer's mind based on their experiences. "Thanks to its code of connotation the reading of the photograph is thus always historical; it depends on the reader's 'knowledge' just as though it were a matter of a real language [*langue*], intelligible only if one has learned the signs" (Barthes, 1977, p. 28). These types of connotations are present in everyday life, be it in spoken, visual, musical, or body language, and it is because of this that cinema can be a powerful tool to transmit complex messages. In essence, cinema takes over the signs of other systems, making them signifiers in a "system of connotation" (Barthes, 1977, p. 37). Surber summarizes and explains further:

The idea underlying Barthes's distinctive analysis of mythology is that any sign, in addition to establishing a relation between a signifier and a signified, can also be employed as a signifier of other signifieds of a higher order that are also signs. This higher order of signification in which a sign signifies other signs Barthes called the level

of connotations. At this level, a signification system encounters an extrasystemic dimension - namely, some prevailing set of historical and cultural meanings or codes. As an example, a photograph of a bald eagle is, at its most basic level, a signifier for a signified, which is simply the actual bald eagle photographed (or its mental image). This, the photograph itself is a sign that denotes bald eagle. However, in addition to the first-order object, most of us would think almost immediately of other, related signs, such as the American flag, patriotism, or perhaps endangered species, all of which constitute part of the eagle's connotation for most contemporary Americans. (1998, p. 175)

Christian Metz sought to directly apply Saussure semiotics to cinema, and in doing so made a distinction between different aspects of the film making process, making a distinction between "cinematic fact" and "film fact."

The cinematic fact, for Metz, refers to the cinematic institution taken in its broadest sense as a multi-dimensional sociocultural complex which includes pre-filmic events (the economic infrastructure, the studio system, technology), post-filmic events (distribution, exhibition, and the social or political impact of film) and a-filmic events (the decor of the theatre, the social ritual of movie going). The filmic fact, meanwhile, refers to a localizable discourse, a text; not to the physical film-object contained in a can but rather to the signifying text. (Stam, Burgoyne, & Flitterman-Lewis, p. 34)

It is the filmic fact that Metz associates with semiotics of film, and thus concludes filmic texts should be studied as such. These texts, Metz argued, are filled with two different types of codes, specific codes and nonspecific codes. Codes that only appear in the cinema are specific, while codes that are borrowed from other languages are nonspecific.

Metz describes the configuration of specific and non-specific codes as a set of concentric circles ranging on a spectrum from the very specific - the inner circle - for example, those codes linked to film's definition as deploying moving, multiple images (e.g. codes of camera movement and continuity editing), through codes shared with other arts (e.g. narrative codes, shared with the novel and the comic strip, or codes of visual analogy, shared with painting) to demonstrably non-specific codes which are widely disseminated in the culture (for example, the codes of gender roles). (Stam, Burgoyne, & Flitterman-Lewis, p. 48-49)

It should be pointed out that for all nonspecific codes that appear in a film the viewers themselves have to be accounted for. For each viewer will have different life experiences and will therefore interpret each code differently, if sometimes only slightly. While most people will have close enough experiences to receive the same general message from a film, there will nevertheless be differences in reception of specific signifiers. This is because:

The iconology specific to each sociocultural group producing or viewing the films (the more or less institutionalized modalities of object representation, the processes of recognition and identification of the objects in their visual or auditive 'reproduction,' and, more generally, the collective notions of what an image is), and, on the other hand, up to a certain point, perception itself (visual habits of identification and construction of forms and figures, the spatial representations peculiar to each culture, various auditory structures, and so on). (Metz, 1974, p. 111)

Similar to Metz's idea of specific and nonspecific codes, but more generalized, is his notion of cultural codes and specialized codes. Cultural codes are those that a person having grown up in a

specific culture would consider natural. While these codes are still products of society most individuals would not have to think to interpret them. Specialized codes would be ones that require training, in addition to simply living in a society, in order to interpret them. The level of training can vary depending on the complexity and frequency of the code, and is usually considered small for the cinema (Metz, 1974, p. 112). It could be argued that many cinematic codes have become cultural codes for Americans due to the frequency of exposure in today's video-saturated culture.

In addition to more precisely fixing semiotics to the cinema Metz argued that film gave the impression of reality in ways that photography or theater could not. For Metz the impression of reality is a two sided phenomenon. On one hand there is how closely the reproduction represents reality, and on the other is the issue of how willing the viewer is to accept the presented as reality. "A fairly convincing reproduction causes the phenomena of affective and perceptual participation to be awakened in the spectator, which, in turn, gives reality to the copy" (Metz, 1974, p. 6-7). To Metz the motion presented by the cinema is what makes movies more 'real' than photographs.

Two things, then, are entailed by motion: a higher degree of reality, and the corporality of objects. These are not all, however. Indeed, it is reasonable to think that the importance of motion in the cinema depends essentially on a third factor . . . movement is never material but is always visual, to reproduce its appearance is to duplicate its reality. In truth, one cannot even "reproduce" a movement; one can only re-produce it in a second production belonging to the same order of reality, for the spectator, as the first. (Metz, 1974, p. 6-9)

This stems from the idea that in the real world you can reach out and touch an object, which cannot be done with a representation in an image. However, when you introduce movement the concept remains the same for both the real world and cinema. In both movement can only be seen, one cannot touch or feel it, which means that movement on the screen is just as real as movement on the street. This, Metz argues, is what makes cinema more real to the viewer than a photograph. It is not just photos that cinema has an advantage of reality over, it is also the theater, because the audience is well aware of the spectacle taking place, where film the viewer is distanced from the 'show' and therefore is able ignore the 'stage' (Metz, 1974).

Rushton takes Metz's idea of film's representation of reality to another level, claiming that film does not simply represent reality convincingly:

I argue that films are part of reality. Against the idea that films are abstracted from reality and can thus only offer a deficient mode of reality, I instead try to see films as part of the reality we typically inhabit, as part of the world we live in, as parts of our lives. I argue that films help us to shape what we call 'reality.' (Rushton, 2011, p. 2)

Rushton continues, "Films do not re-present anything. Instead, they create things; they create realities, they create possibilities, situations and events that have not had a previous existence; they give rise to objects and subjects whose reality is filmic" (2011, p. 4). It is in this way, Rushton argues, that viewers are able to create an understanding of events or cultures that they have not experienced themselves, even through fictional film. It is possible, for example, for a person born after the end of the Vietnam War to create an in depth understanding of it based solely on cinematic depictions in films such as *Platoon* (1986) or *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). This

can also play into the concepts that people use to create representations of other cultures and individuals in those cultures, also known as the production of meaning.

Stuart Hall says that there is a system that correlates objects, people, and events with a set of “mental representations” that everyone carries in their minds. There would be no way to interpret the world in a meaningful way without these. For Hall, “Meaning depends on the system of concepts and images formed in our thoughts which can stand for or ‘represent’ the world, enabling us to refer to things both inside and outside our heads” (1997a, p. 17). It is not just material things that we form representations for, it is also more abstract ideas, things that we cannot see or touch. War, death, friendship and love are just some examples of these abstractions, not to mention the people and places that we will never see, or that never existed (Hall, 1997a, p. 17).

Hall calls this a “system of representation” because it is made up of “different ways of organizing, clustering, arranging and classifying concepts, and of establishing complex relations between them,” not just individual ideas (1997a, p. 17). This allows members of a society to share “conceptual maps” that allow individuals to conceptualize the world in similar ways, this in turn builds cultural meanings constructing a social reality that we share, allowing us to interpret codes or signifiers in ways that produce roughly the same signified message. These signs are what we consider common languages, allowing us to “correlate our concepts and ideas with certain written words, spoken sounds or visual images” (Hall, 1997a, p. 18). Because of this we are able to communicate with an ease that would otherwise not be present. “The relation between ‘things’, concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language.

The process which links these three elements together is what we call ‘representation’” (Hall, 1997a, p 19).

Hall distinguishes between visual signs, the *iconic*, and written or spoken signs, the *indexical*. These names come from the fact that visual signs bear resemblance to the object that they refer. An example of an iconic sign for a rabbit would be a drawing of a rabbit. The indexical sign, on the other hand, is the word “rabbit,” either spoken or written (1997a). The difference between the two, however, is not as important as the difference between similar signs. For example, it is known that a red light, in relation to a traffic light, means “stop.” This, it is argued, does not carry meaning without a corresponding color meaning “go,” such as green in the United States. The colors of the lights themselves are not important, it is the difference that creates the meaning for both. “If you couldn’t differentiate between Red and Green, you couldn’t use one to mean ‘Stop’ and the other to mean ‘Go’” (Hall, 1997a, p. 27). Signs themselves do not fix their meaning, it is dependent on the relation between a sign and a concept to be fixed by a code (Hall, 1997a).

What Hall brings to the table that is different from Saussure, Barthes, or Metz is that he focuses on how these signs can represent people and cultures. Further, he shows that signs can be constructed in our heads from representations that are not based on reality, at least not reality in the real sense. Many of our concepts of people from other cultures are based on images that we saw on film or television, or read in books. While these representations may be based in a filmic or literary reality they do not have to accurately depict the real life people they claim to represent. These false representations can lead to stereotypes that can build on themselves by means of what Hamilton calls the dominant representational paradigm (Hamilton, 1997, p. 76).

The idea is that once a narrative has been created about a certain group then future photographers, filmmakers, and authors will continue to use that representation because it is expected. This, for example, could be the way Africans dress, act, or look; or the vulnerable positions and situations that children are presented in.

Chapter 4: The Sympathetic Child

Since the early part of the 1900s mass media researchers have been interested in the relationship between movies and children. The majority of this research, including the Payne Fund studies of the 1920s, focused on the impact that film can have on children by exposing them to violent or sexual content (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). While this type of study has been refined over the years, the findings are still often vague and inconclusive; only being able to state that movies can potentially have some influence on some children some of the time. In contrast to these studies I am looking at how film can use depictions of children, especially those in danger, to influence the emotions of the viewer. To establish a background of how children can be used in film I must first explore the role that children have played in American society and in Hollywood up to this point.

The Innocent Child in American Society

To understand the origins of the innocent child in the United States, their role during the Renaissance must first be examined. According to Jenks (1996), despite the fact children have been present throughout human history the concept of ‘childhood’ is a relatively recent invention. The idea is a social construction that aims to define children and their role in society, and ultimately to label them as ‘innocent’ in an attempt to protect them from the trials and tribulations of adult life. The notion of childhood first emerged in the sixteenth century during the Renaissance, along with science, the nation-state, and religious freedom (Postman, 1982). It should not be assumed that children were not cared for or prioritized prior to this, it was simply that there was no cohesive idea of childhood or what that meant for a child’s role as a member of

society (Smith, 2010). Postman (1982) claims that the notion of childhood was spread in large part by the invention of the printing press, and therefore a greater ability to disseminate cultural information through print. Two main theories of childhood emerged during this time, the first being constructed by Locke and stating that the child was a ‘tabula rasa,’ or a blank slate, of which it was the parent’s and society’s responsibility to mold the mind into a well functioning adult. The second theory was that of Rousseau, which established that childhood was as close as humans come to being in a “state of nature,” which insinuated that children are pure and innocent. These two competing definitions of childhood, along with many others, shape the ‘alternative discourses’ that Smith (2010) says, “Make competing claims to capture the reality of children’s lives and development” (p. 13). Further exemplifying the evolution of who was considered a child and what constituted childhood, Hendrick (1997) claims:

Since at least the eighteenth century there have been several authoritative social constructions (and reconstructions) of childhood. From the perspective of adults, these different understandings have shared the intention to identify the existence of ‘childhood’; to define the desirable state of ‘childhood’; to incorporate the concept into a larger philosophy concerning the meaning of life; and to control ‘childhood’, whatever its nature. (p. 59)

Despite all of these incarnations of the definition of childhood, the two main theories developed by Locke and Rousseau were what emerged in the United States after its independence (Postman, 1982).

Postman (1982) claims that in America the idea developed by Locke, that the child is a ‘tabula rasa,’ was adopted primarily by the Protestants to emphasize the need to control one’s

children and teach them how to be good citizens. Despite the prevalence of this theory, the Romantic notion of Rousseau remained, situating the child as innocent and close to nature. This was in large part because America itself was a young nation with little history and a wide expanse of wilderness to conquer:

The concept of American innocence that took hold in the nineteenth century is rooted in two central thoughts. The first of these focuses on America's youthfulness as a nation and its optimism in the future. After the War of 1812, an air of hopefulness became apparent in American life and letters, one of which expressed the sense of enormous possibility that Americans were beginning to share about the future of their new country. (Jackson, 1986, p. 16)

Even though it is claimed that, "Not so long ago children were seen as little better than untrained animals, and the path to their education and spiritual cultivation was laid with pain" (Faulkner, 2011, p. 9), the 'innocence' of American children was quickly emphasized, along with their "weakness and ignorance," (Aries, 1962) establishing both the Romantic and Protestant views of childhood. It was the Romantic definition, however, that seemed to grip the nation as we headed toward the twentieth century.

As the twentieth century came into existence there was a shift in both the perception of children and the decrease in the mortality rate of both infants and children. There have been arguments that claim that a greater affection towards children led to better care, and therefore a lower mortality rate. Conversely, arguments claim that the lower mortality rate led to a greater caring for children as there was a lower likelihood that the child would die prematurely (Zelizer, 1985). While causality has not been established in this debate, it is clear that these changes

created a shift in societal views of children. The child was already seen as innocent, but that innocence started to represent something that needed to be protected:

The magnification of child mourning in the twentieth century is a measure of the transformation in the cultural meaning of childhood — specifically, the new exaltation of children’s sentimental worth. If child life is sacred, child death became an intolerable sacrilege, provoking not only parental sorrow but social bereavement as well. (Zelizer, 1985, p. 23)

It was at this point that it became clear that there was “no scandal greater than the possible violation of a child’s innocence” in Western society (Faulkner, 2011, p. 2). This coincided with the rise of the automobile, and the increased death of children that were playing the street and subsequently hit by cars. Many of these incidences caused mobs to take immediate action in punishing the drivers of the cars, whether or not it was their fault (Zelizer, 1985), highlighting the value that Americans had put on the lives of children. This understanding of the innocence of the child was a creation from the thoughts and emotions of adults. As the deaths of children that had been playing the street show, the perception that the child could do no wrong often dominated the decisions of those that were nearby when such accidents occurred. The reality of the situation was quite different, as there was blame to spread to many of the children as they often made foolish decisions to chase passing cars while trying to hit the tires with sticks (Zelizer, 1985). This distinction between the actions and capabilities of the child and the perceptions of the adults stereotyped children (Smith, 2010). In the streets and amongst the public these stereotypes indicated that a child could do no wrong, and it was the responsibilities of the adults to avoid harming a child, not matter the poor choices the child may have made. For

politicians, children took on the role that Locke had outlined many years earlier. Laws were passed that made it illegal for children to play in the street, or even the sidewalk in some cases, in an attempt to educate children of the dangers of such behavior, and prevent the rise of such accidents (Zelizer, 1985).

