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# Exhibiting Atrocity: A Preliminary Exhibition Proposal for the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre's State Identification Card Portrait Collection

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*Exhibiting Atrocity:*  
*A Preliminary Exhibition Proposal for the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre's*  
*State Identification Card Portrait Collection*

by

Sarah Munro  
Bachelor of Fine Arts, Ryerson University, 2009

A Thesis presented to  
  
Ryerson University  
and  
the Art Gallery of Ontario  
  
in partial fulfillment of the  
  
requirements for the degree of  
  
Masters of Arts  
  
in the program of  
  
Photographic Preservation and Collections Management

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2011  
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## **ABSTRACT**

*Exhibiting Atrocity:*

*A Preliminary Exhibition Proposal for the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre's  
State Identification Card Portrait Collection*

Master of Arts

2011

Sarah Munro

Photographic Preservation and Collections Management

Ryerson University and the Art Gallery of Ontario

*Exhibiting Atrocity* investigates common modes of publicly displaying photographs of atrocities, from the Holocaust (1933-1945) to the Cambodian and Rwandan genocides (1975-1979 and 1994, respectively). It incorporates the practical and theoretical concerns raised by these display modes into a preliminary exhibition proposal for the approximately six hundred Rwandan state identification card portraits housed at the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre (KGMC) in Kigali, Rwanda.

The paper's introduction and literature survey are followed by an overview of the Rwandan genocide and the role of state identification cards therein. The KGMC's identification portraits are then discussed in contrast to more explicit depictions of atrocity, wherein the benefits and detriments of displaying less graphic imagery are argued through an analysis of comparable past exhibitions in terms of their artistic or curatorial intention, methodology and critical reception. The findings of this analysis are subsequently applied to the KGMC's collection, yielding a preliminary exhibition proposal that advocates the involvement of atrocity survivors in the creation of such photographic displays.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Susan Sontag famously stated, “All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability.”<sup>1</sup> But while it is true that all photographs of the living will some day be photographs of the dead, the recognition of that living subject’s mortality is certainly more immediate in some images than others. For example, in photojournalistic depictions of the dead and the dying, referred to in the context of war, genocide, and other mass tragedies as atrocity photographs. While the term atrocity photography essentially refers to all photographs of atrocious events, it nevertheless evokes a rather specific set of photographic subjects. In her book, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera’s Eye*, Barbie Zelizer identifies these subjects as the “agonized faces behind barbed wire...stacks of skulls and body parts... and pits of human carnage.”<sup>2</sup> In essence, what atrocity photography as a genre has come to represent is the kind of brutally explicit photographic evidence made iconic by the print media in the wake of World War II. Indeed, the emergence of atrocity photography as a genre unto itself can be attributed to the evolution of wartime photojournalism, both technologically and ideologically. By World War II, improvements in photographic technology had enabled the creation of realistic frontline images of war, while society came to not only accept them, but to demand them as proof that the atrocity actually took place. This is especially true of the Holocaust, the events of which were hard to deny in the face of published photographic evidence. Made iconic by the media, atrocity photographs later found their way into less ephemeral forums, including conflict memorials where they now serve as ongoing reminders of the consequences and casualties of war. Herein lies a problem, however, for the aim of a photojournalistic image of conflict and a memorializing image of conflict is not necessarily the same. Although some images of conflict can ultimately fulfill both functions, they are

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, “In Plato’s Cave”, in *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera’s Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 208.



nonetheless created with different intents. Where one is required to be sensationalistic in order to sell newspapers and magazines, the other is expected to be sensitive in order to avoid re-victimizing those directly affected by war.

In picturing victims of atrocities such as war and genocide, photojournalists not only acknowledge the vulnerability of their subjects, but stand to victimize them further through the act of taking their picture. Whether they live or die, atrocity victims must then suffer the further indignation of their trauma being circulated for the world to see. While they are required to provide proof to the viewer, these photographs are not obligated to give anything back to the victim. On the contrary, they have the tendency to take away. Indeed, this is the root of the argument against the proliferation of atrocity photography, a discussion that remains relevant so long as there is conflict to photograph. Photographic theorists, stimulated by Sontag's assertions in her landmark text *On Photography*, continue to argue the benefits and detriments of picturing human suffering.<sup>3</sup> It is an argument further complicated by the ever-changing role of photography, whose early application as a documentary tool has given way to its acceptance as a fine art. In addition to issues of re-victimization, then, another charge against atrocity photography is its inappropriate aestheticization of human suffering, which arguably occurs when such photographs are shown within artistic institutions. Again, it is the atrocity image's context and not simply its content that poses a problem within photographic depictions of war.

If atrocity photographs are inherently problematic as most photo theorists would suggest, and if these problems are only exacerbated by the various contexts in which they may be exhibited, is there a responsible way to exhibit them at all? Indeed, what is the most suitable mode of display for images of atrocious events? And is this mode of presentation site-specific, or can the same exhibition of war- or genocide-related photography travel to more than one institution in more than one

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Barbie Zelizer's *About To Die: How New Images Move the Public*, Laura Brandon's *Art and War*, and Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others*.

geographic location without major reworking? These are the questions that lie at the heart of this paper, an analysis of the modes of display used to exhibit genocide photography. Further, it is an analysis with a real world application, as it will inform the creation of an inaugural photographic exhibition for the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre (KGMC) in Kigali, Rwanda. This paper proposes the exhibition of a specific collection of photographs related to the Rwandan genocide that is currently housed by the KGMC. It questions why this particular set of images should be exhibited at all, and further asks how they should be exhibited given the complex and potentially problematic nature of their subject matter.

As an emerging resource on the Rwandan genocide, the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre's newly established National Documentation Centre houses a growing collection of photographic evidence of the conflict and its aftermath, including victim and perpetrator portraits, photographs of exhumations and commemoration ceremonies, and photojournalistic images of the event itself. Within it is a sub-collection of approximately six hundred silver gelatin prints, which are the focus of this paper. Measuring approximately 3.5x1.5 inches, the photographs are small in scale and similar in appearance. Each is comprised of two portraits –one portrait appears upright and the other upside down– presumably intended to be cut apart. They are standard headshots depicting male and female secondary school-aged children who have similarly shorn hair and who often appear dressed in the same school uniform. Handwritten on the back of each image is the student's name as well as information relating to their school and/or their family's geographic location. These images are believed to have been taken prior to the Rwandan genocide in 1994 for use on government-issued state identification cards. Most importantly, those identification cards, mandatory for each Rwandan citizen, became one of the most important factors facilitating the speed and magnitude of the genocide, as they prominently stated each citizen's ethnicity: Hutu, Tutsi or Twa.



Fig. 1. Unknown photographer, "UWIZEYE Béatha (recto)," c. 1990. Courtesy of Genocide Archive Rwanda

UWIZEYE Béatha  
 Secteur : Nkomero  
 Cellule : NZU 1  
 Commune : Muramba  
 Page 834

Fig. 2. Unknown photographer, "UWIZEYE Béatha (verso)," c. 1990. Courtesy of Genocide Archive Rwanda

Mod. 3

Ubwoho (Hutu, Tutsi, Twa, Nkorese)  
 Ethnicité : *Nkorese*

Aho yavukiye *Nyamansange*  
 Lieu de Naissance

Itariki yavutseho *1.9.68*  
 Date de Naissance

Umuwuga *MUTSINZU*  
 Profession

Aho atuye *Nyamansange*  
 Lieu de domicile

Amazina y'uwo bashakanye  
 Noms du Conjoint *A.*

N° C.I. *2*

Umukono cyangwa igikumwe cya nyirayo  
 Signature ou l'empreinte du titulaire *[Signature]*

Amazina y'abana n'igihe bavukiye  
 Noms, prénoms et date de naissance des enfants.

Amazina Noms et Prénoms	Yavutse kuwa Né le	Igitsina Sexe
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		

Fig. 3. Unknown photographer, "Rwanda National Identity Card N°30143 circa 1994," June 25, 1992. Courtesy of Genocide Archive Rwanda.

I first encountered the photographs during an internship at the National Documentation Centre in the summer of 2010. Through my ongoing role within the Centre, it will be among my responsibilities to assist in increasing the visibility of the KGMC's burgeoning collection through an inaugural photographic exhibition. It is the KGMC's intention that this exhibition will eventually travel to affiliated memorial centers and museums within Europe and North America. However, as the National Documentation Centre is a newly founded facility, no definitive curatorial mandate exists and precedents on public exhibition have yet to be set. Nonetheless, if the center intends for its very first exhibition to encompass such complex imagery –and further, for it to suit both a Rwandan and an international audience at a variety of different venues– it will require an informed curatorial approach.

In order to justify *why* this particular set of images should be shown and to further suggest *how* it should be shown, this paper first discusses the events of the Rwandan genocide and the role of state identification cards within it. It also explains the significance of the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre and its specific collection of state identification card photographs. It states the traditional approach to the exhibition of war and genocide photography –that is the display of explicit images of atrocity as proof of its occurrence– and counters that approach with case studies of two more contemporary modes of display. The first counter-mode of display is the Archival Mode, which favours implicit images of genocide culled from photographic archives over explicit images of genocide such as those taken for the print media. Whereas photojournalistic images tend to depict the atrocious event or its aftermath in horrific detail, archival images often allude to the tragedy without actually showing it. Images employed by the Archival Mode include photographs produced for both bureaucratic and personal functions, such as identification portraits or family snapshots, whose gravity is defined more by their context than their content. The second counter-mode is the Conceptual Mode, which can employ both explicit and implicit images of atrocity, but which nonetheless presents them as concept-driven artistic interpretations of an atrocity rather than as hard evidence.

In analyzing case studies representative of these modes, this paper will attempt to determine the degree to which the two strategies improve upon the traditional approach to exhibiting graphic atrocity images. It is in this way that the paper ultimately determines which mode of display is most suitable to the KGMC and its collection of identity card photographs. It thereby takes the first steps towards facilitating a successful inaugural exhibition, which stands to subsequently increase the international visibility of the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre's growing collection.

## **2. LITERATURE SURVEY**

This survey includes historical and analytical texts on both the specific events of the Rwandan genocide and on photographic representations of genocide in general. It also includes artist statements and project proposals, monographs and exhibition catalogues, and critical reviews of specific exhibitions of genocide photography. It begins with a review of books on the history of wartime photojournalism in terms of its evolution and dissemination. This section includes texts on photojournalistic magazines such as *Life*, as well as on *Life* photographer Margaret Bourke-White. This is followed by an examination of texts on the Rwandan genocide, as well as books on the creation of memorial museums and photographic archives in response to such events. The third section discusses analytical texts on the depiction of genocide and human suffering in both a photojournalistic and an artistic context. The survey concludes with a review of publications on specific exhibitions of genocide photography, from their inception to their execution and their critical reception.

### **2.a Histories of Wartime Photojournalism**

General histories of photojournalism such as Bodo von Dewitz's *Kiosk: A History of Photojournalism* seek to parallel the evolution of the genre with both improvements in photographic technology and the emergence of forums for photojournalism's rapid dissemination. Von Dewitz's focus on illustrated news magazines as one such forum emphasizes the impact of a photograph's context on its interpretation. Through its reproduction of complete magazine pages and spreads as opposed to isolated images, the text allows for the discussion of editorial decisions such as image selection, cropping and retouching, layout design, headlines and captions, all of which affect the public's reading of an image. Like most books of its kind, this history of press photography from the late 1800's until 1973 pays considerable attention to war pictures through the sections "Press photography in the First World War 1919-1932", "Propaganda and photography 1936-1945", and "Wartime reporting 1945-1949". However, as a German publication discussing

many other German publications, *Kiosk* requires some supplementation if the reader is to emerge with a more holistic understanding of the potential for the press' manipulation of wartime photojournalism.

Erika Doss' *Looking at Life Magazine* fulfills that very function, discussing *Life* as a cultural phenomenon (at the height of its popularity, *Life* sold 13.5 million copies per week<sup>4</sup>) that directly affected North America's understanding of innumerable current events, including World War II. Unlike *Kiosk*, the book does not deconstruct individual issues of *Life* by way of editorial decisions made by its staff. Instead it provides a chronological overview of landmark events that impacted American society and then outlines *Life's* approach thereto. To that end, it also discusses the role of certain writers and photographers in shaping both the magazine and its readership through especially groundbreaking articles and images. Among them is the May 7, 1945 story "The Week's Events: The German Atrocities", photographed in part by Margaret Bourke-White.

At first glance, "The German Atrocities" is a straightforward enough resource. It consists of six pages showcasing twelve photographs from the liberation of German concentrations camps in Belsen, Buchenwald, Gardelegen, and Nordhausen. Taken by four of *Life's* war correspondents, William Vandivert, George Rodger, Johnny Florea and Margaret Bourke-White, the images are accompanied by evocative captions and an approximately 250-word contextualizing paragraph. With so little text, the insights provided by this article can only be understood by reading between the lines, so to speak. Through such editorial decisions as image selection, layout and captioning, the issue differentiates Bourke-White's photographs from those of her male colleagues seemingly by virtue of the fact that they were photographed by a woman. The implied female sensitivity to scenes of human suffering is a theory supported by several other publications. For example, Nancy Caldwell Sorel's writings on Margaret Bourke-White in *The Women Who Wrote the War: The Compelling Story of the Path-breaking Women War*

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<sup>4</sup> Erica Doss, *Looking At Life Magazine* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 2.

*Correspondents of World War II* implies that the “new sensibility” with which Bourke-White pictured the liberation of Buchenwald –among other pivotal events of World War II– can be attributed, in part, to her femininity. Or at least it can be attributed to the novelty of her femininity within the patriarchal world of wartime photojournalism. Caldwell Sorel repeatedly references the ways in which Bourke-White used her femininity to her advantage, including one occasion when Bourke-White dissolved into tears in front of Soviet soldiers and was rewarded with their permission to shoot an additional roll of film at a location she had been instructed to leave.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, two of Bourke-White’s own memoirs, 1946’s *Dear Fatherland, Rest Quietly: A Report on the Collapse of Hitler’s ‘Thousand years’* and 1963’s *Portrait of Myself* recount in words and photographs her horror and disgust upon touring the Nazi camps and the possible motivations for her strong personal reaction, including her status as a woman and as the child of a non-practicing Jew.

