

Precarious Images: Genocides in German Film and Visual Art

By

Laura Strombergsson

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Approved:

Prof. Lutz Koepnick
Prof. Jennifer Fay
Prof. Meike Werner
Prof. Christoph Zeller

To my husband and my sons, with love

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INTRODUCTION

Photography's collective memory is a mirror in which our society continually observes itself... – Sebastiao Salgado

Picturing things, taking a view, is what makes us human; art is making sense and giving shape to that sense – Gerhard Richter

As subjects, we are literally called into the picture, and represented here as caught – Jacques Lacan

To collect photographs is to collect the world – Susan Sontag

In the summer dusk, the elderly woman gazes into the distance, hands clutching the loosely wrapped cotton scarf on her head. The field she stands in, with its lush green grass and fertile red earth, is bathed in the orange glow of the evening sun as it sinks slowly down the horizon into darkness. At her feet lies a tangle of thick green vines connected to several ripe yellow squashes, lined by two carefully tilled segments of earth that run away from the camera. Behind her, the tall trees lining the field reach up to the fading blue sky and melt into the rows of green corn that frame both sides of the photograph. Face turned down from the camera and mostly hidden by her brown and white shawl, the woman's expression is impossible to read. Yet her body language, with arms raised and face concealed, suggests a kind of quiet contradiction of her peaceful bucolic surroundings. We are at once enthralled and drawn in, intent on understanding what we are seeing. The mystery of the image has captivated us and we have become its willing participant in a process that begins but does not end with us.

In his groundbreaking discussion of the impact of images on the way we construct and learn about the world around us, W.J.T. Mitchell writes:

There have been different kinds of world pictures in different places and eras, and that is why history and comparative anthropology are not just descriptions of events and practices but of representations of events and practices. Pictures are our way of gaining access to whatever these things are. Even more emphatically, they are ... “ways of worldmaking,” not just world mirroring. (Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, xiv).

Mitchell’s perceptive understanding of the power of images to not just reflect the world but to shape it echoes similar ideas from other theorists in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Encapsulated in his notion of *worldmaking*, though, is also a kind reciprocity of agency between the image and its viewer. While the image contains the power to show us a thing or concept, the sphere of its influence only extends as far as the network created by those who view it. As Mitchell puts it, pictures “are things that have been marked by the stigmata of personhood: they exhibit both physical and virtual bodies; they speak to us, sometimes literally sometimes figuratively. They present, not just a surface, but a *face* that faces the beholder” (*What Do Pictures Really Want?* 72). Thus, Mitchell’s concept of images as living organisms becomes not only about our interactions with pictures, but also about their interactions with us. And like all interactions with living things, this act remains fraught with equal parts joy and tension, often at the same time.

How do we interact with and learn from images? How do we read them? What do images ask us to do with them as we stand before them, as we gaze at them, as they gaze at us? How do these images come to shape our realities and our understandings of the world around us? And what, in turn, are the implications of the technologies used to capture, produce, and disseminate these images? These are the fundamental questions that lie at the heart of this investigation. Rather than concentrating as Mitchell partially does, on advertising and popular cultural images, this investigation takes as its subject various humanitarian projects based in the visual medium. Humanitarian image making (in its myriad still and moving forms) shares a number of curious similarities with

Mitchell's advertisement images. It is meant not just to be looked at but to animate the viewer to *do* something with it, to go out into the world and to shape it through the image. As Mitchell explains, "some images, to use the trade jargon 'have legs,' –that is, they seem to have the surprising capacity to generate new directions and surprising twists [...], as if they had an intelligence and purposiveness of their own" (31). Even critics of humanitarian image production cannot dismiss the alacrity with which these images tend to whip through society, nor their propensity for impacting international events and politics. While the precise nature and impact of these images has been and should continue to be hotly debated (indeed, this investigation will continue in this tradition), there is no doubt that they indeed belong to the category of picture that, once generated, "nothing can stop" (82). At the same time and because of their subject matter, these images carry with them a humanity and a universality that mere advertisement cannot begin to express, giving form and meaning to human difficulty and suffering, "rendering it comprehensible, urgent, and actionable" for audiences (Fehrenbach & Rodogno, 4). By focusing on a wide range of both still and moving images—and some not normally categorized as 'humanitarian' per se—this investigation opens up more paths for understanding the ways that these images shape our realities and the events that occur in them.

This work was borne out of an interest in still and moving image production of genocide, particularly within the German contemporary. The last thirty years has seen a plethora of German image-makers generating work that focuses on topics of genocide and humanitarian disaster, quite noticeably in areas that do not fall within the German-speaking realm. This dissertation centers on three such significant humanitarian crises in

the twentieth century: Bosnia of the early 1990s, the Armenian genocide taking place in Turkey and Syria during World War One, and Rwanda in 1994. It examines representations of these events rooted in visual media like photography, film, and art installations created by a unique constellation of artists from Germany and argues that the legacy of the Holocaust influences the ways in which German filmmakers and artists engage with these other genocides, both in the methods and styles used to produce visual representations of genocides in other parts of the world.

As this dissertation argues, the images created by these filmmakers and artists often become part of a kind of continuous conversation between past and present, both in terms of the content they espouse and the contexts in which they are produced. What makes the German perspective particularly interesting is the society's own problematic history of genocide and the Third Reich, during which the National Socialists murdered over six million Jews, and tens of thousands of other 'non-desirables' and political opponents. Owing to the intensive confrontation with and learning from this past, the German artists examined here not only often, directly or indirectly, invoke the Holocaust in their material, they also appear to bear a sense of responsibility regarding similar acts occurring around the world, as German-Turkish director Fatih Akin explains of his film on the Armenian genocide:

As I grew up, I used to think that the Holocaust had nothing to do with me or my parents, because I wasn't born at the time and they didn't live in Germany. While making 'The Cut,' I realized that I had equal responsibility for both genocides. Also for the genocides in Laos, in Algeria and in North and South America. Whenever one group of human beings gangs up to kill another group. (Dale, "Fatih Akin: 'Filmmaking is a Holy War'")

Fatih Akin's position remains particularly interesting because he not only brings the Holocaust into play in his production of Armenian genocide images, but he also

acknowledges the deeply transnational nature of his world view and his work. Thus emerges a fundamental yet productive paradox inherent in this dissertation. Many of these photographers, filmmakers, and artists examined here would not necessarily consider themselves as particularly *German* creators, although they do often freely and publicly acknowledge the effect that a history of German image production has had on their work. It is likely that they would instead consider themselves transnational artists, in the sense that they are concerned with issues that transcend boundaries and conventional notions of citizenship and belonging. What is especially interesting though is that for many of these artists, their often sensitive and nuanced production of genocide images becomes precisely the thing which catapults them into the transnational realm. In other words, it is ironically the very German-ness of their images (in the sense that they form a kind of a visual conversation with effects and aftereffects of Holocaust representation) that allows these image-makers to engage in a transnational project to begin with. For the international film world, it is also what lends German artists a kind of unique credibility when it comes to tackling the subject of genocide, making the spectator interest in the work as much about who is producing the project and how they are situated as it is about the project itself. And from these perspectives, it is indeed telling that a good number of the most transnational works (in terms of topic, cast, production, etc) by Germans tend to be on the subject of genocide; it is something that ‘translates’ well across spaces, as does the unique German way of confronting it. Coupled with the deep understanding that comes from this post-Holocaust confrontation of fundamental questions of representation of tragic events “beyond words and understanding”, artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries like Fatih Akin, Marcel Odenbach, and Wim Wenders—just to name a

few—bring a particular kind of aesthetic sensitivity to their work, even with respect to non-German conflicts and crises. Indeed, in interacting with their oeuvres, one gets the creeping feeling that the specters of the genocides of the Third Reich continue to loom in the background. In this sense, the Bosnian, Armenian, and Rwandan works by the Germans featured in this investigation truly seem to be continually in conversation with a host of other images, as W.J.T. Mitchell suggests. The selection of Bosnia, Armenia, and Rwanda as areas for fruitful German representation is also no accident. Germany can claim, for better or for worse, a deep historical connection to these locations, primarily through actions connected to the long-forgotten imperialist past shared with these countries. As will be shown, these connections add postcolonial and racial layers to the representational issues already surrounding these conflicts, particularly in regards to the Rwandan conflict. How the German artists featured in this investigation relate and work with these pasts varies greatly; some of the more successful representations—that is, ones that want to engage the viewer beyond the images themselves—are especially sensitive to this multitude of representational considerations.

The first chapter of the investigation, “Reportage and Reflection,” centers on the Bosnian conflict and the resulting genocide that occurred in the early 1990s. This part features the Bosnian reportage work of photographer Andree Kaiser, the fictional film *Storm* by Hans-Christian Schmid, and Andy Spyrá’s photographic work on post-war Bosnia and looks at these pieces as offering different takes on the nature of visual evidence. It understands visual evidence as occurring in a number of contexts, and investigates the ways evidence is gathered and constructed through on-the-ground reporting, the post-conflict war crimes courtroom, and the landscape and civilian life of

post-conflict society. Taking the work of Susan Sontag, Allen Sekula, and John Tagg as a theoretical basis, the approach of this chapter keeps in mind that “the question is often not about whether photography can attest and prove but rather about what kind of evidence it is being asked to provide” (Cieplak 40). Just as the photojournalistic reports, films, and artistic projects featured here all offer different understandings of the relationships of images to evidence, they also examine the various socio-cultural and socio-historical connections between images and their spheres of their production and interpretation. Likewise, in these objects of study, both medium and context play an important role, and indeed, the two are always in some form or another in conversation with each other. Through the three interwoven perspectives of present, past, and future represented in the works of Kaiser, Schmid, and Spyra, this chapter examines what happens when we acknowledge both the perceived and real verisimilitude of images and the impact these forms of visual evidence can have on cultural memory and learning.

The second chapter, “Fragmented Images,” delves deeper into the myriad relationships between image and narrative, this time in the context of the Armenian Genocide. It examines Fatih Akin’s 2015 film *The Cut* and Andy Spyra’s photographic series *1915-2015*, two twenty-first century visual representations of the genocide and understands them as engaging in a representational process that began with German army medic Armin T. Wegner and his photographic work nearly a century earlier during the First World War. On the ground in Turkey and Syria in 1915, Wegner captured some of the most well known images of the Armenian Genocide, paving the way for the kind of visual stylizations that would come to characterize representations of this event. Yet even as the activist Wegner smuggled the images back to Germany and later traveled through

Europe giving lectures and presentations in the hopes of spurring international involvement in the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East, he demonstrated a particular sensitivity to the representation of the events he had witnessed. Drawing from his work as an expressionist, Wegner engaged in an ongoing process in which he constantly reworked the relationship between image and text in his presentations on the genocide. Beginning with Wegner's Armenia images, this chapter further examines the connections between image, narrative, and trauma. It takes as its basis the idea of a post-traumatic visual narrative developed by Joshua Hirsch in his work on visual narratives and the Holocaust, in which the still and moving image becomes something imbued with post-traumatic aesthetic. This aesthetic is characterized by a form and a content that mimic the frozen stillness and the cyclical and fragmented nature of post-traumatic memory, making it particularly suited to the expression of these kinds of disastrous events. It is from this perspective that the chapter looks at the relationships between Armin T. Wegner's images and storytelling process, Fatih Akin's film, and Andy Spyra's photographs. Taken together, these provide an array of strategies—some markedly more successful than others—not only for presenting these images to an interested public, but also for steering the public perception and conversation around these events, even a century later.

The third and final chapter, "Living with Contingency," takes up Joshua Hirsch's idea of a post-traumatic aesthetic in still and moving images more critically. While the previous chapter shows how Hirsch's theory allows for a broader conceptualization of the impact of images on a viewing public, this chapter explores how this approach also limits in important ways. The cyclical nature of the post-traumatic in which victims become

arrested and robbed of their agency effectively creates an aesthetic frozen in time where the traumatic moment is relived *ad infinitum*. Hirsch's post-traumatic aesthetic also rests heavily on work of seminal trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth, Kali Tal, and Bessel van de Kolk, in which the idea of rupture and of the reconstitution of the ordinary (of some kind of 'normal life') following the trauma features prominently. Looking at the Rwandan filmic work of Wim Wenders (*Salt of the Earth*, 2015) and Marcel Odenbach's dual-screen video installation *In stillen Teichen lauern Krokodile/ In Still Waters Crocodiles Lurk*, this final chapter imagines what aesthetic alternatives might exist in relation to the two previous ways of interacting with and learning from images.

Cultural theorist and philosopher Lauren Berlant has recently pointed out that moments of crisis are "not exceptional to history or consciousness but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what is overwhelming" (Cruel Optimism 10). Her work emphasizes how certain bodies never truly had the luxury of a safe or secure existence and reveals the wide grey zone between states of extreme violence and everyday aggressions and microaggressions. In this sense, everyday life becomes an unsettled and precarious situation, in which the actions of the individual and the group consist of a continuous responding to and shaping of that precariousness. This allows not only for a range of experiences, but also acknowledges the impact that sexual orientation, gender, color, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, class, education, and geographic location have on the everyday for these people. In this sense, the seemingly mundane acts that characterize daily lives actually become the things that make the present bearable—and ultimately livable—to those who experience these unsettled situations. From this, a new kind of imagery emerges that speaks to these contingent

realities — an aesthetic of precarity. Though Wenders's work hints at this aesthetic through using particular filmic devices and storytelling approaches, it ultimately falls short; its relentless focus on photographer Sebastian Salgado's traumatic witness experience of the Rwandan crisis relies too heavily on classical trauma theory to allow for anything more. Marcel Odenbach's video installation, by contrast, mixes several different types of footage and makes liberal use of its dual screen feature to tell a story decidedly rooted in an aesthetic of precarity and contingency. What emerges is a powerful picture that simultaneously denies easy closure and answers but also provokes intense thought. It allows for a reading that does not assume a privileged Western sense of security but rather acknowledges the prevalence of everyday stressors far beyond what one might imagine. Odenbach's *In stillen Teichen* and his oeuvre provides us with a model for these kinds of interactions, offering a path for future engagement beyond the simplistic binaries of trauma both through alternative formal and narrative strategies. In turn, these precarious works encourage viewers to learn about and recognize contingencies inherent in their own worlds through their interactions with the images around them.

CHAPTER 1

REPORTAGE AND REFLECTION: THE BOSNIAN CRISIS OF THE 1990s

*Faith is an island in the setting sun,
But proof, proof is the bottom line for everyone. – Paul Simon*

*The question is often not about whether photography can attest and prove but rather
about what kind of evidence it is being asked to provide. – Piotr Cieplak*

In a 2013 interview, renowned photojournalist Ron Haviv speaks of the way he sees his profession:

I've now documented three genocides — Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur — and I look back to the lessons of the Holocaust, which were 'never again,' " he said. "Nobody should be able to say they didn't know what was happening. What we do as photographers is to attempt to create a body of evidence to hold people accountable. (Estrin, "Photography in the Docket, as Evidence")

Central to this understanding of photojournalism is the sense that images, in their purest form, deliver a special kind of evidence of wrongful actions that might otherwise be covered up and thus forgotten. This section grapples with these notions and examines how differently-positioned visual representations of the Bosnian genocide—in the form of photojournalistic work, fictional films, and photographic art—all present and understand these concepts of evidence and the image. How does each object understand the image's connection to reality? What role does context play? How do certain contexts cast doubt and uncertainty on the verisimilitude of the documentary image? And how are images understood as pieces of evidence and what kind of evidence are they being asked to provide? As we will see, in their work the journalists, artists, and filmmakers in this chapter grapple not only with the indexical qualities of the still and moving image but also with their interpretations within various historical and socio-cultural contexts. While

photojournalist Andree Kaiser shows a unique understanding of the way his photographic dispatches of the Bosnian genocide must be contextualized even as they function as international evidence of occurring war crimes and crimes against humanity, director Hans-Christian Schmid's 2009 thriller *Storm* questions the evidentiary role that images are supposed to play in the courtroom and critiques the range of interpretations of images as reliable evidence in light of internal and external pressure on the international court. Lastly, photographer Andy Spyra offers a glimpse of the way the conflict is understood retrospectively through traces and scars left in the mutilated landscapes of the post-war Balkans in his 2010 artistic photographic series on Bosnia. Though each of these works positions themselves differently in regards to the question of documentary evidence, they all shed light on deeply held cultural notions related to the objectivity of the visual medium and help to uncover and rethink these assumptions in productive and meaningful ways.

The Bosnian Genocide in Context

What today has become known as the Bosnian genocide must be seen within the larger context of the wars that took place upon the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia after the fall of communism in the early 1990s. As the slow collapse of this system got underway in 1990, the republic of Bosnia Herzegovina emerged as a state that remained neither particularly strong nor particularly stable, compared to its neighboring republics of Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia. While Bosnia Herzegovina was among the most ethnically diverse country in the region (comprised of Bosnians, Serbs, and Croats), unlike these other republics it had neither a majority national group or a majority religious community. Identification in the area was instead complex, with Bosnians being

further divided into Bosnian Serbs (usually Orthodox), Bosnian Croats (usually Catholic), and Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims). In the instability surrounding the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Slovenia and Croatia quickly declared independence in 1991, with both Serbia and Croatia looking to absorb Bosnia into their own territories. Thus the war over Bosnia began in 1991, driven primarily by expansionist aims of the other republics and by internal support from groups that supported these endeavors. Bosnian Serbs were led by the head of the Serbian Democratic Party Radovan Karadzic, who quickly co-opted the army of the crumbling Yugoslavia (the JNA) to Serbian advantage as it targeted Sarajevo, Tuzla, Srebrenica, and other Bosnian cities (Rogel 37). While Serbian rhetoric positioned Karadzic as the noble general attempting to hold a crumbling Yugoslavia together, it has been established that these actions instead served towards the creation of a so-called Greater Serbia (Donia, “The Origins of the Republika Srpska”).

Violent policies against local inhabitants (which Serbs termed “ethnic cleansing”) began already in 1991 in Croatia, where territories were rid of ethnic non-Serbian ethnic groups (Calic 120). These strategies were most strongly implemented in Bosnia, where the Serbian army/ JNA harassed, terrorized, raped, mutilated, and murdered Muslims, and confiscated their homes and property. In the fall of 1992, a more systematic execution of the policy began to also destroy artifacts and areas important to Islamic culture and religious life like mosques, libraries, schools, and public spaces. Around the same time, concentration camps were established at Trnopolje, Omarska, and Manjaca, where Muslim prisoners were tortured, killed, and worked to death. Serbian anti-Muslim propaganda was widespread and helped to incite and to justify these actions. In late summer 1995, Serbians “cleansed” the town of Srebrenica of its Muslims, executing

6,000 men and forcing the rest of the Muslim population to flee for survival. At the same time, the UN and other international coalitions put numerous peace agreements in place in a weak attempt to stop the fighting and the atrocities being committed. After the failure of the Owen-Stolten plan in 1994, the fighting took on the character of a civil war and “all parties engaged in ethnic cleansing and atrocities against civilians [...] the early victims adopted the aggressors’ tactics in dealing with the enemy” (Rogel 35). By late 1994, it appeared that Bosnian Serbs had won the conflict; the total estimated number of deaths was around 200,000 and 2 million refugees were dispersed throughout the region. Yet in 1995, renewed international military action in Croatia, the NATO bombing in Bosnia, and diplomatic efforts supported by the United States led to an eventual lasting peace agreement (Rogel 40). The Dayton Agreement, signed in December 1995, effectively ended the wars, and confirmed the sovereignty of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which now was to exist as a two-part state, but of which the Muslim-Croat federation would control fifty-one percent and the Serbian Republic forty-nine percent. Importantly, “the Serbian Republic, Karadzic’s self-proclaimed state within Bosnia was granted recognition for the first time” (Rogel 39). While this move seemed to tacitly condone Serbian expansionist aims, international bodies had agreed before the peace that the atrocities against Muslims and against civilians also could not go unpunished. Thus Richard Goldstone, head of the war crimes tribunal at The Hague, also confirmed the indictments of Serbian civilian and military leaders Radovan Karadzic and Slobodan Milosevic as war criminals before the international court.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was established in November 1994, with the aim of facilitating “an end to such crimes and to

take effective measures to bring justice to the persons who are responsible for them.”¹

The court delivered its final resolution in December of 2017 and closed soon thereafter.

A total of 161 individuals were indicted; of these, 111 trials were completed and 90 of those indicted were sentenced. Those brought before the court ranged in status from common soldiers and policemen all the way to prime ministers, with the most famous cases being Slobodan Milosevic (Serbian prime minister), Milan Babic (former president of the Republika Srpska Krajina), Ramush Haradinaj (former prime minister of Kosovo), Radovan Karadzic (former president of the Republika Srpska), Ratko Mladic (former commander of the Bosnian Serb army), and Ante Gotovina (former general of the Croatian army).² In addition to trying and convicting a wide range of perpetrators, the court delivered the first indictment of a sitting head of state for war crimes through convicting Slobodan Milosevic, who at that time was serving as president of Serbia. The ICTY also became one of the first international courts to find that sexual violence like rape and enslavement constitutes a crime against humanity.³ Yet at the same time, critiques exist of the tribunal and its inner workings. Some note that the establishment of the court while the conflict still raged impeded its ability to adjudicate it properly, while others critique the mildness of the sentencing of criminals in relation to the acts committed. Additionally there have been questions about the way in which the ICTY has actually facilitated reconciliation in the territories affected by the war, with one common complaint being that most of those tried were Serbs or Montenegrins, and that the ICTY—influenced by outside factors—paid too little attention to war crimes committed by other parties. While the numbers certainly support the assertion that more Serbs were

¹ See Preamble of the Security Council’s Resolution 827

² See “Key Figures of Cases,” *United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia*.

³ For more on this topic, see Richard H. Steinberg’s *Assessing the Legacy of the ICTY* (2011)

tried than other nationalities, it is important to understand that similar claims of “selective justice” remain “frequently repeated in anti-Hague diatribes by Serb nationalists;” by most scholarly accounts, these indictment figures are proportionate to the way that these atrocities are thought to have been committed (Hoare, “David Harland’s Attack on the ICTY”). While the legacy of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia is contested, the convictions it delivered for war criminals accused of genocide from all former Yugoslavian countries remain important for the upholding of international justice and have become as much a part of the representations of the Bosnian conflict as the genocide itself.

Visual Representations of the Bosnian Crisis and Genocide

Since its end in the mid to late 1990s,⁴ a plethora of visual representations of the Bosnian conflict and genocide that would accompany it have populated the sphere of cultural production on a massive scale. Initial images and footage of aspects of the conflict itself began to circulate internationally nearly almost as soon as it began, with the post-war years offering a variety of filmic, documentary, and artistic representations of the conflict in the forms of art photography and installation art.

Already during the initial rumblings of war between Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia that would later come to encompass genocide in Bosnia, a multitude of reporters, photojournalists, and international news crews were on the ground covering the unfolding of events. American news channel ABC sent well-known anchors like Peter Jennings and Clark Benston into the area with film crews to gather impressions

⁴ The exact end of the war has been debated hotly by scholars, since the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia produced a multitude of wars and conflicts, many of which continued, in one form or another, until the beginning of the new millennia.

and information, while other networks like CNN highlighted anchor Christine Amanpour in her on-the-ground reporting of the siege of Sarajevo. Because of the consistent reporting, accompanied in many cases by disturbing and graphic video and photographic footage, by American and European news networks, the Bosnian conflict came to dominate particularly the American evening news cycles. Photographic images and video footage also left the area with incredible speed, due largely to the sheer number of reporters on site. Photojournalists like Ron Haviv, Phillip von Recklinghausen, Andree Kaiser, Boris Geilert, and Roger M. Richard (just to name a few of very many) ensured that the public remained relatively well-informed of the humanitarian problems, human rights violations, and other such issues that were occurring on the ground in Bosnia through delivering detailed reports accompanied by photographic imagery and video footage functioning as proof of their claims. Following the end of the genocide and the winding down of the war, a number of filmmakers—both documentary and fictional—took up the genocide, issues of reporting, and the involvement of the international community through various large-scale and smaller-scale productions. Particularly cinema “has played an important role in explaining and interpreting the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s for a global audience” (Harper 1). In this constellation, Hollywood has exhibited a special fascination with the Bosnian war and genocide, releasing abundant fictional films starring Hollywood heavyweights since the mid 1990s. Some examples include the 1997 film *The Peacemaker* (starring George Clooney and Nicole Kidman), *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001, with Owen Wilson and Gene Hackman), *The Hunting Party* (2007, with Richard Gere), *The Land of Blood and Honey* (2011, directed by actress Angelina Jolie), and *Killing Season* (2013, with John Travolta and Robert DeNiro). A

number of these films feature American aid workers or soldiers and present their struggles as they engage with local Yugoslavs and the humanitarian issues from an overwhelmingly Western/American perspective. Various international film companies have also taken up the Bosnian conflict and genocide, like the Spanish *Territorio Comanche* (1997), the British film *Welcome to Sarajevo* (1997), the Polish production *Demons of War* (1998), the Bosnian-British satirical comedy *Beautiful People* (1999), the German-Danish-Dutch drama *Storm* (2009), and the Spanish-Italian production *Twice Born* (2013). A number of films on the war and the genocide have also been produced by Bosnians themselves, who in representing the conflict are often also simultaneously and actively coming to terms with the destruction of their own lives, childhoods, and communities. *The Perfect Circle* (1997), directed by Ademir Kenović, presents the story of two boys during the siege of Sarajevo, and Danis Tanović's *No Man's Land* (2001) portrays the lives of soldiers on opposing sides of the conflict as they struggle with ideologies. Dino Mustafić's *Remake* (2003) explores the ways that violence transcends generational experiences, while Jasmila Žbanić's 2006 film *Grbavica* tackles the way a single mother is haunted by her rapes during the genocide. *The Abandoned* (2010), directed by Adis Bakrač, again picks up the subject of rape, this time from the perspective of a child who was the product of such a war crime. *Sympathy for the Devil*, which is forthcoming in 2020-2021 and directed by Bosnian filmmaker Amra Baksic Camo, is based on the accounts of controversial French reporter Paul Marchand and features a foreign perspective on the genocide. Some Bosnian short films have appeared on the subject, with Bosnian director Ahmed Imamović's *10 Minutes* (2002) and Bosnian-American director Harun Mehmedinović's *In the Name of the Son* (2007) both

receiving critical acclaim for their treatment of wartime Bosnia and the aftermath of genocide. Documentary filmmakers have also actively engaged with the Bosnian crisis and the genocide, with Bernard-Henri Levy's *Bosna!* about the Bosnian resistance (1994) and the BBC documentary *Bosnian War: The Death of Yugoslavia* (1995) providing an international view of the roots of the conflict and responses to it. Bosnian-directed documentary *Miracle in Bosnia* (1995) examines the rise of the Bosnian army and directors Dino Mustafić and Danis Tanović re-appropriate and reincorporate wartime video footage into it. Another British documentary, *A Cry From the Grave* (1999), centers on the massacres of Muslims at Srebrenica, while a Slovenian documentary *Tunel upanja* (2000) tells the story of the construction of a tunnel leading out of Sarajevo by its citizens during the siege of the city. The controversial 2005 Portuguese documentary *Bosnia Diaries*, directed by Joaquim Sapinho, chronicles the director's own experiences and memories of his time in Bosnia and Lars Feldballe-Petersen's *The Unforgiven* (2017) tells the story of a convicted Serbian war criminal seeking forgiveness from former prisoners whom he abused during the war. The most recent release, *The Prosecutors* (2018), is about the legal struggle to enshrine rape as a crime against humanity and Bosnia plays a major role in the way this crime becomes interpreted on the international stage. These and other documentaries have not only helped to raise awareness of the war crimes and the genocide that occurred in Bosnia, but have also contributed to growing discussions on the role of reporting and photojournalism in such events, as will be discussed in more detail later on.

Perhaps what is most apparent when one looks at the body of visual representations of the Bosnian genocide and war is the impressive array of photographic

projects that concern themselves with the aftermath of the conflict and its repercussions. Created by both Bosnians and by outsiders to the genocide, these projects deal with themes of documenting, returning and living on after Srebrenica and Omarska, as well the global prevention of genocide. Sarajevo-born photographer Ziyah Gafić's 2014 project "Quest for Identity" features photographs of personal belongings of the victims of the Srebrenica massacre. Used as evidence by the forensic teams still attempting to identify the bodies in mass graves, the objects are photographed by Gafić in the manner of "a clean, clinical forensic photograph" but such that the personal nature of these items (eyeglasses, family photographs) "triggers empathy in whoever sees these images" (Eng, "Orphans of the Narrative"). Similarly, American-born artist Paula Allen's and Dr. Lisa DiCaprio's photographic exhibit "The Betrayed of Srebrenica," exhibited from 2005 to 2008 throughout Bosnia and the United States, also brings the victims of the genocide to life by showing color photographs of victims and their personal items, accompanied by informative text panels. As a visual narrative of "loss and hope, finality and anticipation," the exhibit seeks "the affirmation of the memory and experiences of the survivors, which is the starting point of all justice."⁵ On a more personal note, Bosnian photojournalist Sulejman Bijedić has worked on themes of return after war and genocide in his 2018 photographic reportage for National Geographic, in which he travels back to the same village from which he was exiled as a child during the war in Bosnia. Bijedić's photographs show the simple rural village and its inhabitants continuing on with everyday activities like plowing the fields, eating together, and socializing. But they are simultaneously haunted by the specter of the genocide, with one caption under the

⁵ <http://www.betrayalofsrebrenicaphotoexhibit.net>

photograph of an elderly woman looking out the window reading: “*When I ask her to tell me about the war she says she does not remember anything about those terrible days, but we both know that it is not the truth*” (Strochlic, “Twenty Years Later”). The stark black and white images of British award-winning photographer and professor Paul Lowe continue in a similar vein as Bijedić, showing how Bosnians have carried on after the violence of the 1990s. His 2005 collection *The Bosnians* documents ten years of the war and the post-war situation in Bosnia in “an intimate, highly personal reconstruction of a people and their nation.”⁶ Traveling through the cities of Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Goradze, and Mostar as they were destroyed and rebuilt, Lowe’s black and white images capture “life rising from catastrophe as Bosnians survive, mourn, and move forward.”⁷

These and other works like it are part of a growing body of work around the Bosnian genocide that thematizes not only different aspects of the conflict and the genocide but also celebrates the lens of contemporary photojournalism through this process. Such work is often sponsored or produced by programs, organizations, and art collectives who mobilize the crises and genocide of the Bosnian war as a way of explicitly advocating for social justice, humanitarianism, and education through visual storytelling mechanisms. Deeply committed to the notion that this type of work offers concrete ties to social justice and peace-building efforts, collectives like the *Picture Justice Project*, *PROOF: Media for Social Justice*, *The Moral Courage Project*, *Inside Injustice*, *The Aftermath Project*, and *The Art of Revolution* marshal artistic and photojournalistic enterprise as a way of “transform[ing] public opinion and inspir[ing] creative action towards social change” (“The Art of Revolution”). Though this chapter

⁶ <http://www.foto8.com/live/paul-lowe-the-bosnians/>

⁷ *ibid.*

will more critically take up these notions again later, these collectives remain an important site for the production of a copious amount of photographic and other visual projects on the Bosnian genocide. The work of award-winning American documentary photographer and filmmaker Sara Terry of *The Aftermath Project* “Aftermath: Bosnia’s Long Road to Peace” (2003) focuses on the long-term consequences of the Bosnian war and the path towards re-building Bosnian society. In contextualizing her photographic work, Terry explains that “in today’s global community, issues of aftermath are increasingly relevant and urgent. War does not teach us about peace. That half of the tale unfolds only in its aftermath, where the painful and promising work of true peacekeeping begins” (“Bosnia’s Long Road to Peace”). Likewise, the work of Paul Lowe and other photographers featured in the *PROOF: Media for Social Justice Project*-sponsored projects like “The Legacy of Rape,” “My Body: A Warzone,” and “The Rescuers” features the Bosnian crisis as a means of thematizing important international human rights issues like rape and bystander complicity. These photographic projects featuring Bosnian topics seek to “deepen awareness and understanding of the presence of [this] behavior during genocide or mass violence. [The] goal is to show how to better understand the conditions that support compassionate behavior in the face of communal violence” (“The Rescuers”). Joanna Teasdale’s photographs of the twentieth anniversary of the genocide and the massacre in Srebrenica presented in *The Art of Revolution’s* “Bones of the Balkans” (2015) show the ways that contemporary Bosnians not only culturally engage with memories of the genocide, but how they are also physically connected to it through handling the bones of past victims. Through these images, Teasdale’s work aims to “increas[e] Bosnian and regional youth involvement in peacebuilding processes” (“Bones

of the Balkans”). In these visual contexts (among various others⁸), the Bosnian crisis has continued to be remembered and engaged with across the globe.

Expectations of Evidence: Visual Documentation and its Interpretations

In a 2008 interview with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, CNN anchor Christiane Amanpour describes scenes in Srebrenica and the profound impact of still and moving images of the violence on the collective conscience of the world:

And we weren't prepared for what we saw when they took the tarpaulin off, and they were children. All of them were children, desperately injured children with dirty bandages and blood all over themselves, and crying and afraid. And I'll never forget that. And the photographs of that day and that moment reverberated across the world. I do actually think that when journalists do their duty and tell the story, and report the truth, that it does eventually make a difference. (“Eyewitness Testimony: Christiane Amanpour on Bosnia”)

Amanpour more explicitly discusses her views on the far-reaching power of these images and of the journalists who help to disseminate them in her documentary film on the subject of genocide and international intervention *Scream Bloody Murder*:

“Photojournalists during the Bosnian War helped clarify what was going on for our leaders and for the world. And in the end there was an intervention, that stopped a genocide, that had a really well-thought out peace plan” (Harper 31). Veteran journalist Roy Gutman expresses similar sentiments in his 1993 Pulitzer Prize-winning account of his team of reporters and photographers on the ground during the crisis and the genocide. Upon landing in Croatia at the onset of what he believed would escalate into an ethnic war, Gutman describes a moment of stark realization:

⁸ Though they fall outside the scope of this particular section, art installations by Aida Šehović and Adela Jušić offer unique affordances for interacting with both visual and tangible representations of the genocide. Another, significantly more controversial project also based on spectator/user interaction with the Bosnian crisis is the 2016 video game *This War of Mine*, created by Polish game development company *11 bit studios*.

By this time I sensed that the story was of such dimensions and seriousness that every element had to be sourced, using eyewitness or official statements, and that photos were essential to establish instant credibility. Every theory I developed about the events and those responsible should be potentially falsifiable—that is, structured in a way that if it was wrong, it could be so proven. (*Witness to Genocide* xii)

Inherent to these perspectives is the sense that the images, especially documentary images (still and moving), provide special access to these moments of humanitarian disaster; they not only reveal fundamental truths about the world, but also provide evidence for these truths. These understandings of images and their ability to document reality have existed almost since the dawn of the photographic medium in the nineteenth century; indeed, “the seductive possibility of an ontologically guaranteed evidential power of photography [...] has been a companion since the early days; both in the way photography was used and in the way it was constructed” (Winston in Cieplak, 38). Because of the way the medium was interpreted from its inception, “the photograph’s technical and mimetic qualities established it as a successful tool for gathering empirical evidence [...] justifiably or not, the photograph became lodged in the imagination as a vessel of accuracy, authenticity, verisimilitude, and truth” (Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, 9). Though theorist and skeptic of photography Susan Sontag questions the actual ability of images of suffering to convey what they proclaim to show due to the complexity involved in the making and viewing of images, she nonetheless concludes that “the very notion of atrocity, of war crime, is associated with the expectation of photographic evidence” (*Pain of Others*, 74). Twenty-five years earlier, Sontag conceptualized a photograph as “not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real, it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask” (*On Photography*, 154).

At the same time, images remain open to interpretation and carry meanings in various ways that complicate their seemingly straightforward characterization as guarantors of truth and impartiality. Semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce, one of the first to write about the medium of photography, conceptualized photographs as operating on multiple levels at once, on what he termed a *symbolic* level and an *indexical* level. The indexical property of an image “fulfills its representative function by virtue of a character which it could not have if its object did not exist” and thus remains intimately connected to the real through the physicality of its existence (*Collected Papers*, 50). At the same time, an image conveys its meaning iconically or *symbolically* through a complex set of interpretive codes and conventions. Though this schema, Peirce acknowledges the important role that the viewer plays in the interpretation of images, while simultaneously maintaining the indexical quality of the photograph. Therefore, the power of the indexical argument “must nonetheless be seen as working in tandem with the photograph’s symbolic representation, giving force to its coded meanings” (Brothers 18). French literary theorist Roland Barthes also wrestled with the precise nature in which images transmit their information in his twentieth-century essays. In his 1956 essay “Myth Today,” Barthes describes a photograph of a young black man gazing to the sky (presumably saluting the French flag) on the cover of a magazine that Barthes had seen at his local barbershop. The “rich, fully experienced, spontaneous, innocent, indisputable image” represented the fantasy of the French empire in which “all France’s sons, without any color discrimination, faithfully serve” (*Mythologies*, 118). In this analysis, Barthes discovers two levels of meaning, one that is literal and that he calls the *image* and one that is implied that he calls *concept*. In his 1961 essay “The Photographic Message,”

Barthes analyses the same image to develop his concepts of the *denoted message* (which is for him an indexical sign based in the real) and the *connoted message*, which he describes as “the way in which a society communicates, to a certain extent, what it thinks of it” (17). The solidifier of the image becomes the photograph’s *image* or *denotation*, while the *concept* or *connotation* stands as the “dependant notion of the French empire, benevolent, and served by willing subjects” (Brothers 19). Barthes again takes up a similar concept in “The Third Meaning” (1971), in which he talks about an *obvious* meaning that exists in opposition to an *obtuse* meaning, “that which, in the image, is purely image (which in fact is very little)” (61). In his final work *Camera Lucida*, Barthes allows emotional response to the fore, with the obvious meaning becoming the *studium* whereas the obtuse meaning transforms into the *punctum* or “that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (26). Though these concepts function on a more affective level than his previous writings, they nonetheless allude to various levels of signification within a single still or moving image. Most importantly, Barthes recognizes not only the multiplicities of meanings that an image contains within its frame or frames, but also that the viewer plays a central role in the interpretation of these meanings.

Critics have wrestled with the role of the indexical and the symbolic in the interpretation of images, with some seeing the evidential and signifying power of the image as coming from the “process of record, the image itself” and others viewing it as “little more than a product of cultural, political, and institutional context” (Cieplak 39). Susan Sontag, John Berger, Victor Burgin, Allan Sekula, John Tagg and other critics have emphasized the primacy of the context in which an image is produced and viewed.

The work of John Tagg, particularly his 1998 *The Burden of Representation*, offers a unique and provocative understanding of how images convey meaning based overwhelmingly on the context in which a photograph is used. He argues that “every photograph is the result of specific and, in every case, significant distortions which render its relation to any prior reality deeply problematic and raise the question of the determining level of the material apparatus and of the social practices within which photography takes place” (2). He compares it to the legal record, as “an image produced according to certain institutionalized formal rules and technical procedures which define legitimate manipulations and permissible distortions in such a way that, in certain contexts, more or less skilled and suitably trained and validated interpreters may draw inferences from them” (2). In contextualizing the image in this manner, Tagg alludes not only to the range of information that might be gleaned from a photograph, but also to the use of images as propaganda because of what they suggest but do not show directly. At the same time, a documentary image is not simply the reflection of an objective truth of a situation, but rather a product of a range of artistic and framing choices made by the person behind the camera, who is in turn placed in a particular socio-cultural context.

Tagg explains further:

Like the state, the camera is never neutral. The representations it produces are highly coded, and the power it wields is never its own. As a means of record, it arrives on the scene vested with a particular authority to arrest, picture, and transform daily life... this is not the power of the camera but the power of the local apparatuses which deploy it and guarantee the authority of the images it constructs to stand as evidence or register a truth.
(64)

The camera and the images it produces are thus to be seen and interpreted as indicative of historical processes: “Photographs are never evidence of history; they are themselves the historical” (65). He concludes that the “indexical nature of the photograph [...] can

guarantee nothing at the level of meaning [and] rests not on a natural or existential fact, but on social, semiotic process” (3). For Tagg and other theorists like him who place a heightened emphasis on the role of context in interpreting the content of an image, one must approach the image with careful consideration and indeed, perhaps what one might term a level of healthy suspicion; a picture is not worth a thousand words, or if it is, the tale it tells is indicative of a complex social process of interpretation contingent on many factors and not of the unfolding of a historical fact.