During the Great Depression the emphasis on the innocent child increased, despite, or because of, the fact that birth rates decreased, due to hope that things would get better in the future (Jackson, 1986). It was at this time that many modern concepts of childhood began to be developed, especially those concerning the notion that, 'children are our future.' As Postman (1982) stated in the first sentence of *The Disappearance of Childhood*, "Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see" (p. xi). This has been echoed by Faulkner (2011), stating, "The child heralds our salvation, conceived as redemptive return to a lost, primordial innocence" (p. 23). This was especially true during the depression as many families were struggling to simply survive. Despite this, parents did not want their children to be burdened with the same problems as adults, and thus it was viewed that if the children could be protected then the future was secure (Zelizer, 1985). Not only did the perception that children were innocent and ignorant to the turmoil happening around them bring a hope for the future, it potentially allowed parents to feel as if things were not as bad as they seemed. Faulkner (2011) claims the idea of protecting our children is a way of feeling superior to those that do not share this belief, or lack the capabilities to protect and coddle their children in a Western fashion. Also coming out of the depression era was the notion that every child in America had the right to a happy and safe childhood (Jackson, 1986).

Following World War II, the advent of the atomic bomb, and the onset of the Cold War, Americans were faced with the new, and very plausible, idea that there might not be a future for our children to inherit (Jackson, 1986). This led to the notion of the deviant child² (Boyden, 1997), which started to be accepted as an alternative to the innocent. This had to do with many of the social movements that were starting to take place along with the loss of the belief that the future will always be there for the children. Throughout all of this the idea that ultimately children were innocent remained as the primary belief for Americans. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union it came to the forefront once again, this time with a focus on all of the world's children, not just America's. In the midst of the Cold War politicians had an enemy in the Soviets and exploited this to promote military spending and actions. The news media played along, and helped promote the attitude of "us versus them," and the need to stay active in the fight against Communism. After the Cold War this was no longer an issue, and attention needed to be shifted to a new enemy, this time, they found one that was not going to disappear, at least any time soon. Impoverished children across the globe became the new cause, and those that were viewed as responsible for the situations of these children became the new enemy (Moeller, 2002). It was in large part because of the images of starving and neglected children that were shown on news coverage that the United States became involved in the humanitarian aid mission to Somalia in 1993 (Hirsch & Oakley, 2010). According to Faulkner (2011), "Disadvantaged children cause discomfort because they do not share the privileges that are supposed to be children's right. They are also the most visible face of a more general need shared by their families and communities" (p. 102). Further, "'The child' can be used as a political tool only because it is

² The deviant child according to Boyden (1997) is the uncivilized delinquent youth that forms as a result of inattentive or absent parents, and is commonly associated with street gangs.

understood to be above politics, which is why actions elicit bipartisan approval once vulnerable childhood is brought into operation” (Faulkner, 2011, p. 117). This makes children an obvious choice for politicians and the news media to focus on when promoting humanitarian intervention. This can work in opposition to war, as it was the images of dead or captured American soldiers, framed as children of the United States, that prompted a quick withdrawal from Somalia when things went wrong. The images lingered in the consciousness of the American public and politicians long enough to contribute to the lack of response to the Rwandan Genocide less than a year after we withdrew from Somalia (Patman, 2010).

The Innocent Child in Hollywood

It would stand to reason that there have been so many studies attempting to determine the affect of mass media on children because of the value that Americans place on the innocence of the child. While these studies have not produced any conclusive results (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995), they do highlight the general feelings that children are in need of protection and that the mass media can influence behavior of the public. There have been very few studies, however, looking at the influence of the images of children, and even then most of them have been focused on how that can influence other children, not adults. This is most likely because “it is children who are seen to be most at risk . . . [and] are defined here as vulnerable and innocent, and thus in need of adult ‘protection’” (Buckingham, 1994, p. 80). Buckingham goes on to state:

There has been a broad shift of emphasis in the past decade, which has led to a greater recognition of the role played by audiences within mass communication. There has been a growing acknowledgment that texts can be read in a variety of ways, which do not necessarily correspond to the intentions of their producers. (1994, p. 81-82)

This, however, did not seem to kickstart a major focus on the way that film, or any other non-news media, influence the opinions or discourses about the topics depicted on screen. Instead the focus has remained on the immediate affects with recognition that an individual's situation plays a role in the outcome. Jackson (1986) compiled a thorough examination of the depictions of children in film and how that mirrored societal definitions of children, but left it at that; not talking about how images influence the viewer in any way other than to bring them into the cinema. That is not to say that there has not been recognition of the influence that depictions of children have over the broader cultural definitions of childhood, although it is often simply a side note to a larger point:

The innocence of our own children is also manufactured. It is manufactured by virtue of the ideals acted out by the adorable child actor and is manufactured through social arrangements that obscure and even prevent children's involvement in everyday life.

Childhood innocence is manufactured using the enormous resources available to Western citizens so that they are able to withdraw children from the circuit of economic production altogether. (Faulkner, 2011, p. 28)

Faulkner does later state that if childhood is viewed as a social construct it allows for us to determine why the current ideas of childhood have taken hold (2011, p. 102). It can be argued whether film reflects society or society reflects film, with the truth probably being a little of both. This means that there is essentially feedback between what is depicted on theater screens and what is the popular belief in society, which is why I have chosen to outline how Hollywood has depicted children and childhood over the years in contrast with the previous section.

Despite few studies that have focused on anything of this sort, there is evidence that film can influence viewers, especially with the depictions of children. Plantinga (2009) states that Hollywood has borrowed many conventions from classical literature, and invented some of their own, that are designed to manipulate the audience via their emotions. While these manipulations are usually used because they make the movies more enjoyable, which will in turn increase the box office take, they can have grander influences as well. “It is widely taken for granted that fictions, including both literature and film, influence our attitudes toward real people, events, and situations” (Friend, 2010, p. 77). In short, if you become emotional when you see something on screen you are very likely to react in the same way if you encounter a similar situation in real life. Emotions have the ability to “forge a place for the film in human memory and have the capacity to strengthen or alter ways of thinking and valuing” (Plantinga, 2009, p. 190). These images that depict children are not only designed to elicit emotions, they convey certain characteristics of what a child or childhood should be like (Smith, 2010). Although, it should be noted that according to Smith (2010), “The dynamics of the relationship between representation and reality remain unclear” (p. 123). If nothing more, however, this highlights the need to study such issues.

In order to talk about how the image of the child could be used to influence the viewer, much less discuss topics associated with modern film plots, one must first understand how Hollywood has depicted children and childhood over time. Jackson (1986) outlined the premise of her book:

The image of the child as innocent that has become so apparent in American movies over the years is not a mere coincidence. In America, children and innocence are highly

valued; indeed, their significance is just as firmly woven into the fabric of American thought as it is into American movies. (p. 14)

She continues that innocence was a characteristic of not just American children, but of American heroes. The ideal hero was one that had to learn as they went along, not one that was ultra prepared for what was coming (1986, p. 17). This trope has continued to be seen in movies as well, but it is not as apparent as that of the innocent child.

The early twentieth century saw the implementation of laws to protect children, which were coupled with popular and serious literature lauding the innocence of children. Further attention was being paid to the needs and psychological conditions of children. This happened to coincide with the gain in popularity of movies, therefore film naturally adopted the image of the innocent child early in its adolescence (Jackson, 1986). At this point movies were silent and extra reliant on visuals to demonstrate the emotion and intricacies of the plot. After the initial novelty of a moving picture started to wear off producers needed ways to allow the audience to connect to the films the same way that they connected to literature. Jackson (1986) outlines how this was accomplished:

Filmmakers had to learn how to translate into visual, cinematic images that intangible quality of innocence that had become so clearly associated with children. One of the most obvious ways to dramatize innocence -- and one which was being used with much success already in popular books and stage melodrama -- was to concentrate on the child's vulnerability by placing him or her in a dangerous situation . . . Of these, the helpless, threatened child, frequently one who spends little time on the screen but around whose rescue the entire plot revolves, became one of the most popular. (p. 31-32)

These plots served to bring in the mostly immigrant audience (Jackson, 1986) by keeping the plots simple and relying on what was considered universal images of children in need. Around this time the child star emerged onto the scene, exemplified by “America’s Sweetheart” Mary Pickford, who “radiated a sense of innocence and independence” (Jackson, 1986, p. 42). Pickford worked as an actress representing children for most of her career, and in the 1920s her innocent and petite looks fit in perfectly with the cultural climate of the time. Her roles were such that she represented the “rambunctious street urchin” but still maintained an image of an angelic innocent little girl that was ultimately good (Jackson, 1986). These practices worked and carried the film industry into the Great Depression with rising attendance, while social scientists had a new found focus on studying the affects of film (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). This was paired with the rise in Progressivism and a newfound focus on the education and humane treatment of children across the country.

The 1930s were Shirley Temple’s time to shine, starring in twenty-one feature films during her childhood. Her films often reflected the sense of a world gone wrong that dominated the general discourse in the Depression era. The plots often revolved around being an orphan and having to set things straight herself (Jackson, 1986), which perfectly mirrored the cultural feelings that the children were the future and would find their way out of the depression. This message was once again hammed home towards the end of the depression with Judy Garland’s depiction of Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). Dorothy represents the ultimate child hero in that she not only leads a band of misfits to the Wizard in hope of solving their problems, while encountering evil along the way, but she is ultimately responsible for her own fate. This message

gave those suffering through the depression the message that they needed to help themselves, and that not even the Wizard, or government, could dig them out of their own hole.

World War II changed a lot, especially the advent of the atomic bomb and the coinciding fear that humanity could be exterminated. This put an end to the thought that children would inevitably inherit the future and restore a sense of normalcy that always seemed to be lacking. The image of children started to shift around this time, most likely as a result of the change in society. It is not that the innocent child disappeared, but unquestioned hope for the future seemed to fade and new images of children, not possible prior to the war, began to emerge (Jackson, 1986).

In 1956, Warner Brothers released The Bad Seed, which became the seventeenth-biggest money-maker of the year. This movie brought to the surface a darker view of childhood that seemed slowly to be emerging in American films, one reflective of fears that were forming in the culture at large. (Jackson, 1986, p. 111)

The Bad Seed (1956) is a story about an adopted 8-year old girl who happens to be a murderer. The plot is driven by the parents concern over whether or not they caused the young girl to be this way or if she was born evil, challenging the cultural assumptions that a child is always innocent and suggesting that some kids are simply 'bad seeds.' With the child playing the villain it is impossible to maintain any image of innocence, but in the final scene the girl is killed, eliminating the evil from society. This death conveniently occurs via lightning, and therefore does not require any adults to be forced to kill the child; preserving the notion that adults should not harm the young. The less optimistic images of children continued throughout the 1960s and often reflected fears of the youth counter culture emerging in society (Jackson, 1986). In

addition, with the rising number of latchkey kids, movies produced a new type of child character, one that was frequently more competent than the surrounding adults, but ultimately still innocent. This was likely in response to parental fears of leaving children home alone, and attempted to resolve such anxiety by reassuring adults that children can take care of themselves (Jackson, 1986).

The 1980s saw the explosion of the teen comedy, which typically focused on the lives of high school or middle school students, usually while at school, but not necessarily while being educated, as seen in *The Breakfast Club* (1985). *The Breakfast Club* features many of the typical characters found in teen movies of the 1980s, and in numerous more films since. There are five basic types of characters in school related films: the nerd, the rebel, the popular kid, the athlete (often sensitive), and the delinquent (Shary, 2002). While the actual enactment of these stereotypical characters has been depicted in different ways over the years, there has not been much change in the basic formula. If one or more of these stereotypes are represented by a main character it is often in an attempt to show a view that might challenge the cultural norms, such as the sensitive jock in *She's All That* (1999), or the rebel that conforms to impress a girl in *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999). Conversely, if a character is meant to be evil, they are often depicted in the cultural normative version of the stereotype, such as the popular girl in *Mean Girls* (2004).

The purely innocent child is still present, or sometimes notably absent, in contemporary film. When Hollywood tackled the events in Somalia in *Black Hawk Down* (2001), it was done in a manner that almost completely eliminated Somali children from the picture, in stark contrast to the news reports that led to United States involvement in the first place. The absence of

innocent African children created a film that spoke to the fears and dangers of getting involved in African conflicts. *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), on the other hand, showed many innocent children that were in danger of brutal deaths, again in contrast to the news coverage at the time of the genocide. The ultimate message of the film was that it was a tragedy that the West did not get involved in the prevention of the genocide and the protection of these children.

The depictions of children in film have become much more varied, but ultimately they usually come down to the images of innocence, or if not, then the result of some form of ‘evil’ that has led the child astray, such as the child soldier. That is not to say that there are not movies that challenge these notions, such as *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2011), which unfortunately once again coincides with a greater societal discourse about what brings a child, or adult for that matter, to commit mass murder.

Chapter 5: “The Other”

Representation can be used for a lot of purposes, some of them productive, but it can also be used in a more negative, way, one that creates a difference between the viewer and another group. In *Orientalism* (1978) by Edward W. Said describes how the West creates knowledge about the East not based on facts but based on archetypes. For Said, the idea of the East was a negative inversion of the West that was created through literary and historical texts that had little actual understanding of reality in the places that they described. This can be done by engaging feelings, attitudes and emotions that are used to mobilize fear and anxiety in viewers (Hall, 1997b, p. 226). This is most commonly done through the use of stereotypes, which point out the differences between Westerners and “the Other” while eliminating any depth to the characters.

Characters labeled as ‘stereotypes’ are usually those that, *also in a narrative sense*, quite openly embody ‘images of the Other.’ These characters not only correspond to the content of stereotypical conscriptions about members of certain groups, but, *as narrative or aesthetic constructs and conventional artifacts* in and of themselves, they are reduced to a limited number of conspicuous characteristics with multiple intertextual repetitions en bloc. (Schweinitz, 2011, p. 44)

Hall claims that this use of stereotypes is part of “the maintenance of social and symbolic order,” defining an us versus them dichotomy. This facilitates the bonding together of all that make up the “normal,” by differentiating “Us” from “the Other” (1997b, p. 258).

Those that are different from the majority are often highlighted because of this binary form of representation, being shown in polarized extremes: good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/attractive (Hall, 1997b, p. 229). According to Ferguson the use of binaries such as these are to

create a notion of difference, which is essential for the creation of meaning. For example, “We only know that something is hard because we can compare it with the concept of softness” (1998, p. 66). Otherness, therefore, becomes something that a viewer can measure themselves by, as they are usually representative of the normal. For example, the African in need of aid becomes “the Other” to an American viewer’s “normal” life (Ferguson, 1998, p. 68).

In the media, the West has been put in solid binary opposition to the global Other, or as Hall put it, “The West and the Rest.” Ferguson adds, “The almost entirely negative discursive construction of the Rest (Other) is seen as rooted in the arrogant certainties of Enlightenment thinking” (1998, p. 68). Schweinitz, however, points out that representations of the Other do not have to be purely negative. They can serve as a basis for characters, once they are properly developed, to break from. The break is a sign of individuality based on the characters variations from the stereotypical base (2011, p. 50). This is a fine line as the filmmaker is showing that this character is different from the stereotype, while at the same time reinforcing that the stereotype exists.

