

**Piotr Cieplak.** *Death, Image, Memory: The Genocide in Rwanda and its Aftermath in Photography and Documentary Film*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. vii + 230 pp. Bibliography. Index. Cloth. \$99.99. ISBN: 978-1-137-57987-4.

**Piotr Cieplak, director.** *The Faces We Lost*. 2017. Documentary film. 60 minutes. Kinyarwanda and French with English subtitles. Rwanda. [www.faceswelostfilm.com](http://www.faceswelostfilm.com).

The distinctions between academic and artist, scholar and commentator, researcher and creator are being blurred at an increasing rate. Filmmaking is one avenue progressively being utilized to complement academic methodologies and potentially reach wider and more varied audiences. Piotr Cieplak is one example of an academic who combines theoretical research with creative work. In 2017, Cieplak debuted his first monograph, *Death, Image, Memory: The Genocide in Rwanda and its Aftermath in Photography and Documentary Film*, along with his first documentary film, *The Faces We Lost*. While dealing with very similar subject matter and overlapping arguments in many respects, the two mediums with which Cieplak engages allow him to explore details, voices, and arguments in different yet complementary ways.

*Death, Image, Memory* is clearly the result of many years of researching and working with the Rwandan film industry. Cieplak's analysis focuses on theoretical considerations of the image, the archive, and questions of representation relating to the 1994 Rwandan genocide. His approach to his material is methodical, theoretically rich, and always sensitive to both his subjects and to his belief that his analysis "can offer nothing" to those who suffered through and continue to suffer because of the genocide (3). Throughout *Death, Image, Memory*, Cieplak reasons that while photos cannot fully represent experiences of genocide nor create fresh memories for those who did not experience this history, they can do *other* things, and it is accounting for these "other" uses that can yield the most interesting analysis. By blurring the boundaries, traditional functions, and readability of images, Cieplak offers a comprehensive and necessary book exploring multiple sites and collections of memory in and of Rwanda.

In his first chapter, Cieplak discusses contemporary coverage of the genocide and presents some of the key theoretical thematics that recur throughout his book. He examines the various definitions, uses, and theories behind concepts such as evidence and memory, and cites his key theoretical influences, namely Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, and Cathy Caruth among others.

Chapter 2 highlights photography and the published photobooks of Gilles Peress and Sebastião Salgado, focusing primarily on the relationship between photography and death; the genre of atrocity photography and the ethics of aesthetics; and the ways in which the Rwandan genocide has come to be defined by images of its aftermath. Here Cieplak makes the important case for reading images as having multiple functions: as documents, as bearers of information, and as commodities (59). He distinguishes between Peress and Salgado, explaining that Peress sees himself

as an evidence-gathering forensic photographer, while Salgado is more interested in harnessing creative aesthetics to elicit a response in the viewer. These two photographers help illustrate Cieplak's central point about images being essentially multi-layered and multi-functional.

In his third chapter, Cieplak explores "images of before" that are housed in personal archives as well as at the Kigali Genocide Memorial. These sites of collection and exhibition of personal photographs taken before the genocide are framed within questions of individual versus collective memory, and distinctions (or lack thereof) between seeing images as objects of documentation and as devices of commemoration. He concludes this chapter with close readings of two wedding photographs. These personal photographic archives and their connections to larger national processes of remembrance and memorialization are taken up further in his film.

Chapter 4 focuses on *Iseta: Behind the Roadblock*, a 2008 documentary tracing cameraman Nick Hughes's return to Kigali and his attempts to name both the victims and perpetrators he captured on film at the time—his documentation being the only known footage of violence filmed during the genocide. This chapter considers the evidential, memorial, and representational significance of this footage on multiple levels: for Hughes, for Rwandans interviewed in the documentary, and for the larger implications of how the genocide is understood. Taking Zapruder's footage of the JFK assassination as inspiration, Cieplak accounts for film's inherent malleability and reliance on the memories of others to provide it with context and meaning.

Cieplak then turns to Eric Kabera's 2004 documentary, *Keepers of Memory*. Here, the analysis shifts from representational images to testimonial texts, where Cieplak notes the importance of spoken testimony in articulations of memory about the genocide. In this chapter, Cieplak also provides a detailed history of post-genocide Rwandan film, stressing its major components and players (including the Rwanda Film Festival), and challenges for filmmakers today, which according to Cieplak's sources include questions of spectatorship, production levels, access and availability, and in regard to film's healing potential, its ultimate usefulness for survivors (a notable distinction for those familiar with Rwandan politics). As an "essentially mediated" text, Cieplak subjects *Keepers of Memory* to questions of authority, blending the emotional with the "factual," and Kabera's intention behind the film (a tricky endeavor in itself). Cieplak sees *Keepers of Memory*'s position as a "dialectical, discursive space in which the voices and images of the survivors are used to perform Kabera's own non-verbal, filmic testimony," in which the complexity of memorial and testimonial evidence is gestured towards rather than explicitly argued (187). In Cieplak's view, the power and malleability of the image are both medium-specific and reliant on the context and wider networks of information within which they operate.

Cieplak's conclusion is bleak but perhaps realistic, emphasizing that while images are likely powerless in and of themselves, they are important

as agents of memory. It is the plethora of alternative uses, meanings, and purposes assigned to photographs and film that make this contribution particularly timely.

*The Faces We've Lost* is Cieplak's first documentary film, shot primarily in Kigali in 2016 and focusing on a series of women, all of whom lost loved ones during the genocide, and all of whom (save one) have either a photograph or photo albums that contain images of those who were lost. The documentary also explores how memorial sites and the Rwanda Genocide Archive collect, preserve, and display donated photographs of victims. Cieplak uses the documentary form to visually illustrate his discussion of personal and professional archives in Rwanda, as well as the value Rwandans assign to photos as a way to remember, to honor, and potentially to heal.