Finally, Robert H. Abzug’s *Inside the Vicious Heart: Americans and the Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camps* testifies to the importance of Margaret Bourke-White’s witnessing (her gender notwithstanding) by including her in this series of personal stories on the camp liberations as experienced by such historical figures as Generals Dwight D. Eisenhower and George S. Patton, and newspaper publisher Joseph Pulitzer. Through their diaries, letters, and photographs, Abzug illustrates how Americans’ eyewitness accounts and other published evidence enabled the world to believe what had only been rumored. The subsequent impression that photographs can and do convey the reality of genocide will further be addressed by the publications in the following section, whose focus on the events and aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda will speak to the movement of such photojournalistic evidence into post-war memorial museums.

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<sup>5</sup> Nancy Caldwell Sorel, *The Women Who Wrote the War: The Compelling Story of the Path-breaking Women War Correspondents of World War II* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2011), 124.



## **2.b Histories of the Rwandan Genocide, its Events and Aftermath**

*Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* by Roméo Dallaire is but one of many texts to outline the circumstances contributing to the Rwandan genocide. Like most, it presents the genocide as the result of ongoing ethnic tensions incited by colonization. It provides a chronology of events and key players in the genocide and –in addition to the history, geography and statistics of the nation– offers the Canadian general’s personal interpretation of the event through meticulous diary entries written while he was stationed in Rwanda. While Dallaire’s publication focuses on the events and immediate aftermath of the genocide from a largely militaristic or political perspective, Paul Williams’ *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* concentrates on the long-term effects of genocide from a cultural perspective. One such long-term outcome is the establishment of memorial museums and other sites of remembrance in post-war nations. A relatively recent phenomenon, the Third World memorial museum exists as a multipurpose cultural space modeled after First World War and Holocaust memorials. In the chapter “Photographic Memory: Images from Calamitous Histories”, Williams discusses the changing role of photographs within these memorial museums, from pieces of corroborating evidence within object-based exhibitions to the sole focus of exhibitions all their own. In the process, Williams acknowledges the dual capabilities of photography to document and to aestheticize, and he problematizes specific exhibitions that have attempted to walk the line between document and art. Among those exhibitions is *Photographs from S-21: 1975-1979*, a show of images from the Cambodian genocide, which will be the subject of a case study within the body of this paper.

Nicholas Mirzoeff’s article in the autumn 2005 issue of *African Arts*, “Invisible Again: Rwanda and Representation After Genocide”, deals largely with artistic interpretations of the conflict, such as Gilles Peress’ photo book *The Silence* and Alfredo Jaar’s *Rwanda Project: 1994-2000*, the latter being the subject of a comparative case study within this essay. In his article Mirzoeff identifies the struggle of Western contemporary artists to accurately represent the suffering of a subaltern culture. He states that their attempts to do so have traditionally relied

upon the familiar frameworks of Christianity, documentary photography, and conceptual art<sup>6</sup>, and he subsequently deconstructs the efficacy (or inefficacy, as the case may be) of each approach. One tactic Mirzoeff does not address is the recontextualization of archival images, which is also common practice amongst contemporary artists engaging with representations of genocide. Instead it is Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* that lays the foundation for the discussion of archival imagery. Here the philosopher defines the archive as emerging at the "disintegration point of the memory it seeks to preserve"<sup>7</sup>, suggesting the archive's paradoxical role as a site wherein memories are both preserved and, in a sense, lost. Derrida subsequently sets up society's repetitive engagement with the archive and its contents as a compulsive act, which helps to rationalize the revisitation of archival photographs of genocide by artists. It is the consequences of their photographic representations of human suffering that the books in the following section will address.

## **2.c Analyses of the Depiction of Human Suffering**

Perhaps the most influential text on the photographic representation of human suffering is Susan Sontag's 2003 book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, which reconsiders her earlier contention in 1977's *On Photography* that society's ability to respond to atrocity is compromised by "the relentless diffusion of vulgar and appalling images"<sup>8</sup> within our media-driven culture. In examining the many issues associated with images of genocide and other atrocities, Sontag references a complex history that includes the Crimean War, the American Civil War, the Spanish Civil War, the Nazi death camps, the Khmer Rouge, and the Rwandan genocide. She discusses the history of atrocity photographs, the various purposes for their production, the evolution of such imagery (which she sees as culminating in the

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<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Invisible Again: Rwanda and Representation After Genocide," *African Arts* (Autumn 2005): 36.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 109.

intersection between art and document), and the impact of atrocity photographs on both their victims and their viewers. Overall, Sontag's text explores what it means for outsiders to regard the suffering of others by questioning whether the act of looking necessarily accomplishes all that the accompanying photographic rhetoric suggests.

Barbie Zelizer's *About to Die: How News Images Move the Public* narrows Sontag's discussion down to depictions specifically of death, with the photographs she cites having been created within the context of catastrophic or atrocious events. In particular, Zelizer addresses how and why journalists exploit images of the moment before one dies (what she refers to as the *as if* moment) over the death itself. She separates *as if* photographs into three distinct categories: images of *presumed death* wherein inanimate objects act as signifiers of human casualties, images of *possible death* wherein single anonymous figures stand for the dead masses, and images of *certain death* wherein the figure depicted is the one who will die. It is the latter category that tends to evoke the greatest sense of discomfort, disbelief and subsequent engagement, and it is these images' potential to engage that has historically justified the proliferation of all *as if* images. Engagement is paramount to Zelizer, who argues it is when the viewer regards about-to-die images merely as conduits of information about an atrocity –empty symbols as opposed to real people– that they truly become exploitative. While Zelizer's focus is on the use of potentially exploitative atrocity imagery within the news media, Roger I. Simon's interest is on the use of such imagery within public exhibitions. His article "A Shock to Thought: Curatorial Judgment and the Public Exhibition of 'Difficult Knowledge'", which appeared in the February 21, 2011 edition of *Memory Studies*, alleges that institutions of social memory have reduced their emphasis on affirming exhibitions such as displays of triumph or great deeds in favour of more difficult exhibitions depicting violence, loss and death. Upon dissecting what it is that renders certain exhibitions difficult, Simon questions what might be accomplished by making these painful histories public. He does so through a series of comparative studies of varying museum exhibitions. While drawing largely from the same archive of images, each exhibition presents those artifacts in different ways, suggesting that

each unique mode of display fulfills a different purpose and achieves a different end. It is the end result of disparate representational strategies that is addressed by the texts in the following section. These publications deal with the specific artists and exhibitions later employed by this essay as case studies, and address issues of artistic or curatorial intent, methodology, and critical reception.

## **2.d Exhibition Publications**

*Beautiful Suffering: Photography and the Traffic in Pain*, the exhibition catalogue to the self-same titled 2006 show at Williams College Museum of Art, effectively bridges the gap between the theories surrounding photographic representations of human suffering and their exhibition in art galleries. Drawing on images from advertising, photojournalism and contemporary art, both the book and the exhibition question whether it is indeed inherently problematic to aestheticize pain. Acknowledging that there is no definitive answer to the query, the writers and curatorial team treat the works within *Beautiful Suffering* as punctuation points within a series of open-ended questions included in the exhibition as wall text and reproduced within the book. They ask: “Why do we take pictures of people in pain instead of helping them?” “Does [a picture’s] beauty deepen our critical engagement or distract us, anesthetizing us to pain[?]” “Do the photographs here [in exhibition] accomplish more, less, or just something altogether different from those we see everyday in the news?” The catalogue’s essays address selected works in relation to these questions, one of which is a piece from Alfredo Jaar’s *Rwanda Project*, described by editor and essayist Mike Reinhardt as “hugely ambitious and self undercutting...a work that shows its own inability to capture its referent.”<sup>9</sup> However, Reinhardt appears to regard this as an asset rather than a liability as he speaks at length to the complexity of Jaar’s work.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Erina Duganne, Holly Edwards and Mark Reinhardt, *Beautiful Suffering: Photography And the Traffic in Pain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 34.

<sup>10</sup> Jaar’s piece, as discussed by Mike Reinhardt, is entitled “The Eyes of Gutete Emerita”. A description of the work can be found in a later section of this paper, wherein a more thorough case study deconstructs Jaar’s simultaneous unwillingness and inability to photograph the events of the Rwandan genocide (the “referent”).

Providing more polarized viewpoints are the critical reviews, both local and international, of one of the aforementioned photographic exhibitions, *Photographs from S-21: 1975-1979*. Among them are *The New York Time's* review, "Hypnotized by Mug Shots That Stare Back: Are They Windows or Mirrors?", *The Wall Street Journal's* "Profiting from his Shots of Pol Pot's Terror", *The Village Voice's* "Killing Fields of Vision: Was Cambodia's Genocide Just a Moment of Photographic History?", and *The New York Observer's* "Jottings of Death in Gallery Three". While critical reviews written within Thailand and Cambodia are fairly favourable, those published in New York, where the exhibition was held, are largely unfavourable. They question the exhibition's organizers and museum curators' motivations for exhibiting archival documents within an arts institution. They also make accusations of profiteering from the inappropriate aestheticization of horrific images.

The notion of curatorial or artistic intention versus critical reception factors into texts on Alfredo Jaar as well. Ben Okri and David Levi-Strauss' *Let There be Light: The Rwanda Project 1994-1998* and *Alfredo Jaar: La Politique des Images* by Jacques Rancière address Jaar's artistic intention in relation to his output. They discuss the artist's struggle to represent the unrepresentable, and its manifestation as numerous projects derived from the same source material. Jaar's refusal to revictimize those directly affected by genocide is also discussed as the motivation for his employment of exhibition strategies that paradoxically deny his audience access to the very images he created.

## **2.e Conclusion**

Building upon the arguments of the aforementioned texts, this paper will discuss the presentation and dissemination of graphic images through illustrated news magazines. It will identify key magazine photographers whose iconic images of World War II and the Holocaust set the tone for all subsequent photographic representations of genocide. It will further address the movement of such representations out of the press and into memorial museums and their traveling exhibitions, as well as list the problems inherent with this recontextualization.

Through two case studies, the paper will discuss differing modes of display that have previously been applied to photographs of genocide to varying degrees of success. Finally, in deconstructing the successes and failures of those modes, the paper will propose a strategy to display the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre's collection of state identity card photographs, as ideal subject matter for the Centre's inaugural exhibition.

### **3. The Rwandan Genocide and the Establishment of the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre**

The Rwandan genocide (1994) resulted from the politicization of longstanding ethnic tensions between the Tutsi minority who had controlled power for centuries, and the Hutu majority who came to power in the rebellion of 1959–1962. Prior to the country's colonization by both Germany and Belgium,<sup>11</sup> a Tutsi monarchy reigned over Rwanda. This monarchy continued under colonial rule, however its efficacy was undoubtedly undermined by the presence of a foreign political agenda. Indeed, it was Belgian colonists who played a pivotal role in establishing the divide between the Tutsi and Hutu peoples. While ethnic categories existed loosely before colonialism, the specific differences between them were substantiated by the Belgians' introduction of mandatory ethnic identification cards in 1935. Earlier German colonists had believed the Tutsi to be a superior race due to their alleged Hamitic origin, as it was believed that the Tutsi were of Caucasian ancestry. The European eugenics movement only increased colonial interest in the physical differences between the two tribes. Beginning in the 1920s, Belgian ethnologists analyzed thousands of Rwandans on comparable racial criteria, and in 1931, ethnic identity was officially mandated and administrative documents began specifically stating each person's ethnicity. Height, build, and skin color were among the physical traits typically considered in ethnic identification. Tall, slender and lighter-colored Rwandans were typically Tutsi, while shorter, stockier and darker-skinned Rwandans were considered Hutu. Familial wealth, determined largely by livestock ownership, was another supposed indicator of a Rwandan's ethnicity, with the Tutsi typically possessing greater wealth than the Hutu.<sup>12</sup> As the

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<sup>11</sup> Rwanda was formally divided between Belgium and the German Empire in 1890. After several border skirmishes, the final borders of the colony were established in 1900, with the German Empire controlling the kingdom of Rwanda. By the end of World War I, Belgium had acquired completed control.

<sup>12</sup> Traditionally, anyone possessing ten or more cattle was considered a member of the Tutsi social class. It should be noted that the Rwandan people previously considered these categorizations to be fluid; Hutu who gained wealth by acquiring cattle could become Tutsi, just as Tutsi who lost cattle could become Hutu through a process known as *kwihutura*.

colonial presence in Rwanda gradually reduced, the Belgians bequeathed the majority of their property and power to the Tutsi, while the Hutu were left to work as forced labourers. It is in this way that Belgian colonists strategically created a culture of inequality, and subsequent instability, in Rwanda.

It was not until 1957 that the embittered Hutu Emancipation Movement published the *Hutu Manifesto*, asserting that the Tutsi minority held an unfair monopoly of power in Rwanda. This increase in anti-colonial and anti-Tutsi sentiments resulted in Belgium granting Rwanda national independence in 1961. By 1962, the Hutu had overthrown the monarchy and established the Republic of Rwanda, headed by Grégoire Kayibanda. Kayibanda's regime persecuted the Tutsi in turn, causing many to flee for Uganda. Then-General Juvénal Habyarimana, an ethnic Hutu, seized power in a coup in 1973, killing Kayibanda and promising progress. In 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, a rebel group composed mostly of Tutsi refugees, invaded northern Rwanda from Uganda in an attempt to defeat the Hutu-led government. This began the Rwandan Civil War, further exacerbating ethnic tensions in the country. In response, many Hutu gravitated toward the *Hutu Power*<sup>13</sup> ideology, spurned by state-controlled Rwandan media.