The use of representations, especially those in binary opposition to what the typical viewer would consider normal, are useful in filmmaking as they provide a quick and easy way to develop the plot. They are not something to be taken lightly as they can have a large impact on the creation of cultural ideologies (Helsby, 2005). This is especially true when the same, or similar, representations or stereotypes are used repeatedly in various texts, creating inter-textual meanings that becomes common place in the minds of viewers.

Cinema (and all other mass media) are important parts of American culture . . . Culture is thus deeply connected to ideology: one might say it is the ‘real-world’ manifestation of

ideology, since characteristic features, social behaviors, and cultural products all convey ideology. (Benshoff, 2009, p. 13)

For example, most citizens of the United States have never been to China, but that does not mean that they do not have an understanding of what they think China looks like, or how the Chinese people act. This works both ways:

All media texts reflect in some way the ideological biases of the culture from which they emanate, the images of China shown in Hollywood movies on American television will be different from the mediated images of China made in some other area of the world (and different from China's *own* images of itself). (Benshoff, 2009, p. 14)

Depictions of Africa

Western depictions of Africa, and Africans, especially those such as the savage, heathen, or animal, can be traced back to prehistory before Europeans were engaged with Africa. For Europeans, according to myth, the forests were a borderline between humans and animals. Therefore, these types of descriptors were frequently used to describe any type of Other, and were not unique when they were applied to Africans. Greeks, for example, used to call the people in the more northern regions of Europe barbarians. During the Middle Ages Hungarians were described as ogres and savages, and around the twelfth century the English referred to the Irish as "wild" (Ferguson, 1998, p.79). Greece used similar descriptions for parts of Africa that were unknown, or wild, while Egypt and what is now Ethiopia were referred to by more positive descriptors. The Romans, who were well acquainted with Africans as they served in many of their armies, created positive representations of both individual Africans and Africa in general (Pieterse, 1992).

With the rise of Christianity there was also an increased perception that black was the color of evil, being associated with sin, darkness, and other negative connotations. The color black played in opposition to lightness:

The symbolism of light and darkness was probably derived from astrology, alchemy, Gnosticism and forms of Manichaeism; in itself it had nothing to do with skin colour, but in the course of time it did acquire that connotation. Black became the colour of the devil and demons. Later, in the confrontation with Islam, it came to form part of the enemy image of Muslims: the symbolism of the 'black demon' was transferred to Muslims - in early medieval paintings black Saracens, black tormentors and black henchmen torture Christ during the Passion. This is the tradition of the devil as the Black Man and the black bugaboo. (Pieterse, 1992, p. 24)

It should be noted, that most representations of Africa by Europeans had more to do with changes in the culture of Europe, and often had little to do with any actual interaction with Africans. "The principles that the image-formation of outsiders is determined primarily by the dynamics of one's own circle, and not because the people in question themselves change, is a recurring refrain in this study of image-formation" (Pieterse, 1992, p. 29).

The savage had become a common description of Africans by the nineteenth century, with the images being dominated by notable absences such as the lack of clothing, possessions, or the attributes of civilizations.

The *Sunday Reading for the Young* (1877) showed a drawing of Africans huddled together amidst dark, wild vegetation and commented: "They are but one degree removed from the level of brute creation - the sole trace of civilization about them is that they cook their food,

and that, it may be assumed, in the crudest manner” (Pieterse, 1992, p. 35). These descriptions were in direct opposition to what many of the European travelers encountered during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many of the accounts praised the level of civilization that they encountered, describing cities that rivaled Europe’s, both in age and infrastructure (Pieterse, 1992, p. 35). Even today, images of Africa tend to ignore the urban areas, preferring to depict scenic vistas and exotic animals.

With the rise of African slaves in the West the descriptions changed as well. Specifically, the rationale for why Africans were inferior went from cultural traits to racial inferiority, or the idea that Africans were naturally a similar yet lower species than Europeans. This was mainly used as justification for the brutal treatment of slaves. However, those images and thoughts did not die with slavery, “The prehistory of racial thinking in natural history, in which blacks were compared with animals, has a lasting echo also in attitudes towards blacks in the west” (Pieterse, 1992, p. 43). Towards the end of the institution of slavery there was another image of Africans that arose. This style of image is what most Americans probably associate with slavery, because it is the dominant surviving image from that time.

Almost all of the images of slavery with which we are familiar are in fact abolitionist images. The typical iconography of abolitionism displays the movement’s Christian pathos: the recurring image is that of blacks kneeling with hands folded and eyes cast upward. (Pieterse, 1992, p. 58)

Not only did the abolitionist movement create images of slaves that humanized them by depicting them as victims, but it capitalized on existing Christian images of prayer. This image provided two different, but critically linked, ideas to the white populations. First, it made them

sympathize with the suffering and identify the slaves as fellow Christians. Second, it helped ease concerns of retribution by freed slaves by showing that they were meek and in need of protection, not angry and out for revenge (Pieterse, 1992).

The most popular abolitionist book, Harriet Beech Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853), created a new and henceforth proverbial stereotype. Uncle Tom is the docile black who sacrifices himself for his master and is supposed to generate sympathy because he does *not* resist or revolt. The black whose name was invoked by whites to generate sympathy for blacks soon became a term of abuse among blacks. (Pieterse, 1992, p. 61)

Thus, even while trying to help the black slaves, the white abolitionists still managed to portray the slaves as less than fully developed human beings. As slavery was losing favor and being abolished, Europeans began to exploit Africa in a different way, this time through colonialism.

It was during the lead up to colonialism that the metaphor of Africa as the Dark Continent began to take shape. Colonialism started with the exploration of Africa's interior. During the slave trade most interactions took place along the coasts, and there was little incentive to venture inland for Europeans and Americans. It was this interior that the West, mainly the British, referred to as 'dark' (Pieterse, 1992). This descriptor had multiple consequences, on the one hand it gave merit and a sense of great adventure to those that dared enter Africa's depths. On the other it created justification for Europe's presence on the continent:

The metaphor homogenizes and flattens places and people, denies the actualities and specificities of social and economic processes which transform the continent, and obscures a nuanced examination of the forces of cultural and economic imperialism unfolding within Africa in their relation to Europe and America. Thus, the metaphor

legitimizes the status quo and perpetuates unequal relations of power. (Jarosz, 1992, p. 105)

The stories that were told placed the Africans firmly in the place of the Other, with the earliest written accounts being that of Henry M. Stanley (Jarosz, 1992). These adventures, and the images that accompanied them were often in direct contradiction of the abolitionist images. These new images were of savages and depicted, “Terrifying tales about heathen rituals, idolatry and human sacrifice traditionally play an important part in missionary image-building about the non-western world” (Pieterse, 1992, p. 69).

The next to arrive in Africa, following the explorers, were the missionaries, and they gladly took up the image of the Dark Continent as it played into their desires and could be integrated into the Christian mythos (Jarosz, 1992). Interestingly, the negative depictions of Africa by missionaries started before they even arrived in Africa. During March of 1852, “Cornelius Rudolf Vietor began writing a four-volume illustrated description, drawn ‘in true colours’, of ‘Africa, the field full of skeletons’, swarming with satanic butcheries and perversities. Only he had never himself set foot in Africa” (Pieterse, 1992, p. 69-70). This, was of course, in stark contrast to the idea, and images, of the missionaries as heroes. The Dark Continent also provided imagery in line with traditional Christian teachings. “The Dark Continent counterposes the Dark as sin, ignorance, and brutality with the Light of Christian doctrine and epistemology. Here the Dark Continent does not signify place or person but more a lack of Christian belief and practice” (Jarosz, 1992, p. 107). While these two stereotypes were independent of each other they complimented each other and provided a solid justification for the missionaries. “For the missions to justify themselves the heathen *had to be* perceived and

labelled as degraded creatures sunk deep in darkness who needed to be brought to the light” (Pieterse, 1992, p. 71). In the end it was the explorers that created the myth of the Dark Continent, but the missionaries were the ones that expanded that to include the descriptions of the people as heathen and savages (Pieterse, 1992).

The cinematic images of Africa during the colonial era were dominated by jungle epics such as *Tarzan* and *The African Queen* (1951), not to mention several adaptations of H. Rider Haggard’s 1885 novel, *King Solomon’s Mines*. All of these images reinforced the vision of Africa as a continent full of savages and with no history or culture prior to the Europeans arriving (Murphy, 2000, p. 239).

There were other images of Africans during this time as well, and they were predominantly those of an enemy. Many of the virtues that were at one time associated with Africans were now being used as justifications for military actions in order to colonize (Pieterse, 1992, p. 79). After the majority of the colonial fighting had stopped the imagery started to shift once again, this time from the enemy to the binary of the African inferiority to the European colonizers (p. 88). Hall describes this further:

This radicalized discourse is structured by a set of binary oppositions. There is the powerful opposition between ‘civilization’ (white) and ‘savagery’ (black). There is the opposition between the biological or bodily characteristics of the ‘black’ and ‘white’ ‘races’, polarized into their extreme opposites - each the signifiers of an absolute difference between human ‘types’ or species. (1997b, p. 243)

These images were in contrast to the reality that there existed many well-developed civilizations in Africa, with art, architecture, mathematics, and literature (Helsby, 2005).

It was not just colonial governments that disseminated these images. Anthropologists had their influence as well, attempting to create connections between race and culture:

As the position and status of the 'inferior' races became increasingly to be regarded as fixed, so socio-cultural differences came to be regarded as dependent upon hereditary characteristics. Since there were inaccessible to direct observation they had to be inferred from physical and behavioral traits which, in turn, they were intended to explain.

Socio-cultural differences among human populations became subsumed within the identity of the individual human body. In the attempt to trace the line of determination between the biological and the social, the body became the totemic object, and its very visibility the evident articulation of nature and culture. (Hall, 1997b, p 244)

All of this created a mythology of Africans as savages, which fit the needs of the colonizers at the time. These images have faded in popularity, although not entirely as I shall discuss later, giving way to images of Africans as childlike and helpless (Pieterse, 1992, p. 88). These new depictions once again suited the needs of those in the West, as after World War II large scale development projects by the West, such as the Kariba Dam on the border of Zambia and Zimbabwe, provided Western media the opportunity to show how the West was helping Africans in need (Jarosz, 1992).

Mass media, especially in the West, is a source for the dissemination of governmental policy and ideological ideas. Africa is seldom discussed, unless there is a story that involves the West helping Africa via aid missions or military intervention, or depicts the West in danger from Africa, such as AIDs or a failed military intervention. These stories, and the corresponding images, are continuing the West's control over the depictions of Africa. "Media accounts often

justify, or even celebrate, dominant international and national political and economic agendas. They confirm relations of domination, the politics of intervention and confrontation, and an antipathy toward local, indigenous cultures” (Jarosz, 1992, p. 108). In this way there are two dominant depictions of Africa that still linger today. That of the wild savage and that of the helpless child. Sometimes, as in the case with both *Black Hawk Down* and *Hotel Rwanda* both depictions are present.

Hall (1997b) considers the cinema to be especially important to the decimation of popular representations of the Other, and I feel that *Black Hawk Down* and *Hotel Rwanda* are no exceptions, especially since they are both based on actual events. Despite this, they still draw heavily from colonial descriptions of Africa, mainly that of the savage warrior:

The ignoble savage of colonialism was first of all a warrior . . . The contrast between the warrior and the soldier, the colonial enemy image and the self-image, is aversion of the rhetorical contrast between savagery and civilization. Soldiers are sometimes referred to as warriors, but not the other way round. The stereotype of the warrior is a virtually naked native, ferocious, equipped with archaic arms, shown more often as an individual than in a group (but if a group is shown it is a disorganized group). The soldier, on the other hand wears a uniform belongs to an army and is subject to army discipline.

(Pieterse, 1992, p. 79)

These images were not accurate at the time, as many of the armies that the European faced were highly organized with modern firearms and drove back the Europeans, until the arrival of the European machine gun (Pieterse, 1992).

The details have shifted slightly as the African warriors are no longer depicted as nearly naked, and they are not shown as individuals. The groups that they are shown in, however, are definitely not organized and resemble mobs rather than trained military units. They are also shown using archaic arms, Cold War leftovers in *Black Hawk Down* and machetes and other such weapons in *Hotel Rwanda*. Most importantly this is all in contrast to the highly organized and trained American soldiers in *Black Hawk Down* and the innocent, child-like civilians in *Hotel Rwanda*. Further, the rationale behind the colonial violence often revolved around “African Savagery,” namely the idea of human sacrifice (Pieterse, 1992). In both films, the motivation for military intervention, or the lack of it, revolves around the idea of Africans being savages and killing other Africans, although no longer through sacrifice.

Chapter 6: Research Method and Questions

I will be conducting a textual analysis of *Black Hawk Down* and *Hotel Rwanda* in order to observe the ways that each film uses stereotypes of children and depictions of Africa and Africans as the Other in an attempt to manipulate the opinions of the viewers.

I have outlined ways that children are viewed in American culture and how they have commonly been used in film. The idea that children are innocent and in need of protection is paramount here, and crucial to understanding that images of children, especially those in danger, can illicit sympathetic emotions from the viewer. Based on these examples I will thoroughly examine each film for scenes of children being used as sympathetic tools. The most common example of this in *Hotel Rwanda* will be the depiction of children that are in immediate danger, usually from armed combatants. Also common will be unseen children that are referenced and assumed to be in danger. These usages, it will be argued, promote a sympathetic view towards the groups responsible for the safety of the children.

In *Black Hawk Down* the definition of children is expanded from the normative to include adult soldiers that are described in ways that indicate that they should be viewed as the sons and daughters of American families. This is primarily done indirectly with reference to a soldier's parents, and directly by calling the soldier "son." Both of these methods, although more subtle than depictions of actual children, give the idea that a dead US soldier is a dead son or daughter of American parents. This is again used in an attempt to gain sympathy towards the Americans in the film. Another way that American youth are present in the film is through references to children of the soldiers. While this does not put the children in direct harm themselves, it does indicate that if a soldier dies his children will be without a father. Also of note is the almost

complete absence of innocent Somali children. This absence can help the viewer ignore the plight of the Somali people, and solely view them as the enemy throughout most of the film. When Somali children are shown it is predominately as a child soldier, which can be viewed as a corrupted or deviant child. These children might garner sympathy from the viewer, but that will most likely trigger anger towards the Somalis for forcing young children to fight. It will be argued that almost all depictions of children in *Black Hawk Down* support sympathy towards the Americans.