The effects of the viewing of images, as well as the perceived proliferation, consumption, and recurrence of still and moving documentary images in a world already saturated by the visual, remains a prevalent concern of theorists who exhibit a strong suspicion of the deceptive verisimilitude of images. Photojournalism, with its dogged insistence on documenting a slice of the real through images, receives the brunt of this criticism; visual work that features war, genocide, and other humanitarian disasters receives the special attention (and often the derision) of critics. A number of characteristics associated with still and moving documentary images have invited the scorn of critics. Because images do not show the causes or origins of the problem they claim to represent (and indeed often make their point through that which they do not show), they often lack a specific socio-historical context for interpretation. This has been perceived as leaving the viewer at the mercy of not only the particular artistic whims and socio-cultural perspectives of the photographer, but also as being subject to particular forces that construct the act of looking to begin with.⁹ Because of these factors, images

⁹ See the essay “Who is Speaking Thus?” by Abigail Solomon-Godeau in *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (1997), which she writes: “the documentary photograph commits a double act of subjugation, in which the hapless subject is victimized first by oppressive social forces, then by the regime of the image” (33).

are actually radically open to interpretation, which leaves them equally open to misuse and misappropriation, as they are perceived as being guarantors of truth and contain real power as they circulate in society. Writing of the work of humanitarian photographers like Sebastiao Salgado and others, Susan Sontag expresses a deep concern that these forces lead to a skewed looking at and reception of photographs, claiming that the public that views images of suffering are mostly “voyeurs, whether or not we mean to be” (*Pain of Others*, 14). She sees moral feelings as being “embedded in history, whose personae are concrete, whose situations are always specific”; since images do not engage with these histories per se, they are said in turn to present stereotypical abstractions of it, such that “the shock of photographed atrocities wears off with repeated viewings” (35). Because of this, Sontag concludes that “in these last decades, ‘concerned’ photography has done at least as much to deaden conscience as to arouse it” (21). Photographer and theorist Allan Sekula, writing on Paul Strand’s humanitarian photography, charges that “documentary has contributed much to spectacle, to retinal excitation, envy and nostalgia, and only a little to the critical understanding of the social world” (57). Martha Rosler echoes these sentiments, writing that “liberal documentary assuages any stirrings of conscience in its viewers the way that scratching relieves an itch [...] Documentary is a little like horror movies, putting a face on fear and transforming threat into fantasy” (178-79).

Though not taken up fully in this chapter, these anxieties must nonetheless be mentioned, as they dominate much of the literature in discussions of still and moving images and their evidential power. Because they tacitly hinge on notions of what

constitutes ethical image production, viewing and dissemination, these concerns are not without merit, as “the evidential value associated with photographs allows them to both document suffering—seen as an inherently necessary act—and create a visual landscape that can stray into the territory of stereotype and reduction” (Cieplak 42). Like Sontag, I acknowledge the fear that images, with their claims to absolute truth and objectivity, offer seductive possibilities to our unfiltered gaze. They assault our eyes, providing immediate access to visual information; their seeming directness draws out visceral emotional reactions, and not always the ones that we would ideally want or find morally acceptable. Susie Linfield’s salient analysis of photojournalistic enterprise, in which she engages with these ideas posed by Sontag, Sekula, and others, also identifies much of this unease as stemming from a deep suspicion of images based on their affective powers. Without minimalizing or rejecting these concerns of critics, I follow Linfield in her thinking that responding to photographs must not always be a thing fraught with ethical and moral tension; rather, still and moving documentary images and their power can instead open fruitful avenues for discovery. Examining photographs of the war in Iraq, Linfield explains:

It is because photographs are so open-ended—such utter failures at providing answers to the tangled politics of the wars in Iraq—that they are so valuable; by refusing to tell us what to feel, and allowing us to feel things we don’t quite understand, they make us dig, and even think, a little deeper. In approaching photographs such as these, the point is not to formally disassemble them as a way of gaining mastery, not to reject them as feeble, partial truths; nor certainly to deny sometimes uncomfortable, sometimes unfamiliar reactions they elicit. Instead, we can use these photographs’ ambiguities as a starting point for discovery: by connecting these photographs to the world outside their frames, they begin to live and breathe more fully. (*The Cruel Radiance*, 29)

In line with this understanding that the documentary image can evoke true and meaningful interaction, it also bears noting that I remain somewhat critical of the positions of Sekula and others who claim that these images, being mere delusions of the

real, cannot provide us with evidence. In this I follow Piotr Cieplak in his conclusion that “photography as a medium has a unique evidential relationship to what it represents (with an understanding that it is not a completely unmediated relationship...)” and that “this potential is always influenced by and achieved in a specific context” (40). At the same, it remains painfully obvious that still and moving documentary images must be approached and considered very carefully. The recent scandal involving the editing of the photographs of the inauguration crowd of President Donald Trump remains a more innocuous example—though perhaps still worrisome in its own right—while the Serbian use of Western media and photojournalistic images of Sarajevo to promote a narrative of the crisis that would serve the expansionist aims of the greater Serbian state and as justification for genocide remains another more serious one. Therefore, my approach keeps in mind that “the question is often not about whether photography can attest and prove but rather about what kind of evidence it is being asked to provide” (Cieplak 40). Just as the photojournalistic reports, films, and artistic projects featured later in this chapter all offer different understandings of the relationships of images to evidence, they also examine the various socio-cultural and socio-historical connections between images and their spheres of their production and interpretation. Likewise, in these objects of study, both medium and context play an important role, and indeed, the two are always in some form or another in conversation with each other. As we will see, these conversations are varied and often take many different forms, although they all work within the historical context of the Bosnian crisis and the genocide.

Photographic Reportage in Bosnia: Andree Kaiser's Images in Roy Gutman's *Witness to Genocide*

In a 2003 radio interview, *Fresh Air*'s Terry Gross asked Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Roy Gutman about his 1992 reports on the rumored concentration camps in Omarska and Banja Luka, Bosnia:

TG: Were your stories attacked for not being substantiated?

RG: Oddly enough, they weren't. Because for one thing, just the fact of having pictures made it clear that these were real people. Secondly, the story contained comments from every responsible news organization, including the Red Cross. ("Pulitzer-Prize Winning Journalist Roy Gutman")

While Gutman's response correctly highlights the positive international reaction that his reporting eventually garnered, the story of its emergence remains somewhat more complex than his words imply. Serbian authorities initially prevented the team comprised of reporter Roy Gutman and photographer Andree Kaiser from visiting the site of the Omarska camp; therefore, the dispatch detailing what was happening at Omarska was published in *Newsweek*, without any images of the camp, on August 2, 1992 (Strobel 125). Four days later on August 6, 1992, video footage and images of emaciated prisoners of the Omarska and Trnopolje camps were broadcast by Britain's *ITN*, accompanied by reporter Guy Villiamy. Though unclear how the crew managed to document these scenes only a few days after Kaiser and Geilert could not, the images showed severely undernourished male inmates with shaved heads standing in front of barbed wire fences. Starkly reminiscent of the other massive human tragedy that had occurred on European soil just fifty years earlier, their appearance shocked the public and galvanized international action. Perhaps most importantly for Gutman, the images of Omarska and Trnopolje lent credibility to his own reports, confirming what he strongly

believed to be true, but could not definitively prove because of the lack of visual evidence. Of his reports of on the concentration camps in Bosnia, Gutman later commented: “You had to package the story. It’s not enough to come upon it. You have to make it credible ... you have to have the pictures” (124).

This piecing together of a story – of which images only tell a part – remains a distinctively difficult enterprise in the midst of the chaos, death, and destruction of war. Indeed, the challenge of the profession of photojournalism becomes to understand under these complex conditions what is happening around one as it unfolds, a truly herculean task in the best of times. This section examines the photojournalistic work of Andree Kaiser during the Bosnian genocide and tries to understand not only the conversation these images hope to have with us in their own right, but also the ways in which they become supported and in some cases mobilized by the context that Gutman provides through his reports collected in Gutman and Kaiser’s 1993 prize-winning book *Witness to Genocide: Dispatches on the ‘Ethnic Cleansing’ of Bosnia*. While Kaiser and Gutman both rely heavily on the sense that Kaiser’s photographs are indeed the veritable slice of reality, the way Kaiser treats his images and the way he places them into the verbal framework that Gutman provides implies a sensitivity to context that goes beyond the bold rhetoric describing the image as unequivocal evidence and proof. In doing so, this section tries to comprehend how these processes occur in the myriad connections between images and their evidential reception, especially in light of the complexity of piecing a story together as it happens on the ground in front of one’s own eyes (or ears).

Andree Kaiser is a German photojournalist born in 1964 in communist East Berlin. His parents had been committed socialists who actively participated in the

building of the East German state, but had largely grown disillusioned with the turn the country had taken. This disappointment became personal also for Kaiser when the authorities prevented him from studying photography due to his parent's disengagement from state activities. Disheartened and angry at this lack of personal freedom, the then eighteen-year-old Kaiser together with a friend attempted an escape to Austria through sneaking over the its shared border with then Czechoslovakia. Both young men were arrested at the border and were interned in the infamous state-run Hohenschönhausen prison in East Berlin. Spending three years under lock and key, interrogations and solitary confinement became the norm for Kaiser, particularly for his refusal to implicate others in interrogations. After the authorities released him from prison, he found work with a photographer, an experience that he describes as one that imbued him with a new purpose for life.¹⁰ In the late 1980s this work allowed him to travel to West Berlin, where he decided to stay and to develop his photojournalistic career. First employed with Reuters and then later working as a freelance photojournalist, Kaiser participated in various assignments that took him to Bulgaria, Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Russia, where he covered the transition from the communism to democracy from the perspective of a former communist citizen. From 1991-1993 Kaiser traveled with Roy Gutman to Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia where he photographed the war and the genocide for *Newsweek*. Since this assignment he has worked in the United States, China, Israel, Palestine, Uganda and many other countries around the world, and has participated in numerous humanitarian and commercial projects. Kaiser's body of work has also been featured in numerous photographic exhibitions like *Faces of Sorrow* (1994, Holocaust

¹⁰ See the volume titled *Nur raus hier!* (2014)

Memorial Museum, Washington DC), *Zeit meines Lebens* (1999, at the Hohenschönhausen Memorial site), *Crimes of War* (2001, International Criminal Tribunal, The Hague), *Yougoslavie: Déchirures* (2002, SIPA, Paris), and *Fotos des Jahrhunderts* (2014, Arte, Strassburg). Most recently, he has traveled to Syria to photograph the war and humanitarian crisis occurring there. On the particular resonance of his visual work, Kaiser explains: “I know how guards think and act. I know how to become invisible—and I also have no fear left. That’s why I’m able to make photographs that others would not be able to” (Elcheikh, “Picturing Violence”).

Because of his humanitarian photography and experience in communist Europe, in 1991 Kaiser received the assignment to accompany reporter Roy Gutman to the former Yugoslavia. The team comprised of Kaiser, Gutman, and journalist-interpreter Seska Stanojlovic arrived in the Bosnian town of Banja Luka in early July of 1992, after driving fourteen hours through combat zones and destroyed villages. They were the first foreign journalists to land in the area, a situation that they soon found advantageous, as locals were interested in their presence and very willing to share details of what they thought was going on. As they spoke with locals and began to gather a sense of the untoward violence and possible violations of human rights that were underway, Kaiser and Gutman tried to get access to the sites of the rumored concentration camps in Trnopolje and Omarska, with little success. With their freedom of movement barred by the Serbian authorities, “the only way to reconstruct events was to question refugees who were flooding out of Bosnia” (Kaiser & Gutman, vii). Because of Gutman’s personal and professional knowledge of the former Yugoslavia and its cultural and political landscape, the team suspected the movements of the newly formed Serbian army to be part of a

larger plan; while they had “no idea how to uncover and document the bigger picture [they] assumed there would be many leads” (viii). During this time they received verbal confirmation of the boxcar deportations of parts of population in Bosnia, as well as of mass killings occurring in Serb-run concentration camps and systematic rape by conquering forces. Again prevented from visiting these sites, an official finally agreed to let the team visit what was termed an “army-run prisoner-of-war camp” in Manjaca. What greeted them upon arrival was a portrait of the loss of human dignity: underfed prisoners with shaved heads building a perimeter fence for their own imprisonment. Kaiser, though watched closely by guards, was able to snap a few furtive photographs. Some time later, after the British ITC broadcast caused Serbian authorities to vacate and clean up the Omarska and Trnopolje camps, the team also visited these areas and uncovered the way that authorities had tried to cover up the events that has taken place there, as well as the ill-treatment and killing of prisoners. A final set of images was taken in Tuzla, where a number of rumored female rape victims were housed in a gymnasium. All images and the reports accompanying them were released to the public through *Newsweek* almost as soon as they were taken; in a 2018 interview, Kaiser describes what he hoped this speed would accomplish: “We wanted to be eyewitnesses and to change something on the ground, by sending out the horrifying truth of violence and atrocities” (Elcheikh, “Picturing Violence”). Through this work, Kaiser and Gutman provided the first documented reports of the atrocities and human rights violations occurring in Bosnia, reporting that many argue indeed helped push the international community to take action in Bosnia (Elcheikh, “Picturing Violence”). For these dispatches Kaiser and Gutman won the 1993 Pulitzer Prize, with the duo releasing a compilation of all Bosnian

reports and images in their volume *Witness to Genocide* later that year. While Gutman's part in the work is considerably better known (partially due to Gutman's high-profile presence through numerous interviews, talks, and other public appearances), it is Kaiser's images that produce half of the prize-winning equation, and indeed, that underpin the reports' entire existence as evidential products. The following sections examine these photographs and their contexts in more detail, focusing on what I have termed *The Manjaca Images*, *The Approved Camp Images*, and *The Tuzla Images*. As we will see, the gap between what these photographs actually provide and what they claim to provide—one of Susan Sontag's central critiques of the medium—offers chances for Kaiser to act as intermediary and to place them in a more meaningful and robust context for signification and interpretation.

Kaiser appears to have taken all *The Manjaca Images*, *The Approved Camp Images*, and *The Tuzla Images* sometime in the second half of 1992. The images were dispatched in tandem with Roy Gutman's reports of the situations of at hand, which span from July to October of 1992. *The Manjaca Images* consist of two secretly taken photographs (Figures 1.1 and 1.2¹¹) that depict the disturbing conditions in the Manjaca detention camp; captions indicate that these images were taken in early July 1992. In *Witness to Genocide*, Gutman describes the scene as he and Kaiser arrived at Manjaca and how Kaiser came to take these photographs in the first place:

In a field just before the camp entrance [we] saw a haunting scene: emaciated men with their heads shaved in a field building a perimeter fence. We looked at each other and didn't say a word. Andree was born in East Germany and had been jailed for three years [...]. In jail he had learned the art of *runterschrauben*, which means roughly to burrow into the background, and this he did throughout the visit. From the camp forecourt we could see the top of a rise several hundred yards away dozens of prisoners lined up to have their heads shorn like sheep. Half a dozen guards surrounded Andree to ensure he took only authorized photos. While I talked with the camp doctors, Andree passed out

¹¹ Author's note: image not in text, is forthcoming.

cigarettes to the guards and feigned boredom. When no one was looking he snapped three frames of prisoners on the hill. It is one of the most famous photos of the war in Bosnia, depicting the humiliation wrought on the Muslims by their conquerors. (Kaiser & Gutman, xi)

Particularly galling for their recollection of Holocaust imagery of shaved heads and barbed wire fencing, these images also remain notable for the secretive manner in which they were taken. Though Serbian authorities had permitted Kaiser and Gutman to visit the camp, they had presumably done so with the assumption that the foreign journalists would follow the mandate to take only authorized photos and that whatever images would leave the camp would fail to establish connections to the actual events occurring there. Instead, the two images taken by Kaiser, situated as they are within the larger context of the appalling human rights violations of the twentieth century, immediately draw the eye to the details that culminate in a depiction of the loss of human dignity. The first image of the prisoners in a line, captured through a horizontal shot, shows not only the length of the line of men but also how closely they are packed into the space containing their bodies. Through situating the line of prisoners in the middle of the shot but not allowing it to take over the entire frame, Kaiser allows the viewer to get a sense of the desolate conditions of the camp around the men. Most noticeable are the men themselves; although they appear first as a mass of bowed heads all facing towards the right side of the frame, a number of troubled individual faces become visible upon closer inspection.



Figure 1.1: Prisoners in the concentration camp in Manjaca

Gone are the citizens who seek to interact with the camera, thus reaffirming their human agency. These men have not seen Kaiser not only because he is furtively snapping this image, but also because they dare not look around the camp surroundings; they have been cowed into total and complete submission. The shaving of the head is only a final step on this ladder of shame. Kaiser's caption emphasizes the imagery of his photograph as it reads: *"Manjaca, Bosnia-Herzegovina, July 1992: Newly arrested Muslim prisoners being shorn like sheep by the Serb guards at a 'prisoner of war' camp in Serb-dominated north Bosnia. Of the estimated 3,000 prisoners, only a handful bore arms against the Serb conquerors, according to international relief workers"* (*Witness to Genocide*, 52). The second photograph, captioned *"Manjaca: Hand-lettered sign on the barbed-wire perimeter fence warns of mines,"* expounds on the conditions of the camp hinted at in the first photograph, and continues the connection to the animalistic treatment of prisoners.

For just like sheep, these men are kept in these camps through dangerous fences; worse than sheep, they risk a horrific death if they attempt to leave. The positioning of the fencing in Kaiser's second image is particularly conspicuous; the angle of his photograph shows numerous lines of fencing, and one can imagine rows and rows of it beyond the frame. Through providing visual and verbal clues that implicitly tie this scene in Manjaca to similar scenes fifty years earlier in Auschwitz, Kaiser highlights the connections between both sites of detention and death; far from being a simply 'prisoner-of-war' camp as claimed by the Serbs, the implication is that it is a much more serious issue that deserves international attention for its questionable justification. Though initially prevented from taking these images, Kaiser's insistence on gaining access to the site and documenting it also adds a layer of additional legitimacy to his images: Serbian authorities have something to hide, and he is there to document it and to uncover it. This is underscored by the formal characteristics of the photographs: both are in a clean black and white color scheme and appear to be minimally stylized, reinforcing the perception that they indeed simply represent what the Kaiser the photographer happened to see in very this moment of looking. At the same time, Kaiser's imagery and caption calls into question the rhetoric of the Serbian government because of their questionable approach to human rights; they categorize these prisoners as rebels and outlaws, yet the images suggest that this is merely an excuse for inhumane and violent treatment. The implied equation of the Serbian government with the National Socialist regime, as well as verbal confirmation of the innocence of these prisoners from respected international relief organizations, further undermines the Serbian explanation of these images.

The second set of photographs taken by Kaiser together with his associate Boris Geilert, what I have termed *The Approved Camp Images*, provide a stark contrast to the *Manjaca Images* particularly for what they do not show. Importantly, these images of the camps of Omarska and of Omarska survivors at Trnopolje were taken with the express sanction of the Serbian authorities, as Kaiser, Geilert, and Gutman were allowed to visit these sites with hosts of other journalists after the shocking August 1992 British *ITC* broadcast showed the gross mistreatment of emaciated prisoners at Omarska. Serbian authorities, conscious of maintaining the appearance of legitimate state after the international outcry that followed the release of this video footage, removed all prisoners from Omarska and the other camps and opened them to the foreign press. The result of the team's visit to these sites is a series of open-ended images that contain a troublesome malleability. The two images examined in this section (Figures 1.3 and 1.4) are a selection of a bigger group of images taken by Kaiser and Geilert between October and December of 1992. The first photograph shows a sleeping area for prisoners in the Omarska camp. With its neatly ordered rows of worn but sturdy bunk beds, folded sheets, and pristine swept floors, it projects a visual of clean, orderly, and comfortable housing for those who were held there; indeed, the bunk beds make it seem almost as though it were a summer camp for children. The caption, however, tells another story: "*Omarska: After emptying the camp in early August following the Newsday disclosures, authorities installed bunk beds and mattresses, then opened the facility to the press and other visitors. Officials say there were 270 prisoners and all slept in beds; former prisoners say it was ten times that number and that all slept on the floor*" (*Witness to Genocide*, 116).



Figure 1.3. An empty Camp Omarska

Thus, what is interesting about this photograph in connection with its caption is precisely what it does not show; no trace is left of the deplorable conditions under which prisoners say they were kept. In other words, the image alone tells us nothing and serves as evidence of nothing. It documents not what has occurred before, but what is occurring now: the covering up of evidence by the Serbian authorities. Yet without the caption this image would offer no such narrative to its viewers, leaving it precisely in that limbo of signification that Susan Sontag warns of when she writes of the ahistorical nature of photographs. The real trouble with this image is the “evidence [it] contains bears only tangential relation to the content of the image itself” (Brothers 22). The second image, taken in what appears to be a gymnasium in Trnopolje, northern Bosnia, show a large room packed with men of all ages and sizes; they are standing, sitting on the floor, and lying on blankets. Lined up in the middle of the room are plastic carts with buckets and towels on them, presumably for drinking or washing.



Figure 1.4. Gymnasium in Trnopolje

The photograph is more highly saturated than the images previously discussed. The sunlight streaming in the large windows at the far end of the gymnasium illuminate the smaller, standing figures towards the back of the image and obscure the ones closer to the camera. Like the previous images of the prisoners at Manjaca, the men mostly avert their eyes from the camera; many sit or stand with their backs turned, seemingly shunning all contact with the men taking pictures from the entryway. However, a few stare directly at the lens with what appear to be curious and sad glances. On the bottom right corner, swathed nearly in total shadow since he is sitting beyond the reach of the light behind the makeshift sanitary stands, is a young man laying on his back with his feet propped up and his arm behind his head. He stares into the camera with such a venomous glare that it surprises when it suddenly becomes apparent to the viewer—and it cannot be ignored

after it does. For all that he looks worn thin and tired, like most of the men in the gymnasium, the mysterious prisoner's gaze locks with that of the camera, almost demanding recognition as a human being equal to that of the man behind the lens. The caption reads: "*Trnopolje, northern Bosnia: Serb authorities closed down the Omarska camp in August and shifted 1,571 prisoners to this schoolhouse detention camp. When places were found for them two months later, 3,500 refugees flocked to the site. But Europe's borders were closed and they languished for months*" (*Witness to Genocide*, 116). Again, little in this image tells the story that it is supposed to tell; it might as well be the photograph of a hurricane shelter in the United States following the devastation of a large storm. But through this caption, Kaiser and Geilert not only give a name to the place and a group identity to these men, but they also identify them as former inmates of the death camp Omarska. Therefore, an image that initially seems innocuous becomes fraught with a latent meaning that runs through its contents yet simultaneously remains independent of them. These photographs remain part of a larger series of reports that not only follow the survivors of these camps after their release, but also attempt to track down what happened to the majority of prisoners that were released but were never seen again. The place of these images in a series that acts to expose the deliberate attempts of Serbian authorities to cover up their genocidal actions remains a true irony, for Serbian media would later use these very same images to argue that the international community was biased in their assessment of the genocide and that such events never happened to begin with, a move that further fanned the flames of propaganda. The inherent innocence of the images, their disconnect from what they claim to show, leaves them open to precisely this kind of misrepresentation. At the same time, they remain documents of the

trauma caused by the camp experiences; the first because of its very coldness and its starkly arranged assertion of order and the second because of the direct and pained gaze of the surviving men in it. In this way, it is the two photographs read together that provide a better understanding of what actually happened on the ground as these crimes against humanity were committed.

The third set of photographs, *The Tuzla Images*, offer the most direct representation of the effects of these crimes on their victims. Taken in the later summer of 1992 in a gymnasium *cum* makeshift shelter in this northern Bosnian city, these photographs show women in the grip of the emotional aftermath of their rapes by Serbian captors in Brezovo Polje. Though they show nothing especially explicit, the images are harrowing. The first (Figure 1.5), captioned simply “*rape victim from Brezovo Polje*,” depicts a young woman sitting by herself, tears streaming down her face as she bites her hand in an attempt to control her emotions.



Figure 1.5. Rape victim from Brezovo Polje

The devastation caused by this dehumanizing experience is written on the woman’s face and she keeps her eyes averted, staring into the distance as if caught in some horrific

cycle of memory. Notably in this particular case Kaiser eschews the longer, more detailed captions he typically seems to favor; yet the diminished detail contextualizing this image does not make it any less powerful. While the woman is not named and her experience is not given, the anonymity he affords her almost feels like a gesture of respect on Kaiser's part. He quietly keeps his distance, aware of both his position as an outsider and as a male. The next image is a photograph of a large group of women in the hall, lined up in a semi-circle in the gymnasium. Some older women are standing behind the younger ones, who are kneeling directly in front of them. All are facing the camera, though a number of them avert their eyes. The caption sheds light on who these women are: "*Tuzla: Their fathers and brothers were taken to concentration camps. Their mothers were sent alone across a minefield. Then the daughters were systematically raped and released. The Brezovo rape victims, reunited with their mothers*" (*Witness to Genocide*, 53). Together, the nearly thirty women in the photograph have witnessed and been subject to unspeakable tragedy, their families ripped apart, their lives on the edge, and their integrity violated. Disturbingly, this image taken by Kaiser, set as it is in a gymnasium with the women lined up as they are, reminds of a team sports photograph for a high school. Yet the initial simple innocence of the photograph becomes suspect when one looks closer and notes the way many women avert their eyes and when one begins to take stock of the pain and shame on their faces. This first artlessness of the photo is further unmasked by the detailed caption. Interestingly, the distance at which the shot is taken again allows the women a degree of anonymity; a few faces stand out and are recognizable in other photos, but the majority are not. It is perhaps this privacy which Kaiser affords them visually that allows him to describe their experiences in more detail

verbally. The caption implies a uniformity of experiences amongst the women pictured, while the image itself binds them together as a collective of survivors. At the same time, a number of questions stand out about the image. One must wonder why the women lined up this way as they did: who directed them? Did they choose to do this on their own? If not, who convinced them to pose for a picture and why? While these questions might seem mundane, they remain of paramount importance in such a fraught situation with women who are physically, emotionally, and psychologically traumatized.

The second photograph (Figure 1.6) is a close-up shot of a group of four women and is captioned: “*Tuzla: Hurt, distraught, angry. Rape victims from Brezovo Polje*” (*Witness to Genocide*, 53).



Figure 1.6: Rape Victims from Brezovo Polje

They are lined up across the shot, all facing the camera at various angles. The two women on the edges of the group avert their eyes from the camera; the one on the far left, a slight

blonde, appears to be crying and staring off into the distance as her hand rests on the shoulder of the woman next to her. Similarly the one on the left, a brunette with close-cropped hair, glances down and across the shot, seemingly shamed and refusing to meet the eye of the camera. The two women in the middle, though, stare directly at the camera lens in a challenging manner. One, a stocky curly-haired brunette with a ponytail, glares almost aggressively at the photographer. She raises her chin and clenches her jaw stubbornly, almost daring the viewer to look at the group but also daring us to look away. The victim next to her—a dark-haired elegant woman with curled hair, jewelry, and winged eyeliner—holds her waist as she perches an arm on it, her index finger touching her face in a graceful gesture as she gazes almost quizzically at the camera. *“What do you want with us?”* her gaze seems to say. The photograph contrasts with the last two in that it not only features women who engage more directly with the camera and the photographer behind it, but that also shows the ways in which these victims cope with the aftermath of their experiences. All the victims stand very closely to one another, their arms touching, hands resting on each other’s shoulders and on each other’s arms. In this sense, it becomes clear that these women are relying on each other to survive. Of his experience photographing the rape victims in Tuzla, Kaiser remembers that “the women had a great need to talk about their suffering and to make it visible to the international public” (Winter, “Augenzeugen des Völkermordes”). Therefore, their engagement with the camera demands that their experiences not be shrugged off: *“Take us seriously. Do something about this”* their gazes seem to implore. Through this Kaiser’s photograph, although not precisely evidential in nature, becomes a kind of evidential force in the wake of the naked emotion of the victims.

Taken together, *The Manjaca Images*, *The Approved Camp Images*, and *The Tuzla Images* all offer different pieces of what at that time was the changing and evolving story of the Bosnian crisis and genocide. Far from being images that speak for themselves, they nonetheless take on the essence of evidence through being placed in various socio-historical and cultural contexts for interpretation. Through being taken by esteemed photojournalist Andree Kaiser and accompanied by texts written by veteran reported Roy Gutman, these images not only benefitted from the appearance of having being taken by honest, unbiased persons but also followed an avenue of dissemination that lent them additional legitimacy. Ultimately ending up in many editions and sometimes even on the covers of Newsweek, The New York Times, and other important current events magazines popular in Europe and the United States at the time, Kaiser's photographs were circulated in a manner that effectively solidified their status as evidential objects. While the perceived impact of these images—particularly on the public and its mobilization of political forces to end the conflict—certainly remains open to debate, it is undeniable that Kaiser's work in Bosnia in 1992 laid an important foundation for these discussions. At the same time, the way in which each of the sets of images mentioned in this section function in relation to evidence differs starkly. *The Manjaca Images* not only show the mistreatment of Muslim prisoners under the Serbian authorities but also place these actions and where they occur squarely within the historical realm of the Holocaust. Although the photographs themselves show nothing violent *per se*, this visual and contextual placement remains something that imbues the images with an urgency beyond their contents: their dissemination is not only an appeal for recognition but also one for action against a Serbian government that has made itself

illegitimate through its crimes against humanity. *The Approved Camp Images*, conversely, resonate precisely because of what they do not show. As photographs whose very existence rely on a cooperation with the government that has created these conditions, they tell a circuitous story of dissemblance and misrepresentation; these camps never looked this clean, these prisoners never looked this well-taken care of. As one terrified detainee whispered to a visiting foreign correspondent: “Don’t believe what you see. They have made this place into a tourist attraction” (Nizich 85). Kaiser’s photographs advance a similar kind of perceptive blindness and resonate because of the stark contrast between what exists visually in them and what they represent contextually. At the same time, this makes them unstable, unreliable images that are left open to egregious misuse. *The Tuzla Images*, however, offer something different. While all the photographs contain varying degrees of violence, both implied and direct, these images confront the viewer with the personal and emotional aftermath that these crimes leave with their victims. Kaiser rightly notes that “a camera cannot catch the tears running down their cheeks, nor the power of their silence while looking at each other and holding hands. A snapshot cannot seize the screaming silence of a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* (Elchiekh, “Picturing Violence”).¹² Yet by placing these images in the context of Gutman’s reports on the violent and systematic rapes of Bosnian women during this war and ensuing genocide, Kaiser encourages viewers to understand the image beyond itself, something that, in the end, remains possible because of the sad universality of the crime of rape. Rather than becoming, as Susan Sontag writes in *Pain of Others*, something that “nourish[es] belief in the inevitability of tragedy in the benighted or backward—that is

¹² “shared fate or destiny”

poor—parts of the world,” the viewer is confronted by the emotional evidence of an event that occurs with a distressing amount of regularity in all parts of the world (65). For Kaiser to present the criminal use of rape as a weapon of war through these images imbues them with an evidential significance far beyond their initial surface signification. Therefore, *The Tuzla Images* become photographs that resonate beyond the cultural and historical context of the Bosnian crisis; they strike a chord that connects us all, making them particularly powerful forces for evidence.

In all his photographs of Bosnia during 1992-1993, Kaiser displays a deep sensitivity not only to the plight of prisoners and victims of crimes against humanity, but also to the evidential perceptions and limits of the medium of photography. While his partner Roy Gutman may very well believe that Kaiser’s images “are necessary to establish instant credibility,” Kaiser appears to engage more thoughtfully with the perceived verisimilitude of his photographs (Gutman 35). From the way he takes the individual photograph to the socio-historical context in which he makes sure to place it both visually and verbally, Kaiser knows that for his images to “be witnesses and to change something on the ground, [to send] out the horrifying truth of violence and atrocities,” he must do more than treat them simply as a straightforward slice of the real (Elcheikh, “Picturing Violence”). While this does not always mean that Kaiser’s Bosnia photographs are protected from misuse and misappropriation, this awareness has helped bring forth the public outcry surrounding his evidential images and indeed, the first substantial international reaction to the Bosnian genocide. As we will see in the next sections, images like Kaiser’s front-page headline photographs and their relationship to events have played a central role in the way the crisis has come to be understood not only

by the public but also by those wishing to visually engage with the genocide and its legacy through fictional film and art photography.

Storm: Knowledge, Evidence, and the International War Crimes Courtroom

At the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) on February 15, 2002, former Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic took the stand in self-defense against charges of responsibility for the genocide of Bosnian Muslims between 1992 and 1995. In his testimony, Milosevic

engaged in a duel of images, producing photographs and videos that were even more ghastly than those shown by prosecutors earlier this week, this time of the victims of NATO airstrikes. At his request, courtroom monitors flashed images of bombed sites, charred and mangled bodies and severed human limbs and heads. [...] "The bombing of civilian targets was merciless," he said solemnly. "The more suffering of civilians, the better." [...] From his stack of papers, he showed dozens of photographs, of bombed factories, houses, bridges, a train and a convoy of Albanians to make his case that NATO was equally responsible for civilian deaths in the Balkans. [He asked] when NATO would be tried for the bombing. (Fisher & Simmons, "Defiant")

While Milosevic's brash statements remain typical of the types of arguments that characterized Serbian nationalist rhetoric of the post-Yugoslavian era, they also demonstrate a deep if wily understanding of the evidentiary power of images, particularly within the context of the courtroom; in presenting visual documentation of the consequences of NATO wrongdoing eerily similar in appearance to those that are said to document genocide, Milosevic not only seeks to absolve himself of serious crimes but also to normalize these actions as a simply a product of times of war. This move not only compares but also equates two very different acts with one another; far from being concrete evidence of wrongdoing as Kaiser had hoped they would be, documentary images of the Bosnian crisis become instead fodder for a very different kind of narrative of exoneration.

This section takes up these concerns of the image and its signification within the larger apparatus of the ICTY by looking at Hans-Christian Schmid's 2009 film *Storm*. Starkly critical of the ability of international justice to remain independent from financial and political pressure, the film explores various notions of evidence, the ways truth comes to be established in institution of the court, and the way justice is influenced by a variety of internal and external factors. In this web, *Storm* reveals, evidence and even visual documentary is not the same thing as proof. The image is not, like Kaiser imagined, able to directly relate an urgent truth by virtue of being placed in the right visual or verbal context. Instead, the environment of the ICTY creates a troubling relationship of the image to what it signifies; what evidence can be gleaned from it becomes not only highly regulated but also highly suspect in an atmosphere that treats all narratives as equal before the law.

German director and screenwriter Hans Christian Schmid remains known primarily for his work in the area of documentary filmmaking, though his more recent body of work combines documentary styles with fictional narratives. Born in a small Bavarian town in southern Germany and currently based in Berlin, Schmid studied documentary filmmaking at the University of Television and Film in Munich and completed his degree in 1992. Major productions include *Himmel und Hölle* (1994), *Nach fünf im Urwald* (1995), *23—Nichts ist so wie es scheint* (1998), *Crazy* (2000), *Distant Lights* (2003), *Requiem* (2006), *Die wundersame Welt der Waschkraft* (2007), *Storm* (2009), and *Home for the Weekend* (2012). Schmid's documentary and fictional works have garnered the numerous Findling Awards, as well as the Adolf-Grimme Prize, the German Film Prize, and the Bavarian Film Award for Best Screenplay; films like

Requiem, *Storm*, and *Home for the Weekend* have also been featured at several international film festivals. In addition to his prolific oeuvre, Schmid holds positions at the University of Television and Film in Munich, the Film Academy in Ludwigsburg, and the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne, where he lectures as visiting professor of film. *Storm* joins the more recent of Schmid's films that work across international boundaries; the German-Dutch-Danish-Bosnian coproduction not only features multiple languages, but works with a strong international cast of actors as it follows the developments of a war crimes trial at the Hague. *Storm* follows the story of the middle-aged Hannah Maynard, who steps in as lead prosecutor in the ICTY trial of Goran Duric, a Serbian general and national hero accused of war crimes during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s. The case against Duric is said to be airtight, with a favorable conviction and a speedy conclusion to the trial seemingly immanent. Yet after Bosnian Muslim Alen Hajdarevic, the principle witness for the prosecution, is revealed as having submitted false testimony regarding genocidal events at the Bosnian town of Kosmaj, Maynard must scramble to save the almost three-year-old case before Duric receives an acquittal. Following the suicide of Hajdarevic, a desperate Maynard travels to Serbia to collect evidence, where she meets Hajdarevic's sister Mia Arendt. Now living in Berlin with her own German family, the guarded Arendt is initially of little help; yet it slowly becomes clear to Maynard that Arendt not only knows what happened at Kosmaj, but that she herself was there. After some time Arendt shares information regarding Duric's role as commandant of a rape camp located in a hotel spa in the town of Vilina Kosa. Previously unknown to the prosecution the events at Vilina Kosa serve as the final nail in the coffin for Duric—Arendt is admitted to the ICTY as a witness and the prosecution prepares to win the case.

But political events far beyond Maynard's control—the EU-entry negotiations of the European Union with Balkan nations and the financial idiosyncrasies that underpin the ICTY—make Arendt's testimony beyond Kosmaj inadmissible in court. Faced with the choice of losing the career she holds dear or sacrificing justice for Arendt and Duric's other victims by withholding important truths, Maynard allows the truth about Vilina Kosa to come to light at the expense of personal gain.

Described by Schmid as an intentional cross between a thriller and a drama, *Storm* has been praised by critics as “a different kind of political thriller” and “a reality check for a genre in which the good guys somehow always come out on top” (Honeycutt, “Film Review: Storm”). Schmid's directorial style has also made an impression with critics who have characterized the film as “remarkably restrained and subtle” (Holden, “Crime”). The documentary-like style of *Storm*, filmed as it is with a handheld camera with 35mm film and delicate lighting, not only allows the dialogue and the images to come to the fore, but also creates the sense of being part of moments of witnessing. As Schmid and his screenwriter Bernd Lange explain, the way *Storm* is related to real-life events occurring at the ICTY (particularly developments in the trial of Serbian war criminal Radovan Karadzic concurrent to the making of the film) impact the way its documentary style is interpreted: “In the film it becomes nearly impossible to explicitly distinguish between reality and fiction, since we attempted to create a kind of poetic reality [*verdichtete Realität*] and to avoid all staged dramatic effects” (“Interview with Schmid and Lange”). In making the film, *Storm* cinematographer Bogumil Godfrejow follows this notion by using the handheld camera to maximum effect, something that creates an aesthetic based on “the feeling you get when you suddenly want to shoot [something] but you're not

really sure why” (“Interview with Bogumil Godfrejow”). These directorial choices result in a film that shows a sensitivity towards a particularly subtle kind of realism as the fabric into which images pertaining to the Bosnian crisis are woven.

Falling in line with the previously discussed subtle documentary aesthetic of the film, *Storm* does not linger on the violence and gore of images of atrocity and war; indeed, those hoping for a similar straightforward portrayal of evidence as Andree Kaiser puts forth in his photojournalistic work would be sorely disappointed. In contrast, *Storm* nearly completely eschews the naked violence and raw emotion present in Kaiser’s images in favor of an understated interaction with images pertaining to the Bosnian crisis. Partly responsible for this phenomenon are the types of images Schmid elects to insert into the visual narrative—rather than dwelling on photographic stills of carnage described by Milosevic at the beginning of this section, Schmid relies more on documentary video footage, sketches of buildings, and maps of towns to investigate the relationship between truth and meaning, the image, and forms of witnessing. The first such moment occurs early on in the film, after the audience is first introduced to prosecutor Hannah Maynard. As Maynard enters the office of her former colleague Keith Haywood, now promoted to chief prosecutor of the bureau, the Duric case is handed over to her and she is informed of its details. As Haywood describes the ease of the case and its expected success to Maynard due to three years previously collecting evidence and interviewing witnesses, he turns to a large screen in the room which begins to play video footage. The footage is grainy, shot with an extremely unsteady camera; this, together with its faded color scheme identifies it as documentary footage taken at the time of the events in question. The imagery is that of a proud general, a charismatic freedom fighter: Duric, dressed in

his Serbian military fatigues, is laughing and shaking hands with his men as they pass by carrying firearms. Soldier after soldier marches by as Duric responds with nods of approval, yet their informal interaction and easy camaraderie speak to not only the trust these men have in their leader, but in the power of the figure himself. As this footage is played, Haywood lays out the conviction the prosecution is seeking for Duric: crimes against humanity and violation of martial law. The difference between what the footage shows and what Haywood describes remains striking in its incongruence. What it actually implies, though, comes to light only much later in the film—Duric is beloved by the Serbian people and funded by powerful Serbian financial and political players and so convicting him of war crimes proves to be more elusive than Haywood anticipates. As the scene continues, a second video clip is shown, this time of Kosmaj in Serbian-occupied Bosnia. This time, the footage is in stark black and white and depicts soldiers carrying guns as they dart from one side of the screen to the other, fighting on foot as a large tank rolls by (Figure 1.7). The action appears to take place on the outskirts of this small town as the soldiers dodge gunfire and the sound of the ammunition echoes in the background of the clip.