The divisiveness of the *Hutu Power* ideology resulted in the assassination of Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana and Cyprien Ntaryamira, the president of neighbouring Burundi, on April 6, 1994. Responsibility for Habyarimana's assassination was disputed, with both Tutsi and Hutu extremists being blamed. Regardless, the president's death set off a violent reaction, resulting in the mass murder of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis and moderate Hutus in the span of approximately one hundred days. The genocide had been planned by members of the Hutu Power group known as the *Akazu*, many of whom occupied positions at top

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<sup>13</sup> *Hutu Power* was an ideology propounded by Hutu extremists in Rwanda before the onset of the 1994 genocide. It idealized an ethnically pure territory governed by the "Hutu Ten Commandments", wherein Hutu and Tutsi were forbidden from intermarrying and conducting business together, and wherein the Rwandan education system, Armed Forces, and positions of power were intended to be exclusively Hutu.



levels of the national government. The genocide was supported and coordinated by the national government in cooperation with local military and civil officials. Two Hutu militias had been organized to carry out the killings: the *Interahamwe* and the *Impuzamugambi*, although many Hutu civilians also took part in the murders. The militias erected hundreds of roadblocks around the country, creating checkpoints at which ethnic identification cards could be demanded, with verified Tutsis being systematically slaughtered.<sup>14</sup> The killing continued for three months, until the overwhelmed Rwandan Patriotic Front fought its way out of the nation's capital and joined with other RPF units in the north. Upon regrouping, the RPF launched an offensive and on July 4, 1994 overtook the capital. Less than two weeks later, the RPF defeated the last government stronghold and declared victory.

The resulting death toll of the Rwandan genocide is estimated at between 500,000 and 1,000,000 people, or as much as 85% of the Tutsi population and 20% of the total national population in 1994.<sup>15</sup> Constructed on the site where over 250,000 of those people have since been buried,<sup>16</sup> the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre was created by the Kigali City Council in partnership with the UK-based genocide prevention organization Aegis Trust to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the genocide in April of 2004. The facility features external mass graves and memorial gardens, the main memorial building, the Education Centre, and the National Documentation Centre, home to the newly established Genocide Archive of Rwanda. The eleven mass graves consist of numerous concrete crypts, filled from floor to ceiling with coffins, each containing the fragmented remains of up to fifty victims. These mass graves serve to consolidate the contents of hundreds of shallow graves still being unearthed around the city. Within the main building are three permanent exhibitions spanning two floors. The lower level exhibition

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<sup>14</sup> Jim Fussell, "Group Classification on National ID Cards as a Factor in Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing", (paper presented during the Seminar Series of the Yale University Genocide Studies Program, New Haven, Connecticut, November 15, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> Both the Rwandan death toll and overall population figures vary significantly from source to source, hence they have been presented as minimum versus maximum values.

<sup>16</sup> By 2004, the ongoing discovery of mass graves in and around Kigali after the genocide had resulted in the exhumation of approximately 250,000 bodies, which have since been buried in mass graves at the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre.

chronicles the Rwandan genocide in three sections, from its inception to its implementation and its aftermath. All three sections use a combination of photographs, text panels, charts and maps, and audiovisual elements. Also included on the lower level are artistic interpretations of the genocide conveyed through a pair of stained-glass windows and a series of six wooden sculptures. A separate room houses a combination of victims' bones and personal belongings enclosed in glass cases, three television monitors displaying subtitled survivor testimony, and an informal photo gallery where visitors are encouraged to leave images of lost loved ones. The upper level includes a separate children's memorial, comprised of photographs and text panels. This exhibit features fourteen windows, each depicting the enlarged, backlit photographic transparency of a child killed during the genocide. Beneath each portrait is a plaque containing a few details about them and an overview of how they died. Finally, the exhibit entitled "Wasted Lives" chronicles in words and photographs the history of genocide around the world, and includes Armenia, the Holocaust, Bosnia and Darfur.

That the permanent exhibition seeks to situate the events of 1994 alongside the Holocaust and other acts of genocide seems logical. However it also begs the question, to what degree does the Aegis Trust UK –and thus the European/Western museum model– influence the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre and its visitors' understanding of the Rwandan genocide? And is this influence an asset or a liability? It is worth noting that the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre is, to date, the most affluent and arguably "Westernized" memorial to the Rwandan genocide, and that it exists in stark contrast to the six other facilities situated throughout the country.

#### **4. Raw Evidence**

Rwanda's six other memorial sites, located in Nyamata, Ntarama, Bisesero, Nyanza, Nyarubuye, and Murambi, involve far fewer components than the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre, having remained largely unmediated since the genocide. Although some are in the process of being revitalized, they still consist primarily of existing sites and structures significant to the genocide where the remains of victims are openly displayed, having been "curated" to varying degrees. The Nyamata memorial site consists of a church compound where approximately 10,000 people were killed. Presently, victims' remaining bones, clothing and personal belongings are piled upon church pews, which face an altar posthumously adorned with an encased rosary and a machete. Two underground crypts, which hold the bodies of approximately 41,000 victims, are fully accessible to visitors who may view the shelved contents, categorized by skulls, femurs, and other assorted bones. As with Nyamata, the church at Ntarama, which saw the death of approximately 5,000 people, is now filled with the randomly piled bones, clothes and belongings of victims. Two sets of metal shelves, later installed at the front and back of the church, hold additional skeletons and personal belongings, while outside the church a makeshift memorial garden features flowers and an incomplete wall of inscribed victim names. The memorial at Bisesero, also referred to as the "Hill of Resistance", is comprised of nine small outbuildings, which represent the nine communes formerly constituting the province of Kibuye. At the foot of the hill is a shed housing the remains of over 1,000 victims. The remaining buildings, ranging from an abstract archway to a bunker-like structure to four empty exhibition buildings, are connected by stone steps that lead up to a set of mass graves. Over 50,000 victims are buried at Bisesero. The national memorial at Nyanza, where over 2,000 victims were murdered following a death march from the outskirts of Kigali, consisted originally of rows of wooden crosses, which have more recently been replaced by less conspicuous concrete-topped mass graves. Nyarubuye consists of a convent and school where an estimated 20,000 people were killed. In 2003, the school became functional again, while the convent remains empty apart from the bones of

the victims. Only the Murambi Memorial Centre, also a former school where approximately 27,000 people were killed, will eventually come closest to replicating the experience of the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre. It is presently a series of outbuildings where hundreds of intact corpses and loose bones have been temporarily preserved and presented on slatted wood tables. However construction at the Centre, currently being completed by Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre and Aegis Trust UK staff, will result in an exhibition similar to that at the KGMC, which is slated to open on May 26, 2011.



Fig. 4. Frank Wolf, "Deep gashes delivered by the killers are visible in the skulls that fill one room at the Murambi School," 2001. Courtesy of U.S. Government Photos and Images.



Fig. 5. Sean Kilpatrick, "Governor General Michaëlle Jean visits the Kigali Memorial Centre in Kigali, Rwanda," 2010. Courtesy of The Canadian Press.

As evidenced by the similarities between the other six national memorial sites, the tendency in Rwanda –and indeed many post-conflict developing nations– is to display personal effects and human remains at memorial sites in lieu of formal exhibitions incorporating text and images. The display of a victim’s belongings is not unique to the developing world; by the 1990’s, the exhibition of Holocaust victims’ personal property, influenced by the collection of the Auschwitz II-Birkenau Memorial Museum, was commonplace.<sup>17</sup> The corporeal nature of clothing in particular, perhaps the most commonly exhibited personal item in Rwandan memorials, makes it an especially suitable surrogate for the bodies themselves, however the necessity of such a surrogate is debatable. While the display of human remains has been deemed by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as “offensive to the memory of the dead”<sup>18</sup> and while other Holocaust memorials have since echoed the sentiment, it remains common practice in Rwanda. The most readily accepted explanation for this is that the sight of death is commonplace in developing nations, where disease is prevalent and life expectancy is lower. However, it is less likely that human remains are exhibited because life expectancy is low than because the cost of memorialization is high. The exhibition of human remains can indeed be attributed to several factors, including the fiscal and practical impossibility of identifying and thus properly burying upwards of one million people, as well as the perceived need to provide proof to the external international community and internal genocide deniers.<sup>19</sup> Whatever the reason, the accepted tendency to exhibit human remains in Rwanda was supplanted by the Aegis Trust’s plans for the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre and its exhibitions. The inclusion of token remains, encased subtly behind smoked glass, represented a compromise between the accepted standards of Holocaust memorial sites and those related to

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2007), 29.

<sup>18</sup> Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 213.

<sup>19</sup> Genocide denial and revisionism remain ongoing issues in Rwanda. Accusations that the Tutsi engaged in a “counter-genocide” against the Hutu, for example, are supported by Pierre Péan’s text *Black Furies, White Liars*, published in 2005.

the Rwandan genocide. “For those who say it is undignified to show bones, we’re burying them, in a sense, behind dark glass,” explained Aegis Trust co-founder and Chief Executive Dr. James Smith. “For those who say it is necessary to see the death, we’re accommodating them, too.”<sup>20</sup> While perhaps as diplomatic a resolution as possible, the decision to tailor the inclusion of human remains to European standards is still emblematic of the overall Westernization of the KGMC. As are the contents and structure of the exhibitions’ text panels, all of which were written and designed by employees of Aegis Trust’s head office in the UK, before being shipped to Rwanda for installation. The aforementioned artistic interpretations also display a certain Eurocentricity; the stained-glass windows were commissions created by Ardyn Halter, whose father, Roman Halter, was a survivor of the Auschwitz death camp. Aegis’ European influence further extends to the Education Centre, whose civic education programming for Rwandan schoolchildren is “based on the successful work that has already been carried out through teaching about the Holocaust at the [Aegis Trust-run] Holocaust Centre in Nottinghamshire, UK.”<sup>21</sup> While the myriad differences between the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide need not be reiterated, the importance of not painting two entirely different events with same brush, so to speak, bears repeating. If the primary goal is, as it should be, to enable Rwandans to reconcile and reclaim their own troubled history through the KGMC, then they should be encouraged to do so in their own way. The selection of images and text, of artworks, and of educational programming, as well as the decision to include or exclude human remains should not be the choice of a European institution working within a Holocaust mindset; it should be the choice of Rwandans. This is a point that will again be addressed in the concluding sections of this paper; for the fixedness of the main building’s exhibitions does not prevent the greater input of the Rwandan community in the future. With its recent expansion to include the physical and digital Genocide Archive of Rwanda, the KGMC’s Documentation Centre stands to become as important a resource as the exhibitions

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<sup>20</sup> Marc Lacey, “10 Years Later in Rwanda, the Dead are Ever Present,” *New York Times*, February 26, 2004, A8.

<sup>21</sup> Kigali Memorial Centre. “Education Project.” Last modified March, 2004, <http://www.kigalimemorialcentre.org/old/doccentre/index.html>

themselves. Not simply a hub for the digitization of documents, the Centre and its staff are interested in giving information back out to the public as opposed to merely taking it in. Several strategies will facilitate their giving back, namely the Genocide Archive of Rwanda web database (globally accessible and free of charge), the eventual on-site accessibility of physical artifacts to eligible researchers and educators, and the proposed creation of one or more traveling exhibitions showcasing such artifacts.

Under consideration for the inaugural exhibition is the aforementioned collection of state identity card photographs. In part, their suitability for exhibition can be attributed to the simple fact that they are the largest cohesive set of photographs in the archive to date. While broad subject categories of images exist within the Genocide Archive of Rwanda website (“Victim Photographs”, “Alleged Perpetrator Photographs”, etcetera<sup>22</sup>) these particular photos belong to the largest sub-collection, that is a depiction made by the same photographer or in the same place at the same time. A better justification for their exhibition, however, is their status as *pre-genocide* state identity card photographs, and it is the importance of this very distinction that is the subject of the following section.

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<sup>22</sup> A complete list of photographic subject categories is available on the Genocide Archive Rwanda website: <http://www.genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/index.php/Category:Photographs>.

## 5. State Identification Cards Within the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre

The Rwandan genocide left more than corpses in its wake: it created a cultural divide so significant it was uncertain whether Rwanda as a nation would ever fully recover. In an effort to instill feelings of unity and to promote national healing, Rwanda's rebuilt government immediately enacted laws strictly prohibiting any and all emphasis on ethnic affiliation. The mere discussion of ethnicity has been formally outlawed in Rwanda, where one can now stand trial for pointedly questioning the ethnic identity of another.<sup>23</sup> To that end, following the genocide new identification cards were issued which omitted the tribal origin of the card bearer (*Ubwoko/ethnie*). New residency cards were issued in 1995 and new national identification cards in 1996.

The collection of photographs currently housed by the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre was originally recovered from the genocide survivor organization IBUKA before being migrated to the KGMC for digital and physical archivation. In the absence of further information indicating their provenance, several visual clues have informed their interpretation as pre-genocide state identification card photographs. One such clue is the overall uniformity of the photographs' appearance. The photos affixed to identification cards issued during or prior to 1995 were taken at communal offices or by itinerant photographers there from, whereas the photos affixed to newer cards are brought in by the applicants themselves.<sup>24</sup> Since many of the sitters appear in front of the same (or a similar) backdrop, it is likely that the photographer was the same, or at least employed by the same studio. Another clue is the inscription on the back of each photo, which presumably states where in Rwanda each sitter resides. Regardless of when it was produced, each finished identification card bears the name of the prefecture or province where they were (or are) to be issued. Prior to the genocide, standard

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<sup>23</sup> In 2004 the Rwandan Penal Code officially criminalized all acts considered to encourage divisionism or sectarianism. The code threatens imprisonment to anyone who speaks of ethnicity in a "divisive manner".

<sup>24</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. "Rwanda: Procedure for obtaining or replacing a national identification card including a description of the card and information on the 'attestation d'identité' signed by a burgomaster." Last modified June 14, 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/47d65476c.html>.



administrative titles for geographic regions were Prefecture, Commune, Secteur, and Cellule, whereas after the genocide, geographic regions were referred to via Province, District, Sector and Cell.<sup>25</sup> Since all of the inscriptions use the titles Prefecture, Commune, Secteur and Cellule, it is safe to assume they were written before 1995.

A third clue is the age range of the depicted sitters, which is surprisingly narrow considering the quantity of images. For such a large number of images presumably taken by the same studio or individual photographer not to depict a broader spectrum of sitters is indeed curious. While the exact age of each sitter is impossible to determine, many of the images contain inscriptions on the verso that include the letters “E.S”, likely the abbreviation of *École Secondaire*, and in one instance the word *Collège*, also suggesting a secondary school. If all of the sitters are approximately the same age, as they appear to be, and if some of them attended specific secondary schools, then it is safe to assume they are all between the ages of fourteen and seventeen.<sup>26</sup> Finally, that they are indeed identification card photographs and not simply high school portraits is verified by the fact that, unlike in the West, it is not customary for Rwandan students to have their portraits taken every year. Nor is the production of high school yearbooks common within Rwanda. Again, without additional information on the photographs’ provenance, it is impossible to know their exact origin. However, the combination of these visual clues suggests the photos fulfilled an important role in Rwandan history and are therefore deserving of additional study through exhibition.