As I did for children I have outlined what it means to depict someone or someplace as the Other, and how the West has used depictions of Africa and Africans to promote Western values since the pre-colonial era. The most notable of these examples is the depiction of the African savage, being both violent and uncivilized. Also important, especially in *Hotel Rwanda* is the abolitionist idea of the loyal and hardworking African servant, similar to the now derogatory Uncle Tom. *Hotel Rwanda* uses this in order to show one group of Rwandans as innocent and in need of assistance, just as the abolitionists used this as an argument for freeing the slaves; both arguing the inhumanity of standing by and doing nothing about these atrocities. Likewise, the African savage stereotype is used to promote other groups of Rwandans as violent and hostile to the values that should be present in the world. In a twist, I will argue that the West is depicted, in a way, as the Other due to their lack of humanity and unwillingness to help the Rwandan people being slaughtered.

Black Hawk Down, apart from the opening scenes, does not show Somalis in anything but a savage role. This stereotype will be shown to be present throughout the entire film. Further, it will be shown that Somalis are depicted as animal like, and especially in reference to their

unorganized pack like behavior, just like Africans were characterized by Western colonists. I will detail how the depictions of Somalis can be interpreted as an attempt to downplay their humanity and firmly put them in the role of the Other in contrast the more civilized Americans.

By detailing the ways that the filmmakers used children and depictions of the Other in both *Black Hawk Down* and *Hotel Rwanda* I will examine how these techniques are incorporated into the larger ideas presented in each film. More specifically, I will attempt to determine the ways in which these stereotypes are used as shortcuts to promoting sympathy for one side in each film and casting the Others as the enemies.

Chapter 7: Analysis of *Black Hawk Down* and *Hotel Rwanda*

There have been many cinematic depictions of war over the years, with some of the most frequent being Vietnam and World War II, although the United States' operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have been common in recent years. Africa, on the other hand, seems to have far fewer major Hollywood movies made about its post colonial conflicts. This is probably due to the lack of United States involvement, but even in the case of Somalia, there has only been *Black Hawk Down*. Likewise, *Hotel Rwanda* is the only film about Rwanda that most Americans have heard of, much less seen. This is important because these representations are most likely the only ones that viewers are exposed to; unlike Vietnam where you have many films, including *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Platoon* (1986), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *Good Morning Vietnam* (1987), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), and even *Forrest Gump* (1994), just to name a few.

While the research is unclear about how much a film can cause specific interpretations by its viewers, it is certain that there can be agenda setting and framing when it comes to how a viewer sees war (Michalski, 2007). At the very least, fictional films “can produce salient and lasting interpretations of war in themselves” (Michalski, 2007, p. 218). When it comes to Africa, the depictions of the native peoples are all too often the same, no matter what country they are from or what their role in the film. They are almost always cast as the Other, and only there in relation to the Western actors. This is especially true in *Black Hawk Down*:

Africa is defined by image. Just as much as *Black Hawk Down*'s images of the devastated bird [Black Hawk Helicopter] and the mutilated corpses of the US Rangers epitomise the fragility of external intervention, its early scene-setting also captures the essence of Africa as found in the stockroom of moving images, the kinds of ‘wallpaper’ images of

desert landscapes, with straw housing and emaciated bodies noted above regarding television news pictures - typical images that could make scenes of ethnic cleansing in Darfur not immediately distinguishable from these standard views of the continent and its people. The scenes of famine, the Somali landscape and so on are depicted in a respectful elegiac manner by the visually sensitive Scott, an approach supported by the simple typographical comment at the end of the film that 1,000 Somalis and 19 US personnel died in the course of the 18-hour operation shown in the film. That simple comment, especially alongside the consideration and honour shown in the images of Africa, appears almost to suggest that the 1,000 Somalis should not be forgotten. The suggestion, however, following the images of famine and the icon of the downed Black Hawk is almost confirmation, in itself, of the way in which conflict and death in Africa are way behind those same phenomena in the US or Europe on the scale of broadcast news media or Western governmental importance . . . Numbers and images both indicate that African security counts less than that of other continents or regions, which, quite probably, means that the parameters of legitimacy in armed conflict are different.

(Michalski, 2007, p. 173-174)

Lawrence, has argued that for the producer of *Black Hawk Down*, Jerry Bruckheimer, the film was about celebrating American heroism (2008, p. 431). This is undoubtedly true, as the film depicts the ability of the American soldier to battle out of a horrific situation, although it does place the blame on those that planned the attack and the entire intervention in Somalia in the first place. However, there is still the matter of how the Somalis are depicted. When Ridley Scott, the

director, was asked how he had kept the film from becoming the same as *Zulu*, a bunch of white people fighting off a horde of Africans, Scott responded:

That *Black Hawk Down* was not *Zulu*: 'It's a time when American involvement in a foreign conflict was absolutely moral. They'd come there at the behest of the UN and they were doing something that the world had asked them to do and they executed that with remarkable prowess.' (Rubin, 2011, p. 263)

This is an interesting response, as the film is indeed about a bunch of white Americans, with a single black comrade, fighting off a horde of Somalis. To Scott, however, the film is not about this because of the moral responsibility that America felt that it had in Somalia during the early 1990s, as opposed to the, in retrospect, non-morally guided colonial forces that were in play in *Zulu*. In essence, Scott is saying that *Black Hawk Down* can depict Americans killing hundreds of Somalis without remorse because the United States was there to help, not conquer. His comments are ignorant to the facts that the United States did not fully execute these desires, and that his film is in many ways a condemnation of the United States military being in Somalia to begin with. Michalski (2007) highlights the fact that *Black Hawk Down* was made to be as realistic as possible, something that inherently will make most Americans oppose the war that it depicts, while not making the US soldiers into the bad guys. The outcome of this, I will argue, is that the film ultimately promotes the resiliency of the US soldier, although it condemns our involvement in African conflicts, specifically because we are not wanted by the locals, even those suffering.

Hotel Rwanda offers a different view of African conflicts, and Hron points out the importance of its cinematic depictions:

The importance of cinematic representation about Rwanda cannot be underestimated. Because of their wide distribution in the West, films and documentaries have largely informed, in their most generic terms, Western perceptions about *itsembabwoko* - the Rwandan term for the 1994 Tutsi extermination campaign - as well as, more broadly, popular understandings of genocide and post-genocide. Furthermore, these films effectively reaffirm Western discourse about non-Western others. Generic tropes drawn from feature films about Rwanda now often resurface in recent Hollywood films about Africa. For instance, the depiction of Hutu killers - as a crazed mob dressed in colorful clothing, who sing and yell as they wield their murderous weapons - has since been replicated in *Blood Diamond*, *The Last King of Scotland*, and *Casino Royal*, as recognizable, brutally barbaric, yet exotically carnivalesque 'African bad guy' figures. Moreover, the effects of these films are not only apparent in cinema, but also in the public forum. Activism about Darfur often refers back to films about Rwanda; most prominently, actor Don Cheadle from *Hotel Rwanda* and activist Adam Sterling have in fact initiated a widely publicized campaign called 'Hotel Darfur,' which was later changed to the better known campaign 'Darfur Now.' (Hron, 2012, p. 134)

Despite the differences in the two movies, they use many of the same depictions of Africa and Africans. "Stereotypically, in films we see 'TIA' or 'This if Africa': a primitive and savage, albeit exotic, continent, characterized by the 4Ds' (danger, death, disease, and desperation)" (Hron, 2012, p. 136). The main difference between the two films is that *Hotel Rwanda* shows some Africans as being similar to what we recognize as Westerners or at least Western colonial servants:

The cinematic representation of Rusesabagina [the main character in *Hotel Rwanda*] is thus none other than that of the perfect colonial subject. Innately intelligent, docile, and having internalized colonial structures - these were characteristics that urged Belgians to educate Tutsi in the first place. Except, of course, Rusesabagina is Hutu. Though, in *Hotel Rwanda*, he is just a black African, a victim of racism, not an actor in ethnic conflict. (Hron, 2012, p.142-143)

Since the release of *Hotel Rwanda* there have been many Rwandans that have claimed that Paul Rusesabagina is somewhat of a false hero. It does not help the situation that he is now critical of the Tutsi government and claims that the Tutsi rebels were just as indiscriminately violent as the Hutus (Waldorf, 2009).

Thanks to the reach of *Hotel Rwanda*, which has been seen by more people than all other Rwanda films combined, many ordinary English-speakers are likely to know of only one Rwandan, Paul Rusesabagina, whom they believe to be a hero of the genocide, a righteous man who saved Tutsi lives at great personal risk. What his Western admirers still do not grasp however, is that now Rusesabagina is probably the most prominent person in the world openly working alongside known génocidaires and Western deniers against the Kagame government. He claims, for instance, that Kagame's rebels were as deadly as the génocidaires, and insists—I actually heard him make this mind-boggling statement—that Kigali today is just like Kigali during the 100 days of the genocide. (Caplan, 2009, p. 284)

The other main issue with *Hotel Rwanda* is that there is little to no historical background. While it blames the West for not intervening in the genocide, it almost completely ignores the

importance of the West's involvement in creating the conditions for the genocide in the first place:

A Westerner taking these films at face value will have little understanding of what, apparently out of the blue, led some Rwandans to savagely murder other Rwandans in 1994, but they are sure to be critical of the Clinton administration for failing to save these Africans from themselves. We might as well be reading the memoirs of nineteenth-century missionaries in "The Dark Continent" or watching old Tarzan movies. Except that Tarzan always saved the day while Bill Clinton, John Major, and Francois Mitterrand ruined it. (Caplan, 2009, p. 281-282)

The Other in *Black Hawk Down*

Black Hawk Down is in its simplest form a movie about the survival of American troops against seemingly insurmountable odds. After what was supposed to be a simple mission to capture high profile Somali targets goes completely wrong the Americans are forced to fight their way out of the heart of Mogadishu, against what appears to be the entire the city. As this happens the enemy morphs from the militias controlled by Aidid to the Somali people in general, and the idea that there are "good" Somalis vanishes with the film is left depicting only "bad" Somalis. The Americans, in contrast, are depicted in sympathetic roles, and the viewer is actively encouraged to root for their survival. In the end, all but 19 of the Americans make it out alive, leaving behind over 1,000 dead Somalis.

Throughout the movie the Somalis are continuously placed in the role of the Other. This is done in many ways, often referencing colonial tropes, such as depicting Somalis as animal-like or savage, and using classic Hollywood depictions of Africa and Africans. It is also of note that

of all the American troops depicted in the film only one is black, and he plays a small role only showing up a couple of times. So, despite the filmmakers claims otherwise, *Black Hawk Down* is truly a bunch of white Americans killing black Africans.

I start at the very end of the movie in describing the Othering of the Somalis. Ridley Scott did not have to identify the number of dead Somalis as the credits rolled at all, and to that I give him credit, but the way that he did it made sure that the audience remembered that this movie was about the tragedy that happened to Americans, and the Somalis just happened to be the unfortunate enemy.

Before the credits roll (02:15:00) text is presented that reads, “During the raid over 1000 Somalis died and 19 Americans soldiers lost their lives.” They then list the names of the dead Americans. This places the Somalis firmly in the roll of the Other one last time, as it downgrades them to a status lower than the Americans that fought. Not only are the Somali names not listed, but the exact number of dead is not even known. Further, the film is about the tragedy that took place against the Americans, but statistically the tragedy seems to have been perpetrated by the Americans.

Skinny Muslims

Throughout the film the American troops refer to the Somalis as ‘Skinnies.’ While this is most likely in reference to the famine, it also serves to identify them as the Other; at 00:17:45 it is taken to another level. A group of soldiers, including the main character Eversmann, played by Josh Hartnett, sit around talking when one soldier reads from a pamphlet, “Listen to this, if one skinny kills another skinny, his clan owes the dead guys clan a hundred camels. A hundred camels.” From here the conversation revolves around the whether or not they should like the

Somalis, with all the Americans calling them “skinnies.” This conversation highlights the view that the Somalis are less than human, and referring to them as “skinnies” dehumanizes them and casts them as lower than the United States soldiers. When Eversmann says, “It’s not that I like them or don’t like them. I respect them,” he is made fun of as an idealist. He concludes that, “We can either help, or we can sit back and watch a country destroy itself on CNN.” The totality of this conversation not only sets up a derogatory slur for the Somalis, but also places the US military in a culturally and morally superior position to the locals.

If it was not clear enough that the Somalis are different from the majority of Americans, there is the presentation that Somalia is an Islamic country and the fighters themselves are devout enough to stop fighting in order to take part in prayer. This is especially important given the 18 January 2002 release date of the film, only a few months after the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on 11 September 2001. At this time the attitudes towards Muslims in the United States was cautious at best, and downright hostile amongst many Americans. Choosing to release a film that vilifies Muslims so strongly can be seen as an intentional choice to capitalize on the feelings of the American public.

At 00:19:20 an aerial shot over Mogadishu of a mosque tower with the sound of the morning prayer at sunrise is shown. Somalis on the beach are depicted praying to the East towards the rising sun, which immediately identifies them, to many Americans, as Muslim. As the prayer ends, you see a man pick up his prayer rug along with his machine gun. This signifies that not only are the Somalis Muslim, but they are radical and violent as well. This scene is brief, and the only purpose that it seems to hold is to show what religion the Somalis are and that they carry guns, even while praying. The fact that the Somali fighters are Muslim is once again

highlighted at 01:26:30 when a mass of Somalis descending on the second Black Hawk crash sight are depicted, you distinctly hear ululation, which many Americans associate with Muslims and villains due to previous pop culture depictions of the sound³.

More blatantly, as American troops are pinned down by Somalis on rooftops (01:36:00), the sun is shown setting and the evening prayer is heard; once again they show the mosque tower to start this scene. They cut to the location of the first Black Hawk crash, where there is nothing but silence as the Somalis have stopped fighting for the time being as they, presumably, perform their prayers. This is confirmed when Eversmann says, “Watch out for the Skinnies, they’re on the rooftops. They are at prayer, but not for much longer.” This again shows a stark difference between the Islamic Somalis and the Americans, as though the Somalis are being controlled by their religious duties while the Americans have a freedom of choice.