Figure 1.7: Still of found footage (Storm, 2009)

At the same time, Haywood explains the contents of an official Serbian military communiqué: *“to ensure peace, individual arrests of members of the civilian population were carried out.”* The next clip immediately begins to play, most likely showing the deportations of these civilians occurring. The footage is highly stylized in color, presented in a brownish sepia tone; the clicking sound in the background making it seem like this could be a vintage slide presentation. Women and men walk across the screen from far left corner to front right corner; the women’s heads are covered, possibly identifying them as Muslim Bosnians. They are followed by a group of darkly dressed older men with similarly covered heads, and all are carrying bundles of clothing and goods in their arms as they walk slowly with their heads down. The following scene in this footage is in a similar sepia tone and features a line of men walking towards the camera, all dressed similarly with black clothing and matching caps. They too drag heavy items with them, and some appear to struggle under the weight. The line goes on and on, no end in sight, as the frame continues to play. While the line of men is flanked by bushes on the right, the left side of the screen seems to show a caravan of large military vehicles

with covered transportation bays. The proximity of these vehicles not only gives the visual sense of these men being hemmed in, but also evokes a sense of latent violence in that they prevent any possible escape as they keep the line moving forward. The resemblance to other well-known deportation imagery of the Armenians during World War One and of the Jews during World War Two is stark. Haywood provides the interpretation of the footage as he explains that this show ethnic cleansing, for which Duric was giving the orders. The ease with which this footage is integrated into the scene not only underscores the aesthetic of verisimilitude that pervades the film, but also establishes the way the image will come to be treated as *Storm* progresses. The images of Duric, of the fighting, and of the deportations are powerful forces within these scenes; they not only help to illustrate what has happened, but also provide a familiarity or kind of visual grounding for the events being described. At the same time though, there remains a noticeable gap between what the footage actually demonstrates and the events that Haywood seems to think it confirms. In other words, what Haywood claims that these scenes of footage show clearly does not stem from the footage itself. Rather, it comes from the very specific narrative of guilt and criminality that he places it into. Indeed, the explanation undergirding the images at hand appears so far abstracted from the image itself that the footage loses touch with its own sources and circumstances of production; how they were made, by whom they were taken, what the circumstances of their creation are—all this remains unknown and unimportant. Yet the implication of authenticity is highlighted by the grainy characteristics of the footage, the instability of the hand-held camera that captured it, and the faded color, black and white, and sepia tones. These formal characteristics encourage the viewer to take the footage seriously, yet

it remains unclear whether this is actual archival footage that has been integrated into the film or a product of Schmid's team of editors. The result is a visual representation of Serbian crimes in Bosnia that feels nebulous, intangible, and startlingly divorced from both the record of evidence and the emotion of experience. But as *Storm* will show, the courtroom becomes the space in which the elusive and unstable image is reinvested with loaded and specific evidential meaning, while the witness imbues it with emotion.

The moments of and around first courtroom scenes of *Storm* serve as a salient example of how these processes function and are interpreted in the film. The key witness, Alen Hajdarevic, sits soberly before the judges as Maynard questions him as to the events occurring in Kosmaj. Hajdarevic begins to give background to the story, explaining what led up to his witnessing in Kosmaj, but is quickly interrupted by both the defense and the judges, who urge him to restrict his testimony only to what he saw that day at the school. After Hajdarevic gives a detailed account of Duric beating women and children and forcing them onto a bus, he identifies the Serbian general as the officer in charge of the deportations in the Kosmaj schoolyard. As the court is adjourned, Hajdarevic approaches Maynard, asking her if he might have a video recording of his testimony so that his work at the court might be remembered. Before Maynard can answer, a court official steps in, reminding Hajdarevic that he is not allowed to speak to the lead prosecutor outside of the courtroom. While Hajdarevic's request is an interesting move on Schmid's part that plays with notions of video documentary, evidence, and truth, these scenes both demonstrate the way the court tightly controls not only the witnesses' testimony and interactions, but also the image itself. In the next scene, the defense cross-examines Hajdarevic, asking him to look at a map of the area of Kosmaj

where the deportations occurred. The map contains sketches of the gymnasium, schoolyard, and school building, with the buildings all outlined in relation to one another with labeled streets in between them (Figure 1.8).

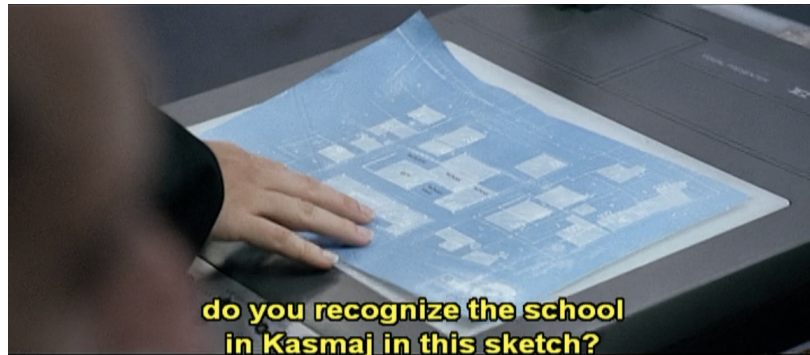


Figure 1.8: Still of the courtroom sketch (Storm, 2009)

Using the sketches, which appear on the computer screens in front of the teams of judges, the defense, and the prosecution, Hajdarevic explains that he observed the events in the schoolyard as he hid in the entrance of his family home. He indicates the location on the map and an assistant marks it with an *X*. The defense next asks him to identify from a series of photographs the bus onto which Duric forced the citizens of Kosmaj. The images are blurry, weakly colored Polaroid prints of a bus model from the 1990s, all garishly colored and pasted onto a poster board that is again projected onto each personal computer screen. Although he first protests that he cannot remember—the events occurred over fifteen years ago—Hajdarevic agrees that he saw the blue and white bus after the defense helpfully reminds him that the JNA used this type of bus during the Yugoslav Wars. Yet what Hajdarevic has failed to notice is that the map also contains measurements of distances between buildings and of roads; using the map the defense subsequently unmask his testimony as untrue, arguing that the turning radius of the bus

in question would have never made it into the schoolyard to begin with. After the court decides to travel to Kosmaj to physically investigate this phenomenon using the blue and white bus (a move that fails spectacularly in that it confirms Hajdarevic could not possibly have seen what he claimed to witness), Hajdarevic's testimony is thrown out and he leaves The Hague in disgrace.

While seemingly ridiculous that such an important testimonial moment would come down to an argument about three-point turns and parking a bus, these moments also demonstrate the important role of witness in relationship to image and truth. The map stands as something that has been entered into evidence, that is, the actors of the court have approved it as an item bearing evidential significance. In contrast to the documentary footage at the beginning of the film, which Schmid encourages his viewer to take seriously by placing them in the context of criminality, the Kosmaj map already holds this status by virtue of its existence in court. Without a doubt, the map shows the space as it is, connecting it intimately to that which occurred in with the confines it depicts. Though the map serves as a seemingly neutral representation of Kosmaj, the deportations there remain anything but; the role of Hajdarevic as the witness is to imbue the image with the narrative it is connected to but initially lacks. Yet in this case, while the image remains credible in its neutrality, its very neutrality serves to undermine the testimony of the Bosniak witness and to aid the defense of Duric. These scenes underscore how even the seemingly neutral image of a map can come to mean many things at once as it represents opposing ideological positions. A similar process occurs with the Polaroid photographs of the busses. Interestingly, *Storm* does not take into account the texture of witness memory, particular post-traumatic memory, in which

remembering the color of a bus under the significant psychological strain of witnessing extreme violence would be far from a given. Instead, the film seems to suggest that in its single-minded pursuit of its narrow definition of proof, the institution of the international court actually impedes its larger quest for justice.

While the interaction of the witness with the image in the courtroom scenes with Hajdarevic represent a fraught relationship of testimony to visual evidence, the revelation of his sister Mia Arendt's experiences in Kosmaj and Vilina Kosa offer a different—though perhaps more disturbing—take on the nature of these connections. As Maynard and her team begin to suspect that Arendt knows more than she initially let on, Maynard begins to press her to tell her story so that she may testify before the ICTY in place of her brother. Viewing this as her last chance to close the case against Duric, Maynard finally convinces Arendt, who confirms not only that she witnessed Duric ordering deportations at Kosmaj, but also that she was interred at a systematic rape camp run by Duric at Vilina Kosa. The moments in which Arendt first relates her version of the tale is tense and chilling. Seated alone with Maynard late at night in a dark hotel room in Berlin, Arendt describes how she was forced onto the bus in the schoolyard of Kosmaj. She witnessed Duric beating a woman and her small child to death in the schoolyard and tells the story of how the deported women were divided up, locked in hotel rooms at Vilina Kosa, and repeatedly raped for months. Those who protested or who could not take it anymore were taken to the cellar, lined up against the wall, and shot to death. As Arendt confirms that Duric gave the orders for all of this, Maynard quickly pulls out an architectural blueprint of the Vilina Kosa spa hotel. The white paper with the black lines printed starkly on it shows the layout and rooms of the hotel, and is labeled in Serbo-Croatian. As she slams

the blueprint down on the coffee table between them, Maynard urges Arendt to indicate where she believes the cellar to be where the women were shot; with a shaking finger Arendt wordlessly points to the location on the map, with Maynard quickly marking the spot. The very next scene features a forensic team entering the spa hotel in Vilina Kosa, and they find evidence of hidden bloodstains and bullet holes in the wall, just as Arendt described. These scenes between Arendt and Maynard remain notable not only for the way they turn the narrative of the film, but also for the kind of relationship that gets established between the witness and the image. Like the previously described scene with Hajdarevic, the map of Kosmaj—an inanimate object showing nothing particularly special in its own right—becomes vested with an intense signification. Though maps certainly cannot be said to exist independently of ideological forces that shape them, *Storm* presents the map of the grounds of Vilina Kosa and the blueprint of the spa building as objective representations of places until Arendt provides the shocking narrative of the atrocities committed there. Yet in contrast to the way the map of Kosmaj ultimately acts against the testimony of the witness by dismantling Hajdarevic's account, this blueprint of Vilina Kosa serves to confirm Arendt's experiences in both places. In this sense, the map and blueprint elicit a testimony that helps to re-establish the connection between the witness and the image; rather than remaining discrete and fragmented, these varying components and interpretations of evidence come together into a unified whole. The subsequent scene in which the forensic team combs the grounds for evidence goes a step further, in that it links the emotion of experience and the abstraction of this experience through the image to the physical evidence of its occurrence.

While these scenes with Maynard and Arendt certainly initially revive the symbiotic relationship between the testimony of the witness and the evidence of the image, the conclusion of *Storm* ultimately suggests that within the strictures of the rites and rituals that undergird the international criminal justice system, the connection of the image to evidence actually bears little impact on justice. For just as soon as the prosecution enters the blueprint along with Arendt's testimony on events in Kosmaj and Vilina Kosa into evidence against Duric, they receive a personal visit from the president of the ICTY, who castigates them for lengthening the trial and implicitly, for costing the UN more money in doing so. Combined with pressure from a European Union having found an ally in Duric and hoping to ensure Balkan integration into its economic and political coalition, forces beyond Maynard's control strike a deal with Duric: rather than portraying Duric as the commander in charge of ordering these atrocities, the prosecution is to concede that he was not in sole command and to imply that he was acting under instructions of other, unnamed officers. The ICTY judge will allow Arendt to testify about Kosmaj, but atrocities at Vilina Kosa may not be mentioned in court and are to be swept under the rug.

The way that *Storm* relates these narrative developments demonstrates not only a distinctly dark view of the institution of the international human rights court to function as it should, but also a deep skepticism in relation to the image as evidence in different thematic contexts throughout the film. The placement of documentary footage at the beginning of the film suggests the wide gulf between image and the narrative that becomes ascribed to it, while the scenes with the false witness Hajdarevic portray a negative association of testimony with an evidential image—a case in which the image

actually inversely affects the witness testimony. In the third scenario with Hajdarevic's sister Arendt, *Storm* seems to offer the possibility of redemption as it shows that these factors can be unified in meaningful ways that may have an impact not just on the establishment of the truth of what the crimes Duric committed, but also on the legal judgment of these crimes. Yet, the visual and narrative polemic of *Storm* demonstrates that these hopes remain but a mere illusion in the face of wider political and financial considerations. Indeed, the film implies that the larger institution of the International Court is itself fundamentally corrupt and defunct, serving expediency and political gain over justice. The rule and rituals governing the trial not only affect the inner workings of the courtroom but also influence events outside of it, creating a tight sphere of control into which the image, the witness, and through them, the truth of events are placed. Indeed, the truth that emerges from this sphere is one that, in many cases, remains severely handicapped at best—at worst it is an outright fabrication by parties hoping for political gain. For in this context, the very notion of what counts as true remains something that is highly constructed by the machinery of the court. Though evidence may be present as with Vilina Kosa, certain important truths become inadmissible and thus effectively cease to exist legally. Thus the connection of evidence, truth, and the image to speaking or showing the truth in a legal setting not only rests on factors internal to the courtroom, but also external to it. In the end, Schmid's film emphasizes that it is the "definite techniques and procedures, concrete institutions, and specific social relations – that is, relations of power" that hold primacy over the image, its myriad evidential interpretations, and the pursuit of justice (Tagg 5). If anything, *Storm* seems to suggest

that the truth and the visual evidence that undergirds it actually remain safest outside of the sphere of international litigation altogether.

The Scarred Environs of Andy Spyra's *Bosnia* Photography

If *Storm* presents and problematizes a particularly narrow definition of what counts as evidence within the sphere of the international criminal tribunal, the art of millennial photographer Andy Spyra offers a vastly different take on the story that an image can tell in relation to the Bosnian conflict and genocide. In the photo essays titled “Shadows of Srebrenica” and “Bosnia: The Nation Left Behind,” Spyra’s stark images of the Bosnian landscape, the remains of shelled cities and abandoned houses, and memorial sites in Srebrenica thematize the lasting physical and psychological effects of the violence fifteen years after its occurrence. Through Spyra’s photographs, evidence of the genocide manifests itself not only through a visual construction of physical scars in the Bosnian topography, but also through the deep fog of collective trauma that hovers in the atmosphere.

German-born photographer Andy Spyra first started working as a photographer with his local hometown newspaper in Hannover. He began to study photography at the *Fachhochschule Hannover* but soon broke off his studies as he found them too cumbersome. Possessing a natural self-taught talent, he began to work as a freelance photographer and soon received assignments covering events throughout the world. A committed human rights photographer, his body of work features war-torn regions across the globe, including Syria, Kashmir, Ethiopia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Nigeria, but also depicts moments of cultural and social upheaval in Turkey, Armenia, Palestine, and the

Gaza Strip. Despite thematic commonalities with similar photojournalistic work, Spyra explicitly defines his work in opposition to war photographers:

War photographers I know usually go to the front to watch what's happening there, they're interested in the war as such. But I'm not interested in the war as such. Instead, I'm interested in the repercussions of war [...] not the actual fighting. I'm interested in what's happening around wars, the legacy and the aftermath of wars. (Baumann, "Feeling the Pull of War").

In addition to positioning himself as someone who focuses more on the aftershocks of violent conflict, Spyra also eschews more traditional avenues of photojournalistic publishing: "Glossy and polished magazine journalism isn't for me [...] I don't just want to deliver a good image, I really want to tell a story through my images" (Rosorius, "Glatt geschliffen"). As such, Spyra's images rarely find themselves on the headlines of daily or weekly publications, but are instead self-published on his website or usually part of more in-depth photo essays in periodicals like *The Times*, *der Spiegel*, *die Zeit*, and *die Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Accordingly, Spyra's images do not possess the straightforward, seemingly indexical qualities seen in Andree Kaiser's photographs; rather, they use the visual language of the medium itself—black and white imagery, a blurred lens, extreme camera angles—to convey meaning. These highly stylized images appear at first glance more closely related to art photography than photojournalism, something that Spyra acknowledges of his work:

Good pictures are those that touch me emotionally, in which I perceive a statement, in which I also perceive the photographer. A picture is worthless if it looks like a news ticker, if it only shows that something is actually there, that something actually happened. I want to know what happened where, but I also want to know how it feels like. (Baumann, "Feeling the Pull of War").

This approach has helped to inform much of Spyra's oeuvre and comes to the fore particularly in his large body of work on post-war Bosnia. When he first traveled to Bosnia-Herzegovina on assignment in 2009, the history of the conflict and the genocide touched him in unexpected ways, leaving him feeling deeply ashamed: "As a German citizen, [...] what happened in Bosnia was in its ideology very similar to the Jewish genocide and it seemed like Europe and especially Germany have learned nothing since the Holocaust" (Spyra, "Aftermath of a Genocide"). After this initial assignment, he went back to the area of for his own photographic projects and for a period of three years, Spyra went back and forth between Bosnia and Germany. Each time, he spent a month traveling through Bosnia, living with its people, and photographing his surroundings. Spyra took hundreds of photographs during his interactions with the people and his visits to significant sites like Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Foca, Visegrad, Tuzla, Seps, and Zvornik. In contextualizing these copious images, Spyra explains that

Houses may have been rebuilt, but it's the pain inside, the loss of their beloved ones what makes the people of eastern Bosnia suffer so much. And it's the ignorance and neglect for that suffering on the Serbian side that defines the atmosphere in this area, that creates that deep division between not only the local people, but also between the states of Bosnia and Serbia. (*ibid*)

It is these emotional, psychological, and physical states that Spyra aims to capture in his photographs, making his work into a strange yet powerful amalgamation of art photography and photojournalism. This section focuses primarily on select images from the photo essays "Shadows of Srebrenica" (published in *Foreign Policy* in July 2010) and "Bosnia: The Nation Left Behind" (featured in *The Independent* in December 2010). Though both photo essays provide distinct visual takes on the ways that the fog of genocide still hangs over Bosnia-Herzegovina and the people there, this section will

concentrate mainly on several images that overlap in both series, namely, photographs of Bosnian locations (Vlasenica, Perucac Lake, and Potocari) significant to the war and the genocide that accompanied it. By showing the way these landscapes bear the scars of the genocide as much as its inhabitants do, Spyra's work allows for a boarder conceptualization of evidence that goes beyond what can be seen or proven within the narrower confines of photojournalistic reporting or the international tribunal.

The first photograph (Figure 1.9) in Spyra's series is a black and white square shot of a clearing in the middle of a heavily wooded area. The foliage surrounding the clearing is thick and lush, with shorter, chunky trees edging it towards the back and a few taller, spindlier trees standing on the left and right side of the clearing closer to the camera. In the clearing, foliage appears to have been trodden down, walked on by humans or by some kind of animal, while its center appears to be muddy and covered in broken sticks and strewn leaves; if one looks closely, one can see a sunken area in the middle of the clearing under the branches lightly covering it. With an un-obscured view of the clearing extending forward towards the lens, the placement of the camera gives the impression of looking into something hidden. Dark clouds hang over the entire image, as if a thunderstorm was about to erupt over the pictured landscape at any moment.



Figure 1.9: Vlasenica

Perhaps what is most noticeable about the image at first glance is the stark contrast in the black and white color gradient; the image is saturated in such a way that there exist equal parts darkness and light. The trees on the right and left sides towards the camera are nearly black on the scale and blend into their surroundings, creating two walls of darkness that continues into the lower front part of the image in a horizontal manner. Thus, the clearing becomes effectively framed by these shifts in the color gradient, allowing it, the trees, and the sky immediately above to remain the main focal point before the ominous thundercloud at the top of the frame abruptly stops the eye. The image bears the caption: “*A former mass grave in the area of Vlasenica near Srebrenica.*” While the menacing tone set by the color gradient and the way the camera feels like it is peering into something forbidden already hint at the events that might have occurred here, the caption confirms the suspicions of the viewer. In this sense, it serves as a method of effectively completing the impressions generated by Spyra’s visual

arrangements. Though Spyra does not provide more information beyond this simple sentence, this area was the site of a 1992 massacre, after which the bodies were dumped into a mass grave. After the war ended, the bodies of the victims were discovered and exhumed (Sorguc, “Bosnia Charges Serb Woman”). Arriving in this area decades after the massacre and years after the exhumations, Spyra engages in a kind of delayed photojournalism by documenting not what is currently happening at Vlasenica, but by offering insight into the site’s past through his image. In this sense, the scars left on the landscape by the clearing of the trees to create space and the digging of a mass grave provide clues to the events that occurred here, though they do not engage with its history explicitly. Thus what initially appears to be a rather innocuous image (except perhaps for its dramatic stylization) takes on a particularly sinister meaning in light of the context in which Spyra places it. Already through this first photograph of a clearing in Vlasenica, Spyra suggests that Bosnia—because of its history of genocide—remains a place with deeply hidden secrets, both metaphorically and literally.

The next photograph in the series (Figure 1.10) thematizes this notion more literally. It features what appears to be a large, muddy surface that takes up a broad expanse of the lower half of the frame, while the upper part consists of far-away mountains to the distant left of the image and a small ridge covered with furry trees to the distant right. In the middle of the photograph, so small it is barely visible in the vast expanse of mud, is a human figure who seems to be heaving some kind of digging apparatus over his head, his back bent as he swings it down into the sodden earth. Among the human figure are a few pieces of twisted and gnarled timber, but other than these small accompaniments, the man is alone in the immense stretch of sludge. The image is

again shot in black and white, its tone equally ominous to that of the previous “Vlasenica” photograph. Yet at the same time, it lacks the distribution of the heavy saturation in color that added the framed effect to the site of the mass grave. In contrast, the lower half of the image, containing the swath of wet earth and the small wooded ridge on the distant right are darkly colored, while the distant mountains on the left and wide sky to the top are almost white they are so light. Though still heavily saturated, this image instead encourages the viewer’s eye to travel upwards from the human figure slogging away in the mud to the wide expanse of sky covering the upper half of the photograph.



Figure 1.10: Lake Perucac

This reading of the photograph is encouraged by the way Spyra appears to have taken the image: a panorama shot of the landscape taken from a laying down position that puts the photographer at almost eye-level with the mud at the bottom of the image. The blurred forefront of the image where the camera lens has not managed to focus because of its closeness supports such a reading. Underneath the image, a succinct caption reads: “*Lake Perucac in eastern Bosnia, on the border with Serbia. Victims’ bodies were discovered*

when the lake level was lowered.” With the addition of the caption, a photograph that at first simply suggests a desolate interaction with a wasteland space takes on a whole new meaning. The vast expanse of mud actually becomes identified not only as a lake but as a place that has served to cover up Serbian crimes. While Spyra does not add more information to the brief caption, the discovery of these bodies led to a large forensic investigation into the bottom of the lake, where it was determined that many bodies, deposited by Serbian forces, belonged to the nearly 2,000 victims of the 1992 Visegrad massacre. In his imagery Spyra focuses heavily on the significance of the lake bottom by having it take up nearly half of the photograph. *This is where*, he seems to say, *we can find what we are looking for, if we only know where to look.* At the same time, the darkness of the lake bottom contrasted with the brightness of the sky brings to light—quite literally—the connections between what is known and what is unknown, between what is seen and unseen. The truth might be hidden at the moment, but as the human figure digging seems to imply, it will come to light (even if it does so accidentally). The inclusion of the human figure in Spyra’s photograph also highlights the significance of Bosnian survivors and other concerned citizens in actively searching for and uncovering the truth. Unlike the Vlasenica photograph, which remains devoid of human presence and thus takes on the characteristics of a mausoleum in nature, the Lake Perucac image indirectly thematizes the impact the human can have on the environment around him through direct action, and in doing so, effectively marries a hidden past and a visible present.

The third of Spyra’s photographs (Figure 1.11) thematizing the genocide shows a cobblestone lane with neatly laid blocks, beginning at the bottom center of the image and

moving away from the camera as it narrows and winds along with the gently upward sloping landscape. The camera appears to be pointing down at the road, but not so much that nothing else is visible; to the left of the cobblestone path stands a large stone edifice, its polish glinting in the sun—on it is written “8372”. Except these two visual markers, the rest of the image on either side of the pathway is shrouded in almost complete darkness, exhibiting perhaps the most dramatic use of color gradient of any of Spyra’s images discussed so far. To the lower right portion of the image, a lone shadow stretches out into the cobblestones, appearing to gesture towards the stone edifice on the far left of the image. It soon becomes clear that this shadow is made by the outstretched hand that is facing the camera, palm up.



Figure 1.11: Memorial in Potocari (Spyra, 2010)

Yet the hand in question remains utterly disembodied; the rest of the figure to whom it belongs is shrouded in the same darkness that covered the rest of the image beyond the stone structure and the road. At the same time, the gesturing of the hand in the same direction as the shadow on the ground—in the direction of the stone marker—provides a clue that perhaps the marker, though not the center of the image visually, is actually the

main focus of the image's signification. While the mysterious hand motions towards the viewer to look at the plaque, the cobblestone road simultaneously invites the eye to follow it, as if beckoning the viewer on down this road. Yet the full pathway of the cobblestone lane cannot be seen and what is at the end of it remains hidden from the viewer, no matter how hard he tries to deduce it. Underneath the image, the caption reads: "*Hatidza Mehmedovic, president of the Srebrenica mothers support group, at the memorial site in Potocari.*" Through the caption, the mysterious hand and its shadow are identified, though the lack of subsequent information makes it difficult to fully place the photograph at first. Though Spyra does not provide additional information, the village of Potocari—a stone's throw from Srebrenica—was the first to fall victim to large-scale genocidal attacks when Serbian forces entered the area in 1995. Though Srebrenica, attacked after Potocari, remains the better known, the memorial built in 2003 covers the space between both areas in an effort to acknowledge the killings, deportations, and rapes that took place there. Marcus Tanner, working together with Spyra in his photo essay "Bosnia: The Nation Left Behind," explains the significance of the site further:

Most shockingly, the town of Srebrenica, site of the July 1995 massacre of 7,000 Muslims – and an overwhelmingly Muslim town before almost all its male inhabitants were murdered – was included in the lands awarded to the Serbs. After 1995, the world handed over guilt money for reconstruction, dragged a token number of war criminals to The Hague to trial and told everyone else it was time to start getting along. There was no Truth Commission. There haven't even been any unambiguous apologies. Survivors groups like the Mothers of Srebrenica make their annual pilgrimage to the town where their husbands, sons and brothers were killed knowing that almost all the killers got off scot free and in some cases are still walking round the town. (Tanner & Spyra, "The Nation Left Behind")

If Tanner paints a stark written picture of the current situation, then Spyra offers its emotionally-laden visual counterpoint. The stone edifice to the left of the pathway bearing the numbers "8372" becomes more than simply signage and instead provides

valuable information as to the number of estimated victims killed in the massacres of the area. The identification of the shadowy figure as a mother of a victim of Srebrenica—perhaps an unacknowledged, still missing victim—sheds a stark new light on the image. The outstretched hand of Hatidza Mehmedovic does not simply gesture towards the plaque, but is the human presence in the darkness of the events that Spyra's photograph represents; she beseeches the viewer to enter the space as an acknowledgement of her son's fate and his mother's ongoing bereavement and suffering. Though the memorial stands and the stone edifice bears witness to the facts of what occurred in Potocari and Srebrenica, these platitudes offer little to the grief that remains in the light of the lack of justice and closure that official avenues have failed to deliver. The past thus remains a door that is forever opened to the present, much like the winding cobblestone pathway leading from the front of the image to a distant end. At the same time, the immense blackness of the image not only sharpens the tragic atmosphere, but also hints at the impossibility of truly understanding what has occurred in this place. Although the site has been literally constructed upon the killing fields where massacres took place—places where bodies of victims are still now being discovered—the memorial denies explicit access to the experience of the event while still commemorating it abstractly. Like the barrier of the darkness lets in some light, one may come to know elements and facts surrounding the genocidal acts occurring in Potocari and Srebrenica, but one is never really access the events in full, nor can one begin to fully comprehend the loss of the victims, their families, and their communities. Such easy narratives, it is suggested, only serve to placate and deceive; the truth remains much darker, more opaque, and far more disturbing. Through its visual tale, Spyra's photograph provides an affective window into

what the experience of mourning in contemporary Bosnia might be like, especially in light of the difficult circumstances stemming from a social and political climate that partially rests in denial or silence.

Taken together, these images from Spyra's Bosnian photo essays give a sense of how the Bosnian landscape, as much as the people living there, bears the scars of the events that took place there. Sometimes these marks are visible as in the Vlasenica photograph, other times they remain deeply buried like the hidden victims in the image of Lake Perucac. Yet regardless of the visibility of the wounds that the genocide has left behind, its essence remains ever-present, hovering over the landscape and its people like a lingering curse. This is something that Spyra achieves largely due to the way his photographs engage with the visual language of the medium itself: his use of a highly-saturated black and white color gradient and his strategic placement of the camera to capture unusual angles of Vlasenica, Lake Perucac, and Potocari elicits the sense that all is not right with these places and encourages the viewer to look deeper in order to discover potential causalities. At the same time, the lack of specific information in Spyra's photographs also "ask us to expand their frames with words and narratives," leading to an engagement with the image that is thoughtful even as it does not deny affective response (Koepnick 123). In this sense, the photographs of these places effectively "captur[e] aftershocks of trauma" but "make no effort to answer the viewer's open questions" (126). These dialectic forces at work in Spyra's images not only encapsulate a response to concerns involved in reading the photographic medium by critics like Susan Sontag and others, but also mirror the tensions existing in Bosnia today between the visible and the invisible, and the past and the present.

Though enigmatic, the very intangibility of Spyra's images and the way their layers come together to work with the notion of absence provides the potential for a unorthodox rethinking of what photographic evidence might look like in these contexts. Unlike Andree Kaiser, who appears to mostly ascribe to the indexical possibilities of his images as he covers the fast-paced events unfolding around him Bosnia in 1992, Spyra works at the slower speed of the thoughtful retrospective glance, uncovering deep and hidden pasts through an attention to scars in the Bosnian landscape. While Kaiser hopes that his emotional images of emaciated prisoners in Manjaca and rape victims in Tuzla will jolt the international public into action, Spyra focuses more on uncovering what remains hidden in Bosnia, decades after the wars have ended and understanding what the long term effects of these events have been. In taking this approach, Spyra's evidential markers are infinitely subtler than Kaiser's and thus manifest themselves through small details, like depressions in the ground or a worn footpath in a forest. In this sense, Spyra's work engages heavily with Barthes's notion of "having-been-there," even as he asks viewers to take the time to look into his images—not to see graphic human suffering but to comprehend the atmosphere it has left behind. Indeed, throughout his Bosnia work, Spyra appears to remain acutely aware of his own role in the photographic process, as he explains when asked about the photographs he took of the female survivors of the Boko Haram kidnappings in 2010:

I tried to capture their trauma and also their immense inner strength in my pictures. But I believe that here I reached my own limits as a photographer. Because there still is so much more that I didn't manage to capture. (Baumann, "Feeling the Pull of War")

Like Sontag, Spyra acknowledges the ways in which the photographic medium falls short as an evidential power: it might show something powerful, but it can never show all it

claims to show. In response, his Bosnian images offer something different from the attempt at a straightforward kind of visual evidence; by making absence—something at the very heart of the medium of photography—his main guiding principle, Spyra offers a glimpse of what remains after that photojournalists have left and the tribunals have subsided. In this sense, not seeing becomes as much a form of proof as an explicit showing of events, since it highlights the erasure of people from these places. Perhaps most importantly, Spyra's evidence suggests that it's not always about *what* is seen in the documentary image but also *how* it is seen through the structure of the image itself.

The visual work presented in this chapter has offered a variety of understandings of the ways in which documentary evidence can interact with still and moving images of the Bosnian genocide. To return to Piotr Cieplak's salient observation at its beginning, "the question is often not about whether photography can attest and prove but rather about what kind of evidence it is being asked to provide" (40). To this end, Andree Kaiser's photojournalistic images of Manjaca, Trnopolje, and Turzla remain infused with the optimistic belief in the trustworthy verisimilitude of the documentary image, even as Kaiser demonstrates a sensitivity to the important role that context plays in the reception of his pictures. Set within a much narrower interpretive schema, Hans Christian Schmid's quiet thriller *Storm* demonstrates not only a deep skepticism in relation to the image as evidence in different thematic contexts, but also connects this to the failings of the international justice system in effectively bringing justice and closure to victims of the genocide. Lastly, images from Andy Spyra's highly stylized Bosnian photo essays offer a kind of psychogram of a country and its people through the landscapes and places they interact with. Through picking up where Kaiser's earnest photojournalistic images and

Storm's bogged-down legalese end, Spyra uncovers not only the hidden spaces where atrocities have occurred, but also the psychological burden that continues on long after the events themselves have ceased to be portrayed and talked about. Here, "evidence" as such becomes conceptualized much more broadly as an omnipotent atmospheric force in post-war Bosnia. One does not have to go through elaborate, highly regulated steps to discover it, but rather, one does so simply by standing on Bosnian soil and engaging with its people, through a freer openness to the ongoing interaction between the seen and the unseen, between the traumatic past and the present. This approach allows for the emotion of human experience to emerge from Spyra's images, creating a kind of complementary approach to the other ways of seeing evidence that are provided by Kaiser and Schmid, which each find their roots in more limited—though still distinct— frameworks of analysis. While the works of Kaiser, Schmid, and Spyra stand as differing representations of the relationships between the still and moving documentary image and evidence, taken together they all effectively complement one another conceptually. Kaiser is one who captures events as they unfold, pieces them together, and believes that his images can change the world through being placed in the right contexts, while Schmid suggests that the courtroom—a place traditionally associated with evidential images— provides exactly the wrong context for interpretation. Indeed, for him the only way that images can realize their full potential is outside of the narrow interpretive schema of the international criminal tribunal. Spyra, as the final part of this triad, offers the very thing which Schmid seems to castigate the courtroom for lacking: a careful attention to the human element and to the trauma of the experiences themselves. This approach allows for a very different kind of storytelling in regards to the portrayal of human suffering, but at the

same time—as the next chapter will show—it is still one that does not remain free of intense interpretive resistance.

CHAPTER 2

FRAGMENTED IMAGES: THE ARMENIAN STRUGGLE

“History does not break down into stories but into images” – Walter Benjamin

*“Wie dem Dichter das Bild eines erhöhten Lebens vorschwebt, dass er im eigenen darzustellen sucht, denkt der Berichterstatter an das höhere Leben des Landes”
– Armin T. Wegner*

On the evening of March 19, 1919 at the Institute for Popular Natural History of the Urania Scientific Society in Berlin, German expressionist writer, poet, and human rights activist Armin T. Wegner delivered a tumultuous public lecture that would shake the society and indeed, reverberate up and beyond it. Having tasked himself as the German spokesperson for spreading knowledge of the Armenian Genocide and disseminating images concerning the horrors he had witnessed, Wegner showed a collection of photographs, accompanied by a descriptive spoken presentation. Told in a style that effectively reconstructed the deadly journey of the Armenians to the desert is Deir-ez-Zor, chaos broke out during and after the presentation:

A Turk, who sat in one of the front rows, loudly and repeatedly disrupted the statements of the speaker. He was subsequently roughly removed from the room and it was again quiet. Soon, however, there were angry shouts at the showing of a particular image. Several Turks cried out that the photos were falsified and started to quarrel sharply with the Armenians present. Another visitor cried out that the Turkish colony would not stand for this kind of slander and would defend itself against it. On the ground floor there ensued a veritable *brawl*. With great effort it was finally possible to break up the perturbators and reach the end of the lecture. However, in the cloakroom the brawl once again broke out, whereupon the instigators were thrown out into the street, and the fisticuffs continued. An Armenian, who was gesturing around wildly with his revolver, was taken into custody and escorted away by security. (Tamcke 70)

Wegner was eventually able to finish the presentation, albeit with the help of an intermission and the director's removal of the most disturbing slides (Payne 40). This,

and the wide-eyed report of the incidents occurring at the event in the local newspaper above, underscores the tensions between Turks and Armenians following the genocide and the highly emotionally charged nature of their interactions, but it also highlights the significance and the influence of narrative context in conjunction with images. Though it has been commonly said that images “speak for themselves” as freestanding evidentiary “slices of life,” this episode and Wegner’s presentation – as combination of spoken text and image – shows that images and our interpretations of them do not occur in a vacuum and indeed are powerfully shaped by our attempts to make sense of them in the form of a coherent narrative history. In reaction to this reception of his work, Wegner engaged in a sustained and significant editing process of his presentation, in which he added to, took away, remodeled, and re-conceptualized the way he told the story of the Armenian Genocide through images in subsequent public lectures again in April 1919 in Breslau and later in Vienna in 1924. On the one hand, this process demonstrates Wegner’s fervent and ongoing commitment to fighting for the recognition of the genocide, the reconciliation of Germany and the Armenians, and the drumming up of socio-political support for an Armenian nation-state. On the other, through his continued and careful engagement with not only the subject matter of the Armenian Genocide but also his concern with the form and method in which to best and most effectively tell this story, Wegner displays an awareness of the tensions inherent in telling stories with images of violence and the ways in which narrative may not be a naturalized consequence of a particular image.

This chapter aims to delve deeper into the myriad relationships between image and narrative in the context of the Armenian Genocide. It examines Fatih Akin’s film *The*

Cut and Andy Spyra's photographic series *1915-2015*, two twenty-first century visual representations of the genocide and understands them as engaging in a representational process that began with Armin T. Wegner and his photographic work nearly a century earlier. Investigating how Wegner fundamentally wrestles with creating a satisfactory amalgamation of text and image and the role his position as an expressionist poet may have played in these processes assists in understanding how subsequent German representations like *The Cut* and *1915-2015* meet with more or less success in their own representational ventures. How does Wegner engage with these questions? What areas seem to trouble him and how does he seek to reconcile them? Is a similar kind of awareness present in Fatih Akin's film, which appears to draw heavily from Wegner's visual corpus? What implications do these visual connections between Wegner and Akin have not only for a successful representation of the Armenian Genocide, but also for the ways in which questions of visual traumas connect to visual narratives? How does Andy Spyra seek to offer new perspectives that integrate various narrative and visual approaches? Lastly, how might a study of these phenomena assist us in understanding more about the nature of the Armenian Genocide itself? As this chapter will show, these artists and the various representations they create offer different and often conflicting answers to these questions.

The Armenian Genocide in Context

Wegner's witnessing of the Armenian Genocide coincided with the zenith of the crisis in Turkey during the First World War. Already since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century there had existed a degree of violence against the minority Christian

Armenian population by the Ottoman Turks, with massacres breaking out in the Armenian-populated cities of Van, Bitlis, and Erzurum in 1895 under the Sultan Abdul Hamid II. These events, cumulatively known as the Hamidian Massacres, took the lives of between 100,000 and 300,000 Armenians. In 1909, following the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, reactionary Ottoman military and Islamic theological students attempted to return the government to the Sultan, again resulting in a rampage that left between 15,000 and 30,000 Armenians dead. In April 1915, under guise of conscripting Armenian men for the First World War, in which the Ottoman Empire allied with Germany and Austria-Hungary against the British, the French, and the Russians, deportations of men began in the Armenian city of Van. Citing the popular notion that the Armenian people acted in treasonous collaboration with the Russians, the Ottoman authorities presented the Armenians as a ‘threat to the empire’s security’ and on the night of April 23-24, 1915, began arresting and executing Armenian intellectuals. Throughout the following months, the Ottoman authorities rounded up and sent the majority of the Armenian population – men, women, and children – on a murderous death march towards the town of Deir-ez-Zor and the desert of present-day Syria. Supplies and faculties necessary to sustain life were deliberately withheld (Bartrop 58). Those who managed to survive the death marches were quarantined in concentration camps, of which there were over twenty-five. The Ottomans hunted down the remaining Armenians who had managed to escape deportation and burned them alive, drowned them, and used them as subjects for lethal human experimentation. Of the carnage, ambassador for the (then neutral) United States Henry Morgenthau wrote:

Scenes like this were common all over the Armenian provinces in the spring and summer months of 1915. Death in its several forms—massacre, starvation, exhaustion—destroyed

the larger part of the refugees. The Turkish policy was that of extermination under the guise of deportation. (402)

Around 1.5 million Armenians perished during this time, and some modern scholars estimate that the number could be as high as two million dead (Whitehorn 125).