If the photographs were indeed produced for use on identification cards issued prior to 1994, they represent a powerful genocidal tool. Better still, they represent a genocidal tool that is less likely to offend a contemporary museum audience. Compared to the presentation of actual killing apparatuses (common to many

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<sup>25</sup> “Rwanda: Procedure for obtaining or replacing a national identification card including a description of the card and information on the ‘attestation d’identité’ signed by a burgomaster”

<sup>26</sup> Rwandan youth are only issued identification cards at or after the age of sixteen, whereas the names of children under sixteen years of age are typically written on their father’s identification card.

memorial museums worldwide), the exhibition of identity cards is both less offensive and more accessible to viewers, since identity documents say more about the logical bureaucracy of genocide than its unimaginable brutality. This is due largely to their employment of the headshot, which has fulfilled numerous bureaucratic functions throughout the history of photography. To look at even the most modern ID photograph within a museum context is to subconsciously call to mind the many uses of the headshot historically. For example, to view the identically expressionless faces of Africans in particular evokes ethnographic portraiture, and thus allows for the discussion of the Rwandan ID cards' colonial origins and subsequent discriminatory applications. Likewise, a headshot of any kind indirectly references the prison mug-shot, a comparable tool of intervention and of control over subjects from whom all rights have been stripped. This allows for the analysis of the ID cards in terms of their Tutsi subjects' presumed innocence (wherein that subject is seen as undeserving of their cruel fate) versus implied criminality (wherein the subject is seen as having brought that fate upon his or herself). Headshots simultaneously say everything and nothing about their subjects, describing their physical selves in perfect detail while leaving their mental, emotional, social, and political identities open to interpretation.

That identity cards permit so many entry points into the discussion of genocide suggests that they ought to be seen publicly. Perhaps the most powerful argument for why these specific works should be presented to the public, however, is rooted not in what they are, but what they are not. For as emblematic as these photos are of the atrocities committed in Rwanda, these are not atrocity photographs insofar as Barbie Zelizer and other photographic theorists have defined them. In other words, they are not the explicit images of human suffering that the world has come to know and expect in the wake of early, and now iconic, photographic depictions of mass atrocity such as those produced during World War II.

## 6. The Emergence of Atrocity Photography Within Wartime Photojournalism

The Holocaust is widely considered to be the touchstone for both public recognition of atrocity photographs, and for debate surrounding their presentation and reception.<sup>27</sup> While it is estimated that approximately two million Holocaust-related images can be found in the public archives of over twenty nations,<sup>28</sup> most people are familiar with only an iconic few. Among them are the harrowing depictions of emaciated concentration camp survivors, huddled in overcrowded bunks or behind barbed-wire fences, as well as the unflinching inventories of victims' remains, both of which were captured in equal measure by famed photographer Margaret Bourke-White. The specific iconicity of Margaret Bourke-White's photographs depicting prisoners at the Buchenwald concentration camp can be attributed to the conflation of circumstances that accompanied their creation. These circumstances include the increased capabilities of photographic technology and their impact on the field of wartime photojournalism. They also include the forums through which photojournalistic images of conflict came to be seen by such a wide audience, as well as the changes to censorship laws that permitted their publication in the first place.

The Crimean War (1853-1856) and the American Civil War (1861-1865) were among the first conflicts to be captured photographically. Many of the most impactful images thereof merely depicted the aftermath of war, often staged, as photographic technology was not yet advanced enough to allow for the realistic capture of combat.<sup>29</sup> It was the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) that was the first to be covered in the contemporary sense: by professional photojournalists whose work was immediately printed in newspapers and magazines. The most iconic image to emerge from the Spanish Civil War was Robert Capa's "Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of Death", allegedly taken at Cerro Muriano on September 5, 1936.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*, 54.

<sup>28</sup> Sybil Milton, "Photographs of the Warsaw Ghetto," *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* 3 (1986): 307.

<sup>29</sup> Depictions of war as we know them were only made possible by the advent of lightweight cameras, such as the Leica, and of 35-mm film, officially introduced in 1925 and 1934, respectively.

<sup>30</sup> Also known as *The Falling Soldier*, the photograph's subject was originally identified as a Workers' Party of Marxist Unification militiaman who was shot in Cerro Muriano on the Cordoba Front. However, the authenticity

The photo appears exactly as its title describes, depicting a Republican soldier at the very moment he is hit by an enemy bullet.



Fig. 6. Robert Capa, "Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of Death," September 5, 1936. Courtesy of *Life Magazine*.

While perhaps tame by today's standards, at the time of its initial publication in the September 23, 1936 issue of the French pictorial magazine *Vu*, Capa's image was a shocking sight. Indeed, that was the intention. In addition to documenting conflict, photojournalistic images of war were intended to arrest attention and thus to sell magazines. Fittingly, the early advertising slogan of *Paris Match*, another French photo magazine that would fill the void left by the short-lived *Vu*, read, "The weight of words, the shock of photos."<sup>31</sup> It would appear that somewhere between *Vu*'s publication of Capa's militiaman in 1936 and the founding of *Paris Match* in 1949, the use of such shock tactics became common practice in wartime photojournalism. If any one photojournalistic forum served to set the precedent for the kinds of

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of this photograph has been widely disputed. Numerous publications allege that the photograph could not have been taken where, when, or how Capa had suggested.

<sup>31</sup> Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 23.

conflict imagery the general public was not only permitted<sup>32</sup> but encouraged to see, it was *Life* magazine.

Launched in the wake of Capa's militiaman on November 23, 1936, *Life* likewise did not shy away the depiction of difficult subject matter, nor could it. When the first issue of *Life* appeared on newsstands, the United States was in the midst of the Great Depression and the world was headed towards war. Preceded by *Vu*, the German *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, the British *Weekly Illustrated* and *Picture Post*, and a host of American magazines including *National Geographic* and *Vanity Fair*, *Life* was hardly an anomalous publication. It was, however, helmed by an experienced publisher (Luce was also responsible for the weekly news magazine *Time* and the business monthly *Fortune*) and employed some of the most celebrated photojournalists in the history of the medium. During the conflict *Life*'s circulation skyrocketed, from 380,000 copies of the first issue to more than two million by the onset of World War II,<sup>33</sup> and the magazine consistently endeavoured to provide its substantial audience with as thorough a picture of the war as possible, given the U.S. War Department's ongoing policy of pictorial censorship. It was not until mid-1943, when Allied victory seemed imminent and when the formal suppression of contentious imagery was abandoned, that *Life* was at liberty to publish its first "real" photograph of war, George Strock's shocking "Three dead Americans on the beach at Buna", printed in the September 20 issue.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The First World War saw a strictly enforced ban on press photography; in particular the German and French high commands allowed only a select few military photographers at the front.

<sup>33</sup> Doss, *Looking at Life Magazine*, 2.

<sup>34</sup> While photographs of anonymous American casualties had appeared in earlier publications, their faces were always concealed for the sake of dignity. Strock's image depicted two soldiers lying face-down and a third lying face-up, making it the first image of dead American troops to appear in media during World War II without their bodies being enclosed in a coffin, draped, or otherwise covered.



Fig. 7. George Strock, "Three dead Americans on the beach at Buna," September 20, 1943. Courtesy of *Life* Magazine.

Over the remaining two years of the war, the now uninhibited *Life* dispatched twenty-one photographers to various combat zones. Through *Life* the prevalence and popularity of grittily "realistic" wartime photography grew. Even as the war came to a close, the magazine spared no expense in its reportage. A total of eight *Life* photographers were stationed along the Western front to cover the close of World War II, almost as many photojournalists as every other picture and news agency put together.<sup>35</sup> Inevitably, many of them photographed concentration camps in the first days following their liberation, and it was through these images that the ever-intensifying photojournalism of World War II unwittingly evolved into an entirely new genre of imagery.

Of those eight *Life* photographers, four would be featured in the magazine's infamous May 7, 1945 article, "The Week's Events: The German Atrocities." As the photographs' accompanying text would attest, "many people refused to put much faith in stories about the inhuman Nazi treatment of prisoners... For the first time

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<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Silverman, *For the World to See: The Life of Margaret Bourke-White* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), 151.

[this] was irrefutable evidence.”<sup>36</sup> That evidence came in the form of twelve photographs, of which William Vandivert, who would also be the first to photograph Hitler’s bunker, contributed five. George Rodger contributed four photographs, while Johnny Florea was credited with one. Only two of the twelve images were attributed to Margaret Bourke-White, images whose gruesomeness paled in comparison to the contributions of her colleagues.

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<sup>36</sup> “The Week’s Events: The German Atrocities,” *Life magazine*, May 7, 1945, 33.



(top) Fig. 8. "The Week's Events: The German Atrocities," (pg 32-33) May 7, 1945. Courtesy of *Life* Magazine.

(bottom left) Fig. 9. Margaret Bourke-White, "In the barracks at Buchenwald" from "The Week's Events: The German Atrocities," May 7, 1945. Courtesy of *Life* Magazine.

(bottom right) Fig. 10. Margaret Bourke-White, "Deformed by malnutrition" from "The Week's Events: The German Atrocities," May 7, 1945. Courtesy of *Life* Magazine.



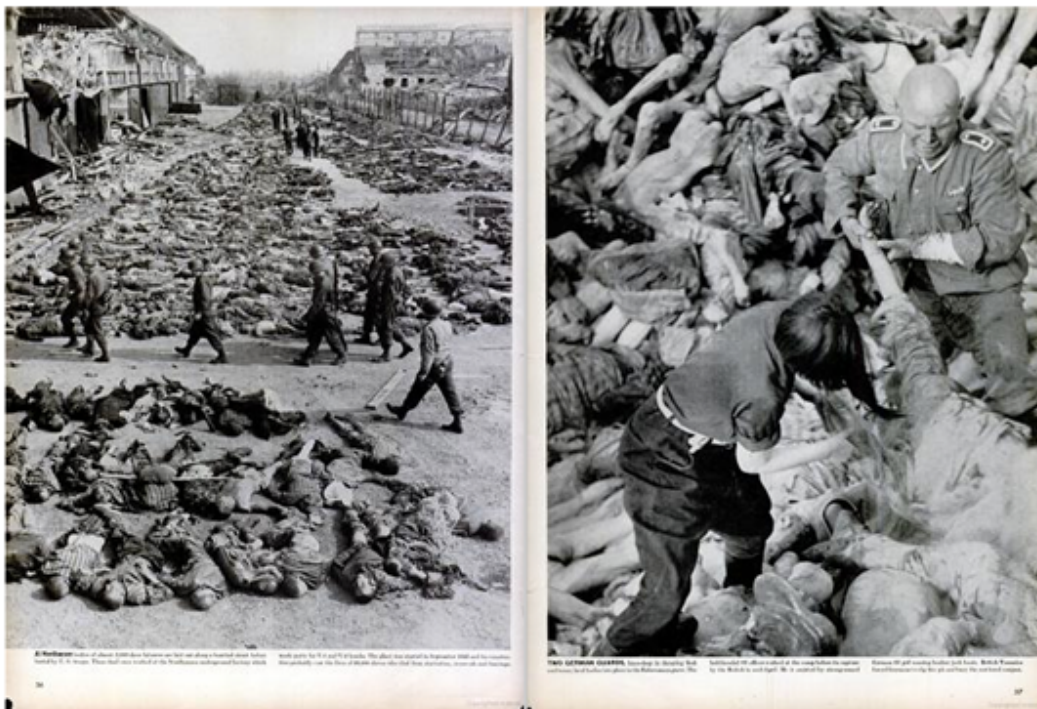


Fig. 11. "The Week's Events: The German Atrocities,"(pg 34-35 and pg 36-37) May 7, 1945. Courtesy of *Life Magazine*.

Of the twelve photographs, only Bourke-White's two would depict living prisoners. In one photograph the prisoners are even shown eating, waving and smiling. And yet it was these images, as part of Bourke-White's larger photographic series from Buchenwald, that would leave the most lasting impression. This larger collection of photographs pictured what Bourke-White would later recount as "the piles of naked, lifeless bodies, the human skeletons in furnaces, the living skeletons who would die the next day... the pieces of tattooed skin for lampshades."<sup>37</sup> Despite her grim description, however, it was never Bourke-White's intention to sensationalize the subjects of her photographs. In her autobiography, *Portrait of Myself*, Bourke-White would later reflect, "The war was racing toward its close in that crucial spring of 1945, and we correspondents were hard pressed to keep up with the march of events... No time to think about it or interpret it. Just rush to photograph it; write it; cable it. Record it now – think about it later. History will form the judgments."<sup>38</sup> As objective a record as they attempted to provide, photographers like Margaret Bourke-White were not without their biases or personal agendas. Bourke-White's priorities included self-preservation, as she has since famously stated, "Using the camera was almost a relief. It interposed a slight barrier between myself and the horror in front of me."<sup>39</sup> As the first female war correspondent as well as the first female photographer for *Life*, it is entirely possible that Bourke-White's implied sensitivity towards her subjects also contributed to the impact of her Buchenwald images. Undoubtedly, so did the editorial choices made by *Life* magazine, whose call to arms printed immediately above Bourke-White's images read, "Dead men will have indeed died in vain if live men refuse to look at them."<sup>40</sup> To accurately report an historical event, photographically or otherwise, requires a witness. Further, within a forum reliant upon the constant reproduction and dissemination of images to sell magazines, witnessing requires the creation of a

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<sup>37</sup> Margaret Bourke-White, *Portrait of Myself* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 258-259.

<sup>38</sup> Bourke-White, *Portrait of Myself*, 258-259.

<sup>39</sup> Bourke-White, *Portrait of Myself*, 258-259.