Depictions of “Africa”

The opening scene of *Black Hawk Down* (00:00:30) is a quick reminder that Somalis are not members of the West, and are most definitely “the Other.” The shot opens on a desert camp with a man, whose clothes are tattered and his body emaciated, wrapping a white cloth around a dead body, making it appear mummy like. His camp is makeshift, adding to his appearance of poverty, and most definitely not Western. For further emphasis the music playing in the background is of a man chanting in a way that projects an Islamic song. As the shot changes to that of a Red Cross aide truck the screen turns black and written across it is this sentence: “Years of warfare among rival clans causes famine on a biblical scale.” The viewer then sees the truck pull up to a small dilapidated village, showing additional people that appear to be starving and

³ This can be found in *Battle of Algiers* (1966), *G.I. Joe* cartoons, the *Family Guy* episode “E. Peterbus Unum” to name a few.

several more dead bodies. “300,000 civilians die of starvation,” appears on the screen. All of this is playing into the idea that these people are starving, and is implying that something (by the West) should be done about it. The next statement that is shown to the viewer explains who is to blame. “Mohamed Farrah Aidid, the most powerful of the warlords, rules the capital Mogadishu. He seizes international food shipments at the ports. Hunger is his weapon.” These words continue to be mixed in with images of the starving Somalis, until at the end of the scene an image of a white male aide worker holding a cup up to the lips of a Somali, helping him to drink. As the shot pans over what appear to be his dead children and family, the text states:

The world responds. Behind a force of 20,000 U.S. Marines, food is delivered and order is restored. April 1993. Aidid waits until the Marines withdraw, and then declares war on the remaining U.N. peacekeepers. In June, Aidid’s militia ambush and slaughter 24 Pakistani soldiers, and begin targeting American personnel. In late August, America’s elite soldiers, Delta Force, Army Rangers and the 160th SOAR are sent to Mogadishu to remove Aidid and restore order. The mission was to take three weeks, but six weeks later Washington was growing impatient. (00:01:52)

As this pre-title sequence draws to a close the music changes and becomes more Western and heavier. This coincides with the description of the targeting of US personnel and the transfer, immediately after the title, to a shot of a United States Black Hawk helicopter. This opening scene is the last that the viewer sees of the Somali perspective. It gives the viewer a reason, although truncated and simplistic, as to why the West is involved. It is also a throwback to colonial times when the Africans’ savagery and human sacrifice was used as a reason for military conquest by the European powers. Here, while not human sacrifice specifically, the rational for

military intervention is still Africans hurting themselves in inhumane ways. The basic idea, while not accurate, is that if Aidid was not stealing the food shipments then all would be well in Somalia. The aide workers can also be compared to the missionaries of the colonial era. While they are not spreading religion, they are spreading the Western philosophy in exchange for food and medical aid. They bring assistance, but also a mentality that the West is good. God might not be in their message, but they are still preaching a Western ideology.

Later in the opening of the film (00:31:15) there is a call back to Colonial thinking when Eversmann states, “You know, it’s funny. Beautiful beach. Beautiful sun. It would almost be a good place to visit.” This is a stark reminder that it is the people that make Somalia a bad place. If Somalia was run by Westerners, and not the African Other, then there would not be the violence and poverty that there is. The notion is that if it were not for the people then it would be a nice place to visit. This, of course, is ignoring the fact that many of the problems were created by Western intervention in the region to begin with.

“This is Africa”

Many of the images of Aidid’s militia are taken from stereotypes of African warlords and their armies. While many of these are based on reality they have become a common sight and depiction in Hollywood films. When Africans are presented in these ways they are automatically identified as bad guys, and all potential sympathy for their cause goes out the window. For example, most of the vehicles used by the Somalis are almost apocalyptic in nature, and their behavior is similar to the colonial era savages that were once talked about. The vehicles driven by many of the Somali militia men are old pickups that have been stripped of their paint and fenders, and modified for use in battle. They have often been fitted with machine guns mounted

in the back, and lack the sophistication of the American vehicles made specially for war.

Nowadays, filmmakers do not refer to them as savages, but still use depictions that nonetheless convey savagery.

As the American perspective takes over the film (00:03:00), the viewer sees United States Black Hawk helicopters circling above aid trucks that are distributing food. A mob of Somali men rush the trucks, defying any organization or order, they rip the bags of food open and beat each other with sticks. This can best be described as an animal feeding frenzy, harking back to the colonial descriptions of Africans as animals without order. It is at this point (00:04:00) that Aidid's men open fire on the crowd, indiscriminately killing, and claim the food for themselves. The Americans overhead ask for permission to engage, but are told that UN regulations prohibit them from intervening unless they are personally being attacked. Again this depicts Africans killing other more helpless Africans, tackling two stereotypes at once. On the one hand the civilians are helpless and obviously need the West's aid, but on the other Aidid's men are savages that will kill unarmed civilians for some food; if only the UN would allow the American soldiers to engage Aidid's men without being fired upon first.

When we are first shown Mogadishu (00:05:00), it is full of men walking around with AK-47s and rocket launchers slung over their shoulders, and a vender is selling weapons next to bananas. The streets are made of dirt, and the city looks filthy and dilapidated, just how a Westerner would expect a third world urban area to look. This is obviously not Kansas, or anywhere near the West for that matter. Clearly the people of Somalia are lacking the refinement of Western civilization, and the propensity of weapons indicates the danger while insinuating a savage nature of the inhabitants.

The savage imagery continues later in the film (00:20:30) when Aidid's militia is shown in a traditional way that Hollywood depicts African militia; riding in the backs of pickup trucks with AK-47s in hand. A large machine gun is mounted to the bed of the truck, and the gunner has a typical sash of bullets draped over his shoulder, and is wearing a black shirt with the sleeves cut off. The militiamen are shown driving through the streets in an unorganized manner, looking like traffic congestion rather than a military convoy, and wearing no uniforms. The shot cuts to one of the many street vendors, this one selling weapons. He demonstrates the quality of one gun by firing it into the air; no one seems to care. Again the shot moves, this time to a group of men standing on a balcony overlooking the street holding assault rifles, guarding an unseen person. Although this is all presented as normal for Somalia, most Americans would find it disturbing and scary if they were to encounter this behavior at home. This helps to establish the difference between America and Somalia, portraying Somalia as a lawless nation where weapons and violence are the norm.

The scene cuts back to the Americans (00:21:20) showing a contrast to the chaotic nature of Mogadishu, as they are planning the attack at a boardroom like meeting. They are sitting around a table with a Powerpoint type slideshow demonstrating the plan of attack. They take polite turns in asking questions about the plan. This business like behavior is a depiction of what a military action should look like, well planned and organized. It becomes clear that the Somalis are not organized, at least by their depiction in the film.

Every once in a while, as if the viewer might forget, there is a shot of a pickup truck full of militia men, for example at 00:32:30; just to remind the viewer that these "savages" use common pickups for their battles, and lack the modern advances of the Americans.

As the US military descends on Mogadishu (00:37:00) the film jumps back and forth from scenes of Aidid's militia and the American troops. There is an obvious contrast between how the two groups are depicted. The US is shown as technologically advanced with their superior weaponry, helicopters, and armored trucks, while the Somalis are shown as having a pieced together militia, using pickup trucks and seemingly passing out Soviet era weapons at random. The Somalis are also shown to be piling garbage to form road blocks, lacking proper military barricades. The technological contrast places the Somalis squarely as the Other with their third world tactics and equipment. The Somalis resort to burning tires as signals, something that the US soldiers would not have to do. Further, the drilled and strategic file-formation organization of the Americans is what is expected out of an army, while the Somalis are shown as being chaotic, unorganized and non-military like, similar to depictions of Africans during the colonial era. The Somalis are depicted as a horde, rather than a trained fighting force, a theme that will continue throughout the film. This is highlighted as the US helicopters fly over the city with a view of the fleeing Somalis below looking like the wild boars that fled from a helicopter that was game hunting earlier in the film.

These types of depictions are almost constant throughout the middle of the film. For almost an hour and a half, from 00:40:50 until 02:08:30, the US soldiers continuously fight mobs of Somalis walking through the streets with guns slung over their shoulders or pointed at the sky. These hordes are also accompanied by machine guns mounted in the beds of pickup trucks. It is not hard to forget who the advanced and civil side of this conflict is supposed to be.

Hordes of Somali “Animals”

Not only are the Somalis depicted as savages, but they are frequently shown to be extremely animal like, both in the individual behavior and in their tendency to mass together like a herd, rather than act like trained soldiers as the Americans do. The Somalis are shown, not only massing together and running through the streets like a stampede of bison, but they are shown individually as demonstrating undisciplined aggression in contrast to the restraint and precision-like nature of the Americans. There are more subtle attempts to insinuate this as well, for example one of the trucks that is used by the Somalis is painted like a zebra (01:51:45).

As the major fighting starts (00:44:00) and the Somalis descend on Mogadushu to fight the Americans, they are shown running through the streets like animals, ducking in and out of the shadows with no apparent organization or plan; seeming to operate on instinct rather than military training. Their status as a savage horde is continuously being upheld, while they are denied the position of an organized military. This is just the beginning of many scenes that depict such behavior throughout the film. Further, the technologic superiority of the Americans is demonstrated with Somalis in dilapidated civilian pickup trucks chasing modern helicopters from below (00:50:45). Despite this, the Somalis are shown to get lucky and shoot down a Black Hawk helicopter with a rocket propelled grenade (RPG). After the crash of the first Black Hawk the commanding officer says, "Move quick, the whole damn city will be coming down on top of you." This not only foreshadows what is about to happen, but continues to signify that the Somalis are an unorganized mob.

As Eversmann and his group move to secure the downed Black Hawk they are shown advancing through the streets as trained military members (00:54:45). They communicate via hands signs, take their time to make sure the route is clear, and proceed in alternating groups in

order to lay down cover fire for the other soldiers if necessary. The Somalis, in contrast, are shown casually walking down the streets in undisciplined groups, showing no sign of communication, organization, or care for what might be around the corner. Once again the two military operations are shown in stark contrast, firmly positioning the Somalis as the Other. Aerial shots above the crash sight once again show Somalis descending on the helicopter as fevered mobs looking more like a group of hyenas looking for fresh meat than organized military personnel (00:58:10). The Somalis are shown to be like animals, or ants, swarming to food, running in the streets, on the roof tops, over anything in their way. This is not the strategic maneuvers of the trained military forces of the US.

After the second Black Hawk crash we see Somalis approaching the crash site to take a look (01:16:00). These appear to be mainly women and non-combatants, but the way that they are depicted is very similar to animals that are approaching something unknown with caution. They keep their distance, staying on rooftops, all the while fidgeting restlessly and nervously, seemingly waiting for someone braver to take a closer look. This is followed by a large crowd of Somalis running through the streets towards the second crash site (01:23:45). They are shown both from a head on angle, making them seem menacing like a charging herd of bison or the running of the bulls, and from the air which again leads to comparisons to the filming of wild animals for nature films, especially in Africa. This comparison to the wild animals as seen from the air can once again be traced back to an earlier scene in the film when one of the Delta Force soldiers shoots and kills a wild boar from a helicopter (00:13:00).

As the Delta snipers are dropped off to help the pilot of the second Black Hawk crash (01:27:10 viewers see the pilot firing at Somalis that are running blindly towards the helicopter

with no concern for their lives. This portrays a lack of military training, making them look as if they are operating on animal instinct, which is contrasted by the Delta snipers who are shown alternating their movement while the stationary soldier lays down cover fire. The two Delta snipers that were dropped off to protect the pilot of the second downed Black Hawk die fighting (01:32:30). After the death of the second sniper the horde of Somalis rushes the helicopter, dragging the bodies of the dead Americans into the street and ripping off their clothes, all while the crowd celebrates. All around Somalis are throwing rocks and mud at the dead, while other dance on top of the helicopter. This scene makes the Somalis look very much like monkeys or apes, both in their behavior and their appearance. The way they throw mud is reminiscent of the stereotypical monkey throwing poop, while their dancing is very animalistic in nature as well, all that is missing is them beating their chests with their clenched fists like King Kong.

A new team of Deltas arrive at the second crash sight to find Somali civilians playing on the blades of the helicopter and scavenging inside (01:42:30). Those that are outside of the helicopter run away from the Deltas at first sight, like scared coyotes startled by a more dominant grizzly bear. The Somalis that remain on the inside of the helicopter are hunched over something unseen, reminiscent of a group of carnivores ripping and feeding on a carcass. They too are easily scared away by a single gunshot into the ground by a Delta soldier, again submitting to the dominant predator.

There are not many, if any depictions of Somalis as being anything but the Other. Even when they are shown in sympathetic ways, as in the opening scenes, they are still shown using stereotypes of starving Africans, unable to help themselves, in need of Western aid.

The Other in *Hotel Rwanda*

Hotel Rwanda provides a more balanced depiction of Africans than *Black Hawk Down*, but that does not mean that it shies away from depicting the Rwandan military and the Hutu militia as savages in many of the same ways used in *Black Hawk Down*. Interestingly, the white Westerners are not the ones that are depicted as normal or in the sympathetic roles, this belongs to the Rwandans that get trapped in the hotel, specifically Paul and his family. The Rwandans deserving of the viewers sympathy are not portrayed as equal to the white Westerners, as they fill the role of the diligent yet harmless servant, much like Uncle Tom during the abolitionist movement. In their own way the white Westerners are shamed and cast as the Other for their role in standing by and doing nothing, again similar to slave owning whites in the mid 1800s.

The Hutu Savage

The Hutu militias and even the state run Hutu military are the villains in the film, and this is made clear before an image of Rwanda is even shown. As the film opens (00:00:30) the viewer hears a voiceover of George Rutaganda on the radio:

When people ask me, good listeners, why do I hate all the Tutsi, I say, "Read our history."

The Tutsi were collaborators for the Belgian colonists, they stole our Hutu land, they whipped us. Now they have come back, these Tutsi rebels. They are cockroaches. They are murderers. Rwanda is our Hutu land. We are the majority. They are a minority of traitors and invaders. We will squash the infestation. We will wipe out the RPF rebels.

This is RTLM, Hutu power radio. Stay alert. Watch your neighbors.

While this provides some of the little historical context in the movie about what led to the events depicted in the film, it also positions that Hutu as the Other, although, interestingly from their

point of view. This is a Hutu saying that they are different from the Tutsi in large part because they did not collaborate with the Belgians. However, it also displays the Hutu as violent, therefore, any sympathy that might have been is quickly taken away.

Paul, played by Don Cheadle, meets with George (00:03:00), the man on the radio during the opening credits, to buy supplies for the hotel that he manages. George tells Paul that he should come to the Hutu rally later that day, but Paul seems uninterested and says that he is busy but will try and make it. George then tosses Paul a shirt, one that is blue, green and yellow with a very “African” print on it. George himself is wearing a similar shirt. These colorful shirts will later become associated with the Hutu militias, and are in contrast to the Western suit that Paul is wearing. Again, this not only shows that Paul is a servant of the West, even an Uncle Tom, but that George is African, setting up that ability for Paul to act in place of the West, at least in the minds and sympathies of the viewers. George’s place as an African militia man is further emphasized when one of his employees drops a crate full of machetes, which will later be used in the slaughter. As Paul and Dube, and employee of Paul’s, leave George’s warehouse, Dube talks about hearing George on the radio, and how he is a bad man. Paul responds that George and his people are fools, and that their time will soon be over. At this point we have set up the three types of Africans in the film. Paul, the Westerner; Dube, the innocent and uneducated but kind African; and George, the vicious and violent militia man.

As Paul and Dube are driving back from George’s they encounter a Hutu militia march in the streets (00:05:00). The participants are all wearing clothing that is similar in style to the shirt that George gave Paul, making it clear to the viewer that they are bad. They are depicted as a large mob, dancing and shouting as they take up the entire street. They are singing and chanting

in their native language, with rhythmic drumbeats in accompaniment. This sounds very much like what many Americans would consider African music; firmly putting the militia in the role of the African Other. As the march passes the van that Paul and Dube are in, the marchers recognize Dube as a Tutsi, and start to harass him, only to be calmed when Paul shows them the shirt that George had given him.