Almost from the time of its inception, Ottoman conversations surrounding Armenian Genocide took on the rhetoric of denial associated so characteristically with the genocide until present day. The event itself was supposed to be cloaked in secrecy, with Ottoman forces forbidding any kind of photographing of the event, limiting the number of non-Turks who witnessed it, and attempting to quash any mention of it in the decades that followed. Indeed, it was, as often asserted in Holocaust literature, an event meant to leave no witnesses, “not only in the sense that [the perpetrators] attempted to leave none among the victims to testify to what had been done,” but also in relation to “the dehumanizing dimension to the event” (Hovannisian 154). Yet nearly from the onset of the genocide, the Ottoman authorities lost this control, and the world was surprisingly well informed about events taking place. Hundreds of eyewitnesses recorded and documented numerous points of the state-sponsored massacres through letters, reports, and in some cases, even through photographic images. Numerous foreign ambassadors and international diplomats also attempted to intervene on behalf of the Armenians, though the Ottoman Empire’s wartime allies offered little protest. The international press was also well-informed about the events occurring in the Ottoman Empire: according to various sources, from 1915 to 1917 there were over 136 newspaper headlines on the subject of the Armenian Genocide in widely circulated publications.¹³ In spite of the

¹³ For more on this, see Richard Kloian’s book *The Armenian Genocide: News Accounts from the American Press*, Nora Arissian’s chapter “The Armenian Genocide in the Syrian Press,” Vahakn Dadrian’s book *Documentation of the Armenian Genocide in Turkish Sources* and Chabot and Godin’s *Mass Media and the Genocide of the Armenians* for more on this topic.

widespread knowledge of the genocide and the massive funds raised by international relief groups, little was actively undertaken to put an end to the violence. Margaret Livinia Anderson distinguishes between “noise in the public square and intense but discreet exchanges in the corridors of power, “ asserting that “the last thing [European] policy makers wanted was the kind of moralizing speech that might limit their own freedom of action” (“Who Still Talked,” 200). She concludes that “the louder the outcry over the Armenian’s plight, (...) the more Europe’s foreign offices cooperated in their studied efforts at silence” (201). Particularly in Germany, as Anderson has shown, a counter-discourse formed which “succeeded in diluting sympathy for the victims and shifting it to the perpetrators of the massacres” (*Down in Turkey* 83). This shift and the silence resulting from it remained so effective that on the eve of the German invasion of Poland in 1939, Hitler questioned: “Who still talks nowadays about the extermination of the Armenians?” (202). This silence, in concert with the persistent culture of denial that the Ottoman Empire built up and actively upholds until present day¹⁴, demonstrates the international power play that has surrounded the remembrance and recognition of the Armenian Genocide for over the last one hundred years.¹⁵

Cultural Representation of the Armenian Genocide

The last century since the Armenian Genocide has brought with it a flood of cultural representations of the events and their aftermaths. The works of filmmakers,

¹⁴ The very use term ‘genocide’ in relation to the Armenians is currently outlawed in print. The last person to say so, prominent Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, was assassinated by nationalist fanatics in 2007. He had previously been found guilty of ‘insulting Turkish identity’ by writing about the genocide and naming it thusly.

¹⁵ Currently, thirty countries have adopted resolutions acknowledging the genocide. Among these are Germany, France, Great Britain, and Russia. Israel and the United States have yet to do so.

photographers, and other visual artists, poets, musicians, and writers collectively work to remember the genocide even as they grapple with its memory and its place in our contemporary world. Underpinning many of these efforts is an enduring lack of closure caused by the unaddressed suffering of the Armenians, and ongoing issues of responsibility, denial, victimization, and marginalization (Demirdjian 1). As noted earlier, because of the manner in which the genocide was witnessed by foreign military personnel, aid workers and diplomats, a plethora of first-hand accounts of events exist. Eyewitnesses like Swedish missionary Alma Johansson, U.S. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, German businessman Auguste Berneau, German teacher Martin Niepage, and German minister Johannes Lepsius published their accounts of the genocide. These and other written and visual accounts have formed the basis for numerous literary works, among which are German expressionist writers Armin T. Wegner's epistolary novel *Der Weg ohne Heimkehr* (1919) and Austrian expressionist Franz Werfel's novel *Die vierzig Tage des Musa Dagh* (1933).

Armenians in Diaspora also have engaged with the genocide.¹⁶ Armenian American writer William Saroyan underscored the resilience of Armenians in the face of the genocide in his 1935 short story "The Armenian and the Armenian." Armenian survivor, refugee, and modernist painter Arshile Gorky completed numerous paintings representing the genocide and its after effects, most notably as series of paintings between 1926 and 1936 entitled *The Artist and His Mother*, based on a photograph taken with his mother in Van before their escape to Russian-Armenia. Contemporary work by

¹⁶ The list of works mentioned here is by no means exhaustive; cultural and artistic work on the Armenian Genocide has been prolific and would require an entirely separate volume to adequately represent. What I attempt to offer here is a quick sketch of the geographic, cultural, and artistic scope covered by various works as a way of illustrating the many forms the representation of the genocide has taken.

contemporary Armenian American artist Mher Khachatryan uses smoke to create haunting paintings representing the genocide, while Aline Ohanesian's 2015 novel *Orhan's Inheritance* takes up Turkish/ Armenian relations and the legacy of genocide in the present. Theatrical productions like Richard Kalinoski's 1992 play, *Beast on the Moon*, focuses on two young survivors of the genocide that settle down and raise a family in Milwaukee. Recent work by Azerbaijani author Akram Aylisli and by the Turkish writer Halil İbrahim Özcan emphasize the significance of penitence in contemporaneous discourse.¹⁷

The Armenian Genocide has also inspired prolific production in the realm of the visual arts of photography and film. Peter Balakian notes that the Armenian Genocide was the first genocide to be photographed by eyewitnesses and these images “capture the aspects of the process of deportation, mass killing, and atrocity” (89). As a result, they give rise to a particular kind of visual culture. Unlike photojournalistic photographs, which contain “certain levels of performative gestures” and elements of staging, most (if not almost all) photographers taking pictures of the Armenian Genocide were taken by bystanders “who found themselves in unforeseen circumstances” (92). These bystanders found themselves witnessing humanitarian conditions and moments of violence beyond imagining and felt compelled to take out their pocket cameras in order to capture what they saw. Though there were many anonymous photographs taken, quite a few images were taken by German army medic Armin T. Wegner and Pennsylvania divinity student John Elder, with Wegner capturing the initial deportations in 1915-16 in the company of German Field Marshall Von der Goltz. A few years later, Elder joined the American

¹⁷ See Akram Aylisli's *Stone Dreams (Daş Yuxular)* published in 2006 and Halil İbrahim Özcan's *Among the Ashes (Küller Arasında)* from 2009.

Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief 1917 in order to aid refugees and volunteer in Turkey. From 1917 to 1919, he also photographed refugees and conditions in the camps, providing a plethora of moving first-hand images. Both Wegner and Elder worked hard to disseminate their images widely to aid in the humanitarian mission and the Armenian cause in the political landscape after the First World War.¹⁸ In his study of the visual culture surrounding the Armenian Genocide, academic and activist Peter Balakian identifies two periods of visual cultures associated with the eyewitness photographs in question: “the photographs taken during the period of genocide (1915-1918), and the photographs and constructed images (mostly posters) produced in its aftermath and following World War One during a time of urgent humanitarian appeal” (*Humanitarian Photography* 90). In assessing and cataloguing the two ‘lives’ of these images, Balakian also correctly notes that, as mentioned above, “both chapters of the visual culture of the genocide were lost, along with the largely forgotten history of the event, until the genocide became the subject of intensified scholarly work over the past forty years” (92). Indeed, in attempting to identify photographic work occurring between the original eyewitness images and the turn of the twenty-first century, it appears that little such work exists.

As of recently, however, the subject of the Armenian Genocide has enjoyed renewed and sustained attention within the sphere of photographic production. Numerous contemporary projects –too many to list here—critically engage with both the genocide and its legacies in the present. Partially an international response to the centenary passing of the commemoration of the genocide in 2015 and partially motivated by a new

¹⁸ To what extent this was successful is unclear and could be a fruitful area for further study.

generation of Armenian photographers, these socially conscious and often younger photographers seek to understand the stories of their own pasts and ask difficult questions of the present through their work. Many, like the Armenian/Russian-American Diana Markosian (*1915*) and Armenian-American Nazik Armenakyan (*Survivors*), travel back to Armenia in an attempt to retrace the past through their photographs, while German born Andy Spyra engages with his own country's genocidal past through his Armenian series *1915-2015*.

While it seems that photographic work of and on the Armenian Genocide has flowed and ebbed during the twentieth century until the around the arrival of the twenty-first century and the centenary commemoration of the genocide, the filmic imagination seems to have followed a slightly different trajectory. 1915 already saw two feature films released, *Bloody East* and *Under the Rule of the Kurds*, and in 1917 a Hollywood –style film entitled *Ravished Armenia/ Auction of Souls* –based on a novel of the same name by Aurora Mardiganian—emphasized the gendered aspect of the genocide by highlighting the Turkish rape, capture, and sale of Armenian women. Following these last films appears to be a glaring silence in both the fictional and documentary arenas, much like that noted in relation to literature and photography. Aside from the odd documentary film—*Fatherland*, directed by Gurgen Balasanyan –produced in 1945 (presumably spurred into being by the revealing of the horrors of the Holocaust in the same year), it appears that no films of any kind were produced until the early 1960's. This trajectory in Armenian Genocide representation seems to loosely resemble a similar trajectory of Holocaust representation, in which first silence reigned and the process of coming to terms with the past unfolded over time, beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Beginning around this time, though, numerous films began to tackle the subject of the genocide through both fictional and documentary forms. Elia Kazan directed 1963's *America, America* (centered on the Hamidian Massacres, their aftermath, and the resulting Armenian and Greek diasporas) and 1964 saw the release of the first major documentary to receive popular attention, J. Michael Hagopian's *Where Are My People?* Since this time, an estimated more than twenty additional documentaries and an estimated more than fifteen fictional films have been produced, with the 2000s seeing the highest concentration of filmic representations in the past century. Beginning in the 1980s, Armenian and non-Armenian directors began to produce lengthy documentaries concerning the Armenian Genocide, with this effort also reaching a high point in the 2000s with films like J. Michael Hagopian's *Destination Nowhere: The Witness* (2003), *Germany and the Secret Genocide* (2003), *Voices from the Lake: A Film about the Secret Genocide* (2003), and *The River Ran Red* (2008), Hrair Khatcherian's *Desecration* (2003), Hagop Goudsouzian's *My Son Shall Be Armenian* (2004), Carla Garapedian's *Screamers* (2006), Suzanne Khardalian's *Grandma's Tattoos* (2011), and Joe Berlinger's heavy hitter *Intent to Destroy* (2017).

Increasingly, German directors have also begun to investigate the complicity of Germany in the Armenian Genocide and the relationships of this event to Germany's own legacy of Holocaust through films like Karin Epperlein's *I Will Not Be Sad in This World* (2000) and Eric Friedler's *Aghet –Ein Völkermord* (2010). Such international collaborations between German and Armenian studios emphasize the global significance of the events of 1915 and have called for Germany to demonstrate renewed leadership in the face of growing pressure from a denialist Turkey with increasingly internationalist

aspirations within the European Union (Bayraktar 197). Interestingly, most of these films directed by Germans appear to be documentary features, with Fatih Akin's *The Cut* being a noticeable exception.

At around the same time in the 2000s and 2010s, films by non-Armenian directors (like the Italian Taviani brothers' 2007 *The Lark Farm*, Turkish-German Fatih Akin's 2014 *The Cut*, and American Terry George's 2016 *The Promise*) aimed to bring knowledge of the genocide to a wider audience through their Hollywood-style portrayals of events, while popular films by Armenian directors like *On the Old Roman Road* (2001), *Ararat* (2002), *Orphans of the Genocide* (2014), and *1915* (2015) took a hard look at the events of the past, the politics of memory and denial in the present, and the intricacies of genocide representation in the face of these factors. The desire to represent the Armenian Genocide has ebbed and flowed over the century following it but as this cursory summary shows, the new millennium has seen a drastic increase in filmic and photographic production, a powerful tribute to the resonance these events continue to have today on both the local and the world stage.

The Limits of Representation

The work of Atom Egoyan, particularly his 2002 film *Ararat*, grapples with the question of how to show genocide memory as something inherently present but also bound up in fractious issues of denial. Writing some time after the making of the film, Egoyan admitted that *Ararat* made him ask "the same questions over and over again: 'how does an artist speak the unspeakable? What does it mean to listen? What does it mean when it is denied?'" (Egoyan in Meerzon, ix). These questions, so poignantly phrased by Egoyan, have heavily influenced his own modernist aesthetic of trauma and

montage, as will be explored in more detail later in this chapter. These considerations have not only informed the many attempts to represent the Armenian Genocide, but have also shaped much of the discourse surrounding perhaps the most well-known genocide of the twentieth century, the Holocaust.

After the end of the Third Reich and the Jewish Holocaust in 1945, an uncertainty in representing events so cataclysmic to humanity began to emerge, exemplified by Theodor Adorno's (often misunderstood) 1949 stance that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (*Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* 34). Coupled with this was the notion, fueled by some survivors, that the Holocaust itself stood as something unspeakable and thus retained an impossibility of discourse as a result. However, survivor and poet Paul Celan, intellectual Lawrence Langer, and even later, Adorno himself, would retain the stance that Jewish feminist writer Ronit Lentin put so well, namely that "surrendering to silence would be to surrender to cynicism and by implication, to the very forces that created the Holocaust in the first place" (Lentin 8). In the 1992 foreword to his volume on Holocaust representation, Saul Friedlander argued that "the extermination of the Jews of Europe is as accessible to both representation and interpretation as any other historical event (...) but we are dealing with an event which tests our traditional conceptual and representational categories, an "event at the limits"" (*Probing the Limits*, 1-2). These considerations manifested themselves also as a tension between ethics and aesthetics, begun with the 1978 American miniseries *Holocaust*,¹⁹ and brought to life most vehemently by the 1993 release of Steven Spielberg's Holocaust melodrama *Schindler's List*, which spurred a robust discussion of 'the limits of representation' within in the

¹⁹ See Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel's scathing critique of the *Holocaust* miniseries in his *New York Times* article "Trivializing the Holocaust" (1978)

realm of visual and literary culture. Berel Lang articulated these positions in a series of works from 1988 until 2000, arguing that “the prima facie evidence that such conditions or limits do apply seems to be apparent in the recurring controversies about specific Holocaust images” and that they raised important questions about “what can or should be represented of that event, and how” (*Holocaust Representation* x). Lang’s position encompassed not so much the notion that “the challenge posed by fictionalization is insuperable, but ‘that it is unavoidable and that it has both unusual force and unusual form’ due to the subject we are dealing with” (Lang in Friedlander, 17). Inherent in these fictionalizations of the Holocaust were important questions of historiography of the Holocaust: “a need for ‘truth’ and the problems raised by the opaqueness of the events and the opaqueness of language as such” (Friedlander 4). Lang’s arguments might best be summarized as follows:

The genocide, quite apart from being a real event, an event that really happened, is also a ‘literal event’, that is an event whose nature permits it to serve as a paradigm of the kind of event about which we can be permitted to speak only in a literal manner. Lang holds that figurative language not only turns or swerves away from literalness of expression but also deflects attention from the states of affairs about which it pretends to speak. Any figurative expression, he argues, adds something to the representation of the object to which it refers. First of all, it adds itself (i.e. the specific figure used) and the decision it presupposes (i.e. the choice to use one figure rather than another). Figuration produces stylization, which directs attention to the author and his or her creative talent. Second, figuration produces a perspective on the referent of the utterance, but featuring one particular perspective, it necessarily closes off others. Thus it reduces or obscures certain aspects of events (143). (Lang in White, *Figural Realism* 36).

Because of these troubling aspects of narrative, Lang found “events of the Nazi genocide” to be “intrinsically anti-representational” (143).

As a response, some scholars attempted to point to literary and artistic works that gave “a feeling of relative ‘adequacy’ in bringing the reader and the viewer to insights about the Shoah” (Friedlander 17). Friedlander weighing in on this, couches this feeling of ‘adequacy’ in formal and structural terms:

One would readily think, among several well-known examples, of Ida Fink's stories or of Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*. A common denominator appears: the exclusion of straight, documentary realism, but the use of some sort of *allusive* or *distanced realism*. Reality there is, in its starkness, but perceived through a filter: that of memory (distance in time), that of spatial displacement, that of some sort of narrative margin which leaves the unsayable unsaid. (17)

Other scholars, like Dan Diner and Hayden White searched for new ways of understanding the ways in which scholars, writers, and artists might present the Holocaust. Diner proposed his notion of "counterrationality" in which "the very subject matter acts to cancel, to deactivate the connection between an assumption of rationality, or the ability to understand, and meaningful reconstruction" (*Beyond the Conceivable* 133). White, though, focused his scrutiny on the particular aspect of Berel Lang's argument that seemed most problematic in representing the Holocaust and other such cataclysmic events: the question of narrative. In searching for new way to narrate these events, he argued that "most theorists of narrative history take the view that emplotment produces not so much another, more comprehensive and synthetic factual statement as, rather, an *interpretation* of the facts" ("Historical Emplotment" 39). Furthermore, he held that "the distinction between factual statements (considered as a product of object-language) and interpretations of them (considered as a product of one or more metalanguages) does not help us when it is a matter of interpretations produced by the modes of emplotment used to represent the facts as displaying the form and meaning of different kinds of stories" (39). Indeed, he found that these statements:

(...) must, by implication, be extended also to include any kind of narrative history, which is to say, any attempt to represent the Holocaust as a story. And this is because, if every story must be said to have a plot, and every emplotment is a kind of figuration, then it follows that every narrative account of the Holocaust, whatever its mode of emplotment, stands condemned on the same grounds that any merely literary representation of it must be condemned. (*Figural Realism* 36-37)

White returns to Derrida's notion of *différance* in order to formulate his alternative, which he sees as suggesting something akin to the modernist experience in the form of a 'middle voice':

I cite Derrida as representing a modernist conception of the project of philosophy, founded on the recognition of the differences between a distinctly modernist experience of the world (or is it the experience of a distinctively modernist world?) and the notions of representation, knowledge, and meaning prevailing in the inherited realist cultural endowment. And I do so in order to suggest that the kind of anomalies, enigmas, and dead ends met with in discussions of the representation of the Holocaust are the result of a conception of discourse that owes too much to a realism that is inadequate to the representation of events, such as the Holocaust, which are themselves modernist in nature. The concept of cultural modernism is relevant to the discussion inasmuch as it reflects a reaction to (if not a rejection of) the great efforts of nineteenth-century writers – both historians and fictioneers – to represent reality *realistically* – where *reality* is understood to mean 'history' and realistically means the treatment not only of the past but also of the present *as* 'history.' In this view, the modernist version of the realist project could be seen as consisting of a radical rejection of history, of reality as history, and of historical consciousness itself. (39)

White goes on to identify some elements of the so-called "style of middle voicedness": "the disappearance of the writer as narrative of objective facts; almost everything stated appears by way of reflection in the consciousness of the *dramatis personae*," "the dissolution of any viewpoint... outside the novel from which the people and events within it are observed," "the predominance of a 'tone of doubt and questioning' in the narrator's interpretation of those events seemingly described in an objective manner," "the employment of such devices as *erlebte Rede*, stream of consciousness, *monologue interieur*' for 'aesthetic purposes' that 'obscure and obliterate the impression of an objective reality completely known to the author," and "the use of new techniques for the representation of the experience of time and temporality, for example, use of the 'chance occasion' to release 'processes of consciousness' that remain unconnected to a 'specific subject of thought'; obliteration of the distinction between exterior and interior time; and

representation of events not as ‘successive episodes of [a] story’ but as random occurrences” (Auerbach in White 40). Finally White suggests that:

Modernist modes of representations may offer possibilities of representing the reality of both the Holocaust and the experience of it that no other version of realism could do. We might want to consider that by intransitive writing we must intend something like the relationship to that events expressed in the middle voice. This is not to suggest that we will give up the effort to represent the Holocaust realistically, but, rather, that our notion of what constitutes a realistic representation must be revised to take account of experiences that are unique to our century and for which the older modes of representation have proven to be inadequate. (41)

For White, it is precisely the fragmented nature of modernist narrative that lends it this representational potential of doing justice to catastrophic humanitarian events like genocide.

In his powerful 2004 study *After Image: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust*, scholar Joshua Hirsch makes a similar argument in relation to what he calls “posttraumatic cinema” after the Holocaust. He distinguishes between the classical realist style as one that implies mastery over the past and over memory through its mastery over narrative and the modernist style, which implies a kind of “failure of narration—a collapse of mastery over time and point of view” (23). Classical realism “works to provide the spectator with a sense of mastery over time, a sense of power to travel back in time to see the past, or to make the past visible to the present on command” (20-21). This form of narrating the past:

(...) assumes the form of a linear chronology; when flashbacks occur, they are contained within narrow formal boundaries. Realism assumes the omniscient point of view of one who is outside history epistemologically, emotionally, and morally – one who is free to enter into history through the image and assume a variety of embedded points of view, to see and feel history vicariously, on the condition of being free to return again unscathed to that exterior position from which one can know and judge the past without being personally implicated in it. And realism presents the past unselfconsciously, drawing attention to the events represented, and away from the film’s own act of presentation. Realism abhors a vacuum; it converts the absence of the past to a visible presence. And yet, visually, the Holocaust is characterized by absence; of the killing of millions of people, there are only two minutes of film. Realism then, must replace the missing image of death, and put the spectator in the position of being an eyewitness (...) In other words, the realist Holocaust film positions the spectator as a false witness, one who can slip in

and out of the witnessing position at will without having to experience the existential consequences of this act, one who can master the Holocaust as spectacle. (21)

In this sense, this type of narration gives the illusion that aspects of the genocide can all be known and experienced clearly, all through one film. In the words of Elie Wiesel's 1978 article: "It tries to tell it all: what happened before, during and after. The beginning and the end (...) hardly a name is omitted, hardly an episode obliterated" (*New York Times*). It does not take into account that traumatic memory itself takes on the characteristics of modernism: disorienting time shifts, hyper-subjective points of view, and narrative self-consciousness (Hirsch 23). From this perspective, Hirsch posits that "modernist cinema represented the image as a problematic substitute for reality, and eventually gave rise to a postwar cinema that grappled with the difficulty of representing historical trauma" (161). It is within this context that the "attempt to discover a form for presenting that content that mimics some aspects of posttraumatic consciousness itself, the attempt to formally reproduce for the spectator an experience of suddenly seeing the unthinkable" takes on significance (19).

Image, Trauma, Narrative

It is interesting to consider the position that a modernist narrative offers a particularly salient narrative structure through which to tell stories of genocide, violence, and trauma, and it is worth briefly exploring the relationships between the image, trauma, and narrative in order to understand how this might come to bear on Armin T. Wegner's photographs, Fatih Akin's film, and Andy Spyra's photographic series.

Hirsch in his discussion of posttraumatic cinema identifies the ways in which traumatic and posttraumatic memory may take on the characteristics of modernist narrative:

In posttraumatic memory [...] linear chronology collapses. Time is experienced as fragmented and uncontrollable. The past becomes either too remote or too immediate. It remains inaccessible in the past (amnesia), or presents itself uninvited, seizing consciousness (hyperamnesia). Psychiatrist Henry Krystal describes the case of a concentration camp survivor who immigrated to the United States and was serving in the army, who experienced “mental confusion as to the past and present.” (22)

Additionally, traumatic memories act differently than normal memories:

are not integrated into the mind as normal memories are, but rather become lodged in the mind where they can remain indefinitely, dissociated, or split off, from normal consciousness, returning in pathological forms. Another way of putting it is that, in normal memory, the “I” that remembers in the present is different from the “I” that experienced the event in the past. The point of view has changed. In posttraumatic memory, on the other hand, the present “I” is invaded by the memory of the past “I”. The point of view remains that of the witness. (22)

These snapshots provide us with an understanding of the way that traumatic memories actually work and the ways in which they lend themselves to certain types of narrative, particularly fragmented ones. Indeed, in his work on involuntary memory, Walter Benjamin conceives of memories *as* images:

On the knowledge of the *memoire involontaire*: not only do its images come unsummoned, but it is a matter of images we never saw before remembering them. That is clearest for those images in which we... ourselves can be seen... And precisely the most important images- those developed in the darkroom of the lived moment – are the ones we get to see. One could say that a little image [*Bildchen*], a photo of ourselves comes along with our deepest moments... And that “entire life” that is often said to pass before the eyes of the dying, or those hovering in danger of dying, is composed of precisely these little images” (II 1064)²⁰

For Benjamin, particularly involuntary images play a central role in memory; they return at unexpected moments, moments connected to death, and hover on the edges of our consciousness. Involuntary in the sense that we do not actively summon them, they lie

²⁰ In John Joseph McCole’s *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (2018), p. 273.

beyond the realm of our control and move without our say-so, much like traumatic memory-images. Importantly, they are also “little images,” or fragments. Often repressed, they forcefully reinsert themselves into our consciousness and shock like “images we never saw before remembering them.”

In this constellation of memory, image, and trauma, it almost goes without saying that positionality plays a central role: whether the person is personally connected to the memories through their role as a victim, as a perpetrator, as a bystander, or even as a distanced outside viewer removed from time and space fundamentally changes the connection to the traumatic memory and the experience of trauma through an image. Writing on four images of Auschwitz taken secretly by prisoners in August 1944, Georges Didi-Huberman, following Hannah Arendt, describes them as “instants of truth [...] in this chaos of horror” and contextualizes the words of Auschwitz survivor and member of the *Sonderkommando* Zalman Gradowski:

And how are we to deal with all this? Zalman Gradowski writes that to sustain the ‘vision’ of the things he speaks of, his hypothetical reader must do as he had to do: we must ‘take leave’ of everything. Take leave of our forefathers, of our points of reference, of our world, of our thought. ‘After seeing these cruel images,’ he writes, ‘you will no longer want to live in a world where such ignoble acts can be perpetrated. Take leave of your elders and your acquaintances, for after seeing the abominable acts of a so-called cultured people, you will want to erase your name from the human family.’ Yet in order to sustain the imagination of these images, he then says, ‘your heart must turn to stone [...] and your eye must be transformed into a camera.’ (*Images in Spite of All*, 32)

Gradowski’s insistence that we must “take leave” of everything highlights the break between the time before trauma and the time after it, resulting in a kind of mirroring of the trauma he himself experienced. Irrevocably changed, the viewer’s heart will also “turn to stone” and the eye “into a camera.” The separation of the seeing eye from the emotion of the heart becomes a necessary component of looking at these traumatic photographs, which itself becomes part of the larger process of remembering.

Bernd Hüppauf, writing on the taking of photographs by Nazi soldiers during the heinous acts of the *Einsatzgruppen* in Eastern Europe in the early 1940s, develops a comparable idea through his notion of “the empty gaze” as a response to the trauma of witnessing as a blurry amalgam of bystander and perpetrator: “The combination of fear and hope, together with the construction of the self through gaining power over memory, creates an empty gaze, morally indifferent to that which is represented” (32). Though similar to Gradowski’s dispassionate camera-eye, the positionality of those recording the trauma—as indirect inflictors of pain or at best perhaps helpless spectators—requires them to be “morally indifferent,” something which Gradowski does not endorse, but is central to the way that Nazi soldiers saw the events unfolding before them.

In her seminal work *On Photography*, Susan Sontag described her own secondhand experience of trauma through photographic imagery, in reaction to atrocity photographs:

One’s first encounter with the photographic inventory of ultimate horror is a kind of revelation, the prototypically modern revelation: a negative epiphany. For me, it was photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau which I came across by chance in a bookstore in Santa Monica in July 1945. Nothing I have seen—in photographs or in real life—ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously. Indeed, it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after, though it was several years before I understood fully what they were about... When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying. (15)

In these descriptions, the shock of seeing the concentration camp photographs remains congruent with the shock of the experience of trauma. Joshua Hirsch has termed this type of trauma “vicarious trauma,” suggesting that “the victims’ experience of suddenly seeing the unthinkable was often repeated in a muted form in the experience of others who witnessed the events or their aftermath” (*Afterimage*, 13). Much like the ability of

traumatic memory to fundamentally change the point of view of the witness, this ‘indirect’ witnessing caused Sontag to claim that her life could be “divided into two parts,” the time before the “vicarious trauma” of seeing the images and the time after.

Associations with photography and trauma, death and stillness are central to these descriptions of seeing and experiencing photographs of the concentration camps and atrocity photos of the Holocaust. Susan Sontag writes that “something went dead” as she looked upon the suffering of the camp photos, and Bernd Hüppauf’s “empty gaze” refers not just to a gaze devoid of moral considerations but also recalls the wide-eyed death stare visible in the faces of many of the photographed dead. Likewise, the robotic camera-eye referenced by Gradowski underscores the lifeless mind needed to repeatedly view such images.

In many ways, connections with death have formed part of a larger understanding of photography and what it means to photograph and be photographed. In his elucidations on photography, Roland Barthes expresses the odd feeling he experiences while sitting in front of the camera:

In terms of the image-repertoire, the Photograph (the one I intend) represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter. The Photographer knows this very well, and himself fears [...] this death in which his gesture will embalm me. (*Camera Lucida* 14)

Frozen in time, embalmed in immobility, the photograph acts as the ‘death’ of the subject, transforming Barthes into an object and depriving him of life. Much like the function of traumatic memory, the photograph appears to contain a temporal structure which imbues it with an agency for arresting time. Yet the photograph is also that which allows Barthes to mourn his mother following her death, inserting photography into an

“economy of death and resurrection” (*Mythologizing* 95).²¹ Similarly, Susan Sontag connects the camera to violent action by invoking Ernst Jünger’s observation of the linguistic similarities between ‘shooting’ a subject with a camera and shooting at human being with a firearm (*Pain of Others* 66). At the same time, she writes that “to remember [trauma] is, more and more, not to recall a story but to be able to call up a picture,” suggesting congruencies between violent action and the traumas resulting from it and photography and memory.

Yet the photographic image, for all its connections to death and stillness, can be brought to move in memory and in temporal space, effectively connecting past, present, and future. Barthes sees that camera itself as something that, mechanically at least, counterbalances death:

I love these mechanical sounds [of the camera] in an almost voluptuous way, as if, in the photograph, they were the very thing—and the only thing—to which my desire clings, their abrupt click breaking through the mortiferous layer of the Pose. For me the noise of Time is not sad: I love bells, clocks, watches –and I recall that at first photographic implements were related to techniques of cabinetmaking and the machinery of precision: in short, were clocks for seeing, and perhaps in me someone very old still hears in the photographic mechanism the living sound of the wood. (*Camera Lucida*, 15)

In comparing clocks and cameras in this manner, Barthes himself hints at the ways in which photographs (as the products of cameras) reflect elements of time and allow us to “see” in multifaceted ways. In the context of traumatic images, Georges Didi-Huberman revisits this idea through the work of Siegfried Kracauer. Didi-Huberman notes that “*the image deconstructs reality*, thanks to its own efforts of construction: unobserved objects suddenly invade the screen; the changes of scale change our view of the world; the novel arrangements produced by montage make us understand things differently. Familiar situations are emptied of their meaning, but ‘suddenly the void explodes,’ and then

²¹ *Writing the Image After Roland Barthes* (Ed. Jean-Michel Rabate)

empirical chaos becomes ‘fundamental reality.’” This process results in a “construction of strange things” and because of this, we are suddenly able to see the “cross sections in the spatial and temporal continuum”; the image “touches a real that reality itself kept veiled from us” (*Similar-Image* 175-6). Much like Roland Barthes’ *punctum*, which “disturbs” the surface of the photograph and is “that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me),” this process allows us to glean something essential from the traumatic photograph (*Camera Lucida* 27). Therefore, approaching these images in a particular way so as to allow this process to happen remains imperative. As Didi-Huberman elucidates:

If we look at the four photographs of Birkenau as *tear-images* rather than *veil-images*, as the exception rather than the rule, we find ourselves perceiving *naked horror*, a horror that leaves us all the more devastated as it ceases bear the hyperbolic mark of the ‘unimaginable,’ whether the sublime or the inhuman, bearing instead the marks of human banality at the service of the most radical evil... (*Fact-Image* 81)

Unlike the veil-image, which relies on a fetishization of the image at hand, the tear-image allows a fragment of the real to escape.²² This tear-image, synonymous with a photography of violence, of suffering, or of trauma, leaves behind it a particular kind of residue within the photograph. Some theorists have conceptualized this as a ‘trace,’ within the understanding that photography itself has at times been conceived of as memory.²³ Ultimately enigmatic, these traces (as Didi-Huberman has implied) “are not defined as carriers of meaning from the start (as are convention-based sign systems like speech, but it nonetheless takes cultural knowledge to mark objects (for example, fingerprints) as meaningful traces” (Ruchatz 370). Furthermore, traces “point to photography’s specific temporality” since photography is “profoundly marked by [its] fugaciousness as its brings it into view.” Indeed, “what is certified to have been present,

²² *ibid.*

²³ Jens Ruchatz, *The Photograph as Externalization and Trace*, p. 369

but is no more, can be looked at as if it still was.” As a medium, photographic traces are unique in that they are “regularly and intentionally produced as well as conventionally recognized as significant and signifying: Photographs show- but do not explain – what has caused them” (370).

It is precisely this lack of narrative within an image – the presence of extreme fragmentation, the difficulty in reading this ‘trace’ — that, for Didi-Huberman connects the photograph to its particular temporality:

And that is precisely how *the image touches time* by deconstructing the narratives, the ‘historicist’ chronicles, it becomes capable of a ‘critical realism,’ that is, a power to ‘judge’ history, to bring to the surface what survives of a hidden time, to make visible the ‘return of the absent’... (*Similar Image* 176)

The residue inherent in a traumatic photograph becomes in turn a vehicle for the image that propels it out and beyond its moment in time. For Didi-Huberman, images like the four from Auschwitz – images “in spite of all” – act as witnesses in that they are also “survivors.” He suggests that “we must know how to look into images to see that of which they are survivors.” Only this way is it possible to connect the past and the future: “...history, liberated from pure past (that absolute, that abstraction), might help us *to open* the present of time” (182). The trauma photograph, then, becomes an empowered image that moves us, and in turn animates us to respond beyond the narrowly confined spaces of our own temporality and positionality.

“Images that Horrify and Indict:” Armin T. Wegner’s Armenia Photographs

At the beginning of his Viennese lecture in 1924, it seems that Armin T. Wegner was also aware of the way his pictures acted as witnesses and survivors, as he expressed

to his raptly listening guests his hopes for the presentation and the way in which he hoped to achieve them:

Vielleicht werden auch einige Menschen sich auf diesem Wege übereugen lassen, [...] dass sie ihr ganzes Leben dafür einsetzen müssen, dass die Wiederholung eines solchen Unrechtes niemals wieder geschieht. Ich werde mich dabei fast ausschließlich auf die schlichte Darstellung der Ereignisse als sölcher beschränken, weil diese für mich allein eine so starke Sprache reden, dass sie durch keine politische Erörterung überboten werden können. (in Meier, 12-13)

Wegner's preface set the tone for the upcoming lecture, which contained close to one hundred images of everything from landscapes of Ottoman deserts and mountain valleys to snapshots of typical Armenian life to gruesome photographs of the effects of genocide. The images are black and white, most of them brightly lit and starkly focused. In some of them, one can see Wegner's shadow falling onto his subjects as he stands with his back to the afternoon sun, etching his physical presence into the photographs. Beginning with an introduction into Armenian history, culture, and life, the presentation highlights the historical violence against the Armenians and shows the escalation of this violence into full-scale genocide. The images were arranged carefully in an order that would first inform, then gradually stun the audience, from the culturally informative #19 "Teppichverkauf" showing Armenian rug sellers at Sunday market to the horrifically graphic #88 "Leichen in der Wüste" depicting a small boy, sprawled dead and exposed in the desert sun, mouth agape, ribs prominent. While about a third of the images serve to elucidate Armenian life, another third show images tangential to the genocidal killing but intimately connected to it: long lines of Armenians being marched out of cities, Armenian men working on the side of desert roads in forced labor, and (though curiously unmarked as perpetrators) Turkish soldiers in their traditional dress on horseback. The final third show images we associate with the effects of genocide itself: the appalling conditions of

makeshift refugee camps on the edge of the Syrian desert, bodies strewn about the desolate landscape, and survivors on the edge of starvation. Throughout all the images, Wegner employs a combination of close-ups, medium length shots, and wide-angle panoramas that would be majestic were they not so gruesome. The story woven by Wegner was a tragic one, made all the more so by these graphic images of children starved to death, bodies lost in the desert sands, and the pitiful living conditions of survivors living on the edge of mortality. It remains powerful in its combination of text and image, and it is no accident that these lectures are remembered throughout the century, re-staged and preformed still in Germany until the present day.²⁴

Yet Wegner had had time to study and perfect this tale and his public telling of it. We imagine him at the podium in front of a diverse crowd in 1919 at the Urania in Berlin, forcefully outlining what he saw to be unquestionable German complicity in the Armenian Genocide, stammering with embarrassment as he is forced to admit that indeed, some of the photographs may not relate directly to the event at hand. We catch a glimpse of him during the intermission, agitatedly arguing with the Urania's director, who pressed Wegner to remove several disturbing images from the presentation. And we see Wegner again later in 1919, in Breslau, presenting this time with a great deal more confidence and finesse, delivering a developed version of his arguments, attempting to refine the presentation by radically reconfiguring not only his framing of it, but also by making subtle amendments to the relationships between text and image.²⁵ The Viennese presentation, nearly five years after the original Berliner one, represents the peak of this

²⁴ See for example, work by the Armin T. Wegner Gesellschaft in Germany.

²⁵ For more details on this process and the detailed differences between the three versions of the Armenia lecture, see Martin Tamcke's rendering and analysis of the 1919 version in his edited volume *Orientalische Christen zwischen Repression und Migration* (2001). For more on the Breslau and the Viennese versions, see Andreas Meir's *Armin T. Wegner: Die Austreibung des armenischen Volkes in die Wüste* (2011).

developmental process, though not in the way that might be conventionally supposed. For Wegner knew that he was chasing an elusive ideal, one that promised a perfect synchronicity of image and word, one that conveyed the precision of political urgency but simultaneously ebbed and flowed along with the aesthetic necessities of recounting such violent imagery. Like most ideals, it remained something distant, yet Wegner the expressionist grappled with it, turned it over again and again, searching for a way to adequately represent the trauma encapsulated in the photographs. He felt this to be a deeply precarious undertaking, as can be seen from his continual experiments with the narrative surrounding them.

If the image, as Georges Didi-Hubermann supposed, comes up against time through its deconstruction of narrative, then the composition—or recomposition— of it remains essential to placing the photograph into a larger context. As Susan Sontag writes lucidly:

Harrowing photographs do not inevitably lose their power to shock. But they are not much help if the task is to understand. Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us. (*Pain of Others* 89)

Armin T. Wegner was more than aware of the haunting power of his images, yet he also knew that in order for the world to understand his call for justice for the Armenian people, he would have to do more than allow his images to speak – he would have to speak in conjunction with them, to lend his lyric voice to animate the photographs that contained so much but said so little. Wegner, in “presenting himself as a mediator of reconciliation [...] explored ways of convincing his German and international audiences to look at images and listen to stories of the forced deportation of the Armenians” (Payne 26). This section works off of existing scholarship on Wegner the writer and Wegner the

humanitarian activist, and tries to understand Wegner attempting to merge the various and often conflicting meta-narratives linked to these official causes (to a more or less successful degree through each successive attempt). It adds to these existing discussions by arguing that it is precisely Wegner's literary prowess as an expressionist that led to a finely-tuned sense of the tensions between telling stories with images of violence and the deep precariousness of narrative in conjunction with images of trauma.