<sup>40</sup> "The Week's Events: The German Atrocities," 33.

so-called *star witness*, celebrated for their ability to capture particularly arresting photographs.<sup>41</sup> Through her photographs of Buchenwald, Margaret Bourke-White became *Life's* star witness to the Holocaust, and in doing so unwittingly set the precedent for all subsequent depictions of genocide.

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<sup>41</sup> Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 33.

## 7. Arguments For and Against the Use of Atrocity Photographs

If all photographs echo photographs,<sup>42</sup> as the continuous usage of certain photographic tropes can attest, then it is inevitable that the images of subsequent atrocities would reference the concentration camp photographs of 1945. Not guaranteed, however, was that all photojournalists would treat the subject matter with such sensitivity and (in hindsight) such artistry as Margaret Bourke-White. Thus, while relegated to the same purpose, not all photographs of genocide ultimately performed the same function for their viewers. With the advent and ensuing proliferation of memorial museums in the wake of World War II, photojournalistic images of genocide were nonetheless plucked from the pages of newspapers and magazines and placed on the museum wall. Their original function there was to corroborate text- or object-based exhibition narratives,<sup>43</sup> as with the revelation of an atrocity comes the expectation of photographic evidence thereof. This evidence typically took the form of casualties and other depictions of human suffering. Exhibited alongside explanatory text panels, maps, and artifacts both personal and militaristic, atrocity photographs functioned as but one piece of the puzzle. However, as the overarching institutional attitude towards photography evolved, the perceived legitimacy of the medium and thus its presence within museums –historical, cultural and artistic– became more pronounced. Over time, photographs became increasingly central to the memorial museum experience, and with this shift in the institutional visibility of photography came arguments against the use of explicit atrocity images in illustrating the alleged reality of conflict.

The first such argument suggests that atrocity images, regardless of where they are encountered, are inherently voyeuristic. In pursuit of realism, photojournalists are permitted –perhaps even required– to take shocking photographs. That there is often shame as well as shock in viewing atrocity images suggests that not everyone should be permitted or required to see them. The

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<sup>42</sup> Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 84.

<sup>43</sup> Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*, 51.

counter-argument to this is that atrocity images can function as a rallying cry, that they can impel average people to assist in ending the suffering of others. For photographs to incite public outrage, and thereby create change, they must shock. However, does this shock not expire? Another argument against the use of graphic atrocity photographs is that the proliferation thereof has desensitized the public to their impact. Civil War photographer Alexander Gardner once wrote of his images, "Here are the dreadful details! Let them aid in preventing such another calamity from falling upon the nation."<sup>44</sup> Almost one hundred and fifty years later, with two World Wars and countless other conflicts under America's belt, Gardner's hope for his photographs seems sadly naïve. More often than not, national cries of "Never again!" are being ignored, in part because of apathy. While constant exposure to violent imagery can indeed cause viewers to "turn off", they may also become unresponsive as a result of fear, which manifests as an unwillingness or inability to look closer. It used to be believed that showing shocking images of war was guaranteed to elicit an emotional response. Consequently, photographers became increasingly concerned about the moral implications of provoking and exploiting sentiment. But while a percentage of people will be made to feel sad or angry by depictions of extreme violence, many others will simply shut down. For some viewers, corpses will not necessarily register as real human beings, both because they cannot and will not regard them as such. Incapable of identifying with the photographs' subjects, nor of understanding the personal toll that war took on them, they can easily view victims of genocide with a sense of detachment. For these viewers, traditional atrocity images do not stand to teach anything about the conflict, and indeed this is a common complaint. If the goal of atrocity images is to appeal to human emotion by either evoking or suppressing it then perhaps such images have been successful, however they are of little help if the task is instead to understand. The problem is not that people remember through photographs, but

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<sup>44</sup> Alexander Gardner, *Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War* (New York: Dover Publications, 1959), 56.

that they remember only photographs,<sup>45</sup> in part because they have had little to no direct experience of the event itself. It is in this way that atrocity images over time may become empty symbols, visual sound bites to prompt the recollection of an event.

Thus far, the arguments against atrocity photographs could relate to their use in any forum: in newspapers and magazines, in books, on television or over the Internet. Bearing in mind the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre's impending inaugural show, the task now is to address the implications of utilizing atrocity images specifically in exhibition. As museum walls become metaphorically less concrete, and as atrocity images are disseminated through digital galleries or are otherwise exhibited beyond them, the list of problems associated with their usage grows. First, as long as atrocity photographs can be considered art –and arguably this is what they become when hung on certain institutional walls– they will inevitably be aestheticized.<sup>46</sup> That images of human suffering could be considered beautiful, even in the sublimely tragic sense of the word, is inherently unsettling. While photography has long since been acknowledged as a fine art, and practitioners like Robert Capa or Margaret Bourke-White exhibited in both photojournalistic and artistic contexts, museum goers and photographic theorists alike still struggle to reconcile the dual capability of photographs to document and to assign aesthetic value. Perhaps it is because the two functions have the capacity to cancel each other out. Indeed a beautiful photograph has the ability to turn attention away from its serious subject matter and onto the medium itself, thereby compromising the picture's status as documented proof. Likewise, a documentary photograph whose subject matter is particularly disturbing has the potential to detract from the fact that it is nonetheless a carefully composed aesthetic object. That Bourke-White was rebranded an artist only after her images of Buchenwald were made somehow saves them from this debate. Not so for photojournalists working in the wake of photography's acceptance as fine art, who must increasingly

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<sup>45</sup> Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 89.

<sup>46</sup> Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*, 56.

consider where their images might end up. The same photograph will read differently when experienced in any number of contexts; in a memorial museum, a photography museum, a contemporary art gallery, or an exhibition catalogue. A photograph deemed acceptable in one context may well offend in another, and this sentiment applies not only to the type of institution in which it is shown, but also to other factors such as the geographic region in which that institution is located.

Between victims of genocide and viewers of genocide-related imagery lies a vast difference in their physical, mental, and emotional proximity to war. Thus the types of conflict imagery exhibited must be considered in relation to the audience to whom they are being shown. Historically, the frankness of a conflict photograph has been directly proportionate to the distance of war; the more remote or exotic the locale, the more likely we are to see graphic depictions of the dead. When the conflict lies closer to home, however, the photographer is expected to show greater sensitivity, in part because the images' subjects are seen as more relatable. No family member, friend or spouse of a First World soldier wants to see the photographed remains of dead combatants, just as no family member, friend or spouse of an Third World genocide victim wants to see the photographed remains of other victims. And yet the exhibition of atrocity photographs from other countries continues, oblivious to the considerations that deter such displays of our own victims. What is worse, such exhibitions sometimes originate in the country in which the conflict occurred, having been facilitated by European or Western funding and/or curatorial input, as is the case with the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre. These exhibitions are seldom sufficiently tailored to the wants and needs of their traumatized audience because the Other, even when not considered an enemy, is regarded simply as someone to be seen, rather than someone who also sees.<sup>47</sup> This unintentional tendency to other, having also been alluded to in the discussion of Aegis UK's influence over the exhibitions and overall structure of the KGMC, has the potential to negatively impact the evolution of memorialization within developing

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<sup>47</sup> Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 72.

nations. However necessary the financial assistance and advice of European or Western memorial museums may be, it inevitably carries with it colonial implications. By aiding in the establishment of museums and archives within developing nations, First World institutions imply that their approach is the correct one, and that the native population's seemingly intuitive tendency to display human remains and personal effects, for example, is incorrect. Thus, as more memorials within the developing world establish or amend their exhibitions to adopt the "correct" approach, not only are culturally specific methods of mourning and memorialization being lost, but atrocity images –with all of their associated problems– are being interpreted as the best way to tell a people's tragic story. Rather than reclaiming their history through memorial museums, victims of genocide are, in essence, being re-victimized through the perpetuation of sensationalistic photographs.

With the complex problems associated with the dissemination and exhibition of atrocity photographs outlined, the next issue will be to analyze the various alternatives to the traditional memorial museum approach. Just as improvements in photographic technology catalyzed public interest in photojournalistic images of war in the 1920's and 30's, improvements in computer technology are generating interest in another area of photography today. The sudden accessibility of institutional archives afforded by the Internet, among other factors, has contributed to what French philosopher Jacques Derrida identified in 1996 as *archive fever*, "a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin."<sup>48</sup> Derrida's meditation on archives deconstructs what they mean, what they contain, and how they come to be constructed. It also provides the starting point for the discussion of alternatives to the traditional atrocity image exhibition model.

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<sup>48</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 90.



## 8. Archive Fever and Alternatives to the Exhibition of Explicit Atrocity Photographs

With all that has been said, the question remains: if the true reality of war cannot possibly be understood through atrocity images, then what inarguable purpose do they serve? And is it preferable, or even possible, to successfully substitute less graphic imagery for the kinds of photographs museum visitors have become so accustomed to viewing? An immediate concern with this approach is that non-violent images will not be sufficiently shocking, nor real enough to remain impactful. With so many modern distractions to divert attention away from the cause, how might museums approach the exhibition of genocide-related imagery without resorting to the depiction of violence? The institutional response to this query has been arrived at only recently, and through a certain degree of self-reflexivity.

It was Jacques Derrida who argued that the archive emerges at the disintegration point of the very memory it seeks to preserve.<sup>49</sup> This is true of the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre as well as Rwanda's remaining six national genocide memorials, all situated on sites where the most violent chapter of Rwandan history came to a close. According to Derrida, not only does the resultant archive assure the ongoing possibility of memorization, repetition, reproduction and re-impression, but inherent within it is a *repetition compulsion*<sup>50</sup>, which both creates the archive and is nurtured by it. To combine these two assertions is to surmise that the emergence and evolution of the archive is almost inevitable; that the dormant repetition compulsion, when catalyzed by the traumatic dissolution of a reality into a memory (as in the reduction of one million living Rwandans to mere photographs of one million dead Rwandans), yields an archive. That archive, in turn, is fed by the repetition compulsion to grow, and certainly this is what archives have done. For Derrida, however, the repetition compulsion is indivisible from the Freudian *death*

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<sup>49</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, 11.

<sup>50</sup> In Freudian terms, repetition compulsion is a psychological phenomenon in which a person repeats a traumatic event or its circumstances over and over again. Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* draws on this theory in its discussion of the archive.

*drive*, or the drive towards self-destruction, thus the archive necessarily harbours destructive, anti-archival intentions.<sup>51</sup> Although the alleged existence of a death drive within an institution intended to keep memories alive appears counter-productive and therefore false in theory, in practice it has proven itself to be true. While perhaps unintentional, the archivist's obsessive interest in preserving memories often renders those memories –or at least the tangible manifestations thereof– inaccessible to the general population and therefore destined for obsolescence. To preserve photographic memories is to put them where they cannot be damaged by heat, humidity or the human hand, but in endeavoring to preserve more and more memories, archivists may create more work than they can handle. While many photographs may enter into the archive, few will see the light of day in exhibition. But what is the purpose of a photograph, however precious, if not to be seen? Perhaps it is the archive's contradictory status as a bottomless well of untouchable information that has led to the overwhelming contemporary academic, artistic, and pop cultural compulsion to mine it; as to mine the archive is to make accessible the memories of people who can no longer voice them. One of the earliest instances of this can be witnessed in the aftermath of the Cambodian genocide, wherein meticulous record-keeping –in combination with their extraordinarily quick establishment of a memorial museum and archive, and the timely emergence of a widespread interest in the archival– resulted in the use of bureaucratic archival images of genocide rather than traditional atrocity photography in an especially significant local and international exhibition.

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<sup>51</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, 12.

## 9. The Archival Mode:

### ***Photographs from S-21 at The Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes***

The Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes is located in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh. As with the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre, the museum's location is itself historically significant. It occupies the former site of Security Prison 21 (S-21), the most notorious interrogation and detention centre in the former Democratic Kampuchea, which operated between 1975 and 1979. It was in January of 1979 that a cache of documentation was first discovered at the abandoned prison site by incoming Vietnamese forces during the fall of Democratic Kampuchea. The site was rapidly reconfigured into a genocide museum, and officially opened to the public in 1980. Incorporated into its permanent exhibition are thousands of photographic portraits of prisoners created by S-21's documentation sub-unit between 1975 and 1979. These portraits, used primarily for identification purposes within the camp, were taken of every incoming S-21 prisoner and attached to written copies of their forced confessions.<sup>52</sup> Like the Rwandan identification card portraits, these images would become emblematic of the deliberateness and organization with which the killings in Cambodia took place. Unlike the Rwandan ID portraits, however, which were taken by the government and only later employed by genocidaires, the S-21 prisoner portraits were themselves rendered by members of Pol Pot's murderous regime. In addition to these portraits, the regime created thousands of documents, including confessions, internal memos, other photographic prints and negatives of the prisoner portraits, all of which were relegated to the museum's archives.

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<sup>52</sup> Confessions were sought in the pursuit of traitors, which the leadership believed threatened the entire revolutionary state. However, many Cambodians had committed no real offenses to which they could confess.



Fig. 12. Unknown photographer, "Identification photographs at the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes," 2001. Courtesy of the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes.

In 1993, two North American photojournalists, Douglas Niven and Christopher Riley of the Photo Archive Group, visited the Tuol Sleng Museum, and on viewing its archive conceived of an initiative to clean, catalogue and print the archived S-21 photographs. In their project proposal, the Photo Archive Group argued that Tuol Sleng's collection was, "threatened by a volatile political situation, years of neglect, a lack of resources and the absence of trained staff,"<sup>53</sup> thus the goal was both to "rescue" the archive and to train local Cambodians in photographic preservation so as to sustain its operation long term. Permission for the project was granted by the Cambodian government, and financial support was secured from various American donors. The project encompassed approximately 6,000 photographic negatives, one hundred of which were eventually selected for reproduction in six editions. Those specific negatives were chosen for their "photographic quality, historical value and to present an accurate cross-section of Tuol Sleng's victims."<sup>54</sup> It is important to note, however, that only two of the six one hundred-print editions remained in

<sup>53</sup> Photo Archive Group, "Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Photo Archive Project Proposal," (Boston: unpublished, 1993), 2.

<sup>54</sup> Photo Archive Group, "Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Project Summary," (Boston: unpublished, 1993), 4.