Later in the film, after the violence has started, the Hutu military come to Paul wanting keys to a hotel that he used to manage, they take him along with his family and the neighbors that happen to be hiding at his house at the time with them to get the keys (00:25:10). As Paul, his wife and kids, and the neighbors drive with the military to get hotel keys they quickly leave the familiar setting of the Rwandan “Suburbs” and enter an area that looks like most Americans think Africa looks like. It appears to be more of a shanty town with people walking through the streets with weapons. Fires are burning in oil drums on the side of the road while men scrape machetes across the ground in front of the passing cars. The change in scenery is in conjunction with the change in perceived safety and depictions of civilian weapons gives the image that the violent people are coming from these poor, and familiar, parts of Rwanda, not the Western and suburban area that Paul lives in. Signifying that things would be better if only the whole country was more like him and his neighbors. Images of men shooting guns into the air and ransacking apartments is the focus of the cameras as the convoy moves through this area (00:25:40). Again, many of these men are shown wearing the yellow, blue and green of the Hutu militia. A group, that I presume is Tutsi, is being held at gunpoint by these men. The contrast between the “African” dress of the Hutu militia and the western looking clothes of the captives is noticeable. The captive men are in colored shirts for example.

Throughout the film the Hutu militia and military call the Tutsi “cockroaches.” This is their way of Othering the Tutsi, but it is also an obvious derogatory term that an American audience will understand. Therefore, when they use this term it is placing the Hutu in the role of the Other as many Americans will recognize this behavior as degrading and mentally put the Hutu militia and military in a category of inhumane thereby Othering them (00:28:00).

As the violence picks up outside the hotel it periodically spills through the gates. At 00:44:20 a crowd of Rwandans run through the gates of the hotel to soon be followed by a UN jeep. The people are fleeing for their lives from a group of Hutu militia men that pull up in the back of a pickup, much like was seen in *Black Hawk Down*. These men are dressed the part, with their yellow, green, and blue clothing, machetes, and of course packed into a truck. The few UN soldiers there stand their ground but do not fire at these men, despite them having obviously been trying to kill the other Rwandans that ran into the hotel. The UN does not even do anything once they throw the helmet of a dead UN soldier at their feet. This scene emphasizes the fact that there are three main parties in this movie: the Rwandans in trouble, in this scene played by those running through the gate that happen to be dressed very Western; the Hutu militia and military, which once again are shown in stereotypical African ways (the bright colored clothes and being packed into the back of a pickup truck), and the UN, which while not evil is inefficient and does not do much to help those in need.

Paul leaves the hotel to go get supplies from George (01:10:20), he drives past burning houses and pulls up to George’s store where there are now armed guards, dressed as the Hutu militia. It looks more like a warlord’s camp than a store. There are even women in a cage, who George calls “Tutsi prostitutes.” As Paul waits, George pulls up in a pickup with several militia

men in the back. It is made obvious that the Rwanda that exists outside the hotel is savage, and the Hutus in charge are as well. George, while a necessity for Paul and the hotel, is an evil man representing the savage African militia, a warlord-like figure.

At 01:29:00 the UN attempts to transport many of the Rwandans remaining at the hotel to a refugee camp so they can leave the country. Those that get on the UN trucks are only those that were able to obtain visas from other countries. Paul and his family are some of these people, although Paul decides to stay behind, much to the displeasure of his family. As the UN trucks travel towards the refugee camp the trucks encounter Hutu militia. At first they are simply passing them on the street, but it is obvious that they are militia because of the colorful 'uniforms,' and their display of hostility towards the UN vehicles. They are also carrying machetes and guns, some even hold spears. This, along with the use of oil drums as fire containers highlights their savage nature. When the militia are tipped off by the radio that the trucks are carrying Tutsi refugees the militia descent on the trucks in herds, running through the streets from all angles like wild animals, and using turned over trucks as roadblocks. They climb on the UN trucks, throwing people out. The contrast between the civilized Rwandans and the savage militia is obvious, both in their actions and their dress.

The Western Other

There are few depictions of Westerners in the film, and most of those are of well meaning, but unable to help, UN soldiers. There are Western guests who were staying at the hotel when the violence broke out, and references to Western political leaders unwilling to act to stop the genocide.

Inside the hotel everything is relatively calm compared to the outside world (00:33:00). The white guests are trying to leave, and the black employees are doing their jobs. The hotel is an analogy for the Western world in general. The people know something bad is going on but not how bad, further they only seem to care about themselves. It is also, however, a familiar depiction of colonial era Africa, with the well behaved black servants waiting on the every desire of the white patrons. This is continued as the white Westerners, with the exception of Joaquin Phoenix's character Jack Danglish, are shown acting like spoiled brats, demanding comforts when the world is falling apart outside of the walls (00:41:30). At one point a journalist calls Paul into his room in order to fix his air conditioner, something that would not be of much concern to those outside the confines of the hotel. This is immediately contrasted when Danglish comes back with footage of the massacre that is taking place down the road. Not only is there contrast in the violence that was filmed and the relative calm inside the hotel, but the scene of the killings is on a dirt road with shanty houses lining it, men in colorful clothing and dancing around the dead bodies waving machetes in the air. This contrasts the Western feel of the hotel with the brutality that is expected from Africa.

Paul goes to talk to Jack Danglish, and Jack apologizes for showing the footage of the massacre in front of Paul (00:43:20). Paul then says that it is a good thing that the world will see the footage because it is the only chance that people might intervene. Danglish is not as optimistic, and asks if it is still a good thing to show if no one intervenes. Paul does not understand how people cannot intervene after seeing such violence. Danglish responds that they will think that it is horrible and then continue eating their dinners. Here the film flips the script: establishing the West, rather than Africa, as the Other. The West is shown, while not the

committer of the violence, as sitting back and watching it on CNN. The viewer has already been shown that the Western-like Rwandans are supposed to be the sympathetic characters and the savage African-like Rwandans are the villains, but now the West is being introduced as a secondary villain for not doing anything about the genocide.

From time to time the violence outside the walls of the hotel descends on the front of the facility. At 00:46:00, immediately after the violence spills through the gates of the hotel the shot cuts to the interior where a group of white people are standing around a piano sipping cocktails while someone plays music. It is as if they have no ability to understand what is going on outside as long as they are safe. They are representing the insulation of the West in dealing with this crisis. As long as it does not affect them then they are okay with it happening. This is also a continuation of the colonial attitudes of the whites staying at the hotel.

The role of the secondary villain for the West is cemented when UN troops show up at the hotel and everyone, including the Rwandans, is excited. It is implied that everyone is going to be saved and freed from the confines of the hotel. This is until it is shown that the UN Colonel is not happy (00:48:30). The UN is only taking foreign nationals with them, and will not help the locals. When Paul, still thinking that everyone gets to leave, tries to celebrate with the Colonel he tells Paul:

You're dirt, we think you're dirt Paul. The West, the world's superpowers, everything you believe in Paul, they think you're dirt, they think you're dung, you're worthless. Oh come on, don't bullshit me Paul, you're the smartest man here. You've got them all eating out of your hands. You could own this freaking hotel, except for one thing. You're black,

you're not even a nigger, you're an African. They are not going to stay Paul, they are not going to stop the slaughter. (00:52:15)

This once again shows the UN as standing by and doing nothing to save anyone except the foreign nationals. This is also the point in the movie that Paul loses faith in the West and starts to realize that he needs to work for his people, not the Western hotel.

When the whites leave with the UN (00:52:45), the colonial attitudes and behavior that are common place at the hotel are driven home. As the white Westerners are leaving the hotel on busses the black staff diligently hold umbrellas and carry the whites' luggage for them, continuing their roles, despite being abandoned. They are playing the role of the good servants, similar to the friendly Africans as seen during the end of slavery in the United States, not the savage Africans beyond the walls. During this scene, once again Danglish seems to be the only Westerner being evacuated that is uncomfortable with the situation, telling a staff member to not hold the umbrella for him, saying, "I feel so ashamed."

Western Rwandans

Paul, his family, and the other Rwandans at the hotel are depicted extremely differently than the Hutu militia. Not just in their behavior, but also in their dress and speech. Their clothes are more Western, and they have lighter and more subtle accents for the most part. Paul, especially, is shown as a business savvy person, someone that would fit in with Western culture.

To start the film, Paul and his employee are shown bribing their way into the airport and again bribing someone to get a package from the airport (00:01:30). When they are shown talking to the pilots Paul jokingly tells them to say hello to Fidel (Castro) for him, showing that he is obtaining Cuban cigars. The use of bribes is not something that most Americans are used to,

and this can be seen as signs that Rwanda is a corrupt country, however the panache of a Cuban cigar is not a foreign idea. After leaving the airport (00:02:15), his employee is singing a “native” African song while he drives. Paul, on the other hand, is examining the cigars by sniffing them. Dube, the employee, comments on the cigars and Paul proceeds to explain that each cigar is worth 10,000 Francs, but that they are worth more to him that that because they represent an element of style that business men crave over money. This positions Paul as someone that has been integrated into Western culture, unlike Dube who is still learning. Therefore Paul has himself become a Westerner to the viewer, wiser and more educated than his African employee, even though they are both black. It is not just Paul that is Western, it is the entire hotel. When Paul returns to the hotel (00:07:00) we are greeted with a resort like setting, filled with white Westerners in swimsuits lounging by the pool. This is in contrast to the Hutu marchers in the street.

Paul’s home is no exception either. When Paul returns home to his family (00:08:45) it is a very suburban setting, with his neighbors saying hello to him as he drives by. While this is not what it is truly like in American suburbs, it is very similar to traditional depictions in shows like *Leave it to Beaver* (1957), or more modern suburban parodies such as *The Truman Show* (1998). After Paul gets out of his car he is greeted with a kiss from his wife and news that his brother-in-law and family are visiting. We are shown this family playing in the backyard, the parents spinning a jump rope for one of their girls. The scene is a very awkward one, and it is obvious that it is only in place to depict Paul’s extended family as very Western as well. They are all wearing Western style clothing and playing Western games. If taken out of context this scene could be almost any suburb in the United States. As the other two girls show off their skills with

hula hoops I am reminded of an idyllic image of 1950s United States. When Paul gives the children candy his wife tells them not to eat it before dinner, another classic American attitude about spoiling your dinner with chocolates. This, again, is in contrast to the child soldiers that were shown with the Hutu militia during their march. These scenes are in direct contrast to the scary Africans that the Hutu militia are depicted as.

Moments later Paul and his wife are lying in bed talking about what happened when the military beat and arrested their neighbor (00:11:30). Plainly visible in this scene is a Christian cross around the neck of Paul's wife. Showing that she is Christian demonstrates that her and Paul are part of the West in terms of their religion. This is emphasized with Paul working and acting like a Westerner as well.

After the violence starts and Paul moves his family to the hotel (00:31:50) Paul arranges for a suite at the hotel for his family, when they enter the room it has not been cleaned yet, and there is leftover food on the table. The children are obviously hungry but Paul's wife will not let them eat the food because it is old. She instead hands them some apples that are on the table. Paul then tells a bellhop that the mess is unacceptable and to get housekeeping to clean it up right away. Although this seems snooty and picky given the situation, it is a very American "civilized" thing to do. It once again puts Paul and his family in the role of Westerner in comparison to the savage Africans that they had just escaped from.

Paul walks into the kitchen of the hotel to find his employees not working at 00:39:00. They tell him that there is no reason to work because the (white) boss has left. They laugh at him when he says that he is in charge, and he is forced to get a letter from the corporate office in Belgium. He then confronts the employees and gives them the option of working for him or

taking their chances “out there.” This is putting the staff in the position of choosing to join the Westerners, or the savage Rwandans. They choose the West. Additionally, this scene displays that the non-savage Rwandan is the one that works for, or is associated with, Western business. The contrast between those at the hotel, even the employees, and those outside the walls is absolute. There is no depiction of a gradient of moral or Western like behavior. Outside the hotel there are either victims or savages, while inside the Rwandans are shown as exclusively Western like.

Children in *Black Hawk Down*

Black Hawk Down has few children that are actually shown, but this does not mean that they do not have a major impact on the sympathetic tendencies of the narrative. I have identified three ways in which children are used to sway the viewers’s concern toward the United States soldiers, and one way in which this is done via the notable absence of Somali children.

Absence of Sympathetic Somali Children

Throughout the film there are plenty of Somalis shown, usually in hordes, and usually as a threat to the United States military. The absence of Somali children limits the amount of sympathy that the viewer can feel towards the Somali people as a whole. The film is heavily biased towards the United States soldiers depicted, and therefore does not bother itself with the depictions of Somali civilians, except for a few scenes that show why the Americans were there in the first place, and a couple that show the humanity of the Americans, in contrast with the savagery of the Somalis. This filmmaking strategy, however, can also bend the viewer’s opinion towards the idea that the United States should not have been involved in Somalia to begin with. By eliminating sympathetic Somali characters from most latter parts of the film, the viewer is

only able to identify with the struggles of the Americans, and not the starving Somali children that lead the United States to intervene in the first place.

When Somali children are shown, even as non-combatants, it is generally in passing and hard to notice. The two following scenes were ones that I did not notice the children involved until after multiple viewings of the film, and even then I had to stop the movie in order to make sure that there were even children involved, and to what extent.

The first scene happens at 00:00:30 into the film, which is part of the opening scene depicting starving Somalis with printed words on the screen describing why American troops were there in the first place. What is notable, however, is the lack of children in the depictions of starving people. By omitting children the impact of the desolate images is mitigated. The viewer can feel bad about the Somalis, but not to the level as if they were exposed to images of children. There do appear to be two dead children towards the end of the scene, but they only appear as text is on the screen, distracting the viewer. In fact, I did not notice them until I happened to pause the film in order to exactly copy the text. Some viewers might see this fleeting image, but even if they do it appears at the beginning of the movie when they are supposed to feel bad for the starving Somalis, a viewpoint that will soon change.

This shot changes after the title frame and the viewer sees a mob of people trying to get food from an aid truck. This crowd is entirely adult and mostly male, which allows the viewer to start to forget the starving children, and when Aidid's men open fire on the crowd and taking the food for themselves, there are no dead children. Again, limiting the amount of sympathy that the viewer has for the Somali civilians.

Later in the film, at 00:48:30, two little Somali girls stand silently as the US Delta Force soldiers remove the men that they came to capture. The girls are only seen briefly and in passing, standing to the side of the military action, as if they are simply watching. Everyone seems to ignore them and they seem to symbolize the invisibility of the Somali children as no one pays any attention to them. Their appearance is so brief, however, that it took many viewings of the film before I even noticed them.

Besides these brief, and almost unnoticeable appearances, civilian Somali children are almost completely absent from the rest of the film. There is another appearance at just over an hour into the film that I will talk about later, but it is connection with a child soldier and positions the civilian children as a threat to an American soldier. In general, there is no use of Somali children to illicit the sympathies of the viewer, contributing to the lasting image of all Somalis being evil and anti-American.