Exercising his lyric voice stood as something that Wegner, long a part of the Berlin expressionist scene, excelled at. Born in Wuppertal, Germany, in 1886 to a socially well-connected family, he studied in Breslau, Zürich, and Berlin, before completing a doctoral degree in law.²⁶ Though he graduated with honors in 1913, he retained a stronger interest in the literary and theatrical arts than in the law, and soon attempted to make a name for himself as a writer of expressionist poetry and in the circles of Max Reinhardt's theater (26). When the First World War began in 1914, Wegner joined the waves of intellectuals like Heinrich Mann and Karl Kraus, who ardently embraced the new era they thought the war would bring with it (Samsami 154). While he initially did not join the fray, Wegner was later taken into service as a doctor's assistant on the Russian front. In 1915 he was transferred to the regiment of Field Marshall Colmar von der Goltz—thanks in large part to his family's influence—where he continued to serve as assistant to the Field Marshall's doctor. In the fall of 1916, travelling from east to west in the Ottoman Empire with the Field Marshall and his troops, and later in 1916, Wegner came across southbound Armenian refugees, who the Ottoman forces had driven towards the Syrian Desert in a largely successful effort to exterminate them. After

²⁶ See Martin Rooney's *Leben und Werk Armin T. Wegners (1886-1978) im Kontext der sozio-politischen und kulturellen Entwicklungen in Deutschland* (1984)

spending some time in the makeshift Armenian refugee camp that had formed in that area, Wegner gathered testimonies from refugees and documented their plights with his pocket camera and the diary he kept along the way (Payne 27). Following his forced return to Germany – partially because of his work on behalf of the Armenians and partially due to the pacifist sentiments contained in homeward bound letters to his mother— Wegner became a vocal activist for the Armenians, though his efficacy remained limited by wartime censorship.

Following the end of the war and the lifting of the censorship with the November Revolutions of 1918/1919, Wegner began to openly support the Armenian cause. Beginning in 1918, he served as editor for the magazine *Der Osten*, which concerned itself with all things Mid East, and through which he gained access to a large body of visual representations of the genocide (Maier 164). In February 1919 Wegner published his *Open Letter to President Woodrow Wilson*, in which he asserted his position as an eyewitness to genocide in order to emphasize the suffering of the Armenians and call for American and international support for the upcoming vote on the Armenian state (Tamcke 45). A month later he gave his infamous image presentation at the Urania in Berlin, which caused a nation-wide scandal not only due to the violent tensions among Armenian and Turkish spectators that characterized the viewing event, but also because in the lecture, Wegner for the first time openly emphasized the complicity of Germany in the genocide of the Armenians (Samsami 162). Subsequent lectures followed in various versions until around 1921, and from 1919 through the mid 1920s, Wegner also published a variety of literary writings on his time in Turkey, the war and the genocide, and novels concerning Turkish topics like *Der Weg ohne Heimkehr. Ein Martyrium in*

Briefen (1919), *Im Hause der Glückseligkeit. Aufzeichnungen aus der Türkei* (1920), and *Der Knabe Hüssein. Türkische Novellen* (1921). Added to these are Wegner's so-called "humanistic works," *Der Ankläger* (1919) and *Die Mobilisierung der Menschheit* (1919) (163).

The works referenced above by no means cover the breadth of Wegner's immense corpus of prose, poetry, reportages, personal writings, and public writings. But they do illuminate something important that seems to come up often in the growing circle of discourse surrounding him. Wegner has often been described as a passionate humanitarian who "worked tirelessly for the Armenians" and a "mediator for reconciliation." Certainly he embodied these things. Yet it is also essential to look at Wegner the poet and to connect this aspect of Wegner's personage more concretely to the others. For this helps to explain much about why he went about his literary and humanist engagement with the Armenian Genocide in a certain way, why his particular sensitivity to narrative came to be developed to begin with, and why he may have over time experienced various levels of success associated with his ceaseless engagement with the Armenian cause.

For Wegner, the poetic expression already began bound up in notions of travel and movement. Already before the First World War and during his study of law, the twenty-three year old Wegner published his first collection of poetry *Zwischen Zwei Städten. Ein Buch im Gang einer Entwicklung*, which thematized the difficulties associated with moving from a small, bucolic town back to the modern city. Inspired by Wegner's own experiences of leaving college-prep school to try his hand at becoming a gentleman farmer, the collection is filled with the flowering imagery that became so

central to Wegner's style (152). After the conclusion of his law studies, Wegner went on a series of trips to Brussels, Antwerp, Paris and Marseille, publishing poems, sketches, and stories in magazines there. He once again ended up in Berlin, where he made the acquaintances of well-known German expressionists Kurt Hiller, Gottfried Benn, Franz Werfel, Gottfried Benn, and Max Reinhardt (153). In these circles, Wegner immersed himself in expressionist modes, with the movement heavily influencing his 1917 poetic collection *Im Anlitz der Städte*, also based on his experiences while travelling through Paris, Amsterdam, and Berlin. Full of emotional subjectivity, radical changes in perspective, and symbolic rejection of realist narration, the work pulsed with the feel of the times.

Though expressionist modes enjoyed popularity among intellectuals before and during World War One, the advent of the war and the destruction left in its wake lent a particular urgency to the search for alternative means of expression to the hitherto dominant form of realism. As Anton Kaes explains in his seminal study of traumatic Weimer era film *Shell Shock Cinema*, The Great War realist representations were felt to be insufficient in the wake of the trauma of war. World War One had brought with it great hopes of societal transformation, promising a new era in which a radical modern possibility could bloom on the battlefield and at home. Instead, the eager young men who ran to join the ranks in the exuberant "spirit of 1914" came back physically mutilated by unimaginable modern machines of war and mentally stunned—shell shocked—if they came back at all. Kaes writes about the way this affected artistic, literary, and filmic representation:

The modern war challenged older forms of representation. A realism that implied familiarity with and affirmation of one's surroundings could not capture the eerie and alienating desolation of the battlefield, the anonymous mass killing, the permanent threat

of poison gas, machine guns, and bombs. Technological warfare has destroyed the natural landscape and turned entire regions into no-mans-land. The battlefields looked empty, with soldiers hiding in their dugouts and all movement restricted for fear of exposure. Stripped of all contingencies and ambiguities in the life-and-death situation of the front, the world, radically reduced to its bare essentials, had become more abstract. The war demanded new aesthetics. (*Shell Shock Cinema*, 81)

In this rupture between pre- and post-war society, language itself—as well as linear narrative stemming from reliable language—was perceived as having failed and realist forms were not only felt to be deficient, but fundamentally “tacitly affirm[ing] a stifling reality” (187). In this vein, German philosopher Walter Benjamin asked: “Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned home from the battlefield grown silent - not richer, but poorer in communicable experience?” (*Storyteller* 84). Expressionism, as a form that sought to express the meaning of emotional experience rather than physical reality and which stood as “a vitalist reaction against urban modernity, rationality, and the administered life, effectively became this new aesthetic” (Kaes 188). Though it had existed in its many forms arguably since before the turn of the century and gained strong popularity already around early 1910s, postwar artists, writers, and intellectuals fervently embraced expressionism as way of expressing their new positions as “artificial, eerie, and silent witness[es] to a mortified world that is at once elemental and liminal” (82). Essays like Siegfried Kracauer’s “On Expressionism: Nature and Meaning of a Contemporary Movement” (1918), Friedrich Gundolf’s “Stefan George und der Expressionismus” (1920) and a wide variety of writings by visual artists demonstrated the theories behind the movement, while literary journals like *Der Sturm* (led by editor-in-chief Herwarth Walden) and *Die Aktion* (led by editor-in-chief Franz Pfempfert) printed expressionist poetry, prose, drawings, and prints from 1910-11 until well into late 1920s and early 1930s. Poets like August Stramm, Gottfried Benn, and Else Lasker-Schüler experimented

with language, using expansive or rhapsodic or clipped and telegraphic speech to create conjurations of decay, war experiences, and romantic ecstasy. Films like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), *Nosferatu* (1922), and *Metropolis* (1927) explored “the realm of the unreal, the spiritual, the emotional,” particularly through “the flatness of the image, the stylized starkness of black and white, and the distorted artificiality of the sets” (Kaes 83-84). Painters like Egon Schiele and Alfred Kubin created artworks with radical distortions aimed at an emotional effect that evoked moods and feelings (Baldick 349). Theatrical works like Georg Kaiser’s *Gas Trilogy* (*die Koralle, Gas- Erster Teil, Gas-Zweiter Teil*), Max Reinhardt’s staging of *der Bettler*, and Karl-Heinz Martin’s staging of Toller’s *die Maschinenstürmer* caused a sensation with their “deliberately nonrepresentational style, radical abstraction, and stylized acting” and nearly two dimensional presentation (Kaes 84). Expressionist work spoke of “an intense longing for a world of vitality, creativity, and vision,” and was characterized through a “plea for the restoration of the humanistic values” felt to have been lost already before the war but most certainly intensified by it (187).

In viewing the life and work of Armin T. Wegner, it is possible to see the influence of both the Great War and of expressionism on Wegner the poet-writer (*Dichter*) and Wegner the political and humanist reporter. In his salient analysis of Wegner’s novels and personal papers, German literary critic Behrang Samsamsi notes the important role that travel played in Wegner’s writing processes. He posits that Wegner saw the First World War “primarily from the perspective of a poet and therefore as a source for literary creation” and that he specifically sought out particular lived experiences throughout the period 1914-1921 as he believed they would enrich his poetic

and literary work (155, 157). Samsamsi convincingly argues that this applies to Wegner's encounters with the Armenians as well (157), and while this may seem a negative judgment on the surface, a deeper look reveals that it is not. Wegner remained first and foremost a poet, a writer, and one whose language was fundamentally lyrical; particularly situations which called for more 'straightforward' reporting of facts remained challenging for him. Indeed he recognizes as much in a later piece from 1959 titled *Glück und Verhängnis des Berichterstatters* the manner in which the two modes of expression are inextricably intertwined for him. Wegner writes that, already in 1919, he understood:

...dass es gerade seine Aufrichtigkeit ist, die ihn auf diesem Weg verführt. Statt nur das Selbsterlebte unmittelbar wiederzugeben, wird er [der Reiseschriftsteller, A.M.] wider Willens zum Dichter. Jede Erzählung über ein Land ist ja stets zugleich ein Stück Lebensgeschichte dessen, der es bereist. Bei ihrer Niederschrift ergeht es dem Verfasser wie manchem ersten Manne, der bei der Schilderung seines Lebens zu seinem Unbehagen die Erkenntnis gewinnt, dass er mit seinem Unternehmen scheitern müsse, wollte er sich genau an die geschichtliche Wahrheit halten. Am Ende entschließt er sich, nicht nur vieles fortzulassen, sondern unbekümmert um ihre Reihenfolge die wirklichen Vorgänge zeitlich und räumlich zu verschieben. Kann es eine andere Art, zu schildern, überhaupt geben? (Maier 173-4)

Here Wegner questions what it means to represent an experience and, in typical expressionist fashion, chooses to represent it as subjectively as possible, as a purely 'factual' representation remains not only difficult, but impossible. The poet comes up against his own failings in the face of "die kaum greifbaren Echtheit des Lebens" (173). Indeed, Andreas Maier, using previously unseen documents from the Deutsches Literatur Archiv (DLA) in Marbach, Germany, identifies Wegner's relationships to the lyrical and the literal (though he discusses it in terms of "subject-focused and object-focused authenticity"²⁷) and ultimately argues that Wegner "integrated his own authentic photographic images into this obviously and transparently fictional narrative" (173).

Admittedly, the question of authenticity is an important one, especially since Wegner's

²⁷ "die hier aufscheinende Differenz zwischen objektbezogener und subjektiver Authentizität" (*Nachwort*, p. 173)

tendency to continuously attempt to merge the lyrical and the literal got him in hot water at the Armenia presentation of 1919 at the Berlin Urania, when he was forced to admit publicly during the lecture that he had not actually personally taken all the pictures shown and that some of them stemmed from an earlier time than the genocide.²⁸ Indeed, Maier even warns that we are not to “misunderstand Wegner as a historian” but rather to see his witnessing of the genocide and his experience thereof as “material for a planned literary work” that he was thinking of writing in the future (189).

Wegner’s own positionality may have affected the ‘accuracy’ of his memories and the way he tries to recount them through narrative. Jay Winter in his recent volume on soldiers and war photography looks at Wegner’s photographs in the context of “unofficial photography” by Wegner the *soldier* (*War Beyond Words* 54). As a member of the armed forces and part of the war machine (through German-Turkish alliance), Wegner played a not insignificant role in tacitly supporting the powers to which the genocide owed its occurrence in the first place. Might this dual positionality – as both soldier and witness – have lent Wegner an “empty gaze” through the camera in the face of extreme pain and suffering? More likely, it perhaps may be that Wegner, far from *wishing* to be inauthentic *per se*, simply hoped to convey the trauma of witnessing and the residue of this trauma in the photographs through an expressionist form he knew could move his audience to social, political, and moral action. As demonstrated extensively in the previous section, traumatic memory does not function in a linear manner and maintains a very different relationship to time and to the present than non-traumatic memory. Therefore, it makes sense that Wegner might have struggled with

²⁸ Following this embarrassment, the German press lambasted Wegner as a “charlatan” for some time afterwards (Tamcke, *Die Austreibung*, p. 67).

clearly remembering the trauma he witnessed and the second-hand trauma he experienced through witnessing; it also follows that he may reached for the narrative form he was most familiar with and that he knew might stand a chance of expressing that which he felt, to some degree, was inexpressible. He needed the audience to not just see the images, but *experience* them in the same manner he had, needed to make the images move through his narration of their events in order for them to continue to have “lives” beyond their initial shock. In the words of Didi-Huberman, Wegner needed to ensure that they audience saw these photographs as *tear-images*, rather than *veil-images*. Indeed, in Wegner’s mind, the very future of the Armenian people weighed on his shoulders and depended on his efforts.

In this sense, Wegner’s work with these photographs illustrates the tensions inherent in representations of violence, genocide, and trauma, bringing him up against the same things that literary critics, filmmakers, poets, and historians grappled with after the Holocaust. In Wegner’s case, the urgent socio-political and moral need to disseminate information about the genocide comes up against his own inner need to make the images move in a emotive narrative that would do justice not only to the things the images contained but the things he himself had witnessed. It was something that, throughout his work with images, he remained acutely aware of, and it was something that he never was fully able to reconcile in his work with the Armenian Genocide photographs.

Fatih Akin’s *The Cut*

On April 15, 2014 it was reported that German-Turkish director Fatih Akin unexpectedly pulled his Armenian genocide epic *The Cut* from the lineup of the 2014 Cannes Film Festival, citing ‘personal reasons’ as his only explanation (Szalai, “Director

Fatih Akin Pulls ‘The Cut’”). At the end of the summer, before the Venice Film Festival, Akin sat down with Stephen Heyman of *The New York Times* to explain his decision:

We showed the film to Cannes and Venice at the same time. The reaction of Venice was very enthusiastic and Cannes was a bit much more careful, like they always are. So I was nervous, and I followed my instincts. But I couldn’t talk about my decision in the press because Venice asked me to wait until they made their own announcement. The people in Cannes never rejected the film but I had the feeling that it wasn’t what they expected from me. Because it’s historical, because it’s in English, it’s not minimalistic, I’m not sure. But I cannot fulfill other people’s expectations. I have to fulfill my own.” (Heyman, “Q&A”)

Once the film screened at Venice, however, the critics did not grant Akin the generous reading he had allowed himself. *Indie Wire*’s Jessica King muses that at the time of the *The Cut*’s removal from Cannes “the rumor mill went to work overtime (...) With all that gossip however, there was one possible explanation that never really got much play: that the film would not be very good.” She concludes scathingly: “And in truth, it’s *not* very good. It’s close to a disaster” (King, “Review”). And the negative reviews did not stop there. *The Cut* has been described as “awkward (...) staid, and with a bland lead and uninspired execution,” and as exuding a “lavish and gaudy proclivity towards the epic narrative that already demands and wishes to exact a grandiloquence that is too late and too kitschy at this stage of cinema history (Dabashi, “Turkish Genocide Film”). Critics castigated Akin for “fall[ing] back on convenience and contrivance to streamline the thornier specificities of his grand-scale narrative” (Lund, “Review”), “playing with suspension of disbelief”(ibid) and having “so little to say” concerning the weight of the topic he treats (Barber, “The Cut”). Perhaps the most salient critique published in the whirlwind of *The Cut*’s release came from Hamid Dabashi, professor of Iranian Studies at Columbia University:

Akin's film has all the evident anxieties of a young filmmaker carrying the marks of the filmmakers he admires up its sleeves [...] This gives [*The Cut*] a bit of concocted

character, too much of a nervous filmmaker rookie on display to evince the signs of a mature filmmaker with a serious thing to say about a monumental tragedy (...) the Armenian tragedy has advanced far too deeply into our political consciousness for a tired old cliché kind of cinematic narrative to do justice to it. If a director is not aware of that fact, he walks perilously between tragedy and kitsch (...) Akin is too late and his narrative too visually self-conscious and archival to come anywhere near the emotive complexity of that universe. (“Turkish Genocide Film: An Epic Too Late?”)

Dabashi, understanding the long representational tradition that Akin’s film takes part in, evaluates *The Cut* in terms of the narrative that Akin employs, considering it “too visually self-conscious and archival.” This is an interesting point of departure from other numerous negative reviews, because instead of simply focusing on the surface elements of *The Cut*, Dabashi uses the surface as a way to engage with deeper questions raised by the images Akin tries to present us with. Unlike the film itself, Dabashi sees the image as something critically significant and insists that it be regarded as the entry point into multiple layers of meaning.

This section will use this statement of Dabashi’s as a point of departure in investigating the way that images move—or fail to move— in Akin’s film. *The Cut*, replete in graphic images of genocide and a narrative that appears disparately cobbled together and forced into a synchronous whole, appears to rely heavily on previously existing photographic representations of the genocide, of which Armin T. Wegner’s images constitute an estimated eighty percent of the existing collection. Due to the large number of photographs that Wegner took, collected, and presented in his photo-lectures, as well as the fact that there existed volumes of these photographs and commentary available to Akin at his time of researching the film, it is not unlikely that Wegner’s photographs and narrative greatly influenced the way that Akin chose to tell this story. Indeed, Akin speaks to his method of preparation for making the film: “I did a lot of research while I was writing this [...] I collected a lot of very rich portraits of witnesses

and tried to sew them together” (Heyman, “Q&A”). Though he does not name Wegner per say, Akin speaks to his need for creating a film of accuracy, of authenticity; photographs, with their deceptive statuses as “slices of life,” seem to offer a tantalizing window into the past ‘as it was.’ In analyzing the film in conjunction with Armin T. Wegner’s photographs and the oral/visual narratives he employs, it emerges that *The Cut*’s lackluster and overwrought telling of the genocide is not an accident. It is rather a systemic, structural issue that appears in the way Akin—driven by an almost compulsive need to tell a good story—treats the legacy of Wegner’s still images as unproblematic by sneaking what appear to be re-constructions and re-stagings of them into his interminable film.

Part of the reason that *The Cut* remained especially baffling to critics of the film was that it was so unlike Akin’s cinematic oeuvre prior to, and indeed, after it. Known for making gritty, intense films that thematized cultural identity, violence, and gender, Akin had made something of a name for himself as a new kind of German-Turkish *auteur*, winning numerous German and international prizes at Cannes, the Academy Awards, and the Critics Choice Movie Awards. Born in Hamburg-Altona in 1973 to Turkish immigrant parents, Akin began making films already in grade school. In 1993 he landed a position working with Hamburg-based production company *Wüste Filmproduktion*, where he gained experience as an author, actor, and director. In 2000 he completed his study of visual communication at the *Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg*, and subsequently worked on a number of short films. He released his first full-length production *Kurz und schmerzlos* in 1998, followed by *Im Juli* (2000), *Solino* (2002), and *Gegen die Wand* (2004). In portraying the struggles of German-Turkish individuals, the

already prolific filmmaker received the *Deutscher Filmpreis* and the *Europäischer Filmpreis* in the same year. The film also formed the first in Akin's "Love, Death, and the Devil" trilogy, and was followed by the second part, *Auf der anderen Seite*, in 2007. Professionally recognized for his creativity in his first documentary film *Crossing the Bridge—The Sound of Istanbul* (2005) and his screenplay for international comedy *Kebab Connection* (2006), Akin received a teaching position at the *Hochschule für bildende Künste* and was invited to be part of the jury at the Cannes International Film Festival in the same year. His films have often been described as containing a "brilliant play of actor and circumstance" (Jeong and Szaniawski, 197).

After a series of short films and experimental films that also met with great critical approval, Akin began working on *The Cut*, which, with its 15 million euro budget, was slated to complete the "Love, Death, and the Devil" as "The Devil." Intended to tell the story of the Armenian Genocide from a radical new perspective, and for the first time by a director of Turkish heritage that did not repeat the official Turkish stance of denial, critics and academics alike eagerly awaited its release. Initial expectations of *The Cut* revealed hope for a film that would "pursue intransigent and dangerous issues" yet not "[settle] things all too facilely" as the third and final film of Akin's "Love, Death, and the Devil" trilogy (196). As demonstrated above, these expectations were disappointed, with Akin later reflecting on what he thinks went wrong:

He told the German daily newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that when he finished writing the script for "In the Fade," he was coming out of a "rather fatalistic phase" after having spent nearly five years working on *The Cut*. "I took too much time with the script and the production, during the shoots and working out all the details for the period costumes. When you spend too much energy on such details, you tend to forget the actual drama you're trying to convey, and fall short in fully exposing the inner life of the main character." (Akin in Kürten, "Germany's Golden Globe Winner")

The time following the making of *The Cut* proved to be a time of serious artistic and personal introspection for Akin, from which he emerged to make his 2017 critically acclaimed film *Aus dem Nichts*, starring Diane Krüger and dealing with neo-Nazi violence against ethnic minorities in contemporary Germany. Winning the highest award at Cannes in the same year, *Aus dem Nichts* was also honored with a Golden Globe for Best Foreign Film. His career having fully recovered from “the slump” of *The Cut*, Akin was invited to join the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences—the same organization that awards the Oscars—towards the end of 2017.

It is significant that, throughout all the daring films Akin has made throughout his career, *The Cut* was the one that pushed him outside of himself, away from his decisively gritty and unusual representations into the realm of an overly confident storytelling, characterized by falling back on common clichés and overused tropes. Though Akin speaks to the amount of research he invested in the film, his desire to achieve accuracy through extensive corroboration of historical images, and the sheer amount of time—nearly five years—that it took to make the film, it indeed appears that the film was a difficult one for Akin to make. Reviewers commonly cite possible reasons like the scope of the story, the immense cast and crew, or the geographic scale of the production; yet it seems that the shadow of much bigger issues hover over the production of Akin’s work. Though Akin does not mention this in interviews, questions of personal identity may play a central role in the making of *The Cut*, particularly in the ways that Akin tries to come to terms with his own dual roles as a German and Turk as he wrestles with two interwoven histories of genocide.

Akin's German-Turkish identity —though he has often objected to being described thusly— plays an important part in his making a film on the Armenian genocide. As the son of Turkish immigrants to Germany, he carries within his films characteristics that Yana Meerzon has also attributed a condition of being “post-exilic:” “anxiety for roots by the post exilic subject. (...) who never experienced personally the perils of flight dedicates their lives to a (...) search for reconciliation with his ancestry” (8). While Akin's family situation is not exilic in the traditional sense because it does not contain the trauma of persecution, it may still be seen as containing elements of Diaspora, since Turks have moved from Turkey in large numbers to Germany and Austria after the Second World War. In this manner, Akin still appears to carry the weight of responsibility for the actions of his Turkish predecessors against the Armenians. Drawing on Marianne Hirsch's idea of postmemory, Meerzon describes the ways in which contemporary filmmakers engage with the notion of a family or historical distant past, especially when that past is marked by the violent or the traumatic. Hirsch writes in regards to the children of Holocaust survivors that they:

...live at a further temporal and spatial remove from that decimated world. The distance separating them from the locus of origin is the radical break of unknowable and incomprehensible persecution; for those born after, it is a break impossible to bridge. Still, the power of mourning and memory, and the depth of the rift dividing their parent's lives, impart to them something that is akin to memory (*Family Frames*, 420).

She elucidates further:

Postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection: it is a ‘powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated, not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation (...) Postmemory characterizes those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of a previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated.’ Postmemory is not ‘absent memory’ or the ‘gaping black hole of the unmentionable years.’ Not empty or absent, postmemory is obsessive and relentless as ‘as full or empty, certainly as constructed, as memory itself. (22)

Though Hirsch's concept refers primarily to those whose family histories contain traumatic histories of persecution, it may also be possible to apply this concept to those who, like Akin as a Turk, have a kind of "inherited complicity" from events that happened long before his birth, especially in light of the persistent Turkish narrative of denial in regards to the Armenian genocide. Indeed, in an interview Akin cites his own Turkish origins and the taboo nature of the subject in Turkey as reasons he wanted to make *The Cut* (Sakalis, "Turkey is Changing"). Growing up in Germany, in a country that still actively confronts and wrestles with its own Holocaust history, adds an additional layer of consciousness regarding the issue of genocide for Akin in a recent interview:

The helmer says that growing up in Germany made him want to address the Armenian genocide, in part because of the manner in which the Holocaust is a deep part of German culture, whereas the Armenian genocide continues to be taboo: "As I grew up, I used to think that the Holocaust had nothing to do with me or my parents, because I wasn't born at the time and they didn't live in Germany. But while making 'The Cut,' I realized that I had equal responsibility for both genocides." (Dale, "Filmmaking is a Holy War")

Akin says that he wanted, in making *The Cut*, to create a film "that would be appealing to both Armenians and Turks, adding that "one of [his] main reasons for doing the film is to produce something where people come out and inform themselves, discuss, and start to create a room where they can reflect on their own history and trauma" (Sakalis, "Turkey is Changing"). Reflecting later on his hopes for the film, he added: "It would be good if a film like that could be a trigger to inform yourself more. That was the purpose" (Walsh, "Give Me a Reason to Believe). While it may be safe to say that Akin's film fell somewhat short of this promise, Akin also stated in a number of interviews that had he conceived of *The Cut* as more of a Western genre, or a road movie, adding: "If I wanted to tell a story of the genocide I'd probably make a documentary for at least twelve hours

long and tell the story of not only 1915, but the last few hundred years” (2014 London Film Festival, Q&A). This, although quite contrarian, seems to show a kind of belated awareness of the representational issues associated with making a film about genocide, especially since Akin appears to make a thinly-veiled reference to Claude Lanzmann’s 1985 Holocaust documentary *Shoah*, which at nine hours long, stands as the longest film ever made on the subject.

Unluckily for Akin, there existed a film on the Armenian Genocide—*Ararat*, made in 2002— which had already managed to do much of what the critics lambasted *The Cut* as missing. Created by Armenian-Canadian director Atom Egoyan, the film tells the story of the Armenian genocide as one wrapped up in a culture of denial on the one hand, and the performance of postmemory and remembrance on the other. In an interview, Egoyan states that *Ararat*, as a “non-linear, highly intertextual, and self-referential cinematic narrative, is ‘a story about the transmission of trauma. It is cross-cultural and inter-generational. The grammar of the screenplay uses every possible tense available, from the past, the present, and the future, to the subjective and the conditional. I firmly believe that this was the only way the story could be told” (*Ararat Shooting Script*, ix).

In Egoyan’s film, the story is told through the difficulty of using and creating images of the Armenian genocide. In this context, the restaging of genocide images is treated as something fundamentally problematic through the existence of three concomitant narratives. The first, Armenian expressionist artist Arshile Gorky painting a self-portrait of himself and his mother, based on a photograph taken just before the massacre in Van, “becomes the artist’s physical expression [...] of grief and mourning”

and “draws the audience to the horror of the genocide and to the emotional truth of turmoil” (Meerzon 276). The second is the making of a “film within a film” by director Edward Saroyan, a second-generation survivor. Saroyan attempts to “reconstruct the Armenian genocide artistically for the first time in the history of film” and he falls back on Hollywood-style tropes “of the Holocaust genre,” which “paints its heroes and its villains in an ‘over-the-top’ way in order to heighten the sense of drama” (Romney, *Atom Egoyan* 175). The third follows eighteen-year old Raffi who, troubled by his dysfunctional family and disturbed by the story of his own Armenian father’s death, travels to Turkey in order to see for himself the land his ancestors. In personal denial about family’s and community’s history and aiming to seek out the truth, Raffi brings his video camera in order to take images of Van and bring them with him back home (Meerzon 278).

The image is presented as fundamentally unstable and is constantly being renegotiated through the simultaneous – and often competing – narratives. Indeed, the various narratives contain what might be seen as competing images: We are made aware that in this complex web of denial and personal and official perspectives, we cannot count on an image to provide a ‘straightforward’ understanding of the genocide and its memory. We cannot treat it as something clear-cut that is to open a window to the genocide, to treat it as Didi-Hubermann’s *veil-image*. Only through allowing the image to be destabilized and thus problematized- as *tear-image*- can we begin to glean a sliver of truth through the trauma of these images.

Ararat not only negotiates the traumas of second and third generation Armenian exiles, but also shows how attempts at telling straightforward narratives through

traumatic images must necessarily tip into melodrama. Saroyan's Hollywood-style film, with its insistence on creating visual links through the restaging of a genocidal past event captured through the stillness of traumatic photography, demonstrates the issues associated with taking images of the past and trying to make them move in the present. In this sense, Egoyan's *Ararat* follows Wegner's own sensitivity to images of trauma and narrative. It shows them as fundamentally difficult to contextualize through various visual forms like painting, film-making, and non-official filmmaking, but also hints that particular modernist forms – like Gorky's expressionist painting – come may closest to conveying the trauma not only of the experience itself, but of remembering it long after its conclusion.

Interestingly, most disapproving critiques of Fatih Akin's *The Cut* –whether academic or journalistic—incorporate some kind of reference to Egoyan's *Ararat* by way of negative comparison. In her book *Aesthetics of Displacement: Turkey and its Minorities on Screen*, Turkish professor of Film and Photography Özlem Köksal explains the deficiencies in *The Cut* in terms of its conventional, historical realist narrative, stating that “*The Cut* limits its representations to actions,” (102) although it does “deal with the question of representation in a less assuming manner” than the Taviani Brothers' 2007 Italian melodrama *The Lark Farm* (101). Köksal's main contention with *The Cut* is that Akin's film “refrains from scrutinizing and questioning its own participation in producing a comprehensible representation of the event, as well as dealing with the event's ramifications in contemporary Turkey” (101). Although the analysis Köksal provides is lucid and compelling, it is relatively short, as she mentions the narrative failings of *The Cut* primarily so that she can extol the virtues of Atom Egoyan's *Ararat* as a comparison.

Particularly these last statements are thought-provoking ones, for the question of how or why this might be the case –further than through the catch-all category of ‘narrative’— is not posed.

Examining Armin T. Wegner’s photographs and photographic lecture in these contexts sets the stage for further investigation, particularly in relation to the photographic image, trauma, and storytelling. As mentioned before, as Wegner’s images constitute a good deal of the photographic ‘evidence’ available of the Armenian genocide, it is likely that Akin had some kind of contact with these photos, whether he knew who had taken them or not. Numerous visual moments in the film appear to support this analysis, chiefly in the first half of the film, which explicitly depicts the genocide and the suffering of its victims. The famous Wegner shot of Armenian mothers (Figure 2.1) on a forced march in the desert, carrying their small children on their backs and in their arms,²⁹ is recreated almost to an exact likeness in the film, with the camera angle only slightly changed (Figures 2.2 and 2.3).



Figure 2.1: *Armenische Frau mit Kind* (Armin T. Wegner, 1915)

²⁹ See image #53 “Flüchtlinge auf dem Tauruspass“ in the 1924 Viennese presentation, *Die Austreibung*, Meier (2011)



Figure 2.2: *The Cut* (Fatih Akin, 2015)



Figure 2.3: *The Cut* (Fatih Akin, 2015)

Likewise, many of the *The Cut*'s images dealing with the refugee camp appear to directly mimic Wegner's, as if they were simply cut from the presentation and inserted into the film. Particularly the refugee camp scene in which main character Nazaret nearly stumbles over the prostrate body of his dying sister in law (Figure 2.6), bears a striking similarity to Wegner's #86 "Lagergruppe" (Figure 2.4) and #87 "Im Flüchtlingslager" (Figure 2.5). Interestingly – and perhaps this is a function of the 35mm wide angle lens

that Akin shot the film on—Wegner’s photographic stills of the Syrian desert also appear to find a place in Akin’s film.



Figure 2.4: Lagergruppe (Armin T. Wegner, 1915)



Figure 2.5: Im Flüchtlingslager (Armin T. Wegner, 1915)



Figure 2.6: Still from the refugee camp scene (Fatih Akin, 2015)

While the narrative adopted by Akin to tell the story of these images differs a great deal from Wegner's presentation, there exist curious overlaps that would be hard to view as merely coincidental. Take, for instance, Wegner's commentary concerning a tale he heard of an Armenian man who was the single survivor of a massacre:

Der Armenier, den ich sprach, hatte sich unter den Gefallenen verborgen und war in der Nacht entflohen. Nach zwei Tagen erreichte er das Zelt eines arabischen Bauern, er war durch Hunger und Schrecken so entkräftet, dass er die Sprache verloren hatte. Erst als ihm der Araber mitleidig ein Stück Butter in den Mund schob, begann sich deine Zunge langsam zu lösen. (Meier 82-83)

This story of a man escaping from death by playing dead, losing his speech, and finding solace with an Arabic family is poignant, and it is repeated almost detail for detail in Akin's film, with the exception being that Akin's figure remains silent and never regains his voice. Yet in Wegner's presentation there exists precedence for this as well, as he describes Armenian women who were sexually abused and sold to desert tribes as being similarly committed to life-long silence.

In looking at these images as a whole, we begin to see evidence that Akin truly did "cobble the narrative together," as critics complained. But we also see more clearly why these cobbled together narratives have become problematic: precisely because Akin

screenshots images from Wegner's work and inserts them into his own narrative. He takes them out of Wegner's carefully –though unquestionably problematically—constructed narrative and effectively uses them as stand-ins in order to lend a false air of authenticity to the film. Rather than allowing the competing narratives and images to create disjointed feel that might have prevented the chronic lack of self-reflexivity in *The Cut*, Akin superimposes Wegner's images onto the film without reflecting on what this process means for the representation of genocide in his film.

In *Humanitarian Photography*, Peter Balakian discusses how images like Wegner's situate us in the texture of an event and how they allow us a particular kind of knowledge about the process of genocide" (93). In describing the process of taking photographs under these conditions Balakian emphasizes that Wegner "risked his life hiding in his belt the negatives of the photographs he had collected and taken" (96). With this in mind, he opines:

The Wegner photographs invite us into this historical moment. Photo text and context create a kind of depth that is compounded by the relationship between the image and the knowledge of the historical event that context affords. For me, the photograph is defined by the complex perspective created by foreground, midground, and distant ground [...]
We are catching a glimpse of a larger process that was happening all over Turkey – a freeze frame of a moving picture. (98, 100)

He then looks at Wegner's images in terms of the Barthian *studium* and *punctum*, a fruitful distinction since, as mentioned already elsewhere, it explains one of the ways that the traumatic essence of a photograph can vicariously be transferred. In his analysis, the striped clothed becomes the *punctum* "because it is a traditional textile, an Armenian artifact – an image that embodies culture and normative village life. But now it is a remnant of life that been terminated, and so the textile shock the photograph into another layer of signifying what is lost in the genocidal event" (100). Importantly – and Balakian

does not mention this—it is the very stillness of the photographic image, its very arrestedness, which highlights the *punctum*, a concept that Barthes was able to develop precisely because he had the time to peruse an image ‘frozen in time.’ In the vein of what Balakian (and also Didi-Huberman) suggests, it is possible to reexamine some of Wegner’s images in different way. In some of the photographs that appear to be reinserted into Akin’s film, anomalies and imperfections can be spotted. The glass on the slides are cracked, splintered open and exposed. Likewise, Wegner’s shadow is visible as the sinking desert sun glares behind him in #73 “Beim Lausen” (Hoffmann & Koutcharian 117). Some photographs, like the one of eerie but neatly piled skulls and other human remains in #91 “Leichenhaufen,” have particularly blurry edges to them, as if Wegner had furtively snapped them as he was passing by, afraid of being caught but determined to document what he saw. These are details of the story of these photographs that no narrative, particularly one that is linear and implies a mastery over events, can adequately represent. Simply using the images of violence, lifting of narrative turns, and copying panoramic stills does not lend a film an aura of authenticity; rather it tries to con us into believing, uncritically, that *this is how it was* when the nature of the event—and the photographic representations of it—are fundamentally fragmented phenomena and often hidden in more abstract readings of the objects themselves. Driven by the ambition to tell a good story, Akin descends into the story from the level of the photographs, but does not consider the relationship of still images, after images, and moving images as something problematic and deeply precarious. The traumatic stillness of the photographs cannot be unproblematically incorporated into a film that relies on realist narratives. These many details, convalescing together into the complete succession of frame into

frame, that the Barthian *punctum* –the shock, the tear-image –becomes lost. The shock is instead attempted to be elicited through the showing of highly stylized atrocity scenes – but because they are so far removed from what the photograph contains- with its residue of trauma – they serve to elicit a purely emotional reaction from the viewer (in the form of sadness or disgust) that is easily discarded once the film is over. In other words, this method of incorporating the image – as something of a tableau, useful for staging a particular kind of ‘authenticity’— ignores the fact that in order to successfully do this, one must draw attention to the residue of the photograph through unusual narrative devices that examine what the photograph is to begin with, what it contains and not shows, and the ways in which it transfers these traumas in a vicarious manner.

Because of forces of animation and the tension between it and the way trauma is transmitted, photographs cannot be unproblematically restaged in film. They must be shown, represented as something inherently fragmented, precisely because of what they contain. Akin uses the images and the already prefigured narrative attached to them as a resource to tell a good story without recognizing, as Wegner did, that the images fundamentally come up against their own precariousness of narrative. In the end, Akin deprives himself of a golden opportunity and takes away the disruptive force the photographs could have in questioning seamless storytelling.

Though this section indeed remains critical of Akin’s use of images in *The Cut*, it also bears saying that, quixotically, the image is also sometimes one of the most beautiful things about Akin’s film – widescreen panoramic views do indeed remind of the western genre, as does the relationship between harsh nature of the desert versus the fragility of human man. The composition of some of these stiller images of the desert is striking:

balance in the proportion of a seemingly endless sky generated by a wide-set frame, offset by the contrast in the golden brown sand and rocks of the desert— these are moments where Akin pauses in his relentless storytelling to let the images speak. Instead of trying to re-enact some kind of still detail for detail that he came across in an archive—the film takes on a representational beauty that stuns and gives a sense of the true magnitude of the genocide. It hints at what could be possible if Akin let these types of still images to the fore a bit more and had used the photographs not as a basis for telling a good story, but for fundamentally questioning how to tell this story in the first place. Perhaps in incorporating Armin T. Wegner’s wrestling with image and narrative into his own film’s narrative, Akin might have been more able to adequately tackle the fragmentary nature of traumatic photographic images and finding a way to integrate them into his film. This may have been achievable through some kind of visual device that draws attention to them as photographs – as representations that function in a multilayered way in their own rights. In this sense, allowing them to formalistically stand separate from narrative might have served to interrupt the process of storytelling in a fruitful way, to draw attention to Wegner’s images *as* images, to unsettle, to crack open the process of seamless storytelling to reveal it as presenting a mastery that is overconfident and incorrect. However, propelled by his ambition to tell a good story, Akin does not adequately think through these relationships and their ramifications, and the disintegration of storytelling becomes impossible. The result is a film that feels like it fails to think through how to render the past in the present and one that lacks the power to move us. We never become Raymond Bellour’s “pensive spectators” because Akin never allows us that chance.

Andy Spyra's 1915-2015/ "Out of the Dark"

If Fatih Akin's indiscriminate use of photography in *The Cut* is partially what robs it of its power, then it is worth looking at the work of young German-born photographer Andy Spyra's Armenian work as a highly reflexive way of thinking about how violent pasts can be rendered present today.

Born in 1984 in Hagen, Germany, Spyra stands as one of the most formative young photographers of the contemporary. Particularly interested in issues like violence, trauma, and memory, he has traveled to Bosnia, Armenia, and Iraq to document the remnants of the genocides there. His photographs can be said to be generally characterized by their highly-stylized, black and white aesthetic; the contrasts are stark and the shadows often almost overtake the entire frame. Indeed, this "unorthodox aesthetic" of Spyra's has often sparked fierce debate regarding his images that portray more contemporary conflicts. In a 2010 interview, he responds to these criticisms:

I am aware that I sometimes operate at the borders of photojournalism, but that's my voice and my way of seeing the world. I believe that photojournalism is less about technical regulations than about the integrity of a photographer, both in the field and at home during postproduction. (Johnson, "Postcard from Kashmir")

Spyra's photographs that comprise his Armenian Genocide series, *1915-2015*, can also be said to "operate at the borders of photojournalism." In the series, he looks for traces of the Armenian presence in southeastern Turkey and tries to tell the story of what happened 100 years ago through the way it reflects into the present. In shooting it, he brings what he described in an earlier interview as a "more direct and emotional approach."^{30 31}

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ See a similar statement by photographer Antoine Agoudjian in Edward Siddons's "Antoine Agoudjian: My Best Photograph" (The Guardian)

Interestingly, there exist several different versions of this project. Particularly interesting for this analysis are the *1915-2015* series as accessible through Spyra's professional webpage, the images that comprise a photojournalistic feature "Out of the Dark" in the German magazine *Leica Fotografie International*, and the short feature video by the same name that Leica produced to accompany the release of the article.