In *The Faces We've Lost*, Rwandans—particularly Rwandan women—are placed front and center, with a cross-section of various generations all dealing with the notion of absence and remembrance in the wake of the genocide. Mama Lambert is an older woman who lost much of her family in 1994 and uses their photos as memories and as a form of consolation. Representing those too young to remember the genocide, Adeline's relationship to photography comes from having never known her father, "know[ing] him only through the photograph[ed]" portrait she salvaged. She carries on conversations with this portrait, making it her cellphone screen-page so that she might be never without her father. Claudine and her two daughters are the odd ones out. Unlike the other women, but perhaps representative of a larger portion of the Rwandan population, this family was not able to recover any of their family photographs. As a result, these daughters do not know what their father looked like (a point of contention, as Claudine refuses to tell them which one looks more like her husband). Their family photos were lost during the genocide, and this loss is still felt acutely today.

Often, the film's editing mirrors the stream of consciousness connecting these photographs to history—the interviewees' discussions of people in the photos bleed into memories of the genocide. Cieplak tracks the shifting importance of photographs in Rwandan society, with pale text on screen stating that traditionally, images were not the main method of commemoration in Rwanda, and in the immediate aftermath of the genocide, images were often too traumatic to deal with. With time, photos became "cherished and precious objects," and the documentary naturally then turns to the Rwanda Genocide Archive. Cieplak interviews a handful of archive employees and coordinators, who discuss how people bring photos to the archive where they can be preserved and kept safe. These photographs operate in two opposite yet complimentary capacities: as the masses of donated photos demonstrate the breadth of the killing in 1994, the photos also humanize and individualize those who were killed.

As further commentary on the shifting traumatic or healing capabilities of photographs, many of Cieplak's interviewees describe how photos have helped them manage emotions, how photos can act as a bridge between

generations, and how images can act as a form of medication. In offering examples of photos having both traumatic and therapeutic uses, the documentary refrains from making any absolutist arguments about an image's healing capacity. Mirroring discussions in his monograph, Cieplak's film also deals with the issue of possession and ownership of an image, particularly when multiple women explain how their photos were "stolen" from them during the genocide, and when archivists describe how many Rwandans transfer their personal ownership of family photos to the archive in order to preserve them.

Cieplak offers an important dimension to our understanding of these archives—there is a tactile, tangible element to his cinematography that provides a more corporeal experience of the processes so diligently outlined in his book. Throughout the film, shots are often focused on hands holding a photograph, pointing out and naming individuals in a particular photograph, or thumbing through the pages of a photo album. In many instances, the camera is positioned next to or above the interviewee's shoulder, so it is very much as if the viewer is sitting in these women's homes, being walked personally through their albums.

Both the book and the documentary are able to stand alone as important pieces of research and creativity, but they are ultimately strongest when viewed together, complementing one another's major arguments as well as filling in gaps. Surprisingly, although *Death, Image, Memory* is a study of images, none of the images make it into the pages of the book. In Cieplak's documentary, however, photographs take center stage and help to provide a more sensory, and perhaps more effective, understanding of the book's central discussions. In viewing the kinds of images he has referenced, we are able to even further appreciate Cieplak's careful theoretical handling of his material. Conversely, in keeping his theoretical discussions in mind while viewing the film, the reader/viewer is able to see how his interviewees fit into a longer historical trajectory, thus gaining a more global understanding of the kinds of work images can accomplish.

Another element that became more apparent in the documentary is gender and its relationship to memory and history. In his book, Cieplak deals primarily with Western and/or male voices (with a few notable exceptions). In the documentary, however, Rwandan women are the protagonists of the film. Interestingly, the men that do appear in the documentary are either those being remembered, or they are memorial and archive employees discussing photographs and memory in an official capacity. This perspective shifts in the film's final section, where these men present a more personal view, sharing their own photographs. But what does it mean that the "official" voices are overwhelmingly male, and does this affect our understandings of memory and history? While this gendered division is not explicitly discussed, scholars dealing with gender and memory, trauma, and commemoration will certainly find much of interest in this film.

*Death, Image, Memory* is an important step in further theorizing images and representations of the Rwandan genocide, yet it also raises questions.

As any scholar working on Rwanda right now is well aware, research conditions are often politicized and not always ideal. Thus, even more discussion of Cieplak's research methodologies within the country and his application of a thoroughly Western theoretical framework to a non-Western setting would have been of great interest to this reviewer. In the documentary, the voices of Western theorists are displaced in favor of survivors (an admittedly political and contentious term in Rwanda today) and their understandings of the capabilities and shortcomings of the photographic image. Cieplak has laid the foundations for potential future research on how other groups, both inside and outside of Rwanda, engage with these same kinds of images.

Piotr Cieplak is part of a growing community of scholars who are pushing our understandings of what it means to be a publishing academic. In releasing these two forms of intellectual output in quick succession, Cieplak demonstrates the productive relationship that can exist between text and filmmaking. Much like his typed study, Cieplak's documentary ends on a note of justification, recognizing that these images are only one component of genocide memory. As one of the older interviewees states, "we remember them anyway, but a picture helps, it adds something."

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## **LIFE AT THE CROSSROADS: TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE IN AFRICAN CITIES**

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**Jennifer Hart, *Ghana on the Go: African Mobility in the Age of Motor Transportation***. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. vii–250 pp. Acknowledgements. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$30.00. Paper.

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