Somali Children as Child Soldiers and Threats to Americans

While still not overly present in the film, Somali children do appear as child soldiers, and in other roles that represent potential threats to American soldiers. While viewers might sympathize with individual child soldiers any anger associated with this will be directed towards the Somalis. Further, the only chance that these sympathies would affect how the viewer feels about the Americans would be if they were shown killing a child soldier, which they are explicitly shown to not do. *Black Hawk Down* manages to show child soldiers, instilling anger towards the Somalis, and allow United States soldiers the opportunity to show that they are above killing said children.

At 00:37:00, for the first time since the opening scenes of the film we see Somali children. As the United States military leaves their base in trucks and helicopters we see two young boys that are stationed as lookouts on a hill that overlooks the base. Using cell phones they call in the departure of the US troops to Aidid's men. As the helicopters fly over one of the boys he holds his cell phone up so that his commander can hear the approaching soldiers. The US men in the helicopter think that he is waving at them and wave back in turn. The scene shows how Aidid uses children to help fight his battles, exploiting and corrupting their innocence. The wave of the US soldier, on the other hand, shows that the viewer is supposed to believe that even in the middle of battle Americans take children to be innocent and free from suspicion. These children have been corrupted, despite the ignorance of the Americans, and therefore present a danger that is shown to the viewer. This drastically limits the amount of sympathy for the children, as they are now shown to be the enemy, and the little sympathy that is left is for them being forced to fight in a war, which only promotes anger towards the Somalis, especially when combined with scenes later in the film where Americans refuse to shot Somali child soldiers.

At 01:00:50 while fleeing a horde of Somalis a young US soldier stumbles and falls through a door. Inside the building we see what appears to be a classroom, demonstrated by the chalkboard on the wall. We also see a Somali woman huddled together with several young children, who are obviously afraid, giving us the first explicit case of a sympathetic Somali child in the film. This is quickly contradicted by the fact that one of the Somali soldiers that is pursuing the American is also a child. Further, the sympathy for the school children is quickly replaced with the notion that they too, though not armed, are dangerous to the American. The idea that the school children could scream for help, or otherwise alert the child soldier outside to

the American's presence gives them power over the life of the US soldier. This is confirmed when the American puts a finger to his lips to signal for the school children to be quiet. As he walks past them in search of a backdoor, the teacher sheltering the children nods that they will indeed be quiet and the soldier looks relieved, as if he is safe from their danger, even though he is the one with the gun. Normally in a situation like this the children would be the ones in danger, but when the soldier looks relieved, he is indicating that the children and woman had the power to get him killed by their Somali countryman outside if they had simply yelled something. The soldier waves goodbye to them as he leaves through the rear of the building, again showing that Americans are the good guys in this fight. When he leaves through the back door he slips and falls just as the young boy soldier that was pursuing him sees and fires at him missing high because of the fall, and instead shooting an older Somali man that was with the boy. When this happens he forgets about the US soldier, rushing to the aide of the dying man, whom I presume is his father, at which point the US soldiers decides not to shoot the young boy, instead running away. In sparing the life of the Somali boy the American demonstrates to the viewer that he is superior because of his treatment of this corrupted innocent child. Choosing to let him go free rather than further punish him for being a child soldier. The viewer is left to think that it was the Somalis that forced this child to fight, and the Americans are taking a higher ground by not killing him, even when he fired first. This builds on a more extensive arc of "Don't fire unless fired upon" that is reiterated throughout the movie. This is shown to hinder the efforts of Americans, but also positions them as the victims because it is impossible for them to be the aggressor when firing second.

Both of these scenes show the brutality of the Somalis in training the child soldiers to begin with and the compassion of the American troops towards these children, despite the danger that they represent.

American Soldiers as Children

If children are to be defined as those that are under the age of 18, then there are no American children shown in *Black Hawk Down*. However, this definition does not stop the filmmakers from portraying many of the United States soldiers as children. Sometimes this is done by their youthful innocence, such as Todd Blackburn, and sometimes it is done in reference to an injured or dying soldier's parents. The reference of their parents reminds the viewer that despite being grown men these soldiers are still someone's child, and no parent wants to lose a child, no matter their age.

The first glimpse of young Todd Blackburn (00:10:55), played by Orlando Bloom, is of him sitting beside the open door on a Black Hawk taking him to the US military base in Mogadishu. He is new to Somalia and represents an innocent American child, he is only 18 as we soon find out, and is at risk of dying while fighting (for) the Somalis. We are first introduced to him saying, "That's a nice beach down there. How's the water?" The pilot responds to him, "Yeah, its nice and warm, and loaded with sharks." This exchange highlights Blackburn's childlike innocence. He has yet to be exposed to the rigors of war, and is still interested in playing in the water like the child that he is meant to be. The scene cuts to Blackburn checking in and having his name and information entered into the base's computer. As this is happening he asks John Grimes, played by Ewan McGregor, who is entering his information into the computer, what the fighting in Mogadishu is like. Blackburn is eager and inquisitive, like the naive young

man that he is. In Grimes' response he both calls Blackburn "kid" and says that he looks to be about twelve; both of which highlight that the viewer is supposed to view Blackburn as a child. This is further emphasized when Grimes asks Blackburn his date of birth, as he enters this into the computer the shot zooms in on the field for "Age" as Grimes types "18." Blackburn is there to show that there are American children fighting in this war, and this has the consequence of making the viewer feel attached to them and sympathize with what is going to happen later on in the movie. The idea that children are fighting this war, even if they are technically adults, can make the emotional response greater than it would be if the soldiers were simply thought of as soldiers.

Blackburn is brought to the base's firing range (00:13:15) where Grimes presents him to Eversmann. When Eversmann tells Blackburn that he is not reporting to him, but someone else, Grimes asks, "Can I leave him with you?" This is just like someone would act if they were trying to get rid of a child that they do not want to chaperone any longer. Eversmann is the new kid on the block and therefore needs to be taken care of and escorted to make sure he does not get into trouble. Moments later you see Blackburn in line to get food, when the older Delta Force soldier Hoot, played by Eric Bana, cuts in front of him just like in a high school cafeteria. Again, this put Blackburn in the role of a freshman being bullied in high school by a senior.

As the Rangers are fast-roping from the helicopters (00:43:30) Blackburn falls, becoming the first American to suffer any serious injury in the film. As pointed out before, he was introduced as a child-like soldier, so his fall drives home the message that American casualties are that of American children. Further, a lot of time and energy are taken to care for Blackburn and get him treatment, despite him being in an exposed area, highlighting the care that is taken to

protect America's children. Blackburn's youth and inexperience is continued to be highlighted as numerous people ask how he got hurt, and then show shock at the fact that he fell from the helicopter, even going to so far as to ask, "How'd he do that?"

For over the next hour of the film there is not much reference to American soldiers as children. This portion of the film is taken up by the fighting and struggles of the US troops. When the film is drawing near to its conclusion the image of the American soldier as a child reemerges when the casualties start to be recognized.

A dying US soldier asks Eversmann, "Ev, do me a favor? You tell my parents that I fought well today. That I fought hard" (01:53:45). By asking Eversmann to tell his parents this, combined with his youthful looks, the soldier is making it clear to the viewer that he is indeed an American child. The reference to his parents produces the idea that American children are dying in this battle, and that his parents will be without their son.

It is not just statements made by dying soldiers, it is how the injured are treated by commanding officers as well. At 02:10:45 one of the Army Captains talks to a soldier that is not in good shape in the medic tent. It is a fairly innocuous conversation, with the soldier acting like he is going to be better soon, which he is obviously not going to be. However, what is of interest here is that the Captain does not refer to him a "soldier" or any other military term, but calls him "son." Once again this dying US soldier is situated in the position of an American child.

The final scenes of the film (02:13:10) drive home the concept of the dead United States soldiers being children as the visuals cut to a group of Somali children and puppies playing on and around one of the downed Black Hawks, with a voice over by Eversmann, who is talking to the body of one of the dead US soldiers, connecting the American soldiers with children once

again. In his monologue he tells the dead soldier that he will, “Talk to your ma and pa when I get home,” continuing to highlight the status that this soldier has become; a dead American child. He is connected to all the other dead soldiers in the last image of the movie; the closing of the rear door of a plane carrying their coffins draped in American flags.

Children Back Home

A more frequent but more passive plot item is the reference to the fact that many of the American soldiers are parents and if they die these children will be harmed by the loss of their fathers. For the most part these are subtle reminders, until the closing credits of the film, and are typically shown in the form of passing references or photographs.

At 00:15:55 two soldiers with a minor role have an interaction over a sketch that one of them is drawing for a children’s book he is creating. The one soldier states that the drawing is a bit scary for a children’s book, while the other soldier responds that his daughter loves this stuff. While this does not cast either of the soldiers in the role of a child it does highlight the consequences this military action can have on American children; the loss of a parent. By setting up the soldiers as fathers it positions them in a role that many can identify with, and emphasizes the consequences, especially for families, of the loss of American lives.

As the US soldiers prepare to leave for the assault (00:29:15) one soldier hands an injured soldier a letter for his family. It is not clear if it is for his wife and kids or for his parents until the end credits when the letter is read aloud for the viewers to hear. Either way, it is a sign that there are familial consequences for the death of a US soldier, something that is never shown for the Somalis. As I will show it becomes more impactful at the end of the film.

When part of the convoy that is attempting to get to the downed Black Hawk is stopped by a road block and one vehicle is hit by an RPG (01:08:20). McKnight, played by Tom Sizemore, gets out of his vehicle and walks over to an injured soldier, who has lost the lower half of his body. The soldier looks up at him and before dying says, "Tell my girls it will be okay." Once again this is not a US child dying, but the filmmakers make sure to include the idea that American soldiers are parents and the loss of a life is the loss of a father. Therefore, even without showing any young US children the viewer can still feel sorry for them.

During a more blatant use of a soldier's children as a sympathetic tool a pilot of the second crashed Black Hawk is hidden away while two Delta snipers are killed by the Somali horde outside (01:33:20). He is out of ammunition and seems to know that his time is limited. He puts down his gun and takes out photographs of his wife and child. One side shows his son, while on the other is his wife and son together. The way this is shot allows the viewer to see the sadness on the soldier's face as he studies the photograph of his wife and child, all the while letting the viewer see the photo of his son. This alignment of the shot emphasizes the cost to the soldier's family if he should die. He is found by the Somalis and is beaten and choked, all the while he is trying to reach for the photographs, which he dropped upon being hit in the head with the barrel of a gun. The photographs remain just out of reach, indicating the loss of his family to him, and him to his family. In the end a leader in Aidid's militia spares his life and takes him prisoner, but the impact of the family photographs remains as it made the viewer feel greater sympathy and relief when his life is spared.

As mentioned earlier, as the movie comes to a close and the credits start to role, there is a voice over reading a letter that a soldier had written for his wife. While it may be directed to his wife it references his children as well. It reads:

My love, stay strong and you will do well in life. I love you and my children deeply.

Today and tomorrow let each day grow and grow. Keep smiling and never give up even when things get you down. So in closing my love, tonight tuck my children in bed warmly. Tell them I love them, then hug them for me and give them both a kiss goodnight for daddy. (02:15:00)

Children in *Hotel Rwanda*

Unlike *Black Hawk Down*, *Hotel Rwanda* depicts a large number of children, and almost exclusively for one purpose: to illicit sympathy for the more Western-like Rwandans, especially Paul and his family. That being said, there are a few other uses for children in the film, including child soldiers and references to child victims to make the Hutu militia look even more cruel. Children are also used to exemplify the inhumanity of the inaction by the West.

Hutu Militia and Child Soldiers

There is only one scene which depicts child soldiers but it comes early (00:05:00) in the film, when Paul and Dube encounter a Hutu Militia march before the violence starts. It is shown to have children mixed in with the adults. The young boys are dressed exactly the same as the adults, in the bright yellow, green, blue, and red shirts, and are carrying assault rifles. While the children seem to be enjoying themselves this further emphasizes the Hutu militia as bad people because they are using child soldiers. Children are seen as innocent, and those that disturb that

state are considered evil, even more so than they might already be. It should also be noted that the use of child soldiers has become a common depiction in movies for evildoers in Africa.

Children to Emphasize Cruelty

In addition to using child soldiers the Hutu militia is shown to have killed children, with the victims of their crimes often being shown or highlighted as being children. At 00:25:40 the shot moves from the convoy of cars carrying Paul, his family, and their neighbors to the hotel to an apartment building and focuses in on a mother and three children that are being forced out of their home by armed men. This is in the early stages of the violence, and the impact of what the Hutu militia are doing is made that much more painful by showing it being done to these children.

Later in the film Madam Archer, a Red Cross worker, returns, with news that Paul's nieces are safe for the time being, but she did not find his brother in law and wife. The girls are with an older neighbor woman. Paul's wife seems upset about her brother's presumed death, but is even more upset when they learn that her nieces cannot be brought to the hotel because of road blocks that had been set up by the Hutu militia. Madam Archer emphasizes the dangers of trying to get them with this tale:

When I reached the orphanage, the Interahamwe [Hutu Militia] where there, they'd already started killing children. They made me watch. There was one girl, she had her little sister wrapped on her back. As they were about to chop her she cried out to me, "Please don't let them kill me, I promise I won't be Tutsi anymore." They are targeting Tutsi children Paul, to wipe out the next generation. (00:46:20)

Not only does this emphasize the danger that Paul's nieces are in, it highlights the extreme cruelty of the Hutu militias. If they are willing to kill children in front of a Red Cross worker, then there is no telling the lengths that they will go to.

At 01:15:00 Paul is told to take a certain road home by George from his store, when he does as told he encounters a bank of fog, and upon entering his van starts to drive over large bumps. As Paul gets out of the van it becomes clear that these bumps are in fact dead bodies. Paul falls and comes face to face with one of the corpses. It is a dead girl with her hands clasped over her ears as if she was still hiding from something scary. Of all the bodies in the road the one that is shown close up is that of a young girl, which combined with the sheer number of dead, highlights the savagery of the Hutu militia.

Highlighting the West's Inaction

Two scenes in particular highlight the inaction of the West by using Rwandan children as sympathetic tools to make the viewer dislike the course of action that the West took. As the UN busses for the Westerners are filling up (00:54:30), through the gates run a group of nuns with even more children and other Rwandans. The priest thanks the UN soldiers for helping, but all they say in return is, "No Rwandans," to which the Father responds, "But you can't leave the children behind." The soldier apologizes but says that he has his orders. As they are talking the shot cuts to small children huddled in the rain looking sad, cold, and scared. At this point Paul steps in to explain to the Father that the soldiers are not here to help them and offers to take care of the Rwandans, continuing his realization that the West has abandoned them. At this point, even the whites on the bus are looking out in disbelief and shaking their heads, however one woman still has her dog in her lap.