Like Wegner, Spyra seems to believe that his images can exist in different places and within various mini narratives that all tie back to an overarching meta-narrative. Unlike Wegner, he does appear to view this as something inherently problematic. Importantly, part of the reason that he does not is that the photographs from his original series—as featured on his webpage—are uncaptioned and do not form a coherent narrative. In other words, these thirty-four images already exist as purposefully constructed individual fragments that preempt narrative attempts to string them together visually. The photographs on their own, and in combination with one another, are without a doubt visually stunning, a majestic yet eerie play on darkness and light that remind the viewer of a still from an old expressionist film if the image—or parts of it—were not so sharp. Like Wegner's images, Spyra's *1915-2015* encompasses more than just suffering, from showing the landscape to portraits of individuals and examining cultural practices and ways of life. In this way, Spyra's series is also a document of culture, much like Wegner's was—though in Spyra's case, Armenian culture is precisely what is missing. It has been physically wiped away by violence, death, and the passage of a century of time; it has been purposefully suppressed by the political intrigues of the perpetrating nation.

The short video “Out of the Dark,” features Spyra talking about some of the photographs from the *1915-2015* series and the background behind them. This puts them into some useful context for analysis, since the same type of narrative and photographs were used in the printed journalistic piece in *Leica Fotografie International*.³² Particularly in the context of genocide and violence, this context becomes necessary, for as Susan Sontag writes, “all photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions” (*Pain of Others*, 10). The video, itself a highly stylized piece of production shot in black and white, presents the photographs, adds captions to them, and creates a space for Spyra to talk more about their background and significance. The structure of the video itself is interspersed with a series of textual descriptions that also come up in the article, beginning with a description that sets the tone for the context: “2015 marks the centenary of the Armenian genocide. Many Armenians survived the tragedy after being hidden by Kurdish and Turkish families. Their descendants mostly only learn about their backgrounds decades later. For many it is the beginning of a search for their own identity.” Beginning in the summer of 2014 around the cities of Van and Diyarbakir, Spyra “followed the traces of the Armenian presence in the region.” He describes the significance of choosing the locations, as they remain “areas that were mostly inhabited by Armenians until the genocide in 1914-1915,” but are now predominantly—in some cases, exclusively—populated by Kurds. The images displayed remain absent of official titles, but are accompanied by descriptive captions, upon which Spyra comments, elaborates, and adds first-person perspectives of interest. The first image (Figure 2.7) is captioned “*Child playing in Diyarbakir. The ruined building in the background used to belong to the Armenian churches in the Old Town.*” Spyra informs us that Diyarbakir,

³² See Issue 01/2015

now a “current Kurdish capital,” stood as a predominantly Armenian city one hundred years ago before the genocide. Spyra also reveals that the old city of Diyarbakir has been largely abandoned and that “the remnants of the Armenian inhabitants have not really been taken care of and are slowly falling into decay. All the traces they remain from the Armenians also are falling into decay and into oblivion.” Armed with this information, we see the photograph with new eyes.



Figure 2.7: Diyarbakir (Spyra, 2014/ 2015)

Imposing in its starkness and contrast, the frame is slanted, shot at heavily right-tilting angle. A gaunt Kurdish child with large round eyes – we know his ethnicity from Spyra’s comments—looks straightforwardly yet aggressively at the camera. This is a boy who wants to be a man yet who knows he shouldn’t be playing where he is playing: in the ruins of an Armenian church. And, as Spyra notes in the interview, the boy is ‘playing guns’ with a stick, innocently evoking the violence that occurred in this space.

But the violence is not just one of destruction. It is also one of erasure, of swallowing up. The next image shows an old woman sitting by herself in what appears to

be her home (Figure 2.8). The caption reads: “*Süslu Andanur is the granddaughter of an Armenian who survived the genocide after being hidden by a Kurdish family, and brought up as a Muslim.*” It is a medium-long shot of what might be the living room or the kitchen (we cannot be sure), with the small, slumped figure sitting to the bottom left of the image in front of a covered window. She does not look at the camera, and it is hard to make out her face; it is half covered in shadow, half illuminated by the light from a window to her left. Indeed, shadows take over nearly the entire shot until only vague impressions of light from the outside filters into the darkened room. Towards the middle bottom of the picture, under the window, there appears to be some kind of distortion – perhaps it is a stray beam of sunlight piercing in through the left window and reflecting off of the camera lens just as the photo is being snapped. It almost feels like an apparition from the past, an intrusion of a spirit into the present, of what Süslu has lost – which is not just her family, but her identity, her self.



Figure 2.8: Süslu Andanur (Spyra, 2015)

As she looks out the window, her old face marked by age and grief, we begin to feel this loss and this absence the caption alerts us to. Spyra elucidates that Süşlu “decided to remain Kurdish in identity, even after she found out about her own Armenian past (...) although she does acknowledge the traces in her life“ of the identity that remains lost to her. But they are traces, nothing concrete, at least not anymore.

The third photograph (Figure 2.9) shown investigates this phenomenon further. Captioned “*Özcan and Ferhat Dindar, two Kurds, in their village on Lake Van. The dark room attached to their house used to be an Armenian church. Nowadays it serves for storage,*” the photograph lets the viewer into a cavernous space in which two men stand, arms crossed and facing the camera. Around them are shelves containing goods, awkwardly mounted, but difficult to see as they fall predominantly in the shadows. The only light entering the space comes from the small window far above the men’s heads, its shape the only indication that they are occupying what used to be a holy space.



Figure 2.9: Özcan and Ferhat Dindar (Spyra, 2015)

Spyra explains that Van stood as “one of the biggest majority Armenian cities in southeastern Turkey” and that “in the genocide tens of thousands of people had to flee, were murdered, were deported.” As a result, “all the Armenian villages were depopulated, were empty, and also the churches and homes.” He continues:

Some years after the Armenian people were gone, the Kurdish people moved into the villages because they were all empty and the Kurds needed housing. So it came to be that many of the old Armenian villages are now populated by Kurdish people (...) These two guys live in an old abandoned Armenian church, which is quite a surreal setting. They claim they treat it very well – the church looks pretty good still – but it is a very weird situation, finding a Kurdish family just living in an Armenian holy building. But this is what you find quite often in the region. (“Andy Spyra: Out of the Dark”)

The fourth narrated image (Figure 2.10) of the video continues on this theme, but takes the viewer outside of buildings and their affiliated cultural institutions and out into nature. The caption reads “*A Kurdish woman in a field of sunflowers on the banks of Lake Van. In the past, Armenian women also used to harvest sunflower seeds here.*” The image shows a woman standing in a field of sunflowers, turned to the right side of the frame, with the camera encompassing most of her torso and a bit of her legs. The photo feels overexposed, so lacking in contrast that it almost feels like a sketched drawing, perhaps a consequence of the extreme brightness of the summer sun. The Kurdish woman—who unlike Süslü in the other kind of portrait, is not named—stands surrounded by large, fat-leafed sunflowers, a good number of them a head or two taller than the woman herself. She winds her hands in the leaves attached to thick stalks, brushing them with the back of her left hand, palm open. There is something so very painful about this photo, about the woman’s simple gestures. Perhaps it is the beauty of the vibrant sunflowers combined with the absence of what used to be there. As Spyra puts it: “These are same fields that the Armenians were harvesting hundred years ago. But now there are no more traces of any Armenians, so now it’s the Kurdish people are harvesting the sunflower fields.”

Through this simple description, combined with the way the photograph shows the woman's interaction with the flowers planted generations ago, we become aware not only of the deep gash left upon the disappearance of an individual, but the way that genocide constitutes the eradication of an entire groups of people and their cultures along with it.



Figure 2.10: Kurdish Woman with Sunflowers (Andy Spyra, ca. 2014)

Indeed that this seemingly simple physical act tied so closely to the Armenian culture—something that used to be so uniquely Armenian—today it is the cultural property of the Kurds speaks to how genocide does not only erase, but replaces culture. It does not leave a gap for long; the homes, the property, and the goods of victims are divided up and taken over by those who profited from their loss. We see those who continue to profit today in a land that refuses to recognize that the event happened in the first place.

To some extent, some of Spyra's 2014 images are similar to Wegner's 1915 shots in terms of what they show: what—Spyra's images ask—would be the 'normal' life of Armenians in the area today, had they survived? Like Wegner, Spyra seeks to capture the

Armenians and focuses on similar types of images in some ways: the empty desert, the Taurus Mountains, and the river valleys of the Armenian heartland. Yet Spyra's photographs are characterized by their absence in places where one should be seeing an Armenian presence. They are pictures of the presence of an absence, of loss.

One might also remark on a noticeable lack of atrocity photos as a major difference between the photo collections of Wegner and Spyra, aside from one photo, showing a pile of human bones heaped upon the bare earth. Though Spyra does not show any kind of physical brutality or atrocity, his photos nonetheless contain a violence that is startling. Through the way they feature their subjects and through the abstract forms they take, the images contain the intensity of pain and the shock of one hundred years of genocide memory. Much of this pain comes also from Turkish denial and the state-sponsored forgetting of the genocide, which Spyra thematizes through his photographs in Van. Absence, replacement, afterimages: these are the things that become visible residues of the traumas that occurred in these places. There is a sense of suffocating closeness that threatens to swallow the viewer up, coupled with expansive panoramic perspectives in which the viewer gets totally lost. Through these techniques, Spyra confronts the past through the present, finding the residue of trauma and exposing it, but also acknowledging the vastness of what is lost. He allows the camera to pick up imperfections, angles, and distortions, showing that these photographs refer to an event turned the world upside down for the people that experienced it, just as the denial of it continues to upset their descendants' memory of events. These techniques startle us, and make us think about the process of taking the photo to begin with, drawing attention to the fact that this, too, is something constructed. What makes these images so powerful is

that Spyra does not try to recreate an image of trauma; he recreates a *feeling* of trauma. In other words, he works at the level of affect rather than cognition, but does not slip into the melodramatic. In looking at these photos, we experience this feeling, and something so very much like grief begins to slowly choke us.

In the examples above, the “Out of the Dark” photographs rely captions to make their specificity known, but they also aren’t always told in the same order or in the same way elsewhere. Article and video produce and maintain a concomitant and coherent narrative. On Spyra’s website however, the images stand along without captions. The result is that it is impossible to tell who is Armenian, who is Kurdish, or where the photo is being taken. Though the photos displayed here are infinitely richer, there prevails an air of confusion, of desperation to *know* what happened. Yet it remains elusive to us for we only see the remnants of the vague events of the title 1915-2015 and feel the trauma that the photographs transmit to us in their eerie dreamlike manner. In this context, they do not tell a linear narrative. Indeed, each one stands on its own and to try to read them together becomes a fundamentally disruptive process in which narrative comes up against its own impossibility. They can be taken together – but not at face value – more through what they unite to show us: blurred visions, half hidden faces in shadows, the interplay of contemporary man and Armenian ruins. Similar to Didi-Hubermann’s analysis of the four Holocaust photos, these photographs recall the past not in some kind of distant manner, but through the play on presence and absence. In the same way as those photos, the 1915-2015 series mixes stillness and illusions of movement; some have a cinematic feel to them, of taking us on a visual journey, as if allowing us to watch the unfolding of something. And whatever it is, whatever we feel it to be, this something becomes that

shadow –literally and figuratively—that almost overtakes everything. To locate the pain of the past there and to seal it off becomes an impossible task, and the violence of the past necessarily becomes the grief of the present.

Though all focusing in on the same event, Armin T. Wegner's images, Fatih Akin's film, and Andy Spyra's photographs provide a startling array of representational possibilities when it comes to still and moving images of the Armenian Genocide. As a witness of and for the horrendous acts of the violence and the deportations in Turkey and the squalor and suffering of the refugee camps in the Syrian desert, Wegner not only captured these events for posterity but also understood that telling this story at times came up against its own impossibility, that achieving a harmonious marriage between word and image often raised more uneasy questions than it answered. These images moved Wegner's audiences in 1919 and as some of the only remaining photographs of the Armenian genocide, they have continued to educate and influence in the century since their creation. In Fatih Akin's 2015 film *The Cut*, they carry their own particular weight, seeming to impact everything from the *mise-en-scene* to the staging of certain scenes in the film, even altering significant parts of the storyline. Yet unlike Wegner, Akin simply takes the photographs at their face value, insisting that the images speak for themselves in ways that Wegner understood they could not – or, at least, if they could, they could not do so freely and unproblematically in such a narrative structure. Andy Spyra in his *1915-2015*, offers a third alternative, one that in some ways combines Wegner's and Akin's approaches. Rather than trying to restage and show or to describe what happened, he nonetheless incorporates a startling kind of reality into his photographs, but one that allows for absence to come to the forefront. The interplay between absence and presence

becomes a meditation on space and time, on past and present; it illuminates one, then the other, then many at once, allowing for a viewing that effectively allows the viewer to experience more than just one straightforward narrative of death, loss, and mourning. Yet, at the same time, as different as the works of Wegner, Akin, and Spyra are, they all offer unique takes on the narratives used to tell the story of the Armenian Genocide with images, something that actively shapes and reshapes contemporary representations of the genocide with echoes of the past.

CHAPTER 3

LIVING WITH CONTINGENCY: THE RWANDAN EXPERIENCE

“We are a ferocious animal (...) Our history is a history of wars. It is an endless story, a story of repression, a tale of madness.” – Sebastiao Salgado

*“The night might be long, but whether you want it or not, the day will announce itself.”
— Rwandan Proverb*

The scene opens with a man and woman, dressed in traditional southwestern Ethiopian tribal clothing and decorated with native jewelry. They stand shoulder to shoulder, facing the screen, staring in an uncomfortable, faintly hostile manner at the camera. At the same time, Puccini's operatic declaration of love is heard, blaring into the visual—from where, we cannot be sure. The camera zooms into the woman's face, then into the man's, and then to a group of Mursi warriors sitting with Kalashnikovs against the large roots and trunk of a fallen tree. The man and woman turn towards each other as the piece crescendos and the singers' voices intermingle. They stare passionately (or perhaps challengingly) into one another's eyes, turn their backs the camera, and slowly, gracefully walk away in different trajectories from the cool shade into the sunlit clearing. Immediately the camera cuts back to a mid-length shot of two male warriors with traditional tribal jewelry and western clothing, leaning on the barrels of their upside down firearms. Are they spectators to this drama? Are they threatening the couple? Are they even in the same space and time? The short film, only around five minutes long, goes on to feature four such male/ female pairings, the next one in a close-up shot that slowly moves from the elaborate headscarf of a beautiful young woman chewing on her index

finger nail to a handsome young man dressed in a colorful sarong with an enormous rifle propped on his shoulder. The camera remains still in these close-ups, lingering on the beauty of their faces, the music continuing its operatic climb in the background. Like this first couple, this pairing also face one another, pause, and slowly part to walk away. Again, the camera reverts back to the Mursi warriors and this time, slowly moves down the line in a close-up as the men also stare back intensively and unblinkingly. The same pattern continues with the last two male/ female pairings, repeated until the piece comes to a close, fading out as the last couple parts into the distance.

For all its brevity, Werner Herzog's *O soave fanciulla*—created in 2009 in collaboration with the Sky Arts satellite channel—projects a combination of image and sound experience that perplexes and confounds its viewer with its affective intensity. On the one hand, it engages with a customary Western image of Africa as a genocidal backwater, a place that is stereotypically traditional yet where deterritorialized, generic black bodies are simultaneously an object of desire and armed to the teeth, where violence and death are the order of the day. On the other hand, it features protagonists whose gaze refuses to be colonized by the European camera; the men, women, and the Mursi warriors all stare back at it as if daring it to make another move, as if asserting their power over it. Similarly, they maintain the prerogative of movement—they walk away from the camera. Throughout the work, the couples are depicted as resisting the European gaze yet also as “inwardly centered and emotionally fully absorbed,” owing to the way that the camera separates “distinct orders of experience” (Koepnick 153). The viewer is thus struck by Herzog's casual juxtaposition of everyday actions and the way they are tinged by violence; even in the face of resistance of the African gaze, the sense

of violence lingers powerfully, even as the players exit the scene and the piece comes to an end.

While *O soave fanciulla* remains indicative of the ways in which Herzog conceives of the emotional economy of opera and the image, it also raises a host of important questions pertaining to German portrayals of Africa, and more specifically, to African violence and genocide. How are these events understood and portrayed, and by whom? How do these portrayals hint at issues of responsibility and complicity? And how successfully do they engage with the aftermath of these events and with the difficulty of carrying on in the unique African context?

This chapter explores these questions in the context of the Rwandan Genocide and two visual works by German artists that thematize it: The first, a 2015 documentary by veteran filmmaker Wim Wenders titled *Salt of the Earth*, tells through his photographs the life story of Brazilian photographer Sebastiao Salgado, who witnessed the Rwandan genocide and experienced a mental breakdown following the event. The second is an installation by prominent video-artist Marcel Odenbach called *In Stillen Teichen lauern Krokodile*, created between 2002-2004, which in a dual screen format offers a glimpse into the varying realities of Rwandan life after genocide. Both works try to understand not only how past and present are literally and figuratively layered through sound and image, but also the ways in which both Rwandans and Western outsiders have struggled to come to terms with the events they experienced and witnessed. The works in question become spaces in which the viewer is granted exposure to the genocide yet they also serve as works that engage in an extended process of mourning that relies on the ability to work through traumatic events. In this sense, both filmic works become a working

attempt at discovering what happens after genocide. How do people mourn this genocide? How do they conceive of traumatic events in these mourning processes? And how do they try to make their own present bearable in the wake of these events? As will be seen, the way that trauma itself is conceptualized plays a central role in the way these works conceive of possibilities of working through and ‘returning to normal’: Wenders is forced to abandon his project as something altogether unachievable, whereas Odenbach’s approach allows him to absorb the past into an uneasy present. This chapter will therefore explore how *Salt of the Earth* and *In Stillen Teichen lauern Krokodile*, each in their own ways, think of coping, carrying on, and adjusting to the realities of post-genocide life and society.

The Rwandan Genocide in Context

Nestled in the green rolling hills of the Central East Africa, Rwanda remains home to one of the bloodiest genocides of the twentieth century. In the one hundred day period from April to mid-July 1994, decades of ethnic tension and discord from years of civil war between the Hutu-majority Rwandan government and the exiled Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) erupted into full-scale genocide. Already from the beginning of the RPF invasions into Rwanda in October 1990, Hutus and Tutsis lived in a climate of extreme fear and uncertainty, characterized by increased militarization of the general population “in the name of civil defense”:

The country was awash in anti- Tutsi propaganda, which included rumors about the infiltration of Tutsi spies within the government and opposition parties. While the civil war exacted a mounting toll among civilians, anti- Tutsi sentiment gathered momentum. The assassination of several moderate Hutu politicians further raised intense fears within and outside the Hutu community. In such a highly charged political climate, it is easy to see how Hutu hardliners managed to channel anti- Tutsi feelings into mass killings.” (Herr xviii)

Using the downed plane of then Hutu president Juvenal Habyarimana as a signal to start the killing, the core Hutu elite sent the Rwandan army, the gendarmerie, and government-backed militias known as the *Interahamwe* and the *Impuzamugambi* to hunt down and kill the Tutsi population of the country. Beginning with the summary execution of all Tutsi and moderate Hutu politicians and community leaders, the authorities recruited Hutu civilians to take up arms and encouraged them to maim, rape, kill, and steal from their Tutsi neighbors. This made the killing in rural areas especially effective, since in many cases the Hutu population already knew which of their neighbors was Tutsi. In urban areas, authorities implemented roadblocks and checked for government-issued ethnic identifications—an administrative inheritance from the Belgian colonial days—and those identified as Tutsi were immediately killed. Yet the ethnic categories were often not so neatly divided. In her 2018 study of the genocide, Alexis Herr emphasizes that “there were also cases of Hutu who looked like Tutsi being killed for supposedly looking like the enemy” (xxxvi). Therefore, it is important to note that not all victims were Tutsi, nor were the perpetrators unilaterally Hutu. Herr also points out that, because of the speed of the genocide, the often intensely personal nature of the way it was carried out, and the already longstanding intermingling of ethnic groups in question³³, the categories of perpetrator, victim, and bystander remain subject to change: “an individual could easily move from category to category and in the span of the 100 days of genocide, it is not implausible that an individual was at times a bystander and at others a rescuer or perpetrator” (xxxviii). This dynamic created an especially chaotic situation during an

³³ Importantly, “in opposition to how they were represented in the international media at the time” Tutsi and Hutu were not “separate tribes” (Cieplak 10).

already exceptionally violent time, and it was one that would continue to have longstanding influence in the years after the genocide.

Radio played an especially important part leading up to and during the genocide, with radio stations like RTLM (*Radio-Television Libre des Milles Collines*) heralding the so-called ‘Hutu ideology’ and broadcasting hours of hate radio against the “evil-mindedness” of the Tutsi (Herr xxxvi). Lists of names of those yet to be killed were also broadcasted (Cieplak 11). The constant stream of invective against Tutsi served to convince local Hutu of the fabricated Tutsi threat and mobilized them against their neighbors, even if they had not initially believed the veracity of these ‘threats.’

Sociologists Christine Kellow and Leslie Steeves explain:

Social relationships were important. Many tuned in as a result of the contagion of fear and excitement of people who quickly called each other. In Africa, oral traditions, close ties with kin, and fewer radio receivers mean that group listening is common. People had each other to ignite fear and to corroborate their opinions, judgments, and reactions. (125)

As a result of the incitement of the population through radio and other means, an estimated more than 800,000 Tutsis were murdered in the first six weeks of the genocide alone, occurring at a rate “that had not been seen since the Nazi Holocaust” (Holmes 12). This speed of killing continued through early May 1994, and except for the invasion of the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) into the north and east of Rwanda, there was no force to counteract or stop the killings. The peacekeeping troops sent to Rwanda by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (or UNAMIR) were expressly forbidden to use force except in situations of self defense; they essentially became bystanders to genocide in much the same way that later occurred in Bosnia in 1995 (Dallaire 233). Eventually the RPF, under commander Paul Kagame, was able to fight its way through Rwanda and take control of the capital Kigali on July 4, 1994. By the time

this occurred and the genocide was stopped, over seventy percent of the Tutsi population had been murdered, with the new RPF-controlled government citing the number at around 1,070,014 dead.³⁴ However, the time following the genocide remained a time of deep instability and unrest, with tens of thousands of Hutu refugees leaving Rwanda and fleeing to refugee camps in neighboring countries, fearing reprisals from the RPF military (Prunier 312). During this time, over two million Rwandans (both Hutu and Tutsi) fled into neighboring countries. Defeated Hutu militia used the resulting refugee camps as bases for organizing counter-attacks against the RPF, causing the RPF in turn to strike at refugee camps. Previously exiled Tutsis were returning to Rwanda, and the late 1990s saw the return of long bouts of armed conflict in the region with the First Congo War and the Second Congo War (lasting from 1996-2003). At the same time, the RPF took extrajudicial action against those Hutu they perceived of as having participated in the genocide, and scholars believe that Kagame and the elite RFP either tolerated or orchestrated the killings, some of which were again undertaken in refugee camps (Kinzer 189). Importantly, “it should also be noted that the alleged actions of the RPF in the wake of the genocide remain largely unpunished and something of a taboo in contemporary, RPF-dominated Rwanda” (Cieplak 16).

The Rwandan Genocide was particularly significant in that it demonstrated the limits of Western political and military support against genocidal actions on the African continent. Not only did the international community take too long to recognize the killings as genocide, they also dragged their feet on taking any kind of decisive action, despite widespread reporting and evidence. Indeed, scholars largely agree that much

³⁴See official numbers published by the Rwandan government at www.cnlg.gov.rw. These numbers are contested, with other non-governmental sources placing the number of Tutsi killed closer to 650,000.

more could have been done to stop the genocide, and there was “a profound reluctance to intervene in a distant conflict in a country of no real strategic interest” (Cieplak 14).

Though an international silence on Rwanda prevailed, actions of the USA, France, and Belgium spoke volumes: all “prove[d] very effective in evacuating foreign nationals and closing down shop in the country,” with “their embassies closed by the end of the week of Habyarimana’s assassination” (14)³⁵. This international refusal to aid Rwanda during the genocide—viewed by many Tutsi and the post-genocide RPF government as a betrayal by former colonial powers that had gotten them into this mess in the first place—profoundly shaped the role of Western nations in the rebuilding and recovery efforts after 1994. Perhaps most tellingly, the United States and European nations turned a blind eye to the human rights violations occurring at the hands of the RPF as they began to consolidate power in Rwanda; many Hutu “simply disappeared” (Herr xxii). A clear dictatorial trend emerged with the elections of 2003, held after the end of the Second Congo War:

In view of newly adopted constitutional provisions giving the government a blank check to sanction anyone or any organization suspected of encouraging “divisionism”—a move clearly intended to eventually disqualify Hutu parties and candidates from running for office—it is no surprise that Kagame ran virtually unopposed in the 2003 presidential elections, winning 95 percent of the vote. The RPF, meanwhile, gained unfettered control of both houses. Much of the same scenario unfolded during the 2008 elections, when Kagame was re-elected with 98 percent of the vote. Both in 2003 and 2008, Hutu candidates were systematically discouraged or prevented from campaigning or running for the presidency. (xxii)

Additionally, the RPF-controlled government drastically reshaped ethnicity in Rwanda by effectively legislating the ethnic categories of Hutu and Tutsi out of existence, instead making Rwanda the country of the *Banyarwanda* (“the people of Rwanda”) (xxxiii). By accusing political and social opponents of inciting “divisionism,” the RPF gained an

³⁵ For more on how the international community reacted and refused to react to the genocide, see studies by Linda Melvern (2000), Gerard Prunier (2008), and Andrew Wallis (2006).

effective tool for dealing with any opposition to its regime. Despite serious concerns regarding the state of democracy in Rwanda following the genocide, the United States and European nations have continued to pour monetary aid into the country. Indeed, Herr believes that

...the sense of shame and embarrassment felt by Western nations for their inaction goes far in explaining the vast quantities of financial and economic assistance to the new authorities after the genocide (...) While the sense of guilt shared by the West translates into high levels of aid dependence, the government of Rwanda remains blissfully indifferent to Western proddings in terms of its policy options. (xxx)

It was precisely this sort of shame that led to the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) by the United Nations in November 1994 in the Tanzanian town of Arusha. Closing in December 2015, the ICTR indicted ninety-three individuals and sentenced sixty-two of them (“The ICTR in Brief”). It was also the first institution to recognize rape as a means of perpetrating genocide. Yet critics of the tribunal see it as overly costly and failing to deliver an amount of convictions relative to the large-scale of the killings; Jean Pierre Dusingizemungu, representative of a group for genocide survivors in Rwanda, claims that the ICTR has “delivered nothing for either the victims or the survivors of the genocide (...) no compensation for the horrific atrocities during the genocide planned and perpetrated by the government (Leithead, “Rwanda Genocide”). From these perspectives, the ICTR takes on the sense of yet another failed Western measure applied to an African context; too little too late, and without the necessary understanding that might provide some kind of closure for the genocide’s victims.

Perhaps the most well-publicized justice mechanisms following the genocide were the grass roots courts known as *gacaca*. Based on the customary Rwandan conflict resolution practice also known as ‘gacaca’ (“justice on the grass” in Kinyarwanda) that had existed

since pre-colonial times, this system places an emphasis on interpersonal dialogue, confession, restitution, and reconciliation, leaving justice in the hands of Rwandans themselves. Compared to the ICTR, the *gacaca* has heard an enormous amount of cases: as many as one million cases were heard and 400,000 individuals prosecuted (Clark 56). However, recent studies have pointed out the difficulty of determining how fair and how complete the justice meted out in the *gacaca* actually is. In 2007, a Rwandan minister claimed that Rwandans were “seventy-five percent reconciled,” but other voices “dismiss the reconciliation process, stating that post-genocide justice in Rwanda consists of a return to feudal structures and subordination for the Hutu” (4). Particularly the authoritarian tendencies of the RPF-controlled government have shown to influence not only the proceedings of the courts but also the ways that people talk about them as successful mechanisms of justice; the presence of government officials ready to catch Rwandans disagreeing with the *gacaca* as promoting “ethnic thinking” or “divisionism” makes for a degree of difficulty when it comes to fair trials and a fair assessment of those trials and their outcomes. Therefore, there have emerged—as anthropologist and Rwanda expert Bert Ingelaere convincingly argues in his recent study *Inside Rwanda’s Gacaca Courts*—two separate narratives surrounding the success of the *gacaca* courts in reconciling the Rwandan population: the official government narrative that constructs the *gacaca* process as inherently successful, and the personal narratives that question whether reconciliation—and thus, cohabitation with former perpetrators—can truly be possible after the genocide. In many cases, Ingelaere suggests, one must be wary of these government narratives, which are also working hard to promote a certain image of Rwanda after the genocide. Thus statements regarding the true success of *gacaca* must be

taken with a grain of salt, as must the propaganda campaign surrounding the Rwanda rebuilt under the rule of the RPF and President Paul Kagame.

Recent studies have also demonstrated the ways in which these double narratives extend into areas of mourning and remembering the genocide. Piotr Cieplak explains that:

The close cohabitation of survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders—results of both the scale of the involvement in the genocide and governmental decisions to release a number of genocidaires who confessed their crimes—does not provide the most straightforward blueprint for societal cohesion. Victims, survivors, and their families are likely to live in close proximity to pardoned perpetrators or bystanders. The tensions, however, where they exist, are often reabsorbed and silenced by the official government discourse of reconciliation and forgiveness. (18-19)

Jennie E. Burnet's work traces the difficulties faced by myriad ethnic groups of Tutsi and Hutu and positions within the group (mixed families, Hutu perpetrators, Tutsi survivors, Hutu survivors, Hutu bystanders, exiled Hutu not involved in the genocide but returned to Rwanda afterwards, exiled Tutsi who left before the genocide but returned afterwards). She shows the way that the official Rwandan adoption of policies that erased ethnic differences caused it to create "state practices of national memory have maintained an ethnic dichotomy (Hutu-Tutsi) by politicizing victimhood and emphasizing the distinction between victim and perpetrator in national ceremonies commemorating the genocide" (80). Because of the power of the state to define in public discourse who is considered innocent, who is guilty, who is a victim, and who is a perpetrator, the Hutu-Tutsi divide "has penetrated society so pervasively as to become hegemony" (80). Through conducting years of fieldwork and interviews with Rwandan peasantry, Burnet concludes that "the Hutu who did not participate in the genocide, as well as Rwandans in ethnically mixed marriages and families, were erased from the national imagination" (81). Additionally, "nationalized mourning for the 1994 genocide and its victims has

limited the possibility of publicly mourning all victims of violence associated with the civil war (1990-94), genocide (April-July 1994), and insurgency (1997-2000)” (81). Therefore, while the Rwandan government claims that its people have reconciled by moving beyond ethnicity and though it provides ample opportunities for Rwandans to remember and mourn the genocide through copious graphic memorials, an official nationwide month of remembrance and a month of mourning, it has in reality not erased ethnicity from Rwandan society but reconstructed it in problematic ways. In other words, the Rwandan government has effectively rewritten the history of the genocide in such a way that denies true mourning and true reconciliation to its different kinds of survivors; their “histories become obliterated and replaced by official narratives that favor the current regime” (Holmes 45). Thus, individual, personal experiences are often totalized and subsumed into the larger national narrative of prosperity put forth by an essentially Tutsi-controlled RPF government.

Cultural Representations of the Rwandan Genocide

In his recent work on the visual representation of the Rwandan Genocide, film director and scholar Piotr Cieplak highlights the complex role of film within the current social and political landscape of Rwanda:

Rwanda’s people are preponderantly young –the median age in 2013 was 18.7 years. This means that more than half the population was born after 1994—they have lived with a very vivid presence of the genocide but did not experience it first-hand. This is accompanied by the increasingly frequent calls, including from Rwandan filmmakers, for an effort to make sure that the country is known for things other than the genocide, or at least that it is not defined solely by it. Such calls are both in line with the governmental emphasis on messages of progress and development and at odds with the continually felt need to curate carefully the story of the nation’s horrible past in relation to its political present. (19-20)

In light of these and other considerations, Cieplak argues that “the knowledge that, internationally as well as to a degree nationally, the genocide is and will be known mostly through images—mak[es] their truthfulness particularly important” (37). Yet it is not only the kinds of truths that are told, but also issues of *who* is telling them and from what perspectives they are told that have come to characterize discussions of the way the Rwandan genocide is represented through images and on screen.

It must be noted from the onset that the great majority of visual representations of the Rwandan Genocide—whether in the form of photography, video reportage, documentary film, fictional film, or installation art—are made by non-Rwandan, indeed, often white Western European or American individuals. The reasons for this are manifold, ranging from the intensive international coverage of the genocide and the resulting refugee crisis to the sudden involvement and interest of the international community following 1994. A burgeoning but by no means extensively developed Rwandan national film industry may also be a contributing factor. Yet it remains noticeable that in a survey of the visual work out there on the Rwandan genocide, Rwandan voices and perspectives tend not to be the first ones that are heard, aside from a few important examples to the contrary.

As noted above, the first still and moving images circulating of the genocide left Rwanda in the form of so-called humanitarian photography and news reportages. Professional photographers like Gilles Peress and Sebastiao Salgado produced photographs in Rwanda and in the refugee camps of Zaire and Tanzania that were later published in large format books like *The Silence* (1995) and *Migrations: Humanity in Transition* (2000), while television reports on the violence and its aftermath became a

tragically common occurrence on the nightly news in the United States and Europe. These segments of current-affairs programs morphed into longer, more self-contained pieces, eventually emerging as a separate category of genocide documentaries (Cieplak 31). With the involvement of journalists and other press who had covered the genocide, many of these documentaries were screened on major television networks to large audiences (35). Examples of such documentaries include the BBC documentaries *Journey Into Darkness* (1994), *A Culture of Murder* (1994), *The Bloody Tricolor* (1995), *Valentina's Nightmare* (1997) and *When Good Men Do Nothing* (1998). Other well-known documentary films are *Rwanda: Hope in Hell* (2001), *Ghosts of Rwanda* (2004), *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey of Romeo Dallaire* (2004), *Kigali: des images contre un massacre* (2004), *Keepers of Memory* (2004), and *Iseta: Behind the Roadblock* (2008). Post-genocide Rwandan life also became a feature of Anna Aghion's series of films *Gacaca: Living Together Again in Rwanda?* (2002), *In Rwanda We Say...The Family That Does Not Speak Dies* (2004) and *My Neighbor My Killer* (2009) and the controversial BBC documentary *Rwanda's Untold Story* (2014). Again, the majority of these documentaries have been made by non-Rwandan filmmakers, "albeit with often significant Rwandan involvement in the production process and as subjects and interviewees" (Cieplak 34). An increasing number also make the rounds of the film festival circuit (like Wim Wenders's 2015 *Salt of the Earth*) and many also make regular appearances on Rwandan television during the national mourning week each April. According to Madelaine Hron, most of these documentaries fall into one of three categories: 1) retrospective – focusing on the genocide itself, 2) post-genocide – tackling issues of justice, forgiveness, reconciliation, and cohabitation of survivors and killers, 3)

interpretive – aiming to show both the present of Rwanda and link it to the images of the genocide (135). A number of films, like the 2007 French production *Operation Turquoise*, look at international involvement in the genocide; indeed an entire subcategory of documentary films on France and its involvement in the Rwandan genocide could be said to exist. Among the large body of documentary work on the genocide, Rwandan director Eric Kabera's 2004 *Keepers of Memory* stands as an important example of the rare documentary on this subject that not only presents a truly Rwandan point of view, but also that refuses to fall into easy narratives of African violence and Christian forgiveness and closure espoused by much of the other documentary work in existence.

While the number of documentaries on the Rwandan genocide far outnumber the fictional films on the subject, it is the fictional work that has come to define, and indeed, to represent the Rwandan genocide to the world outside Rwanda³⁶. Many fictional films with the Rwandan genocide as their subject have enjoyed great success and international visibility, like *100 Days* (2001), *Sometimes in April* (2005), *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), *Shooting Dogs* (2005), *Un dimanche a Kigali* (2006), *Shake Hands with the Devil* (2007), *Munyurangabo* (2007), *Operation Turquoise* (2007), *Lignes de front* (2009), *Kinyarwanda* (2011), and *Grey Matter* (2011). Piotr Cieplak writes of these films:

Important differences mark these films when it comes to narrative focus, stylistic approach, adherence to particular mainstream genres, mediation of genocidal violence, and presentation of Rwanda's history. Some –*100 Days*, *Munyurangabo*, and *Kinyarwanda*—were made with significant involvement from Rwandans. *Grey Matter* was directed by a Rwandan, Kivu Ruhorahoza. Others are works of non-Rwandan, indeed very often non-African, directors. *Hotel Rwanda*, arguably the most internationally recognized film on the topic, was mostly shot in South Africa. (31)

³⁶ See work by Piotr Cieplak, Alexandre Dauge-Roth, Madaleine Hron, and Piet Defraeye.

Despite the various circumstances of these films, they have nonetheless played a significant role in “raising international awareness of the genocide” (31).

In his seminal work on Rwandan genocide films, Alexandre Dauge-Roth writes that even the most visible international films—documentary and fictional alike—need to be understood “in the context of production, distribution, and consumption largely determined by Western eyes, voices, references, and values” (170). Not only do these films stand as largely Western productions, they also contain tropes often associated with international films on African suffering and conflict, acting as a “reinforcement of the stereotype of uniquely African savagery and brutality, in the face of which the ‘civilized’ West is quite helpless – a stereotype often present in how the genocide in Rwanda was conveyed to international audiences as it was happening and afterwards” (Cieplak 3).

Among such tropes is the presence of a white male Western character that is introduced in order to ‘guide’ the viewer through the narrative; these “professional witnesses” (Norridge 129) or “male hero-adventurer witnesses” (Holmes 196) inform about the genocide, but also “mediate the space between the viewer and Rwandans” (Cieplak 35). Western characters are often presented as “saviors, martyrs, and generally good sorts” – a dynamic succinctly described by Dave Calhoun as ‘black suffering dramatized on white faces’” (Calhoun in Cieplak, 32). This shift in narrative focus from the Rwandan to the white Western perspective—an outsider’s perspective—stands as “a device often simultaneous with the reduction, marginalization, and simplification of the African experience” (32). Often African characters, when they are present, are portrayed as either stereotypically blood-hungry killers or as equally stereotypically meek and

obedient—exemplified by Don Cheadle’s portrayal of Paul Rusesabagina in *Hotel Rwanda*—and conveniently delineated into categories of perpetrator or victim in a crisis that knew no such clear lines in reality (Hron 120). Along with these stereotypical portrayals comes

a certain decontextualization of the genocide and the violence that came with it. The historical background to the event is often limited to a few intertitles and the event itself is often portrayed as a chaotic, uncoordinated outbreak of savage violence (...) reminiscent of the erroneous way in which the genocide was reported by the media as a resurgence of a ‘civil war between “tribal factions”’ (Cieplak 32)

Within these alternative narratives put forth by many of the documentary and fictional films in existence, “images of drunk, crazed and singing militias abound,” while “the fact that the genocide was carefully planned and part of a pre-organized design by army and government officials sits less comfortably” (Cieplak 32). Particularly within the Rwandan context, the issues of historical accuracy and narrative invention take on added significance, as it is primarily through film that most of the international audience learns about the genocide. The imbalances of power between the global south and the global north in many ways come to be played out in the representation the genocide itself, “tak[ing] the form of a particular view of history and of the genocide that privileges certain perspectives, deeming some aspects of the event more worthy of memorialization than others and displaying the desire to simplify” (Cieplak 33). In a similar vein, Dauge-Roth argues that in many documentaries on the genocide created by Western directors “survivors voices are filtered, contained, framed by experts allegedly more knowledgeable...this silencing hierarchy casts the survivors voices bearing witness [...] as residual interlocutors, attesting presence of a discourse that ventriloquizes them” (74). The “uncomfortably ethnographic feel” of many of the films concerned with the aftermath of the genocide has also been noted by critics (Hron 145). Indeed, in the words

of the Rwandan director of *Keepers of Memory* Eric Kabera, a survey of the documentary and fictional visual representations of the Rwandan genocide might well result in the survivors concluding: “none of this represented our interests, none of this really represented our pain” (Cieplak *Image and Memory*, 203). At the same time, for all the rightful criticism of the Western hegemonic gaze and stereotypical portrayals of the African continent inherent in many of these films, it must also be noted that certain films—like *100 Days*, *Munyurangabo*, *Kinyarwanda*, and *Grey Matter*—largely manage to avoid the many problematic representational traps described above by using “mostly Rwandan actors and focus on largely unmediated (by Western agency) Rwandan experiences of the genocide and the different guises of its aftermath” (Cieplak 33-34). Kabera’s 2004 documentary *Keepers of Memory* provides a strong counter-narrative against these tropes, as it skillfully navigates the layers of the genocide and of post-genocide Rwanda. Yet while these examples show how certain visual representations have treated the genocide with perspective and nuance, it is important to note that they do remain in the minority, at least for the time being.