Cambodia, the remaining four having been brought out of the country for safekeeping.<sup>55</sup> Not only were those sets of one hundred images made the physical property of the Photo Archive Group, but their intellectual property as well. Niven and Riley were granted copyright over the images, which enabled them to later sell fine art prints to buyers including New York's Museum of Modern Art. Curiously, the granting of image rights was neither noted in the Photo Archive Group's Project Proposal or Project Summary, nor reported in local press.<sup>56</sup> What the Project Proposal did state, however, was that "[i]t is in humanity's interest that [the portraits] be preserved and seen by as wide an audience as possible."<sup>57</sup>

To that end, twenty-two of the S-21 prisoner portraits went on public display at the Museum of Modern Art from May 15 to September 30, 1997. The exhibition, entitled *Photographs from S-21: 1975–1979*, was curated by the Department of Photography and installed in Gallery Three. The accompanying wall text briefly chronicled the history of Cambodia from 1975–1979 and introduced Niven and Riley as the “discover[ers]” of the photographs, who “recognized that these powerful images warranted viewing by a larger audience.”<sup>58</sup> The Museum of Modern Art was not the only institution to foreground Niven and Riley's role in bringing the S-21 photographs to light. The group's work was featured in numerous publications including *Time Magazine*, *The New York Times*, and *American Photo*, while the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) televised a documentary on the project in May of 1996. In the same year, art book publishers Twin Palms released *The Killing Fields*, a pricey 124-page text that reproduced seventy-eight individual portraits as photogravures. *The Killing Fields*, like most of these publications and programs, reinforced the notion that Niven and Riley discovered the negatives, thereby dismissing their actual discovery by Vietnamese forces and positioning the Photo

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<sup>55</sup> Photo Archive Group, “Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Project Summary,” 9.

<sup>56</sup> Gretchen Peters, “Restoration Project Immortalises Haunting Images of S-21,” *The Cambodia Daily*, October 12, 1994, 16.

<sup>57</sup> Photo Archive Group, “Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Photo Archive Project Proposal,” 7.

<sup>58</sup> The Museum of Modern Art. “An Exhibition of Photographs of Khmer Rouge Prisoners Opens This Month at the Museum of Modern Art.” Last modified February 25, 2009, [http://press.moma.org/images/press/PRESS\\_RELEASE\\_ARCHIVE/khmer\\_rouge.pdf](http://press.moma.org/images/press/PRESS_RELEASE_ARCHIVE/khmer_rouge.pdf)

Archive Group as American heroes to the Cambodian victims.<sup>59</sup> This outcome was perhaps most alarming to Cambodians themselves; local scholars considered the Photo Archive Group to have taken control of the archive away from the community, thereby shifting the focus away from Cambodia and on to themselves.<sup>60</sup>

Interest surrounding the MoMA show came as much from the celebrity of Niven and Riley as it did from current events. In light of renewed speculation during the summer of 1997 that Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot could be tried for his crimes under international law, MoMA's exhibition was regarded as timely and relevant. Thus, many museum-goers and professional reviewers felt compelled to see and respond to the show. The exhibition's set-up encouraged this dialogue; two benches and a table in the middle of the gallery invited visitors to rest, write comments and peruse a number of publications including *The Killing Fields*. Written visitor comments were largely directed at other museum patrons, the exhibition's curators, or themselves, and dealt with such themes as the sacred nature of the images, their status as art versus document, the context in which they were created and shown, and both the political and personal ramifications of their exhibition. From those comments, it would appear that public reaction to the exhibition was mixed. Of the visitors who specifically found fault with the show, however, feedback was often emotionally charged. Wrote one patron, "I don't believe MoMA had the intention to completely objectify these terrible images, but this mute and 'neutral' exhibition does that in the coldest possible way... As a child of Holocaust survivors, I feel that this kind of behavior is at best indicative of a smugness and an intellectual laziness – AT WORST IT IS INHUMANE."<sup>61</sup> That the word *mute* also appeared repeatedly in formal reviews, both positive and negative, (*New York Times* critic Michael Kimmelman deemed the images "mute" and "tricky to judge,"<sup>62</sup> while Dominique

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<sup>59</sup> Rachel Hughes, "The Abject Artefacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia's Genocide," *Media, Culture & Society* Vol. 25 (2003): 33.

<sup>60</sup> Youk Chhang, the prominent Cambodian researcher and Executive Director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia, has stated in interview that the unprecedented access awarded to North Americans Niven and Riley was unjust: "it is the history of Cambodia, and everyone should have access equally" (Hughes, 33).

<sup>61</sup> The Museum of Modern Art, "Gallery Three" (internal document), April 1997.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Kimmelman, "Hypnotized by Mug Shots That Stare Back: Are They Windows or

Nahas of *The Critical State of Visual Art in New York Review* identified a “mute dignity”<sup>63</sup> to the photographs) is telling. The primary definition of the word mute infers that the images are incapable of communicating, and thus cannot be easily understood by their viewers. That viewers did appear to understand the images, though, suggests a sort of surrogate voice was lent to them, likely by MoMA’s curatorial team. And while giving voice to the voiceless seems an admirable accomplishment, it simultaneously opens *Photographs of S-21* up to the kinds of criticism hitherto reserved for graphic atrocity images.

First, of the charge of voyeurism, *Photographs from S-21* is only slightly less guilty than exhibitions of explicitly violent photojournalism. If voyeurism is understood as the practice of seeking stimulation, sexual or otherwise, by visual means, then the viewing of these formulaic, repetitive, and non-violent portraits does not immediately register as voyeuristic. It is the implication of violence, though, and not its outright depiction, that makes the S-21 photographs enticing. It is the power of seeing others who are simultaneously about to die and already dead. Of the estimated 17,000 prisoners detained at S-21, only seven are known to have escaped death, meaning that virtually every portrait in Tuol Sleng’s archive depicts the victim of a torturous end. Of the small percentage of those portraits exhibited at MoMA, all pictured the deceased. It was Roland Barthes who stated that viewing images of those known to have died inevitably alludes to the anterior future, wherein it is understood “both that this person is going to die, and that [s]he is already dead.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, it is being privy to the final photograph of a murder victim – and technically before that murder victim is necessarily aware of his or her fate – that makes the S-21 images titillating and therefore voyeuristic to behold. Second, albeit in a different manner than explicit atrocity images, archival photographs of genocide also have the potential to desensitize their viewers. In situ at Tuol Sleng,

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Mirrors?” *The New York Times*, August 27, 1997, C12.

<sup>63</sup> Dominique Nahas, “Haunting Images of Impending Death,” *The Critical State of Visual Art in New York Review*, June 15, 1997, 2.

<sup>64</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 96.

as well as in *The Killing Fields* publication featured at the MoMA exhibition, the S-21 prisoner photographs were presented in a grid format, simultaneously referencing the Pol Pot regime's indiscriminate violence and the institution's egalitarian treatment of the victims thereof. The grid format's refusal to foreground any one victim can indeed be interpreted as both negative and positive. In particular, the negative being that the grid format is intrinsically repetitive and apt to create feelings of fatigue or numbness in the viewer. It is also likely to reduce the viewer's ability to differentiate one victim from another, effectively creating a composite or "massified" victim to whom the viewer cannot individually relate. In fact, critics of MoMA's S-21 exhibition charged that it only reinforced that depersonalized victim label, specifically through its omission of the sitters' names. While five of the portraits included in the exhibition arrived at MoMA accompanied by what Riley and Niven listed as the "the names we have,"<sup>65</sup> these names were never included in the exhibition labels. Instead, the labels read:

Photographer unknown. Untitled. 1975-79.

Gelatin-silver print. 14 x 11"

Many basic contextualizing elements were noticeably absent from the MoMA exhibition, including the photographer's name. That MoMA's senior and assistant curators of photography, Susan Kismaric and Adrienne Williams, failed to communicate with Nhem Ein, the Khmer Rouge photographer who originally took many of the pictures, inevitably raised questions about the images' authorship and therefore their ownership. This, of course, being a tricky subject, as Niven and Riley instead owned their copyright. Many visitors also lamented the absence of hard facts such as statistics, maps or official statements that would assist in situating the images within the overarching social and political history of Southeast Asia. Indeed, the exhibition appeared to be mediated neither by fact nor opinion. In response, critics argued that by taking an apolitical stance, the exhibition did not actively

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<sup>65</sup> Christopher Riley, "Facsimile Communication to Adrienne Williams," MoMA Department of Photography Files, April 21, 1997.



facilitate the refusal of victimhood nor the questioning of truth.<sup>66</sup> They further implied that if the forum in which the work was shown was not prepared to add anything to the discussion, perhaps the work ought not to be exhibited there. Indeed, many who viewed the show felt that MoMA was an inappropriate venue. One visitor suggested that the exhibit would be better shown “at the site where these atrocities took place,”<sup>67</sup> the irony being that the images were already on exhibition at Tuol Sleng and had been for years. The alleged inappropriateness of MoMA as a venue and the general ignorance of the images’ use outside of America alludes to two additional charges against traditional atrocity images, namely their aestheticization of human suffering and their colonial implications. It would appear these are charges to which the S-21 exhibition, despite its use of implicit archival images, is guilty.

That many visitor comments referred to the Tuol Sleng photographs specifically as art has as much to do with their curation as with the Museum of Modern Art’s moniker. Although Niven and Riley did not expressly state that their selection of the one hundred-print edition images (from which MoMA’s twenty-two portraits were taken) was based on aesthetics, at least one image adheres questionably close to art historical standards. The depiction of an imprisoned mother holding her infant child is exhibition-worthy for a number of reasons. While Niven and Riley were perhaps right to include this image in “present[ing] an accurate cross-section” of victims, it was likely chosen more for its iconicity than its variety. That it indirectly references the stoic maternity of the Madonna and child, an artistic subject familiar to the Western world, creates a necessary link between the documentary image and its artistic surroundings. It is an image not unlike Dorothea Lange’s “Migrant Mother”, the photograph of a Depression era pea picker taken for the Farm Security Administration that transcended its documentary beginnings to become an iconic work of art. Of all the prisoner portraits, the mother and child is perhaps the most likely to be considered beautiful, if only for the fact

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<sup>66</sup> Hughes, “The Abject Artefacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia’s Genocide,” 36.

<sup>67</sup> The Museum of Modern Art, “Gallery Three” (internal document), April 1997.

that so many images like it have already been deemed beautiful by art historians. In other words, it is the image's comparability to iconic artworks that gives us permission to find it attractive. Finally, contrasting this notion of the familiar is the inherent exoticism of the S-21 photographs. Like colonial spoils, these images are of exotic geographical and cultural origin. Their removal from Cambodia and appearance at MoMA was primarily due to the actions of two expert collectors, neither of whom are of the same nationality as the peoples portrayed.<sup>68</sup> It is in this way that they can be similarly interpreted as exploitative.



Fig. 13. Nhem Ein, Untitled (14-5-7-8), c. 1975. Courtesy of The Photo Archive Group.

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<sup>68</sup> Hughes, "The Abject Artefacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia's Genocide," 36.

In comparing the arguments against explicit atrocity photographs with those against the implicit archival image, it seems little is gained by the memorial museum's substitution of one for another in exhibition. Issues of voyeurism and desensitization, context and aestheticization, colonialism, re-victimization and othering all apply to the exhibition of comparatively benign archival photographs just as much as sensationalistic atrocity pictures. Supposing all third-party depictions of human suffering are inherently plagued by these representational problems, the search for a conflict photograph that somehow fails to offend is a fool's errand. Thus, instead of abandoning the archival image in pursuit of an even more suitable sub-genre of photograph with which to illustrate genocide, perhaps a more productive strategy would be to abandon the approach by which those images are shown. If the intent of memorial museums is to exhibit conflict photographs as evidence, and if evidence must be seen to be believed, then it behooves them to exhibit those photographs to as wide an audience as possible. Given the remoteness of Third World memorials, this often necessitates exhibiting them outside of the memorial museum's walls. Of course, one of the primary complaints with the *Photographs from S-21* exhibition was the alleged inappropriateness of MoMA as a venue for non-artistic images. This is not to say that the exhibition of such images cannot be tailored to other types of institutions, merely that they weren't sufficiently tailored in that instance. Indeed, it is possible for both violent and nonviolent photographs of conflict to be appropriately shown outside of the memorial museum context, and even to great acclaim. In using fragments of Alfredo Jaar's *Rwanda Project: 1994-2000* as a second case study, it is possible to deconstruct the unconventional exhibition strategies by which war and genocide images have been successfully shown in a more conceptual context. Further, it is possible to use these successes as an inspirational point of departure for the discussion of the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre's impending inaugural exhibition.

## 10. The Conceptual Mode:

### **Alfredo Jaar's *Rwanda Project: 1994-2000***

Despite the numerous criticisms of *Photographs from S-21*, the fundamental suitability of archival identity photographs within an exhibition was never specifically called into question. Perhaps this is because the identity photograph's intrinsic relationship to personhood makes it a logical fit for memorial museum exhibitions, specifically as their emphasis on personal stories grows.<sup>69</sup> Certainly, in contrast to the aforementioned massifying effect that archival images such as the S-21 identity photographs can have when exhibited as grids, when presented as unique objects they can also serve to make the relationship of viewer to victim a more personal one by symbolically reducing the scale of a tragedy. This is a strategy often employed by Chilean-born artist, architect and filmmaker Alfredo Jaar, specifically in his widely exhibited body of work, the *Rwanda Project: 1994-2000*. Jaar's intent with the project was to "reduce the scale to a single human being with a name, a story. That helps the audience to identify with that person. And this process of identification is fundamental to create empathy, solidarity, and intellectual involvement."<sup>70</sup> However, instead of utilizing an archival identification portrait for this purpose, Jaar selected as source material his own documentary photographs of the genocide's immediate aftermath; images that inevitably referenced the sensationalistic photojournalism he found issue with.

In August of 1994, immediately following the end of the genocide, Alfredo Jaar traveled to Rwanda where he and an assistant interviewed survivors and captured close to 3,500 images of the conflict's aftermath. Upon returning to New York, Jaar took the next six years to process the photographs, both physically and emotionally, and it was during this time that he conceived of twenty-one projects through which to reconcile his attempted representation of the unrepresentable. Said Jaar, "If I spent six years working on this project, it was trying different

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<sup>69</sup> Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*, 52.