Later in the film (01:26:45) when UN trucks are loading people, the cameras show several small children being loaded in, highlighting them over other refugees. At this point Madam Archer is not back, and Paul says that they must leave without her or Paul's nieces. Paul's wife pleads that they need to wait, but eventually relents and gets in the back of the truck. Paul, on the other hand, decides to stay behind to help the people that remain in the hotel. As the truck pulls away Paul's children cry out for him, and he is obviously upset. The combination of the actions by Paul and his wife, both demonstrate a desire to put children above themselves. Paul's wife was willing to stay behind in hope of helping her nieces, while Paul was willing to separate himself from his children in order to possibly save them, this does not work out, but the viewer does not know this at this point.

If it was not bad enough that the West was not helping out in Rwanda it is made worse for the viewer of the film because of the use of children in these, and for that matter most, scenes in *Hotel Rwanda*. The prevalence of children in general tends to make the Rwandans trapped in the hotel appear more sympathetic, especially compared to the hordes of Hutu militia. They were also used, especially early in the film, to show that Paul and the Rwandans like him were not different from Westerners, and therefore deserving of our help. For example, Paul comes home (00:09:00) and is greeted by his wife with news that her brother and family are visiting. The following scenes are of the children playing with a jumprope and hula hooping, both of which are familiar games to a United States audience. The use of the children in this case is to show that Paul and his family are not different from Americans, and are in fact very similar. Upon the scene shifting inside the young girls are shown playing on the ground, coloring with crayons. All in all, these scenes are not important to the plot, but they do provide background information of just

how 'suburban' Paul and his family are. They are presented in a way that is easy to identify with as an American, and makes them more sympathetic when they are in danger later in the film.

Rwandan Children in Danger

Throughout the film Paul finds his children and those under his care in constant danger. This danger is obviously present for the adults as well, but the filmmakers decided to highlight the children for many of the instances, from Paul searching for his missing son early in the film, to the absence of his nieces.

Early on, (00:18:45) Paul returns home as the violence is starting to find the power out and enters into the house and his children's rooms to find them empty. The missing children cause tension, especially after Paul's brother-in-law warned him at the hotel that something bad was going to happen. The children are being used as sympathetic tools, and also as relief once they are found safely huddled with neighbors in the living room. The danger was real for everyone, but Paul went to his children's room first and the fact that they were missing was what took this scene to the next level of tension.

Shortly thereafter (00:20:15) Roger, Paul's son, leaves the house to go find his friend next door. Paul and his wife are understandably worried, and go look for him. They find him hiding in the bushes covered in blood and rush him into the house. Despite the discovery that the blood is not Roger's the scene uses a child to highlight the danger that everyone is in. It also positions Paul and his wife in a sympathetic role of protector of the children for the rest of the movie, a role that expands beyond their own children to orphans and eventually their nieces.

This is hammered home when Paul and his family are leaving their house in the escort of the Hutu military (00:25:00). As they pass a neighbor's house the viewer sees dead bodies on the

from lawn. At this point Paul's son exclaims, "It's Simon [Rodger's friend] papa." While it is not clear if there is actually a dead child in the front lawn the boy's statement makes it clear that the viewer is supposed to think so. In reaction to this Paul covers his son's face and tells both his son and daughter not to look. Not only is this scene using the death of his son's friend as a sympathetic tool but it is also showing that Paul and his wife are Western in trying to shield their children from even viewing the violence as well.

Madam Archer, the Red Cross worker is first introduced at 00:34:30 when she arrives with a van full of orphan children. She requests Paul's help and proceeds to reveal the children by opening the sliding door on her van. They are huddled together with their big eyes looking up at Paul like little puppy dogs. This shot is meant to influence the viewer to the plight of these children. Archer tells Paul that they are Tutsi children and that there are another ten that she has to go get. At this point Paul asks her to check on his brother-in-law and family. These children are the first signs of "hotel refugees" that are not directly tied to Paul in the film, and it is no coincidence that they are children. The use of the children makes the victims of what is about to happen even more sympathetic because it makes sure that the viewer knows that the Hutu militias are killing children as well. Paul asking for the help of Madam Archer also places children in the overarching story of Paul, and sets the movie up for a happy ending, even though it does not deserve one.

Just in case the viewer forgot that there were orphans staying at the hotel, Paul remembers that he simply put the orphans in a room and left them there (00:37:00). He goes to check on them; they are huddled in the dark room looking as sympathetic as when they arrived. Paul tells one of his employees to take care of them. This scene does not do much other than

show the children again and demonstrate that it is now Paul and his staff's job to look after them. The repeated showing makes sure that the viewer knows that when the hotel is in jeopardy the orphans are too.

As the film progresses the hotel comes under more direct threat as it starts to lose its protected status from both the Hutu Military and the United Nations. At one point the Hutu military wakes Paul up and tells him that everyone must leave the building (00:58:00), this scares Paul's son, who ends up hiding under the bed and needs to be comforted by Paul's wife. While a short scene, it once again highlights the impact that the violence is having on the children, even the ones that are relatively safe in the hotel.

At 01:13:08 Paul is forced to get food and other supplies from George, the leader of the Hutu militias, when Paul is at George's store George talks to him about turning over some of the Tutsi that are staying at the hotel and how good that would be for Paul. When Paul does not seem to agree with this George tells Paul that he is going to give him a gift, "Paul, I will give you a crate of soft drinks, for the kids, free of charge" (01:13:08). This comes off more as a threat than a kind gesture, as George is making sure that Paul knows the kids are in danger if he, or anyone at the hotel slips up. This is highlighted by the route that George tells Paul to take home and the piles of dead bodies that Paul and Dube end up driving over.

When Paul talks to Dube about what he saw on the road (01:18:20) while sitting in the courtyard of the hotel, a group of young girls are dancing near the pool. The scene cuts back and forth between the two shots, showing the contrast of the innocence of the youth and the violence of the outside world. The hotel, and the children in it, have become the symbol for the survival of Rwanda, if they survive, then so will Rwanda.

Amidst the violence Paul takes his wife up to the roof for a picnic type dinner (01:22:45), while up there he tells her that they cannot let their children see them die first. He tells her that if the militia come and he dies that she is to take the children to the roof, "You must take all of our children by the hand. You must jump." He makes her promise to do this in order to avoid a far more gruesome death by machete for their children. This scene is primarily a set up for his regret in telling her this when he thinks that they have jumped later in the film, but it also reinforces that Paul is thinking about not only saving his children, but sparing them from a horrible death. The scene that immediately follows this scene is one with all the children in the hotel running around playing, being led by Paul's children. The visual of the children brings home the message of the previous scene, but it also reinforces the notion that children are innocents. Paul was talking about death with his wife, and the children are running around having fun, even if Paul has to scold them for being in the front of the hotel.

When Paul and his family get a chance to leave (01:25:15), Paul's wife says that she will not leave without her nieces. Upon hearing this Paul goes to Madam Archer to request that she try and get the girls for him and his wife to take with them. She tells Paul that the side of town that they were staying was destroyed by fighting and that the girls are probably dead. Nevertheless she agrees to attempt to get them. Paul's wife's refusal to leave without her nieces, shows that children's lives are valued higher than adults. Madam Archer then asks Paul who will take care of the orphans when he leaves, then asking, "What country is going to take 20 Rwandan orphans?" Both of them are putting their lives at risk in order to save children.

When all seems to be lost Paul leaves the hotel to try and bribe the Hutu Military General one more time for protection, when Paul returns to the hotel with the Hutu General to stop the

Hutu militia from killing everyone only to notice that his wife and children are missing. Fearing the worst he heads to the roof in search of them, he sees people lying in the bushes below, and thinks that his family jumped, but it is not them; he finds them hiding in a shower, safe. At this point Paul lost all concern for anyone other than his wife and kids. The relief that they are safe makes for a happy ending to this part of the story as everyone is escorted out of the hotel and to a refugee camp by the UN in the next scene. This is especially true since the film does not show if anyone was hurt or killed by the militia, the success of Paul is purely dependent on his family and children being safe.

The happy ending continues once they arrive at the refugee camp and Paul's wife notices a board of photographs of children that are missing their parents (01:52:45). She searches for her nieces, but does not find them. Despite this, it shows that the children are more important than the adults, as there does not appear to be a board for missing adults, and if there is she does not look for her brother and wife on it. She starts to go around from person to person with a photograph of her nieces asking if people have seen them. Meanwhile, Madam Archer finds the nieces with a recent transport to the refugee camp, she runs after Paul and his family on the bus, stopping the bus and showing them their nieces. Paul's wife finds them, celebrating with the entire family. The final images of the film are of Paul and his family walking back to the busses that are leaving for Tanzania with Madam Archer and about 10 other children. Madam Archer tells Paul, "They said there wasn't room." To which Paul responds, "There is always room." Implying that not only is his family getting out, but so are all of the orphans that he promised to help earlier in the movie.

This provides a happy ending to the film because Paul, his family, his nieces, and the orphans make it out safely. It leaves the viewer feeling happy at the very end, however the overall story both on film and in real life are not happy. By focusing on this one family, and group of children they are able to turn this genocide into having a relatively happy ending. This allows the viewer to feel bad about what happened in Rwanda, but not too bad to not recommend the movie.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Both *Black Hawk Down* and *Hotel Rwanda* use long standing stereotypes about children and Africa in order to make the movies easily identifiable to American audiences and attempt to manipulate their emotions.

Black Hawk Down places US troops in the middle of militia controlled Mogadishu in a battle that pitted white Americans against black Somali Muslims. The filmmakers used traditional colonial stereotypes of the savage unorganized African in contrast to the Western military superiority; depicting the only disadvantage of the Americans being their lack of numbers compared to the hordes of Somalis. The depictions of the Somalis as savages has been updated since colonial times, but the notion that they are less civilized and more inherently violent persists. *Hotel Rwanda*, likewise, used depictions of Africans as savages, albeit with the contrast of more Western and civilized Rwandans. Further, the West was not shown in an innocent light, having let the genocide happen, but still superior to the less Western Rwandans. In this case it was not whites fighting off hordes of blacks, it was the Western dressing, speaking, and acting Rwandans hiding and manipulating their way to safety from the “African” looking and acting Hutu militiamen. Ultimately, however, it was still Westerners fighting Africans, at least based on their depictions.

Both films used the cultural belief that children are innocent and in need of protection as a way to guide the sympathies of the viewer. The side that has the most children, or in the case of *Hotel Rwanda*, the only children, is the side that is most deserving of an emotional connection. In *Black Hawk Down* children were not readily visible, but many scenes indicated that the American soldiers were sons and daughters, while other scenes referenced the young children of

the soldiers. In contrast, the Somali youth that were shown were child soldiers, ones that had been corrupted and forced to lose their innocence. The contrast between these depictions gave sympathy for the Americans while indicting the Somalis as a people that forced their young to fight against trained military personnel. *Hotel Rwanda* used children as sympathetic tools as well. Much of the film focused on the survival of the children present in the hotel, and often left the viewer fearing for the safety of children that were missing. At the end of the film the safe return of these missing children gave a happy ending to the film, even though the real world situation in Rwanda might not have been so deserving.

Both films are arguably the defining films of their respective conflicts, and at the very least the most watched. They hold in their power the ability to engrain a popular viewpoint of these incidents in the American mind. To me they both had obvious agendas, and both used similar techniques to get their messages across, although these messages seemed to be in opposition to each other. While *Black Hawk Down* comes across as extremely anti-Somali, *Hotel Rwanda* is on the surface pro-Rwandan. However, if it is examined more closely there are many of the same negative stereotypes of Africans that are present in *Black Hawk Down*. Further, the Rwandans that the American audience are supposed to sympathize with are depicted in much the same way that abolitionists depicted American slaves; those that went on to be known as by the now derogatory term, "Uncle Tom." The viewer is supposed to view them as harmless and helpless, which still places them firmly below those that have the power to fight for themselves.

The conclusions that can be drawn are limited by focusing on textual analysis. While it was demonstrated that both films used long standing stereotypes of Africans and sympathetic children to attempt to influence the emotions of the audience, it is impossible to tell the actual

impact that this has had without talking to viewers of the film. It is important, however, to outline how both pro and anti-African films can use the same techniques in their filmmaking. Future research should focus both on expanding to other films to provide a more complete analysis of these techniques and on human-subject research. The scope of such investigations should not be limited to African films or even war films, as these techniques as present in many films across all genres. The use of focus groups to delve into the thoughts of viewers of films such as these could provide valuable insights into the way that movie goers interact with film. It is one thing to watch these films many times as I did and come away with in depth analysis, but it is something else to see what people pick up from one or two casual viewings of a film. Further, this style of study could be done on a much larger scale and include films across time to see how the use of stereotypes have changed. For example, a study could look at the evolution of World War II films and how they depict the German and Japanese, or their use of children.

What can be concluded, however, is that cultural stereotypes of children and Africa are still present in these films, despite the ways they have may have evolved over time. The use of these images and descriptions of both children and Africans dominate these two films in ways that are degrading to Africa and Africans and continue to place children as torchbearers for sympathy, but leave them without agency of their own. *Black Hawk Down* is fundamentally anti-Somali and anti-intervention due to the persistent use of colonial era stereotypes of the animal-like and savage African. Ultimately the films shows Somalia as a place that is in need of Western help but unwilling to accept it. The inhabitants are almost without question depicted as savage and animal like, just as many European colonists depicted Africans in their day. Likewise, *Hotel Rwanda* uses children to steer sympathy where the filmmakers want it, and even while being pro-

Rwandan, uses stereotypes of the savage African to depict the bad guys in the film. Further the “good” Rwandans are shown in much the same way that American slaves were by white abolitionists. Again, this film uses traditional stereotypes to depict Africans in ways that promote the desires of the filmmakers.

The use of children in these films is representative of the greater cultural feelings towards children. They are used in film to promote sympathy because that is how they are generally viewed in American society. Likewise, it can be argued that the idea of innocent and sympathetic children is so ubiquitous because of the common usage of children in this way in film and other media. This may not be of concern to many people, as there is little argument that children should be viewed in this way, but it is indicative of a more troubling practice in the media in general; that of using stereotypes as a shortcut to storytelling and plot development. The danger of the use of stereotypes is better seen in the use of the Other in *Black Hawk Down* and *Hotel Rwanda*. The use of racial and cultural stereotypes might allow filmmakers to let the viewer know who to like and who to hate quickly, but it also continues a dangerous tradition of marginalizing groups of people in negative ways, even when the viewer is supposed to sympathize with a group.

I hope that my research has shed light on the ways that children are used and alluded to in film as a way to promote sympathy, and that the “Other” does not have to represent entire populations and is not limited to non-Westerners, as *Hotel Rwanda* makes clear. Further, both children and the “Other” should not be looked at in ways that remove them from their roles in film, and instead should be taken in context. While they may be promoting unwelcome stereotypes, they are used for a reason. It is easier for a director to make one group look

“Western” and the other look “African” than it is to develop extensive backstories for the two sides, or to place a child in danger than to make the audience sympathize with an adult. The question for Hollywood is whether or not the ease of these shortcuts is worth the continuation of stereotypes.

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