Increasingly, film directors and visual artists have turned to art photography, video art, and installation art as a way of navigating the crisis of representing the Rwandan genocide. The still and moving image-based work of Rakifi Ubaldo, Robert Lyons and Scott Straus, Alfredo Jaar, Jonathan Torgovnik, and Marcel Odenbach thematizes the genocide yet does not seek to create easy accessibility or offer straightforward consumption of the events. Unlike much of the well-known documentary and fictional filmic work on the genocide, these projects ultimately seek to “acknowledge

that the trauma of the other is ultimately unrepresentable, just as historical catastrophe is unrepresentable “ (Solomon-Godeau 40).

Rwandan-born Rafiki Ubaldo’s exhibited photographic work stretches the limits of photographic representation in connection with the 1994 genocide by focusing on items of the everyday that “help viewers empathize with individual suffering of individual people” (Ubaldo & Möller, 32). Ubaldo describes his vision for the project in a recent interview:

For a long time I ached to take photographs that tied the remains of the victims to our, yours and mine, everyday lives. That, I thought would stir the imagination of the living about individual lives lost in the genocide. While I believe that the piles of broken skeletons and bone can inform one about the vast number of lost lives, I surmised that they could not adequately tell us stories about the lives the victims lived. Many around the world see a wedding ring as a symbol of matrimony. Seeing a stove suggests that sometime today or tomorrow one will have to cook something to eat. In this way the personal belongings of the victims represent much more than found objects. They represent life itself. At the memorials, I sought signs and details to convince myself and others that the victims were human beings, not cockroaches or snakes as the propagandists would have it. In that regard, I carefully observed one belonging after another that the victims took with them as they fled to their final destination, the killing fields. (Ubaldo in Möller, 96)

Thus, simple images of a weathered identification card, a discarded watch, and a close-up shot of rocks with fingernail scratches in it serve to recall the lives of the victims, even as it forces viewers to connect those lives to the ways in which they were put to an end.

Photographer Robert Lyons and political scientist and Rwanda expert Scott Stauss’s collection titled *Intimate Enemy* (2013) shows the multifaceted elements associated with the Rwandan genocide. In a project that provides perpetrator testimony, along with photographs of Rwandans (both survivors and perpetrators), *Intimate Enemy* highlights the kinds of “ordinary men” that came to perpetrate the genocide. At the same time, it disrupts standard reading practices, as it begins with six plates before any text is presented and there is little connection between the texts presented and the images

shown. In this sense, *Intimate Enemy* “co-presents the verbal (transcribed interviews) and the visual (photographs) without claiming that there is necessarily a connection between the verbal and the visual” (Möller 90). In taking this approach, the authors highlight that “the visual and the verbal give different accounts of human existence” and human experience. (90)

Israeli photographer Jonathan Torgovnik’s photographic project *Intended Consequences* (2009) consists of thirty portraits of children born of rape during and after the genocide. Many of the images show mothers and their children embracing, and the images are accompanied by translated interviews with the mother. The photographs are unbearably sad yet also beautiful. Importantly, the subject “wanted to be visually depicted and to present themselves and their experiences by talking about them” (Möller *Visual Peace*, 94). This project thus features women who are, in a sense, reclaiming their agency by talking about their experiences and Torgovnik’s role as the photographer “leaves it up to the subjects to decide if they are properly represented” (95).

Perhaps one of the most prolific producers of visual and installation artwork on the subject of Rwanda is Chilean-born artist Alfredo Jaar. Jaar has created and continues to create powerful image-based and object-based projects that remain too numerous to list in their entirety here. *Rwanda, Rwanda* (1994), the second part in the series “Let There Be Light: The Rwanda Projects 1994-2000,” was a public art project commissioned by the city of Malmö in Sweden that highlights the crime of genocide and the world’s indifference towards it. The work consists of a series of fifty light boxes scattered throughout the city bearing only the word Rwanda repeated vertically eight times in bold type (Solomon-Godeau 39). In this condensed format, the sign operates “as an accusatory

reminder of the failure ‘civilized’ Europe to intervene” in the genocide as it occurred (39-40). In the public installation shown in the United States, Jaar later integrated some weekly covers of Newsweek that appeared during the three months of the genocide (with headlines like “Better than Vitamins: The Search for the Magic Pill,” “America’s Cup: Playing Host to the World,” “To Walk on Mars,” etc.) (40).

In 1996 Jaar produced an installation of Rwandan works titled *The Lament of the Images*, which in various projects combined images, running text, and different ways of looking to explore questions of genocide representation. *Real Pictures*, from 1995 and reproduced in *The Lament of the Images*, consists of 372 linen photographic archival boxes, each containing one of Jaar’s self-taken photographs of the traces of the genocide in the country. A written description of the photograph sits on top of each container, and the boxes were set up in a geometric pattern in a darkened room. Another project, *The Eyes of Guetete Emerita* (1996), features overscale light boxes through which the spectator could peer through loupes attached to the corner of the box in order to view the slides therein, only to realize that the images are actually all the same. In the act of looking, though, the spectator intimately meets the gaze of this individual woman, represented on the 35mm transparency which shows only the eyes of this victim of the genocide.

Much of Jaar’s work, unlike that of many of the filmic documentaries and fictional representations of the Rwandan genocide, does not focus on evidence of the massacres or offer easy narratives and closure, but rather “spark[s] in the viewer a personal interrogation of one’s place *in relation* to the genocide of which we had knowledge, just as the intimate encounter with the eyes of Emerita is in the nature of an

irreconcilable collision between our circumstances and hers” (40). Thus for Alfredo Jaar, “visual without text equals spectacle” (Moeller 85). Other prominent Rwanda work by Jaar includes his three-channel installation video “We Wish to Inform You That We Didn’t Know” (2008)—a play on the title of the sensationalized reportage account of American journalist Philip Gourevitch published in 1998 “We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families.”

Marcel Odenbach, a veteran video installation artist from Germany who will be discussed in greater detail later on in this chapter, has also created installation art that takes the Rwandan Genocide as its subject. His 2002-2004 dual screen, thirty-one minute video installation *In stillen Teichen lauern Krokodile/ In Still Waters Crocodiles Lurk* combines found archival footage with still and moving images taken by the artist himself. Layers of images (the lush Rwandan countryside, close-up images of nature, the everyday actions of ordinary Rwandans, and archival footage from the genocide) are combined with layers of sound (radio recording of radio and live speeches, sounds of nature and the weather, and static) in a manner that evoke an uneasy coexistence of past and present. Odenbach does not attempt to explain the images, nor explain how they are historically contextualized; instead, his approach encourages viewers to construct the post-genocide situation for themselves, and in doing so, to delve deeply into the way that ordinary Rwandans make sense of what has happened to them as they continue to live on.

From reading this cursory summary of visual representations of the Rwandan genocide, it is important to keep in mind not only the very real considerations of representation that accompany portrayals of genocide, but also to take into serious account the important issues of Western hegemonic perspective, the representation of

Africa on the international stage, and the important need for Rwandans to be able to tell their own stories in a political and social landscape that seeks to silence those not in line with official RPF rhetoric. As the artists in the last part of the section have shown, it is possible for non-Rwandans, indeed non-Africans, to produce thought-provoking, competent visual work on the genocide. Perhaps most importantly, though, it highlights the importance of supporting Rwandans to tell their own stories through their own means for the future.

Africa in the German Imaginary

Before delving into the Rwandan visual works of Wim Wenders and Marcel Odenbach, it is first important to briefly discuss aspects of Africa in the German imaginary. Indeed, many of these transmitted memories, popular images, and portrayals have their roots in a colonial past whose images continue to impact contemporary representations of Africa. While the German presence in Africa only lasted from around 1884 until the end of the First World War in 1918, the Prussians quickly established colonies in parts of present-day Cameroon, northwest Gabon, the Congo, southwest Chad, and eastern Nigeria (known as the colony of German Cameroon), Namibia (known as German South-West Africa), and Burundi, Rwanda, and mainland Tanzania (known as the colony of German East Africa). Following the British and the French, Germany managed to build the third largest colonial empire on the African continent, and in many of these colonies, the German presence left a social and administrative footprint that would last beyond the end of the colonial period.³⁷

³⁷ Perhaps one of the most insidious of these structures existed in Rwanda, where the German colonial administration divided the population into different groups of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa based on appearances

Although the German colonial presence remains shorter than that of Britain or France, numerous studies have suggested that colonial imagination was “much more deeply rooted in German society than the brevity of the political experiment suggests” (*The German Colonial Imagination*, 251). Two prominent ways of seeing the nature of German colonialism have emerged in scholarship by Russell A. Berman and Susanne Zantop, with Berman arguing that although German involvement in Africa was “extraordinarily violent and destructive” (233), the German colonial discourse remained characterized by an enlightenment-driven intellectualism, in which Africa became a site of “encounter with an alternative sensibility and [...] a source of revitalization” (232). Zantop by contrast argues that German “colonial fantasies” of Germans as ideal colonists sent to enlighten indigenous peoples were supplanted by a more outspokenly racist and sexist discourse when German imperialism actually began (8). Echoing Hannah Arendt’s earlier understandings of the continuities between the concentration camps of Windhoek in German occupied South West Africa and those in Auschwitz during the Holocaust, Zantop views these colonial fantasies as ideas that would ultimately become dangerous when Germany began to flex its colonial muscles (203). Similar assertions are made by Elizabeth Baer in her recent study *The Genocidal Gaze: From German Southwest Africa to the Third Reich*, in which Baer traces the ways that a German imperialist gaze eventually becomes translated into a culturally ‘genocidal gaze’ that would later allow Germans to conceive of and engage in the Holocaust.

and the perceived racial superiority based on these physical characteristics. This move not only constructed ethnicity in a space where it did not exist before, but the decision of colonial powers to vest the Tutsi with exclusive administrative and social control over the other groups laid the foundation for much of the ethnic unrest and violence that would eventually escalate into genocide.

While these different viewpoints remain hotly contested among historians and literary scholars, they simultaneously raise important parameters for thinking about German perceptions of Africa as a kind of intertwining of racist, hierarchical thinking with notions of Enlightenment progress and education. Nina Berman, in her 2004 volume *Impossible Missions: German Economic, Military, and Humanitarian Efforts in Africa* exposes forms of cultural domination that arise from a philosophy of progress and good intentions. By looking at the writings and statements of Germans in Africa from the nineteenth through the twentieth centuries (like Max Eyth in Egypt, Albert Schweizer in Gabon, Ernst Udet in East Africa, Bodo Kirchoff in Somalia, and modern-day tourists in Kenya), Berman shows how a “humanitarian belief in development ... can ultimately lead to the same structural imbalances that an overtly racist model of intervention produces” (146). In looking at different kinds of German interactions with Africa—individuals traveling there as engineers, doctors, pilots, soldiers, and tourists—she shows that regardless of the good intentions of the desire to ‘improve’ that characterized many of these interactions, the German presence was often more destructive than helpful to the local African populations. Importantly, Berman connects these well-meaning but ultimately problematic attitudes to similar issues resulting from more racial modes of hegemonic thinking, reflecting what she sees as a kind of continuity in an overall German attitude to Africa and Africans that continues to insinuate itself into the present. Britta Schilling, in her in-depth exploration into the German memory of colonialism titled *Postcolonial Germany: Memories of Empire in a Decolonized Nation* (2014), surveys four generations of personal material goods—hunting trophies, ethnographic items, photographs, and diaries—from the German colonial past. From analyzing the roles of

these items in the ways the colonial past gets remembered from the inception of the colonies until well into the contemporary, Schilling concludes that not only could positive “private memories of colonialism continue” uninterrupted but that the German colonial past was never subject to “such a full-scale intrusion as the national ‘working through’ of the Nazi past” (43).

Through Nina Berman’s and Britta Schilling’s critical work, it becomes possible to gain a sense of the how the myriad complexities of the German colonial past come to bear on German representations of Africa throughout the twentieth century into the contemporary. Because, as Schilling suggests, Germans have not truly ‘worked through’ their colonial past, they have not gained a sense for the scope of that past, nor of the destruction, death, and genocide associated with it. Unlike Britain or France, Germany is not a ‘post-colonial’ society, where the strong presence of previously colonized peoples demands the confrontation of the colonial past and an appropriate restructuring of the societal mindset in the contemporary (at least officially) (24). Combined with the enduring perception of the brevity and the supposed ‘insignificance’ of the German colonies, one might even say that a kind of ‘selective cultural amnesia’ exists in regards to this past: “They still adhere to the myth of the civilizing mission. They do not frame colonialism as a regime of violence and domination (Eligon, “The Big Hole in Germany’s Nazi Reckoning”).³⁸ These various elements have, to some extent, produced a

³⁸ Though much of the colonial memory seems to have all but faded from the contemporary German memory, numerous scholars point out the continued effects of Germany’s colonial past on its multicultural present. The important work of German black activist groups has helped to uncover the ways in which Germany still honors its colonial past, like through street signs in Berlin describing “Mohrenstrasse,” which many Afro-Germans consider a racist insult. Recent lobbying has drawn renewed attention to this and other issues, like Germany’s involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the floundering attempts of the current German government to negotiate a settlement with the Namibian government to atone for the genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples in German Southwest Africa in 1905. Yet the rise of a violent anti-immigrant far right in Germany has not only “sowed some doubts over how much the nation has

cultural atmosphere where the colonial past is half-hidden, half remembered in dulcet tones, and where racism exists in both obvious and more latent forms. At the same time, German humanitarian efforts, particularly towards Africa, have noticeably increased.³⁹ Propelled onwards by the combination of these factors—which, as Nina Berman has shown, can produce similar effects as overtly racialized actions—the German gaze turned on the African continent often results in well-meaning yet uncomfortably ethnographic portrayals lacking an important component of self-awareness. Similarly, many German visual representations of Africa, though they are certainly characterized by good intentions, reflect this uneasy, amnesic relationship with the colonial past and its lingering effects.

One film that might serve as a kind of paradigmatic example of the way these tendencies manifest themselves in recent German portrayals of Africa is the 2001 award-winning *Nirgendwo in Afrika*. Directed by Caroline Linke and set in wartime Kenya, it tells the story of the Redlichs, a German-Jewish family that escapes the escalating Nazi persecution of the Jews in Germany by fleeing to Africa. Winner of the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, as well of five major German film prizes (including best feature film of 2001), *Nirgendwo in Afrika* also stood as Germany's top-earning German-language film. Critics and moviegoers alike raved about the film's "clear-eyed complexity" and the way the "intelligent epic [is] told without special pleading, a film able to cut deep enough to reveal a keen specificity of experience (Turan, "Unsentimental

actually learned from its past" but also shows the way that the racism of the colonial era "laid the foundation for the racism that the country is still struggling with today" (Eligon).

³⁹ For more on this topic, see Nina Berman's "German Humanitarianism in Contemporary Kenya" (in B. Everill and J. Kaplan's 2013 edited volume *The History and Practice of Humanitarian Intervention and Aid in Africa*), Young-Sun Hong's *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime* (2015), and *Humanitarianism and the Challenges of Cooperation* (2016), edited by V. Heins, K. Koddenbrock, and C. Unrau.

Journey”). Some German critics hailed the film as “*Großes deutsches Kino*...the kind that is entertaining while still maintaining political pretensions” (Marenholz, “In weiter ferne”), while others expressed relief that—unlike the Hollywood-made *Out of Africa* (1985) and other films like it—Link’s film contains “no safari images, no wild animals, and no natives rattling at their chains” (Suchsland, “Vom Schnee”). In her salient critique of *Nirgendwo in Afrika*, Kristin Kopp points out that much of the film’s narrative logic and its effects actually mirrors what occurs in *Out of Africa*, in that it

...employs familiar colonial tropes that foster ontological asymmetries between Europeans and Africans. If Africa becomes a mystical locus of European transformation, the Africans represent at best eager guides along this path. They remain confined within a realm of developmental stasis, lacking the capacity to affect change or progress. (107)

The film’s positioning of Jewish-Germans as refugees and as “good Germans” against the racist British colonizers effectively absolves Germans of a critical view in regards to their own colonial history with Kenya. Kopp writes that the film actually underscores “European fantasies of a harmonious feudal order, in which childlike serfs valued the guardianship and protection of the paternalistic landowners” (115). In the end, Kopp posits that *Nirgendwo in Afrika* presents a “positive exilic experience in which the German-Jewish protagonists reinvent themselves, and even become a resource for the German nation” (132). Yet the way in which the film effectively silences indigenous Africans and establishes asymmetric regimes of cultural validity

...allows the western spectator a journey in time, a trip to a past that is both pleasurable and edifying. *Nirgendwo in Afrika* is truly a feel-good movie. It features beautiful actors in beautiful settings; it commingles a neocolonial fantasy with a soothing tale of German-Jewish reconciliation. (132)

Because the film allows its viewers these feelings of enjoyment and edification, it not only prevents German viewers from engaging with their own colonial past, but it effectively provides an alternative view of that past, one in which Germans again are

“good,” engaging with Africans on the level of a civilizing mission, unlike the other colonial powers. Kenya becomes a site for radical transformation of the German, its very wildness allowing him to find himself and to make him over into the kind of person he should be. Kenya itself, its people, and its culture, remain unimportant in this process of white transformation, though the ongoing concern with authenticity is construed as a kind of cultural sensitivity. However, it ends up coming across more as an uncomfortable ethnographic portrait of an uncivilized former colony in that it tacitly justifies Germany’s colonization of the Kenya without applying a critical lens to this history. While *Nirgendwo in Afrika* certainly cannot be said to represent the entirety of contemporary German visual representations of Africa, it does remain symptomatic of tendencies that insidiously creep up in many of these representations. As this chapter will demonstrate later, even the thoughtful work of Wim Wenders and Marcel Odenbach does not always manage to remain entirely free of such issues. However, Wenders and Odenbach do demonstrate a particular sensitivity to the ways they tell the story of the Rwandan genocide, especially in the ways they understand the plight of outside witnesses and Rwandans themselves as they try to carry on and achieve a return to normalcy after the genocide.

Trauma, Carrying On, and a ‘Logic of Adjustment’ After Genocide

At its core, classical trauma theory rests heavily on the idea of rupture and of the reconstitution of the ordinary—of some kind of ‘normal life,’— following the trauma. In other words, these theories rest on a juxtaposition of normalcy against the traumatic state of exception, a concept that undergirds the work of seminal trauma theorists like Cathy

Caruth, Kali Tal, Bessel van de Kolk, and others. Their work is continued in many ways by the studies of Ruth Leys, Hayden White, and Joshua Hirsch, who seek to apply similar models of trauma theory to cultural products. Hayden White and Joshua Hirsch take up the concept of rupture as something particularly productive within the realm of traumatic narratives, with White arguing that modernist forms of narrative especially serve to capture the pattern of rupture and cyclical returning central to traumatic experiences. Hirsch follows in this vein, arguing especially that these concepts of rupture find their aesthetic manifestations in a kind of ‘post-traumatic’ form of narrative said to mirror the functions of post-traumatic memory in that it is inherently interrupted and fragmented, resist mastery and linear narratives, and denies closure. These aesthetic products are said to do this with the aim of “reproducing in the spectator the experience of suddenly seeing the unthinkable” (Hirsch 19). Therefore, such forms, it is implied, are inherently better suited to represent the ruptured ‘state of exception’ that differentiates a traumatic event from normal non-traumatic events, and for Hirsch in particular, the kind of cinema—a posttraumatic cinema—that follows it.

Recent work has critiqued the notion of the ‘normalcy’ of everyday life by pointing out that the expectation that returning to ‘life as normal’ after a traumatic event stands as a kind of fantasy that remains ultimately unachievable—not because of the nature of trauma itself (as posited by classical trauma theory) but because the concept of normalcy is itself an illusion. Lauren Berlant, for example, imagines the everyday, or ‘the ordinary,’ as a “zone of convergence of many histories, where people manage the incoherence of lives that proceed in the face of threats to the good life they imagine.

Catastrophic forces take shape in this zone and become events within history as it is lived” (10).

Berlant’s work is part of a larger discourse generated in response to new ways of conceptualizing the departure from a certain kind of classical trauma theory that relies heavily on conceptions of normalcy and an exceptional event. Theorists like Berlant, Ann Cvetkovich, and Michelle Balaev posit the idea that everyday life— something that trauma theorists previously described in idyllic, non-traumatic terms— is actually characterized by situations in which the subject does not experience peace, well-being, security, safety, respect, equal opportunity, or equal access to resources. For these theorists, the understanding that everyday life is itself a precarious situation and that the actions of the individual and group consist of a continuous responding to and shaping of that precariousness allows not only for a range of experiences, but acknowledges the impact that sexual orientation, gender, color, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, class, education, and geographic location has on the everyday for these people. Perhaps most importantly, it also shows that certain bodies never truly had the luxury of a non-precarious existence and reveals the wide grey zone between states of extreme violence (genocide) and everyday aggressions and microaggressions.

Therefore, what seems to be increasingly called for are approaches that not just examine everyday precariousness, but help us understand how this present becomes bearable—and ultimately livable— to those who experience these unsettled realities. These models do not discount the shock of an extreme event, but seek to contextualize it as something that is always felt *in relation* to other events. Within these contexts, moments of crisis are “not exceptional to history or consciousness but a process

embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what is overwhelming” (Berlant 10). These are approaches that may allow for investigating coping with situations of precariousness, even as they acknowledge that some precarities come to be replaced by other precarities, that these things are in a kind of constant ebb and flow. Adopting this vantage point may offer a chance to move beyond a perceived “injunction to maintain the post-traumatic condition” as the “only proper ethical response to trauma, displacing any other memorial relation to the past and situating memory entirely under the sign of post-traumatic melancholia” (Luckhurst 210). Not in place of concepts of trauma and precariousness, but alongside and in front of them, opens up a space for a “logic of adjustment” that encompasses processing, working through, and mourning.

It is precisely this idea of “navigating what is overwhelming,” as well as the notion of ‘working through,’ that occupies a central place Eric Santner’s 1990 study *Stranded Objects: Mourning Memory and Film in Postwar Germany*. This work examines the ways that certain German cultural works of literature and film mourn the Holocaust, and works largely off of the 1975 seminal study of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*. In addition to breaking mourning down and understanding it in its Freudian phases and drives, Santner conceives of a procedure of mourning which relies on the “administration of controlled doses” of something initially perceived as harmful in order to promote a kind of healing, as a fundamentally “homeopathic” procedure that serves as a “strategy of mastering real and traumatic loss” (20). The poison thus becomes part of the cure (21). What is perhaps most interesting about this approach is that it, at its core, provides an alternative configuration of Berlant’s “logic of adjustment” in the face of traumatic aftermath and

the precariousness of the everyday. Rather than accepting the post-traumatic cycle of stagnation, repression, and flashback, it highlights how the act of mourning itself is intimately connected to coming to terms with realities, adjusting to them, and carrying on. In asking how we mourn these events, Santner asks how we come to terms with them over time, or as Berlant would put it, as “living beings figuring out how to stay attached to life from within it, and to protect what optimism [we] have for that, at least” (10).

It is from this perspective of mourning and a subsequent “logic of adjustment” that this chapter examines the work of Wim Wenders and Marcel Odenbach and asks how these visual artists approach the connections between genocidal events and the hope of carrying on in Rwandan society. As will be shown, Wenders, in relying on the conception of trauma in the classical sense through photographer Sebastiao Salgado, is forced to abandon the project altogether. Conversely, Odenbach, armed with a sensitivity that an ‘ordinary life’ is something that can actually never truly be achieved for Rwandans, offers alternative strategies for thinking about how Rwandans try to make the present bearable after 1994.

***Salt of the Earth*: Wim Wenders and Sebastiao Salgado’s Trauma**

Featuring well-known Brazilian photographer Sebastiao Salgado and shot together with Salgado’s son Julian, Wim Wenders’s *Salt of the Earth* (2015) stands as a kind of homage from one great artist to another. The documentary, about two hours long and shot in a combination of black and white and color, presents Salgado’s body of achingly beautiful photographic work together with commentary from the photographer in French and Portuguese on his most recognizable and most important images. In

looking at Salgado's oeuvre, which ranges from the workers of salt mines of Brazil to starving refugees in the Congo and Tanzania following the Rwandan genocide, the film highlights not only the stark and cold beauty of Salgado's images, but also examines Salgado's relationship to his images and the events they depict. The resulting half-biographic, half-expository film by Wenders offers an episodic take on Salgado's life, beginning with his journey as a trained economist with the World Bank to photographer of the wretched, the overworked, the oppressed, and the persecuted. With great respect for Salgado and his work and great interest in his personal story, Wenders turns to many aesthetic hallmarks of his own oeuvre to tell this story; the long take and the lone male figure in the landscape, black and white images, and the mixing of colors and foregrounding the soundtrack all come to play an aesthetic role in this film.

Much of the film's interest comes from Wenders's uniquely cinematic treatment of the photographic material in question. In a move that rejects traditional interview formats and reflects Wenders' own struggle to show a photographer speaking naturally about his work, Salgado's photographs are projected onto a one-way mirror through which Wenders films his responses to questions that the photographs prompt. Wenders also manipulates this one-way mirror, so that at times the viewer sees just the image, while in other moments the mirror becomes transparent and we are able to see Salgado's image within the images, effectively superimposing his face onto his own photographs. Through this technique, Salgado's subjective experience of taking the photographs is not only resurrected, but is also reconnected to the images being described. With this move, Wenders elevates the status of photographs in his documentary, as it demonstrates "photography's power to pose questions and allows us to better understand Salgado's

own interrogation of the world via photography” (Taliyan, “Salt of the Earth”). At the same time, *Salt of the Earth* remains a film aware of perceived boundaries between film and photography and actively deconstructs them through the constant merging and melting from one format to another; indeed at times one is not sure if one is looking at one of Salgado’s breathtaking photographs or Wenders’s rich cinematic picture. Thus, structurally and aesthetically, *Salt of the Earth* serves as a remarkable conversation not only between a photographer and his images, but also between the photographic still and cinema’s moving images.

Within this context, the images of the Rwandan genocide occupy an important place within the narrative of *Salt of the Earth*, as they signify as the key event that causes Salgado to experience a mental breakdown and subsequently change the course of his photographic career. Indeed, as will be shown, the film can essentially be divided up into two contrasting narrative and stylistic parts: before Rwanda and after Rwanda. Though they do not appear until well into the second half of the film as part of Salgado’s *Migrations* series, the so-called “Rwanda images” show the situations in Rwanda, the Congo, and Tanzania as the genocide began in 1994 and the refugee crisis of the years following it. In telling the story of Rwanda, the film focuses mostly on the way Salgado remembers it through images, divided up into subsections with titles like “Tanzania 1994,” “Congo 1994,” “Rwanda 1995,” and “Congo 1997.” Each of these sections features Salgado describing the image at hand through the aforementioned filmic technique of the one-way mirror, through which his image appears and fades as the narrative ebbs and flows. At times, certain images occupy the entire screen in large format, the increasing pounding and swaying of the dramatic extradiagetic music of the

soundtrack providing the rhythm to which the photographs are shown when Salgado is not providing commentary. All of the sections switch back and forth with these techniques, with “Congo 1997” being a noticeable outlier in that it adds United Nations archival footage, taken as aid was being distributed to the refugees during the crisis.

Each section thus focuses on a different element related to the Rwandan genocide, narrated from Salgado’s perspective. “Tanzania 1994” provided the initial entryway for Salgado into Rwanda, where he was working on his project on refugees as Rwandan President Habyrimana’s plane was shot down, jumpstarting the brutality against the Tutsi. With his face fading into the image of Rwandan bodies on the side of a dirt road, a distraught Salgado begins to describe the image and remember what he saw:

I was one of the first to arrive there. The catastrophe was everywhere. People were fleeing to Burundi, to the Congo, to Uganda. They were leaving in all directions. I entered Rwanda and it was terrifying, just the number of dead bodies I saw on the road. Here, a grenade had exploded. Those not killed by the grenades were killed by machetes. There I began to sense the sheer scale of the disaster I was witnessing. A genocide was in progress here. It was 150 kilometers by road to Kigali, 150 kilometers of dead bodies.

Following this experience, Salgado left Rwanda and photographed the refugee camps that had sprung up just outside the border, where within days almost a million displaced persons settled. After a short stint in Bosnia, where he photographed refugee camps of the Bosnian war, Salgado returned to photographing the effects of the Rwandan genocide in “Congo 1994.” The Hutu army had been defeated and had retreated into the Goma region of the Congo, fleeing the new Tutsi occupation. Again, Salgado photographed the camps that housed these new refugees, which numbered up to two million in just a few days. The images are graphic and extremely difficult to look at, as Salgado narrates:

It was a disaster in the making. Diseases such as cholera started spreading and people began to die like ants [...] I was taking photographs of these piles of corpses when I saw

the dad coming with his kid. He threw him on the pile and left with his friend, chatting as if nothing had happened.

As the image fades and Salgado's troubled face becomes visible, another image slowly fades in, replacing it (Figure 3.1).



Figure 3.1: Fading mechanism between Salgado and his images (Wenders, 2015)

Starkly reminiscent of the American clearing of bodies at Bergen-Belsen in 1945, this new image shows a bulldozer lifting piles of African corpses in Goma. Salgado again provides the commentary, contextualizing what is shown as Wenders merges Salgado's face with the image:

They couldn't bury all the people. So a bulldozer came from the French army which took dozens at a time, laid them out on the ground and covered them with earth. Everybody should see these images to see how truly terrible our species is.

As Salgado describes this image, his face begins to crumple and for several moments, he cannot go on. Wenders keeps the camera trained on him, relentless in his portrayal of

Salgado's pain. While his silence speaks of the emotional effect of these images from long ago, the visuals also leave a physical imprint on him: "When I got out of there, I was ill. My body was very sick. I didn't have any infectious diseases but my soul was very sick." Because of this 'soul sickness,' Salgado took a year-long break before he could bring himself to return to Rwanda to cover the return of the Hutus who had been in the Congo and who the United Nations began forcing to return. In "Rwanda 1995" Salgado describes his interactions with Tutsi authorities and his visits to areas where massacres had occurred during the genocide, as the screen shows a few images he snapped of the sites, among them a church and a school. This is as close as Salgado gets to discussing the events of the genocide themselves, and the version that he provides appears to be very heavily colored by official RPF rhetoric.

Salgado's final contact with the effects of the Rwandan genocide occurs in "Congo 1997," where he camped, sponsored by the United Nations, among the some two million Hutu refugees who were being encouraged to return to RPF-controlled Rwanda. Around 250,000 of these refused to return to Rwanda (presumably for fear of persecution and reprisals), and so they entered the dense and inhospitable Congo forest. Out of the 250,000 that entered the forest, only 40,000 emerged six months later. Salgado spent a few days with those who survived, photographing emaciated children and adults, clinging to the remains of their clothing and their sanity. As the images are shown on screen, Salgado's face merges with them, and he again remembers:

At that time, a pro-Tutsi guerilla movement that had seized Kisangani began to expel these people again, to send them back. Six months to get there and now back to Rwanda. They began to kill some of them. There, I met people who just couldn't take it anymore, who started to be delirious, losing their minds. They were driven mad. In fact, those people who were expelled were never heard from again. I believe they were all murdered.

Following this statement, the screen goes black and the cascading music falls silent. Only Salgado's voice is heard, slowly stating, "that was my last trip, that disastrous time in Rwanda." The camera then pivots face to face with Salgado, the only time in the film that the traditional interview format is upheld. The close-up shows Salgado almost in some kind of traumatic trance, unmoving, caught captive by his horrible memories of Rwanda (Figure 3.2):



Figure 3.2: Sebastiao Salgado in traumatic trance (Wenders, 2015)

His face, craggy and heavily lined with emotion, his eyes filled with tears and unseeing, not only the magnitude of what Salgado has seen becomes clear, but also the way that it remains imprinted in his psyche. While the photographs on the one-way mirror initially serve to help Salgado to remember, they also bring back a conflicted past that he has yet to come to terms with. The impression given by Wenders is that Salgado is frozen by this past, one that even twenty years later, provides no relief in remembering. Still in a close-up, Salgado explains the lasting effects of these experiences:

When I left there, I no longer believed in anything, in any salvation for the human species. You couldn't survive such a thing. We didn't deserve to live. No one deserved to live.

The utter devastation of his face then fades to black screen, which is held for a long minute. He can no longer speak, his trauma silences him totally. And so Wenders narrates for him, his commentary refocusing the viewer, explaining that Salgado had “seen into the heart of darkness and deeply questioned his work as a social photographer and a witness of the human condition.” He asks rhetorically, “What was left for him to do after Rwanda?” There is no answer; the screen remains black and silence stretches on in time. In this moment, Rwanda is framed as Salgado’s moment of rupture, the traumatic event from which one can never recover. In framing Salgado’s experience within certain structures and techniques, Wenders highlights the state of traumatic exception so central to classical trauma theory. Particularly the way that he has Salgado tell his story through the succession of images projected onto the one-way mirror in stark black and white effectively mirrors the flashback mechanism of posttraumatic memory, especially mimicking the collapse of linear chronology that often occurs when these memories return to the subject. The images flash before our eyes, recreating Salgado’s shock for the viewer and they at times resist narration even as Salgado struggles to apply it to them. The unique combination of the layers of Salgado’s narration, Wenders’ narration, the images, and the soundtrack, which pounds on relentlessly in the background as the images flash before the viewer, completely overwhelms the viewer. This conditioned response mimics Salgado’s own emotion, as the viewer feels his despair acutely and begins to long from an escape from the repeated exposure to this suffering. These memory-images, for Salgado, are unruly and cannot be controlled, and the viewer is

taken along on this affective ride even if they wish not to be. Both become helpless in the onslaught of images. In these posttraumatic moments of memory, time becomes “experienced as fragmented and uncontrollable. The past becomes [...] too immediate” (Hirsch 22). Salgado becomes trapped in the images, mired in the emotional and moral quagmire that they resuscitate within his mind. Indeed, there remains the strong sense that without Wenders to hold the narrative together, it would completely fall apart, a standing as the kind of “collapse of mastery over time and point of view” so central to posttraumatic narratives (Hirsch 23). The events cannot be understood, despite the attempt at narration. Indeed, the way Wenders presents these events suggests that they cannot be mastered by a chronological discussion of the past, despite Wenders’s control over the master narrative of the film. Conversely, they re-insert themselves through the image into Salgado’s mind, leaving him helpless in their wake and frozen in time in response. The only refuge can be the black screen, the utter lack of images, which Wenders finally, and several minutes too late it seems, allows us. The viewer—and Salgado—have already been sent over the edge, literally and figuratively, into darkness.

Not only the way that Wenders frames Salgado’s memories of Rwanda, but also the framing of the time after remains consistent with the classical understanding of trauma as an exceptional event, standing out in time and changing everything. Following the moments of black screen, Wenders takes over as master narrator, and the first image offered to the viewer is a lush, green farmstead rich with color. This lies in stark contrast to the first part of the film, where Wenders’ cinematographic style mirrors the sharpness of the black and white color scheme of Salgado’s photographs. The visual rhythm also changes substantially; indeed, one might say it subsides altogether. Rather than the

relentless succession of still images of suffering, punctuated by Salgado's offered memories and stylistically framed by Wenders dramatic filmic picture, an unadorned and observational documentary style now comes to the fore. The camera is still, taking in the sights and sounds of the Brazilian countryside and forest, grounded in soft color and the peaceful diegetic sound of summer insects and birds that soothes the eyes and ears. The dramatic extradiegetic soundtrack of the previous section is missing entirely; indeed no extra sonic adornment is offered. The viewer, still reeling with overwhelming distress, dreads what might come next, but is instead unexpectedly soothed by what the screen offers. The intense distinction in formal approaches between the Rwanda narrative and the narrative following it is disorientating at first, yet quickly adopted by the viewer as a blissful escape from the previous part of the film; we can now breathe, we can now recover. Now instead of overwhelming despair, we find overwhelming relief in the simple, unstylized moving image. It also soon becomes clear that the content follows this radical departure into safety and tranquility. For, rather than understanding how Salgado learned to live with what he saw in Rwanda and how his work continues to be influenced by this, the viewer is treated to an inspiring story of Salgado's spiritual recovery and rebirth as he restores his family farm and the rainforest in rural Brazil. With the camera still trained on the landscape, following Salgado as he slowly makes his way through the forests, reverently touches the trees, and gazes at the sky, Wenders explains that "the land healed Sebastiao's despair. The joy of seeing the trees grow again and the springs coming back to life all jumpstarted Sebastiao's calling as a photographer once more." The rest of the film discusses, together with Salgado and his wife, their rehabilitation project of *Instituto Terra*, which replanted the historic but largely destroyed rainforest on Salgado's

family land. Over the course of a decade, the Salgados managed to completely restore the forest, and the land and its ecosystem once again began to thrive as Salgado remembered from his childhood. Their efforts also alleviated much of the poverty in the region caused by the devastation of the rainforests and the corresponding drought; farmers are able to successfully grow their crops in the now fertile river valleys. It is a truly heartwarming story that reveals the deep love of a man, perpetually on the move on different continents for most of his working life—for his heritage and the land connected to it. Only after engaging in this project for some time does Salgado consider returning to photography, yet this time he conceives of “a different kind of project, [one that] would pay tribute to the planet.” His last project *Genesis* (2004-2013) focuses on landscape and wildlife photography and offers through Wenders’s words “a much more optimistic view of the planet Sebastiao had witnessed for so long as damaged and destroyed.” This “love letter to our planet” thus effectively becomes the project that marks the complete personal rehabilitation of Sebastiao Salgado, great photographer and artist.

The abrupt about-face of the narrative not only serves to forcefully reorient the viewer towards Salgado’s future, but also says much about the way past, present, and future are conceived of in terms of trauma, remembering, and carrying on. For as much as the Rwanda narrative is about remembering and reliving trauma in a posttraumatic form, so does the narrative after it stand out for its complete lack of these elements. From watching the first part of *Salt of the Earth*, one would expect that the latter half of the narrative would deal with the way that Salgado comes to terms with what he has seen, learns to live with it, and perhaps reincorporates it into future work. Indeed, Wenders makes it perfectly clear that Rwanda impacted Salgado so strongly that it was something

that forced him into a personal reckoning, a moment of breaking. Yet, aside from a few words helping to transition from the black screen to the new narrative at hand, the subject is never broached again for the remainder of the film. Indeed, through the discussion of *Instituto Terra*, the slate of memory is presented as wiped clean; a permeating calm and a perfect harmony has been achieved in what essentially becomes a narrative of escape, repression, and rebirth. What Salgado seeks, and what Wenders orchestrates formally, is a complete retreat from the trauma of witnessing and corresponding rebirth of the self. For it is only through escaping totally from the situation, both physically and mentally, to the lush Brazilian countryside of Salgado's childhood that he stands a chance of continuing on. He cannot come to terms with Rwanda, and cannot reconcile what he has seen there with his perception of the world. The only option for him is withdrawal, to leave for home to be with his wife and children, to seek and redefine his own identity through that of his family and ancestral land.

This stands in stark contrast to other witness photographers like Armin T. Wegner for example, who channeled the trauma he had witnessed and experienced into a wrestling with the fundamental question of *how* to tell the story in the hope that it might change the future. As many times as it would take to present them and as much as he would have to continually recontextualize them, Wegner seemed propelled by a fundamental drive to continue on with his images. Salgado's work, for all its humanitarian acclaim, remains curiously hands-off. He takes beautiful photographs of suffering, places them into books or galleries with minimal commentary—something often pointed out by critics like Susan Sontag and Ingrid Sischy—and allows them to take on a life of their own, on their own journey throughout time and space. By contrast,

Wegner never expected his images to speak for themselves. He always seemed to think—however misguided he may have been at times—that images needed context, a voice to speak for them, someone to carry them forward in the world to ensure their interpretations. Though those interpretations were difficult for him and he continuously struggled with the best way to do achieve his goals, these considerations characterized his work until his death nearly seventy years after his witnessing. Salgado is not an activist in the same sense as Wegner was, one who attaches himself to a cause and works tirelessly at making sure the world knows about it, regardless of the form it takes. The Salgado Wenders portrays is first and foremost an artist, ostensibly more interested in more people than causes, and his portrayals are multifaceted and range over huge geographic and cultural areas. In light of this lack of specificity, Susan Sontag points out that Salgado's images are powerful but also troubling in their beauty. What do they actually achieve, uncoupled as they are from concrete events and their unfolding?