<sup>70</sup> PBS. "Art21, Alfredo Jaar 'The Rwanda Project'." Accessed March 12, 2010. <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/jaar/clip1.html>

strategies of representation. Each project was a new exercise, a new strategy, and a new failure... Basically, this serial structure of exercises was forced by the Rwandan tragedy and my incapacity to represent it in a way that made sense.”<sup>71</sup> While to analyze all of Jaar’s Rwanda projects and their different representational strategies would indeed be illuminating, it is beyond the purpose and scope of this paper. Instead, the focus will be on three of the better-known projects, “Real Pictures” (1995), “The Eyes of Gutete Emerita” (1996) and a second version of “The Eyes of Gutete Emerita”, referred to in this paper as “The Silence of Nduwayezu”<sup>72</sup> (1996), that apply the same source material to three different exhibition strategies.

Commissioned by Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Photography and exhibited there first in January of 1995, “Real Pictures” is comprised of 550 photographic storage boxes, arranged into stacked “monuments” of varying dimensions and spot lit on the gallery floor. The top of each black linen box is silkscreened with white text, which allegedly describes the image (one of 550 direct positive color photographs) housed within it. Although the boxes are not sealed, viewers are not intended to open them and thus it is impossible to know whether the image described at all resembles the image contained. In some instances, the audience is also denied the mere description of the photograph, as each stacked box covers up the presumed inscription of the box below. The inscriptions provide not only a physical description of the photograph, but a narrative as well, which seeks to situate the unseen image within the events of the Rwandan genocide, namely the massacre at Ntarama Church and the establishment of refugee camps along the Zaire border. One of the narratives included in “Real Pictures” reads as follows:

Gutete Emerita, 30 years old, is standing in front of the church.

Dressed in modest, worn clothing, her hair is hidden in faded pink cotton kerchief. She was attending mass in the church when the

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<sup>71</sup> Nicole Schweizer, “The Politics of the Image,” in *Alfredo Jaar: La Politique des Images*, ed. Jacques Rancière, (Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2008), 13.

<sup>72</sup> The reinstallation of “The Eyes of Gutete Emerita” in Berlin and Madrid in 1997 substituted the eyes of Gutete Emerita for those of Nduwayezu, a Rwandan orphan who had witnessed the killing of his mother and father and remained mute for one month as a result. For the sake of differentiating the two iterations of “Eyes”, this paper refers to the latter as “The Silence of Nduwayezu.”

massacre began. Killed with machetes, in front of her eyes, were her husband Tito Kahinamura (40) and her two sons Muhoza (10) and Matirigari (7). Somehow, she managed to escape with her daughter Marie-Louise Unamararunga (12), and hid in a swamp for three weeks, only coming out at night for food. When she speaks about her lost family, she gestures to corpses on the ground, rotting in the African sun.

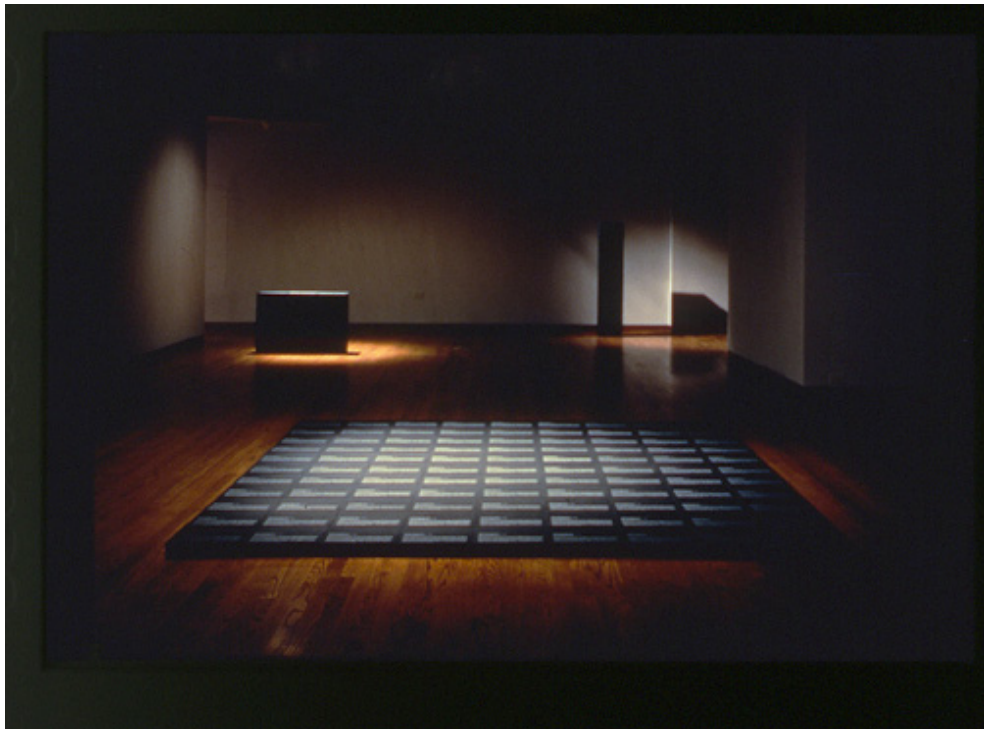


Fig. 14. Alfredo Jaar, "Real Pictures," (installation shot), 1995. Courtesy of Galerie Lelong.

Jaar would revisit Gutete Emerita's story twice more in the installations, "The Eyes of Gutete Emerita" and in a different iteration of "Eyes", later re-titled "The Silence of Nduwayezu." First exhibited at the City Gallery of Contemporary Art in Raleigh, North Carolina in June of 1996, the original version of "The Eyes of Gutete Emerita" employs two wall-mounted light boxes with six black-and-white text transparencies and two color photographic transparencies. The two light boxes, placed side by side, illuminate the text and images at timed intervals, creating an

almost cinematic experience. The narrative begins with a block of white text on a black background, one in each of the two light boxes. There are ten lines of text in each box, and they remain illuminated for forty-five seconds. They read, "Gutete Emerita, 30 years old, is standing in front of a church where 400 Tutsi men, women and children were systematically slaughtered by a Hutu death squad during Sunday mass. She was attending mass with her family when the massacre began. Killed with machetes / in front of her eyes were her husband Tito Kahinamura, 40, and her two sons, Muhoza, 10, and Matirigari, 7. Somehow, Gutete managed to escape with her daughter Marie Louise Unumararunga, 12. They hid in a swamp for three weeks, coming out only at night for food." This text dissolves and more text appears, five lines in each box, for the duration of thirty seconds: "Her eyes look lost and incredulous. Her face is the face of someone who has witnessed an unbelievable tragedy and now wears it. She has returned to this / place in the woods because she has nowhere else to go. When she speaks about her lost family, she gestures to corpses on the ground, rotting in the African sun." This text also disappears, and is replaced by two more lines: "I remember her eyes. / The eyes of Gutete Emerita". These last two lines appear for only fifteen seconds and are suddenly replaced with an image of Gutete's eyes. As an extreme close-up, the eyes fill the two frames entirely, one eye in each. Then as quickly as they appear, Gutete Emerita's eyes are gone.



Fig. 15. Alfredo Jaar, "The Eyes of Gutete Emerita," 1996. Courtesy of Galerie Lelong.

Four months earlier, Jaar's "The Eyes of Gutete Emerita" (later reworked as "The Silence of Nduwayezu") utilized a different representational strategy, this one more architectural than cinematic. "The Silence of Nduwayezu" was first presented at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra in February of 1996. This installation consists of the exact same narrative employed by "The Eyes of Gutete Emerita": "Gutete Emerita, 30 years old, is standing in front of a church. . .", this time as a single line of white lettering on a black wall. At the end of the wall and around a dark corner lies a sixteen by sixteen foot light table, on which is piled a mountainous arrangement of one million 35mm colour slides: one million slides representing the estimated one million victims of the Rwandan genocide. Magnifying loupes arranged around the table invite the viewer to inspect the individual slides, all of which reveal themselves to be exactly the same. They are one million images of Gutete Emerita's eyes.



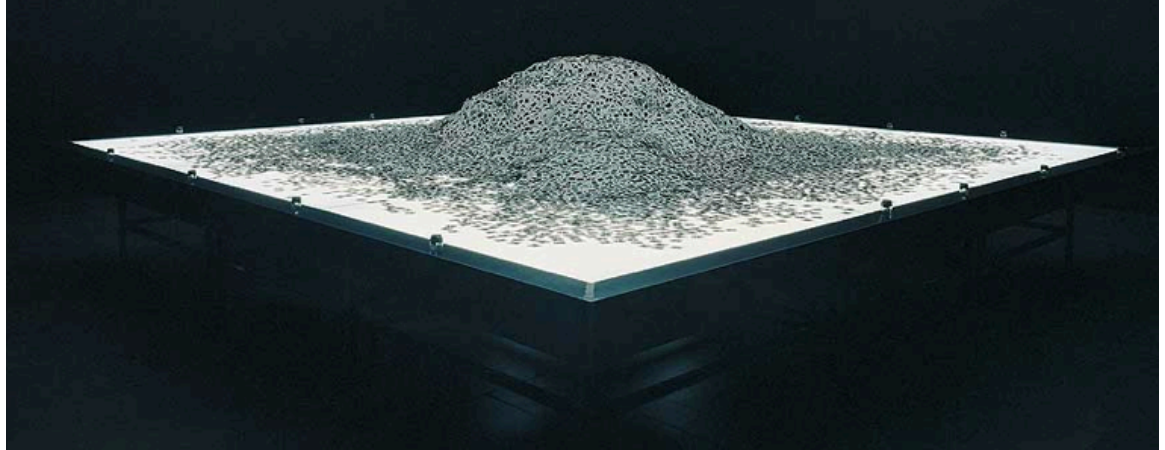


Fig. 16. Alfredo Jaar, "The Silence of Nduwayezu," (installation shot), 1996. Courtesy of Galerie Lelong.

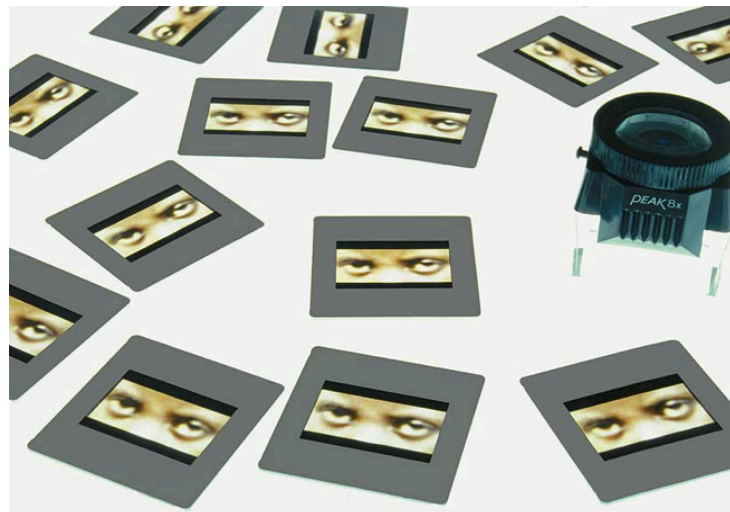


Fig. 17. Alfredo Jaar, "The Silence of Nduwayezu," (detail), 1996. Courtesy of Galerie Lelong.

Jaar's status as an artist (and not a photojournalist-cum-artist as so many before him) does not automatically exclude his photographs from being interpreted as atrocity images. While the source photograph for all three projects is never shown in its entirety, it is known from Jaar's own description to depict dead bodies. Thus it could easily be subject to the same scrutiny as graphic photojournalistic

images of genocide. However, it is Jaar's refusal to adhere to the expected mode of display (and to thereby perpetuate the stereotypes of atrocity) that ultimately reduces the potential charges against him. While referencing and even incorporating graphic images of atrocity, Jaar's works cannot be read in the same way as other exhibitions of atrocity photography. Through their presentation, they address the criticisms of atrocity photography without succumbing to them.

For example, if voyeurism can indeed be defined as the search for stimulation or gratification by visual means, then none of the projects can be correctly interpreted as voyeuristic. "Real Pictures" in particular provokes and then disables voyeuristic intent by denying the viewer the image itself. The feeling of fulfillment that would surely accompany the opening of the boxes and viewing of the images is forever out of reach. Thus the viewer must find another reason, beyond self-satisfaction, to engage with the subject matter. For Jaar that reason is genuine understanding and empathy, which he believes can be achieved without re-victimizing the victim. Says Jaar, "There must be a way to talk about suffering without making the victim suffer again. How do you represent this, respecting the dignity of the people you are focusing on?"<sup>73</sup> Within these three projects, Jaar answers his own question by supplanting the viewer's desire to see the horrifying event with the survivor's need to live beyond it.<sup>74</sup> While one could argue that the use of evocative language atop "Real Pictures" boxes ("she gestures to corpses on the ground, rotting in the African sun") is an equally exploitative surrogate for the shocking photograph within, the purpose served by words and photographs is intrinsically different, specifically within these circumstances. If the testimony of Gutete Emerita comes closest to the event itself, then the photograph of her testimony represents one degree of removal. The written description of the photograph in turn represents a second degree of separation, or an interpretation of an interpretation. By withholding the photograph, Jaar therefore raises questions

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<sup>73</sup> PBS. "Art21, Alfredo Jaar 'The Rwanda Project'." Accessed March 12, 2010. <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/jaar/clip1.html>

<sup>74</sup> Olivier Chow, "Alfredo Jaar and the Post-Traumatic Gaze," *Tate Papers: Tate's Online Research Journal* (2008), accessed on March 25, 2011, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/08spring/chow.shtm>.

regarding the veracity of both his words and his images and, inevitably, their combined use within print media as a whole. Jaar is not opposed to photojournalism per se, in fact he has described himself in interview as a “frustrated journalist”, however he states, “The problem is not in the photojournalists, but in the distribution of their images [...] They...take their pictures and immediately have to send them to the central agencies, which in turn distribute them to the media [...] There are several editing processes that take place, beginning when the scene was photographed to the moment it is published... This is where the problem lies.”<sup>75</sup> Within “The Silence of Nduwayezu”, it is the moment when the viewer first looks through the magnifying loupe, when the eye of that viewer directly meets the eye of the victim, that the distance imposed by the media’s various degrees of separation is both literally and metaphorically collapsed.<sup>76</sup> What is truly significant within this work is that it is the hand of the viewer that willingly draws Emerita closer. Comparatively, within “The Eyes of Gutete Emerita”, the proximity of Emerita’s eyes to her audience comes as an unexpected shock. For a split second, the roles of the watcher and the watched are reversed, as Emerita symbolically bears witness to the surprise, fear, and confusion of the viewer just as they bore witness to hers. It is in this way that both bodies of work resist othering, by acknowledging that Emerita is someone who also sees. Further, it is this element of surprise that also derails the numbing effect created by the exhibition of both repetitive archival images and desensitizing atrocity photos.

That all three works either invite or demand a certain amount of interactivity (touching, reading, reacting) not only keeps them engaging, but suggests that at the very least Jaar is conscious of this obligation to educate: “I’m trying always to create a balance between information and spectacle, between the content and the visuals.”<sup>77</sup> That these visuals take the form of filmic, architectural, or literary

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<sup>75</sup> Guy Lane, “Alfredo Jaar: Picturing Silence,” *8 Magazine*, August 19, 2008, accessed February 12, 2011, <http://www.foto8.com/new/online/blog/609-alfredo-jaar-picturing-silence->.

<sup>76</sup> Olivier Chow, “Alfredo Jaar and the Post-Traumatic Gaze,” *Tate Papers: Tate’s Online Research Journal* (2008), accessed on March 25, 2011, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/08spring/chow.shtm>.

<sup>77</sup> PBS. “Art21, Alfredo Jaar ‘The Rwanda Project.’” Accessed March 12, 2010. <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/jaar/clip1.html>

interpretations rather than irrefutable facts such as statistics or maps theoretically makes Jaar guilty of aestheticizing human suffering. However, that Jaar simultaneously adheres to and undermines the expectation of aestheticization within a gallery context enables him to create an important dialogue. That dialogue includes the notion of artistic intention. Certainly, in openly referring to himself as an artist and in creating works specifically for exhibition in arts institutions, Jaar's work appears to fare better against accusations of aestheticization than *Photographs from S-21*, wherein works created for documentary purposes were later exhibited as art.

Given Alfredo Jaar's ability to avoid criticism through forthright statements about his motivations and artistic intent, it appears crucial that curators of violent or otherwise difficult images of war justify why it is that they approach their exhibitions in the way that they do. While it is unreasonable to expect that a curator could resolve the many concerns associated with the exhibition of genocide photography, it is reasonable to expect that he or she address them. By acknowledging that they have given thought to the long list of problems plaguing such imagery –either explicitly in a curatorial statement, or implicitly through the selection of an atypical mode of display– curators exercise due diligence. Indeed, the knowledge that an artist or curator has approached controversial photographs responsibly does much to mitigate the faults that audiences and critics will inevitably find within exhibitions. It is therefore the purpose of the paper's final section to exercise the same due diligence by summarizing the successes and failures of *Photographs from S-21* and of Alfredo Jaar's "Real Pictures", "The Eyes of Gutete Emerita" and "The Silence of Nduwayezu" and by finally applying what has been learned thus far to the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre's inaugural exhibition of state identity card photographs.

## 11. The Anatomy of An Exhibition

Given the arguments that surround the types of genocide photography that should or should not be exhibited, as well as the potential ways in which they could be shown, it is difficult to conceive of a concrete plan for the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre's identification card photographs. However, to echo the sentiment expressed by Niven and Riley upon their rediscovery of the S-21 photographs, it is certainly in the interest of humanity that they be seen.

Of the two modes of display cited as case studies, the approach employed by MoMA and the Photo Archive Group's *Photographs from S-21* exhibition initially seems more applicable to the KGMC's inaugural show. First of all, the similarities between the headshots at the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes and those at the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre are striking. Both are vast collections of small-scale black and white photographic portraits of genocide victims (or presumed genocide victims, in the case of the KGMC). Both were originally created as a means of identification, of exerting control, and of ultimately inflicting harm on their subjects. Both were absorbed into the archives of their respective memorial museums only to be reinvestigated by Westerners on the grounds that the images deserve to be seen by a wider audience, and that they stand to promote the preservation initiatives of those museums. Both would become the focus of exhibitions. Beyond that, through their status as implicit images of genocide, both deviate from the traditional tendency to exhibit problematic atrocity photographs in explaining the events and implications of war. In theory, then, the identity card photographs at the KGMC could be exhibited in exactly the same way as *Photographs from S-21*. They could be enlarged, reprinted, edited, and exhibited in frames and/or as a grid. They could be shown in a variety of institutions with minimal mediation or contextualizing information. They could begin as little known documents and end up as much publicized (and thereby much criticized) artworks. Or rather they could be, had this paper's analysis of the S-21 exhibition not revealed its mode of display to be an issue; had it not revealed the show to be just as problematic as exhibitions of explicit atrocity photography. To compare the complaints against atrocity photographs with those against *Photographs from S-21*

is to determine what has been stated time and again: that what matters is not necessarily the kind of genocide photography that is exhibited, but the way in which it is shown. Approaching the KGMC's inaugural exhibition in the same way as *Photographs from S-21* would therefore subject it to the exact same charges of voyeurism, of densensitization, of aestheticization, of re-victimization and othering. And it is in acknowledging this fact that Alfredo Jaar's treatment of his *Rwanda Project* seems to represent the more suitable mode of display.

Supposing it is indeed the presentation and not the image itself that matters most, if Alfredo Jaar is capable of exhibiting what qualifies as an explicit atrocity photograph in such a way as to mitigate the criticisms thereof, then surely it is possible to do the same with a less graphic archival image. It is a matter of talking through the problems common to the exhibition of all conflict photographs and determining how they can similarly be avoided by the KGMC's exhibition. For example, by virtue of the fact that they are inexplicit images and that their subjects are not definitively known to be dead or alive, the KGMC identity card photographs arguably resist charges of voyeurism. However, as previously suggested, voyeurism is a hard concept to define; it can apply both to the outright depiction and to the mere implication of violence. As with Jaar's *Real Pictures*, the only way the identity card photos can avoid accusations of voyeurism entirely is by being withheld from the viewer. But how does one exhibit the identity card photographs without actually showing them? Using the KGMC's identity card photographs as source material for an interpretive project, in the way that Jaar used Gutete Emerita's photograph as source material for his three projects, would effectively withhold them from a voyeuristic viewer and similarly free them from the insurmountable task of representing the unrepresentable. Of course, to use Rwandan identity photographs as the source material for an art project initiated by a Westerner is equally troubling, as it inevitably carries colonial implications. That Alfredo Jaar is able to speak on behalf of Rwandan victims to little criticism is due primarily to his unique artistic approach, but secondarily to his status as a Chilean, since Chile has also experienced its fair share of political violence. Somehow, the resident of one troubled nation speaking to the experiences of residents from another troubled

nation is less offensive than a privileged Westerner doing the same. Regardless, what would be most logical is to have Rwandans speak for themselves. And this is where plans for the KGMC's exhibition finally take root.

The preliminary suggestion for the KGMC's inaugural exhibition is to solicit the involvement of Rwandan survivors in creating their own artistic interpretations of the state identification card photos. As the Centre already operates a number of social outreach programs for survivors, their participation could be requested through these existing community contacts. The creation of both the individual artworks and the exhibition as a whole could be workshopped at the Documentation Centre over a period of weeks. During the workshop, survivors would be invited to tour the National Documentation Centre and its archives. This would provide the exhibition's participants with an understanding of the kinds of objects housed there, and would reinforce the significance of the identification card photos within that overall collection. Following workshops would do well to encompass a discussion of why photographs such as those housed by the centre are made in the first place, and how they come to be seen by both Rwandans and the rest of the world. This could include a brainstorming session on the venues where images of war and genocide are shown (newspapers and magazines, electronic media, museums, art galleries, etcetera) and the positive and negative consequences of showing them there. It could also include an exercise wherein participants are given a selection of photographic objects from the archive and asked what venue they would ideally show them in and why. This would help to gauge the survivors' impression of the appropriateness or inappropriateness of both violent and nonviolent imagery to certain applications. A subsequent workshop could expose the participants to sample photographic exhibitions such as those discussed in this paper. A slideshow of individual images and installation shots there from would facilitate the discussion of where and how the photos were shown, as well as what the workshop participants think of the exhibitions. The assignment at the end of this workshop would then be to consider how the KGMC's own collection of identification card photographs could be shown. The following discussion workshop would map out how and why the participants would elect to present the KGMC's ID photographs in

a certain way. Theirs could either be a group project proposal or a series of proposals for individual projects that could then be presented as a group exhibition. The subsequent workshops would then be primarily production based, with the participants reporting on their progress from week to week and soliciting feedback from the group. As the project(s) neared completion, another brainstorming session would focus on the kinds of contextualizing information necessary to the audience's understanding of the finished works. This would entail the compilation of information to be used on object labels, wall text, and promotional materials, as well as the discussion of whether to reveal or conceal the identities and fates of the people pictured. Finally, the participants would work as a team under curatorial supervision to organize and install their works within the space, where a private viewing and wrap-up session would be held to discuss what the participants learned through the experience and how they feel about their individual works or about the exhibition overall.

Inviting Rwandan genocide survivors to create artistic interpretations of photographed Rwandan genocide victims would solve a number of problems by grounding the KGMC's inaugural exhibition in real objects from its archives while still acknowledging that the archive contains only traces of the original tragedy, not the thing itself. For the tragedy itself cannot be contained. In Rwanda, as in all post-conflict nations, the suffering does not stop once photographic evidence of it is put to rest in a museum or an archive; it continues on. Freud's repetition compulsion, in addition to fueling Derrida's writings on archive fever, describes how genocide victims come to revisit the tragic event over and over. However, in the case of Rwandan survivors taking an active role in the creation of the KGMC's exhibition, perhaps this re-visitation of the tragedy can be interpreted as a way of working through the traumatic event. Indeed, this proposed mode of display would address many other problems inherent to the exhibition of genocide photography. First, it would mitigate accusations of colonialism because the persons controlling the unfolding of a history (insofar as that complex history can be conveyed through photographs) are not Europeans or Westerners, rather they are the persons to whom that history belongs. Whereas the Aegis Trust UK controls the contents of the



KGMC's permanent exhibitions, Rwandans themselves could control the contents of the traveling exhibition. To that end, it is unlikely that a Rwandan who suffered similar indignities would seek to either trivialize or sensationalize the related suffering of someone else. It is in this way that an exhibition of conceptual works by Rwandans themselves would at least put a caution on the issue of re-victimizing victims. As in the work of Alredo Jaar, these interpretations could similarly supplant the viewer's interest in seeing evidence of the tragedy with the survivor's interest in living beyond it. Photographs depicting Rwandans who are either known or presumed to have died suggest finitude, both for the victims themselves and for Rwanda as a whole. To the international community, it remains a nation known, and thus defined, by its greatest tragedy. But while many lost their lives in the genocide, there are still survivors; while the country was all but destroyed, it has been rebuilt. Creating artworks based on images of mortality helps to defy that finitude by signifying the continuation of Rwandan arts and culture, supposed hallmarks of civil society. The artworks would also work to resolve the issue of desensitization that has been proven to accompany the repeated viewing of both sensational atrocity photography and banal archival images. When no two interpretations look exactly alike, it becomes much harder to view the victims as an anonymous mass. And when no single interpretation employs the all too familiar tactic of shock and awe, it becomes much harder to look away. Nonetheless, the use of the identity card photographs as a cohesive set of source materials would create a necessary sense of continuity within what are likely to be very different interpretations. In the same way that Jaar's three projects were linked via their source material, these projects would also exhibit a logical through-line, making them easier for the audience to connect together, and thereby to read and understand. Finally, as with Alfredo Jaar, the alleged aestheticization of human suffering would be made less offensive by the fact that the images were curated by Rwandan citizens specifically as artistic interpretations. This differs from the incongruous exhibition of unmediated documents within an artistic institution, as in the case of *Photographs from S-21* appearing at MoMA. The headshots, when reinterpreted as artistic works by Rwandan survivors, could theoretically appear in a variety of institutions so long as

adequate contextualizing information was provided. And indeed, this last assertion is key. For if there is one major lesson to be learned from the two case studies and their respective modes of display, it is the importance of contextualizing those original images. This includes providing information about where, when, why and by whom the photographs were made; information about how and why they came to be featured in exhibition; and most importantly, adequate justification for the institutions in which they are shown and the approach by which they shown there.

## 12. Conclusion

Photographs associated with atrocious events will always be controversial, as will the act of disseminating those photographs through exhibition. As the discussion surrounding depictions of human suffering inevitably continues, the attitudes and approaches towards displaying those depictions will continue to evolve. In analyzing the way that violent atrocity images initially came to be normalized, first in the press and then in memorial museums and other affiliated institutions, this paper seeks to examine the ongoing use of violent imagery. However it does not necessarily seek to either condemn or condone it. Instead this paper suggests that it is not the severity of war- and genocide-related photography that matters, but the way in which the impact of that photography is either amplified or reduced by its context. The matter of context is of course paramount when conceiving of a traveling exhibition; complex photographs (such as those created in a conflict-ridden nation) only become more complex when they are made to travel outside of it. But rather than lament the existence of archives whose contents are too controversial to be exhibited, this paper deconstructs the motivations, the methodology and the critical reception of comparable past exhibitions and arrives at a solution for the KGMC's collection based on that information. Whether or not the KGMC's inaugural exhibition is itself a success –it may easily fall victim to the exact same criticisms– it is starting off on the right foot, so to speak, by practicing due diligence and taking an informed curatorial approach. There are issues with exhibiting collections such as the KGMC's identity card photographs, and this paper, as a prelude to their actual exhibition, acknowledges them. Again, it is merely a starting point; it is one thing to conceive of an exhibition, and another thing entirely to execute it. Nonetheless, it represents the first step towards facilitating what will hopefully become a successful inaugural exhibition for the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre, a facility of great significance housing a collection that the international community deserves to see.

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