Though *Salt of the Earth* implicitly responds to these critiques through grafting specificity back onto the photographs via Wenders's one-way mirror technique and Salgado's commentary, one certainly gets the sense that these strategies leave Salgado even more isolated from his own images. For, unlike Wegner, Salgado does expect the images to speak for themselves, and loudly. His commentary, while enriching and assisting in telling the story of witnessing, remains an addition, and not one that, to his mind is completely necessary. From this perspective, the deep sense of despair that permeates the film during and immediately after the Rwanda images stems not only from the images themselves; it stems from Salgado's own perception of the failure of his images to move his audiences, to achieve what he hoped they would achieve. This failure

becomes construed as also a personal failure, as if language of the camera remains so pure that it needs no further explanation and the fault must lie with the man behind it. In this sense, Salgado's retreat from the world of humanitarian photography retains a sense of an artist being fundamentally disappointed by his art. Rather than trying to rectify that, rather than embarking on a journey that would perhaps attempt to lend more context and human voice to his work, Salgado simply withdraws from it. In the end, what allows Salgado to heal, to move on, and to produce art again is doing something in a world where he feels like he can make an impact, and that that world for him is no longer photography, at least not humanitarian photography.

Through these contrasting narratives taking place before and after the Rwandan moment of rupture, Wenders effectively digs up memories of the past and forcefully buries them again through Salgado's narratives and the director's own formal choices. He offers the viewer the chance, like Salgado, to return to a kind of healing and happiness, a way to forget about what he or she has seen directly through witnessing and vicariously through the medium of film. Yet this technique constructs a deceptive normality that becomes a way to repress the memories of the past in a place that is, geographically and in terms of narrative, as far away from them as possible. It is only through forgetting, through wiping the slate of memory totally clean, that there exists hope for carrying on, and indeed, hope for art at all in the face of such human tragedy. In some ways, this echoes Theodor Adorno's oft-quoted statement of the impossibility of art after Auschwitz. Formally, Wenders encourages us to forget the images in the same way Salgado has forgotten them. And we are happy to do so, blissfully following the narrative path Wenders lays out for us, for we are as eager to escape the painful images as Salgado

is. Though there remains a snagging sense that the images (and the realities that underpin them) could return at any time, unbidden and forcefully once more, it soon becomes obvious that we are now safe, far away in the future. Only a total break with the past, a total withdrawal from its painful memories, can bring some hope for this future we now find ourselves in. Within this constellation, moving on does not mean a homeopathic reincorporation of the traumatic experience, allowing for a working through and living on in some kind of uneasy but productive symbiosis. Even the taking in of small, controlled doses of the substance is not possible in this case; the option is not even entertained by Wenders, nor by Salgado. Indeed, the way the film positions itself in relation to the events in Rwanda after their occurrence presents a model of coping that does not engage meaningfully with the past. The gap between the dark past and the renewed present, presented in neat, contained frames likewise places the traumatic event and the normalcy of everyday life at such extreme polarities that they remain fundamentally irreconcilable with one another. One *must* exclude the other, because to meld the two would create a situation in which the posttraumatic cycle of the subject would remain infinitely perpetuated to the point of utter destruction. As Wenders's overarching aim remains to showcase the development of Salgado the artist against the backdrop of the horrific events he has photographed, he cannot allow for this destruction to occur, as it would not make it possible for the narrative to continue onwards the way he wants it to.

This juxtaposition of traumatic past and the renewal of the present as a model for representing the trauma of witnessing are influenced by Salgado's own positionality as a outside witness. While this is not something that *Salt of the Earth* thematizes in any capacity, it is nonetheless an important component of the narrative. Salgado's position as

an outside(r) witness means that in the end he has the luxury of withdrawing, both geographically and mentally, from the space in which this trauma occurred. Unlike Rwandans, he does not *have* to live with what has happened: he does not have to learn to eek out a living in the ruins of the country, to find missing relatives and to bury dead ones, to cohabitate with men and women who tried to kill him, to stand up to them in the *gacaca* and accuse them to their faces of the crimes committed against his person, family, and property. The limitations of this perspective—and indeed, the great privilege associated with it—present themselves not only in the master narrative of escape, renewal, and rebirth, but also in more subtle moments in the film. One such moment occurs in “Congo 1997,” as Salgado describes the seemingly confounding everyday actions of refugee Hutus as they slowly starved, hunted in the Congolese forest:

Yet life went on at the same time. A guy cutting hair, or even this Congolese guy with his calculator, trying to collect the few dollars he was sure people had on them which he was trying to exchange in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of a forest.

Seemingly inconsequential, this moment speaks volumes for the way the film conceives of a traumatic state of exception from the perspective of an outsider. The fact that “life went on at the same time” is presented with a degree of bewilderment on the part of Salgado, and Wenders invites the viewer to interpret this moment in a similar manner. Not only are these everyday actions seen something impossible to understand, they are taken as a sign of ultimate human depravity. Rather than being a moment of admiration for refugees trying to continue on under terrible strain, these ruminations serve to highlight the absurdity of the situation and the desperation of Rwandans in this environment. For Salgado, this becomes something impossible to understand, impossible

to reconcile with the things he has witnessed. This carrying on in the face of horrific events, these meager attempts at achieving some kind of normalcy are presented as something fundamentally incompatible with Wenders's (and thus Salgado's) understanding of the situation, positioned a privileged outsider. This is not to suggest that there is nothing morally wrong with the situation described above, but Wender's film echoes Salgado's bafflement, asking how such a thing could be possible, rather than trying to understand what it could mean. Taking this situation in the Congolese forest at face value, the film thus ends up bypassing a opportunity to not only understand the moment from a Rwandan perspective, but in doing so, to also recognize the unique way that this perspective might construct the relationship between the precariousness of the everyday and moments of extreme strain.

In the end, this absence does not remain particularly surprising in the larger context of the film. For all its claims that it features the wretched of this earth and the dispossessed and the downtrodden, *Salt of the Earth* is not actually about them. It is rather about Sebastiao Salgado the artist and his story. And though the film remains visually stunning and compelling, the photographs of violence and human suffering in Rwanda and the Congo simply remain a vehicle for Wenders to tell Salgado's tale of despair, escape, and redemption. In a 2015 interview, *Salt of the Earth* producer David Rosier explains the focus of the film:

We didn't want to leave the viewers with a depressing film. We wanted to show the images of Sebastiao and also create a space where Sebastiao could tell his stories. Through all these photographs he was the witness of all these horrible events. ("Interview with David Rosier")

In not wanting to leave the viewers "with a depressing film," Rosier acknowledges that the ultimate goal of the film remained to create something that would leave a feel-good

impression with audiences, despite its difficult subject matter. The film tries hard to counterbalance this by portraying Salgado as a genuine seeker of knowledge who happens to carry a camera, interacts personally with his subjects, and who is profoundly moved—indeed, to crisis—by his subjects’ situations. Yet the fact remains that the individual events and indeed, the individual people portrayed by Salgado, are not treated as entities in their own rights, but as signposts to talk about the personal development of the photographer. Although critics have praised the way that Salgado’s narrative has lent new life to images that have become iconic through overcirculation, the question remains as to whether this actually occurs, as the commentary serves more to tie the images together in a narrative that highlights Salgado’s accomplishments and difficulties than to make us aware of the plight of the victims themselves. While this might seem like a slight quibble in the grand scheme of a film that centers on the biography of an artist, it takes on an added significance in light of much of the critique leveled at Salgado over the years, particularly that he “transforms the miseries of the Third World into attractive images for Westerners to gaze at in art galleries” (Sobczynski, “Review: Salt of the Earth”). Tellingly, the film offers no discussion of the moral and ethical repercussions of Salgado’s work, nor does it take any time to reflect on the shared colonial, if heroic, attitude of Wenders and Salgado towards the people with whom Salgado is working. Indeed, the film at certain moments demonstrates a particular blindness on the part of Wenders of his own position as a German filmmaker on geographic areas, like Rwanda, that are deeply affected and profoundly shaped by his own country’s colonial past. The African portrayals in particular often fall back onto narrative tropes of the wild, dark continent, with Wenders even referencing Joseph Conrad’s famous novel when he explains that Salgado had seen

“into the heart of darkness” after Rwanda. Many representations of the African continent rely on the presence of a white male hero-adventurer that serves to translate the wild scenes at hand into something understandable for Western audiences, much in the way Salgado does. In some sense, the events of Rwanda, presented and characterized as they are by Salgado’s descriptions of animalistic violence, underscore many of the historic European stereotypes of Africans. As Nina Berman and Kristin Kopp point out, these representations are mostly characterized by good intentions, and *Salt of the Earth*, from this perspective, is no different. Yet the distinctly ethnographic feel of Salgado mingling with the wild natives as he photographs them seems to indicate that Wenders, for all his sensitivity towards Salgado’s own story, might have done better to engage more deeply with his own positionality vis-à-vis the Global South in his film.

While the film certainly suffers from moments of colonial blindness and clumsy ethnography, it is important to again remember that, at its core, *Salt of the Earth* remains a portrait of a Western photographer and his trauma. This is not to discount the significance of the above critique, and we will see the ways that other German artists, like Marcel Odenbach, subtly criticize the Western gaze on Africa in their work on Rwanda. But like any biographic portrayal, *Salt of the Earth* remains constrained by its narrative scope and perspective. And its perspective, characterized as it is by its reliance on the exceptional event of classical trauma theory and the subsequent withdrawal and paralysis that accompanies Salgado’s traumatic experience, exposes some of the limitations of this model. For Salgado, by simply wanting to be an artist, never truly works through what he experienced and saw. Indeed, the way that the Rwandan story becomes a mere vehicle for Wenders to present Salgado’s personal development remains symptomatic of a larger

strategy that resists facing what is and remains painful. For through refocusing the story onto Salgado, Wenders avoids any chance of truly coming to terms not only with the genocide, but also for taking responsibility for his own framing and depictions of it. In digging up memories and again repressing them, the film offers no hope that an uneasy truce might be reached between the present and the past. Instead, it seems to suggest that certain things are best left alone and energies are better spent elsewhere if one wants to achieve any hope of normalcy again. Yet, true to classical trauma theory, the film suggests that this normal, at least conceived of as it was before the exceptional event, remains fundamentally out of grasp for Salgado and only a complete reformulation of what the everyday is—by divorcing it totally from the past—can provide some hope for continuing on. Because the past cannot be integrated with the present and the emotions are forcefully buried, both Salgado and the viewer are not allowed to mourn their loss. For what is there to mourn for? That world is past, pushed away, its false promises of humanitarian dignity created by the flash of a camera revealed as false coin, its illusion of normalcy unattainable. In the end, we are all encouraged to forget, to start fresh, and to recreate ourselves in images of the future, bravely and selectively looking forward into the bright world of our own, privileged Westernized making.

Marcel Odenbach: *In Stillen Teichen lauern Krokodile*

In a 2007 interview, German video artist Marcel Odenbach spoke with Solange Farkas about his video installation dealing with the genocide in Rwanda:

I have not actually shown any murderers or hardly any direct victims. I might have been ashamed of that, that I do not want, that would have been too easy for me. Maybe it's also only self-protection. Everyone expected that I would conduct interviews at the place. By the way, I have never conducted an interview myself, I cannot do that, what would I have asked and what would I have done with the answers? I know well enough the result

of such interviews as a German from my generation. In opposition to the TV, I am consciously subjective and therefore perhaps also more honest. I wouldn't like to explain anything, I don't let anyone come directly to words. I can let the images speak for themselves. {Farkas, "Interview"}

Indeed the work, titled *In stillen Teichen lauern Krokodile/ In Still Waters Crocodiles Lurk* and created between 2002 and 2004, remains something of an anomaly among other representations of the Rwandan genocide, largely for the intensely ordinary atmosphere it projects as it attempts to capture in emotional and highly sensual images a country where former enemies are forced to cohabitate peacefully. Presented for the first time on March 23 through June 11 at the Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart in Berlin, the dual screen installation provides "an archeology of images that engages with the normalization of genocidal violence and its psychological repercussions in Rwanda" (Härting 73-74). Thirty-one minutes in length and projected onto screens measuring approximately three by five meters each, the projection is comprised of seven video fragments divided up into seven titled chapters: *When God Goes to Sleep He Rests His Head towards Rwanda, A Land of Milk and Honey, A Nightmare Becomes True, The Drum is Mightier Than the Cry, I Can Forget the Images but Never the Smell, Never Again*, and *When Will God Go to Sleep Again in Rwanda?* Shown in a large but dark portion of the gallery, the screens take up the entire space of the back wall and the images reflect onto the plated glass ceiling as they show an unexpected combination of newsreel images and discarded UNO footage covering the genocide found by Odenbach in archives, along with Odenbach's personal videos and images shot on location in Rwanda. These personal images of Rwandans peacefully farming, cooking, and tending to their livestock and of the lush Rwandan countryside during the fertile rainy season permeate the work, and stand in sharp contrast to the latent and sometimes obvious violence of the

newsreel images and the UNO footage. While some critics have noted that certain segments of *In stillen Teichen* – like one of the first scenes of a hungry crocodile attacking an unsuspecting wildebeest and dragging it into the river to its death – “suggest that violence and serenity are in close proximity in Rwanda” (Harting 74), they do not comment further on the prevalence of the images of ordinary life and their intersection with a history of violence. This section aims to examine the relationship between these concepts in Odenbach’s work and reads it more specifically against Wim Wenders’s seemingly straightforward portrayal of Sebastiao Salgado’s life after his witnessing of the Rwandan genocide. For as much as Wenders relies on classical trauma theory to explain what happens after an exceptional event, he likewise finds a return to ‘normal life’ an impossible task – the kind of ordinariness that he seeks to reestablish remains out of reach and the only solution is the total retreat from the traumatic moment. Yet Odenbach, through his use of the dual screen and the resulting constant layering of ordinary and images and sounds with images and sounds subtly infused with violence and death, effectively attaches a kind of precariousness to sights of ordinariness, capturing the lived experience of Rwandans as they try to make the present bearable following the events of 1994. Such an approach allows for Odenbach to explore the unsettled daily realities of Rwandans’ lives and to probe further than the surface narratives of reconciliation and harmonic cohabitation provided by the Rwandan government.

Such a task, while imposing, does not remain out of character for Marcel Odenbach in light of the work of his venerable oeuvre. Born in 1953 in Germany and a pioneer of video art since the mid-1970s, Odenbach has produced an extensive body of tapes, performances, drawings and installations, and has gained recognition as one of

Germany's most important artists working in video. His works are known for examining the relationship between the self and the psychological and the cultural, with a particular emphasis on personal and cultural memory and the combination of Western and non-Western, of "high" art forms with popular culture. Critically acclaimed works include *The Distance Between Myself and My Losses* (1983), *As If Memories Could Deceive Me* (1986), *Sreca/Susret/ Die glückliche Begegnung* (1987), *Make a Fist in the Pocket* (1994), *Vom Kommen und vom Gehen* (1995), among many others. From 1992 until 1997 he was Professor for Media Art at the Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung in Karlsruhe, and from 2001-2010 he occupied the same post at the Kunsthochschule für Medien in Cologne, Germany. He is currently in the position of professor at the Art Academy in Düsseldorf, with a most recent retrospective of his work *Stille Bewegungen/ Tranquil Motions* being exhibited in over ten cities worldwide in the last five years.

Odenbach received the opportunity to work on a Rwandan project when he partnered with the United Nations Organization (UNO) in 1995. Asked to create something for the fiftieth anniversary of UNO, Odenbach knew he wanted to focus on Africa, a longtime interest of his. Researching in the UNO archives in New York, he discovered leftover footage from the genocide and its aftermath and it soon became clear to him what the subject of his work would be. In a March 2014 interview, Odenbach describes the difficulty he encountered in working with the genocide in Rwanda:

The reason why I think it's one of my most intense works is because of the intense theme, and it's also the work which I think I've worked on for the longest period of time. I went several times to Rwanda for the shooting and I came back with twenty-nine hours of material. And for me of course it was a long process to edit a piece out of it which is just thirty-one minutes long. The editing period took me more or less two years and that is something that's not usual for me. Normally I have a concept, I do the shooting, and then I do the editing. So what that means is that normally the work will be ready after half a year. The Rwanda work took me more than five years to prepare the piece, to shoot the piece, and then to get it finished.

This speaks not only to the way that Odenbach wrestled with the material and the subject at hand, but also underscores his commitment to creating something which did not simply replicate stereotypes of African suffering. The depths of this commitment also remains evident in the great personal lengths he went to in order to ensure that his representation might do justice to the experience of Rwandans; during numerous trips to Rwanda over the course of the project, Odenbach was arrested, thrown in jail, and denied a license to shoot footage with his own camera in the countryside. Yet in the end he managed to speak to enough Rwandans and shoot enough footage to combine it together with the other images in order for *In stillen Teichen* to debut in 2005/2006. The result is a stunning work that, in both form and content, perplexes the viewer in its lush imagery, affective intensity, and latent violence as it confounds with its nonlinear narrative. Both fragmented and retaining the strong sense of visual montage—Odenbach’s preferred method of working with video art—*In stillen Teichen* takes the viewer on a journey through the experience of genocide and the realities of coming to terms with its aftermath for average Rwandans. Already one of the first scenes shows a young woman and a child, the primary victims of the genocide and those most blighted by its after effects, the *mis-en-scene* a partial restaging of the opening scene of Ingmar Bergman’s 1967 psychological drama *Persona*. The child, looking into the camera, first puts his hand up to touch the invisible fourth wall. The camera angle changes, showing the boy now with his back turned to the viewer and facing a projection of his mother onto a back wall. He longingly runs his hands over her face as it becomes alternately focused and then blurred by the projector creating the sense that this woman, though she appears larger than life in this projection, remains out of reach of her child. In *Persona* that which places the mother

out of reach of her son is her emotional breakdown caused by mental illness, whereas in Odenbach's work, it is the workings of a much more pervasive terror. Yet this terror, much like the mental illness of the mother in *Persona*, has left indelible marks on the young children of Rwanda, viciously separating them from loved ones and those who can protect them. In the place of the safety of a mother's love is now simply a picture, a fuzzy memory of her face that comes and goes. These references to *Persona* create a kind of opening and closing remarks for *In Stillen Teichen*, effectively framing the work as a visual archeology of an experience that not only stays with its survivors as they try to carry on in its aftermath, but that also that lives on for the generations to come.

The particular combination of found footage from the UN archive, audio and video recordings, and Odenbach's own video footage of Rwanda serves not only to create a work varied in the texture of its layers; it also emphasizes the different perspectives from which the genocide was viewed and continues to be viewed: that of the European outsider, that of international community, that of the Rwandan government, and that of the average Rwandan citizen. In some cases the viewpoints of a particular group and the concerns associated with it overlap while in others they diverge sharply. Odenbach largely prevents many of these viewpoints from coming to the fore precisely by limiting what he chooses to show of them visually; the layering of the images associated with each perspective over one another creates a potent brew of them all, resulting in a kind of conflagration of these positions. The exception to this is the perspective of the Rwandan citizen, which Odenbach brings to the fore by saying the most about them visually. Already from the beginning of *In stillen Teichen*, Odenbach's personal footage of Rwanda highlights the lives of the Rwandan peasantry, working and earning a living in

the rolling hills of the Rwandan countryside. Indeed, the very first image of the piece, mirrored in the dual screen format, shows groups of men and women carrying timber and baskets of goods, presumably to be used in the home or to be sold at the market. Each of the seven chapters in the piece incorporates a good deal of this type of footage, featuring Rwandans engaging in ordinary, everyday tasks central to their physical comfort and survival and their emotional well-being, like farming, cooking, and socializing together. Yet as much as the chapters feature this kind of footage, the layering of visual and auditory everyday with the sights and sounds of genocide also emphasizes that these moments, at least for Rwandan citizens, may not be as completely as they seem at face value. In other words, what appears as a deceptively content, bucolic community situated in a lush, green paradise is actually a space fraught with a precariousness and an uncertainty stemming not only from the events of 1994 but also from the decades of violence occurring before and after the genocide. In this sense, the everyday acts in *In stillen Teichen* cannot be separated from the histories that inform them and the present conditions under which they are occurring, such that even the simple act of tilling a field becomes one filled with a kind of latent danger.

While the whole of *In stillen Teichen* thematizes the intersection between the ordinary Rwandan and everyday violence, a few key moments of Odenbach's work may help to understand this idea better. The closeness of states of violence and states of peace in Rwanda is already proposed in the beginning moments of the piece, in which the scenes of working Rwandans are interspersed with images of mummified bodies and stacked skulls of victims from the Murambi Genocide Memorial, an extreme close-up of swarming cockroaches crawling all over each other, a scene of a crocodile lunging from a

river to drag an unsuspecting wildebeest to its death, and scenes of what appears to be cheering during some kind of sunny parade in Kigali. These scenes are followed by views of the Rwandan countryside, bullet holes sprayed into the ceiling of a building, and an old Rwandan man looking off into the distance, a troubled look on his face. Already these sequences of images, shown in the double projection, hint at the intertwining of past and present, of violence and peace. These states, so easily separable in other contexts, do not exist independently of one another here. The double projection serves to reinforce this, as it not only allows for each screen to project these contrasting images, but for them to be shown in a rhythm and with a movement that also simultaneously binds them together.

While this first barrage of images is presented largely in black and white, the next chapter (*Chapter One: When God goes to sleep, he rests his head towards Rwanda*) is saturated in rich, vibrant color. Both the left and the right projection show images of smoke rising as the images diverge, with the left remaining focused in place and the right tilting up to the sky and following the trail of smoke as it evaporates into the air. As the camera on the right continues to follow the smoke trail, the right images shows a simple farmhouse in the countryside, surrounded by beautiful green hills. An elderly man sits in front of the home, hat low on his head, looking over the countryside but effectively facing the left projection of the swirling smoke. On the left, the projection switches to feature on a long shot of an idyllic pond as the wind ripples over its water, with cattle wading in it, surrounded by lush fonds of greenery. The projection continues on to show the peaceful countryside, while the right projection shows a man slowly driving his cattle on a dirt road in the bright sunshine. Insects buzz in the background and the man strolls along, seemingly unhurried by the perennial stress so prevalent in Western life. Another

man bends in the high grass to tend his field, his green pants blending in with the lush greenery of the grass in which he rhythmically works. On the left, another long distance shot of a riverside pasture filled with grazing cattle is featured. From far away, one can see the specks of young men slowly jogging to herd them in, their playing children among them. All in all, the scene at hand is most idyllic, the images leaving the viewer with the pleasant – if not somewhat stereotypical—image of Africans at home with nature in their paradise. Yet Odenbach, through his layering of sound and image, refuses to allow such a simplistic reading, for the music accompanying these scenes is the *Saint Matthew Passion* of Johann Sebastian Bach, specifically the aria *Kommt, Ihr Töchter, Helft Mir Klagen* (*Come, Sisters, Help Me Mourn*). While Bach's piece does not play during the entire chapter, it does continue for over half of it and it sets a contrasting tone for a space that ostensibly is characterized as a peaceful paradise of images. For the *Saint Matthew Passion* as a whole focuses on the betrayal and crucifixion of Christ, with this particular piece concerning itself with the mourning of women for their dead lord. The contrast of the highly emotional music with the simple and easy actions of Rwandans seems fundamentally out of tune and incompatible with one another, hinting that Odenbach does not mean for these peaceful images to be taken at face value. The Bach piece eventually blends into the diegetic sound of the buzzing of summer insects, followed by light, two-tone tribal music as the first chapter moves into the second. While this may seem like an unimportant chapter, it follows on the heels of a sequence of images that explicitly reference the violence of 1994. But in terms of what it actually shows, this deceptively simple first chapter remains central to Odenbach's understanding of the Rwandan genocide, from the perspective of Rwandans. For through the

combination of sound and image, Odenbach already unveils these idyllic spaces as being haunted by the past, as much as the people are who live in them. Yet this past is not visible at first glance, nor does it become more so at the second. Importantly, it is the soundtrack which hints at all this for the viewer, making it a particularly effective but also opaque way to demonstrate what Odenbach will show more explicitly in the following chapters of his piece.

The second chapter, titled *A Land of Milk and Honey*, continues to be framed by the same two-tone tribal music that begins towards the end of the first chapter. The projections both focus on images of the red, fertile Rwandan soil, being tilled by farmers in the fields, with the right projection being a close-up of this practice and the left showing a more distanced shot of the same act completed by two women framed by green palm trees. As they use their tools to till the soil, rhythmically striking the clumps of dirt to break them up and readying the earth for planting, a shoe suddenly appears in the soil. Unexpected in an otherwise unspoiled natural setting, the shoe, weathered and tattered, appears to have been buried there for some time. Whose shoe is it and where does it come from? How did it get there and where is its mate? Most importantly, where is the person who was wearing it? Odenbach leaves these questions unanswered, yet the viewer begins to speculate based on what the piece has previously shown in regards to the violence of 1994. The camera does not linger on the shoe, but rather continues on to focus on the faces of the hardworking women and emphasizes the communal nature of their work as it zooms out to show more men and women working alongside each other in this field. Their children also come to be included in the shot, playing alongside their working parents. They talk to each other and laugh, look off into the distance and at times

curiously gaze into what we might presume to be Odenbach's lens. This scene of pastoral work continues, featuring similar scenes from different shots and angles—close-ups of the hoes and spades as they strike the soil, longer shots of the women working among the roots. The right projection then switches locations to show a farmer lovingly scratching the underside of his cow's chin out in the field under the sunshine (Figure 3.3). The animal leans into his caresses and one could easily image that this is a ritual that both engage in daily.



Figure 3.3: Still from In stillen Teichen (Odenbach, 2002-2004)

Indeed, this not only seems to be a bucolic paradise where families work honestly with their hands, but it is also a place where animals are not just raised and used, but also valued for what they can provide for the families who own them. The next few scenes show the working men and women taking a break, sharing drinking water in the fields, and continuing to take care of livestock on their family farms. The man cares for the cows in a simple, homemade wooden structure that serves as their shelter, running a makeshift flyswatter over their flanks to clean them and protect them from insect bites. The woman, presumably his wife, watches over two large pigs after she has brought them

their dinner and they grunt happily as they rummage through the contents of their meal. She even brings them another bucket of water and holds it for them as they drink from it, a move that reemphasizes the harmony between man and beast that exists in this society. The next scene focuses now on the home space, showing the same children talking as the families sit together in their house, mother and father on chairs, surrounded by their children and some neighbors and friends. Together, they partake in a communal meal, serving steaming plates of stew to one another and obviously enjoying each other's company. Subtly, over the sound of talking and the clatter of silverware and plates, a scratchy, buzzing sound, similar to white noise, begins to become noticeable. Over the simple communality of families gathering to eat, the scratchiness increases and takes over the everyday sounds, even as the projections continue to show the same images as before. At nine and a half minutes into Odenbach's piece, the scratchy white noise takes over the sound completely, and suddenly the screen goes black. It remains this way for a few minutes, then returns to segue into chapter three, titled *A Nightmare Becomes True*. This chapter opens showing images of a woman sweeping the doorway of a house, but this time the sound accompanying the image are the harsh tones of the RTLTM hate radio, spewing propaganda against the Tutsi minority. The sound of the propaganda is amplified and becomes quite overwhelming in the way it takes over the simple image at hand with phrases like "Peasants unite! Let us fight the aggression of these cockroaches who shoot without hitting the target!" and "In Rwanda there is no room for Tutsis!". The woman continues to work in the right projection, whereas the left projection shows a shaky image by a hand-held camera stumbling through the forest, giving the impression of wild rambling and confusion. Suddenly, the viewer is not sure where he or she is, nor able to

understand what is being seen. The camera points at the ground and the lens blurs, making it impossible to tell what is going on, when suddenly it focuses on a doorway. The hidden actor behind the camera aggressively pushes the doorway open as the screen on the right goes black. The scene returns to the camera panning around wildly in the forest, as if searching for some hidden attacker, whereas the projection on the left appears to be stalking through a village. It soon becomes apparent that this is the very same village that was previously shown as a peaceful paradise but that the feel of the aggressive camera turns it from a space of safety into a threatening locale. On the right, the camera stalks along the livestock pens, alongside the windows and doors of houses, and violently pushes the doors open. On the left, yet another door is pushed open, its force banging it against the wall of the home. The empty living quarters of the home are revealed, the very same quarters that were featured in the idyllic family scenes of the previous chapter. The sound of the propaganda increases in intensity as door after door is thrown open in the village, showing empty homes, empty beds, empty kitchens. This visual assault continues for the next few minutes, with startled chickens shrieking their displeasure at the interlopers but with humans nowhere to be seen. Door after door is kicked in, space after space is invaded. On the right the camera continues to pan wildly around the shaded greenery of the palm forest. As this footage plays on the right, the fire on the left continues to burn. In the background, a monotone humming covers all other sounds, fading out into nothingness.

These second and third chapters are important in that they marry together two very different interpretations not only of the same space, but also of the differing actions that occur in this space. While the second chapter focuses on and highlights the everyday,

typical actions of the average country-dwelling Rwandan, the third chapter hints at the ways in which even the simple act of tilling the fields or sharing a meal become fraught with precariousness.

Particularly Odenbach's personal footage hints at a reinterpretation of the home space from a space of safety and communality into a dangerous one, and indeed, the use of the aggressive camera shows how closely these spaces and the seemingly innocent actions occurring there are linked to violence and strife: the very same neighbors with which this family is now breaking bread may be the enemies of the future, betraying and attacking the family for the wealth of their land or cattle. Through visually attaching these spaces and states together, Odenbach reminds the viewer of the ways that the 1994 genocide, far from being a spontaneous uprising of ancient tribal discord as portrayed by many Western media sources, was not only planned in great detail, but was also an eruptions of decades of ongoing violence and conflict already existing in the region.

Following some footage that deals more directly with the violence of the genocide and the displacement of Rwandans afterwards, Odenbach again returns to examining the lives of everyday Rwandans in the fifth chapter, titled *I Can Forget the Images but Never the Smell*. The chapter opens with present-day video footage shot by Odenbach himself of the lush countryside dotted with villages and homes. Again, much like Werner Herzog in his use of classical European music in an African visual context, Odenbach allows Bach's *Passion of St. Matthew* to ring through the pictures, and this time it is the mourning piece *Erbarne Dich (Have Mercy for the Sake of My Tears)*. The images split, with the right projection continuing to show the countryside and the left focusing on the bloodied clothes of victims hanging in a memorial space. Both cameras pan across the countryside

and the memorial space, as if to say ‘this is what happened here.’ On the right, uniformed workers in a green field go about the collection of crops, while on the left close-ups of the bloodied garments continue to take over the projection image. The left-hand image then focuses in on the tips of a series of crosses set together in a small alcove, presumably a burial ground for victims of the genocide. Meanwhile the right projection features men working together in a field, again talking and laughing as they go about their duty. The sounds of crickets and other summer insects comes to slowly take over the Bach piece, but not entirely, as if to suggest that not only are these competing images totally at home in this Rwanda, but so are the layers of violence, mourning, and everyday life. On the left, the crosses are replaced by close up of uniformed men who appear to be working together on a structure. As the camera zooms out, it becomes clear that they are dismantling what might have been a house, and they converse as they hand bricks to each other and load them, assembly line style, on to a waiting truck. As the camera angle becomes yet wider, the viewer begins to see that the house appears to have partially been destroyed—what caused this destruction exactly remains again a mystery. Yet the group of men disassembling the house seems unbothered by this as they laugh and sing together. As they continue to work— both sides of the projection features different angles of the same work— the sound of a recorded speech comes up in the background. The speech is in the Rwandan language and no subtitles are provided, making it impossible for a non-Rwandan to tell what is being said. The extradiegetic sound mixes with the diegetic sound of the men talking in the background, creating a sonic dissonance that becomes quite abrupt as the scene goes on. At the end of the chapter, the screen goes black but the sound of the speech continues; later, we find out that it is the speech in

which Rwandan president and RPF leader Paul Kagame famously and aggressively accused Western representatives of partial culpability for the 1994 genocide.

This chapter very much reinforces the impression created by Odenbach in chapters two and three, particularly of the ways that everyday work becomes linked to violence for the average Rwandan. Yet the fifth chapter offers a different perspective on this issue, as it focuses more on the time after the genocide than the time during. Whereas the previous chapters made explicit the connections between the home and the village space as places of both safety and danger, the current one shows the way that even the in-between space of the workplace is similarly tinged by violence through the uniformed (and presumably employed) men who work in these areas. It also emphasizes the ways in which the trauma of the genocide remains a prevalent force even as an official narrative of reconciliation and rebuilding is implied; regardless of what the government may say, it is the everyday Rwandans, those without the means to leave, that must continue to live and work in the same spaces and in the same activities that once offered them a measure of security. At the same time, the physical reminders of the genocide are all around them; crosses in the makeshift mass graveyards and bloodied clothes in the local memorial space. Yet this chapter shows Rwandans as resilient, as committed to carrying on and continuing on with their normal lives, no matter how fraught these activities have become for them.

In stillen Teichen stands as an incredibly dense, layered piece that remains challenging to describe, even in shorter segments like those above. While Odenbach features an impressive range of visual materials from a variety of sources, his insistence on showing the everyday lives of the average Rwanda stands out, especially in regards to

the existing body of visual representations on the Rwandan genocide. In many ways such a representation is a long overdue and much-needed departure from the prevailing image of African genocide. Instead of focusing on the “spectacle of the dead African body” (as Heike Härting so astutely notices in her recent article on Odenbach’s work⁴⁰), *In stillen Teichen* seeks to understand the way the violence of the past century, together with genocide, is experienced by Rwandans themselves. Rather than over-emphasizing the physicality of Rwandans’ experiences by showing it graphically, Odenbach develops an aesthetic that shows effects without showing causes. In focusing on these individuals and on the peasantry, rather than the experience of white Western journalists or the rhetoric of the Rwandan government, Odenbach tries to get at what genocide actually does to the people of a nation, and how they each in their own ways, seek to live with the consequences of what they have witnessed and experienced. Students of the Rwandan genocide might notice that the spaces featured Odenbach’s video footage of the country—the fields, the home, the village—are precisely those spaces in which victims were caught unawares by their neighbors and by their communities in the rampage of killing. Often victims were murdered in the very act of completing these everyday tasks, and often without the slightest warning. In effectively identifying locations of vulnerability and conflating them with spaces of security, Odenbach infuses these spaces with a precariousness that does not leave simply because the events of 1994 have officially passed. He shows that this precariousness lives on in every action, in every moment, even in those that seem innocent and innocuous. The linking of the sites of

⁴⁰ See Härting’s “Global Humanitarianism, Race, and the Spectacle of the African Corpse in Current Western Representations of the Rwandan Genocide,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* (2008)

violence and peace together (seen in Figure 3.4 below) so closely also effectively unmasks the simplistic juxtaposition of states of peace and states of war or genocide, so prevalent in more traditional explanations offered by classical trauma theorists. Rather than conceptualizing of these events as a “time before” and a “time after” a traumatic event, Odenbach instead reveals how elements that come to characterize these significant events remain present and indeed “lurk in the still waters” of societies even when they are ostensibly at peace. The genocide itself, while devastating, is no longer conceived of as a rupture or a break with an otherwise trauma-free existence; rather, it becomes the pinnacle of a process already well underway. This approach also allows Odenbach to create a work that features the hardships of everyday life for Rwandans in addition to the genocide.



Figure 3.4: Still from In Stillen Teichen (Odenbach, 2002-2004)

It represents not only the struggles of survival in the countryside but the added burden that living with decades of violence and continuing on after genocide places on the average person in this multifaceted country; in this sense, one can truly speak of Rwandan’s need for coping with what they have experienced and understand their desire to live on, however difficult and fraught that everyday existence may be. At the same

time, they do not enjoy security within that everyday, as much as they go through the motions that should ostensibly provide them with that security, as the conflation of safe and dangerous spaces in Odenbach's work demonstrates again and again. Nor do they remain free from the haunting of the past, as an abandoned shoe in the dirt, bloodied clothes, and other physical objects continuously remind. Yet *In stillen Teichen* depicts Rwandans stubbornly carrying on after genocide, refusing to give into the stagnation of trauma; it also makes us aware that the idea of a time and space that is not precarious is a indulgence that most Rwandans do not have. Unlike Wenders's Sebastiao Salgado, they do not have the luxury of retreating or of opting out—to do so would mean starvation, potential ostracization from their communities, and perhaps after the *gacaca*, even arrest for promulgating “genocide ideology,” a vague term explicitly forbidden by the Rwandan government. Instead, they carry on, continuing to engage in the everyday acts that bolster survival and hopefully, lead to prosperity. Part of the brilliance of Odenbach's work is that it acknowledges this and shows how Rwandans cope with the very histories buried—subtly and not so subtly—within these everyday spaces and actions. Past and present, everyday and the exceptional exist together and are intermingled, often making it difficult to tell one from the other; the very act that brings comfort through its familiarity also holds traces of a violent history, in addition to being representative of simpler struggles for everyday survival. Odenbach's use of the dual projection screen underscores these impressions. The dual screen projection allows these states to co-exist structurally and aesthetically, much in the sense of German avant-garde filmmaker Harun Farocki's soft montage, which emphasizes a “general relatedness of things rather than a strict opposition of equation” (Farocki and Silverman, 142). Rather than insisting on a single

reading, it allows for multiple interpretations in the space between the images, even when images themselves appear to be in conflict with one another. In disrupting the binary that might emerge from the use of two identical screens, it instead encourages images to be read with and against each other without giving easy access to meaning. Associations are thus “suggested spatially, but not formally mandated temporally” (Alter, “One, Two, Three Montages,” 443). Indeed, much of the viewers’ energies are spent attempting to determine what is happening and where, as the movements on both screens draw the eyes but do so in such a rhythm to cause a feeling of overwhelmed looking rather than an ease of comprehension. Taken in its original installation format—3x5 meter screens in a large, dark concrete basement of an old train station— one can easily imagine the increased difficulty of looking that *In stillen Teichen* might engender. The set up of the two large screens in a dark room creates an environment that “instantly draw[s] the viewer into events as a participant” while the double projection “interrupts the ways in which the viewer’s perception of violence and suffering is conditioned to legitimize global humanitarianism and build humanitarianist capital” (Harting 74). At the same time, the absence of an implied listener or viewer in the construction of the installation mirrors “the West’s deliberate blindness and deafness toward its historical and political involvement in and responsibility for genocidal killings in sub-Saharan Africa” (76). In many ways, the piece effectively demands a different kind of looking, similar to what German-Japanese director and experimental artist Hito Steyrl suggests occurs precisely in the space of an art museum. Rather than positioning viewers as “traditional bourgeois subjects” who attempt to “(re)master the show, to tame the unruly multiplicity of its

meanings, to pronounce a verdict, and to assign value,” the dual-screen video art installation has a very different kind of effect:

To multiply cinematic duration means to blow apart the vantage point of sovereign judgment. It also makes it impossible for you to reconfigure yourself as its subject. Cinema in the museum renders overview, review, and survey impossible. Partial impressions dominate the picture. The true labor of spectatorship can no longer be ignored by casting oneself as master of judgment. Under these circumstances, a transparent, informed, inclusive discourse becomes difficult, if not impossible. (Steyrl 71)

Rather than offering the opportunity to access and process a piece, viewing a piece like *In stillen Teichen* in its original atmosphere no longer allows the easy configuration of subject and object; in other words, not only are the screens moving, but viewers themselves are moving. As this occurs it compounds the resistance to narrative already present in Odenbach’s work, creating a sort of double distancing that requires a particular kind of dogged patience in order to come to some kind of understanding of it. And yet, even if a spectator remains in this place for the thirty-some odd minutes it would take to view the piece in its entirety (and many seldom do), a complete viewing does not equal mastery over the piece. The boldness of Odenbach’s media approach and its impact on the way the story of the genocide is told remains particularly important when contrasted with Wenders’s approach in *Salt of the Earth*. While Wenders’s introduction of the projected layered mirror initially promises a potentially productive disruption of visual and narrative congruence and thus an avenue into an alternative kind of visual storytelling, it soon becomes clear that this signature device instead becomes a reinforcement of the way that Wenders visually controls the narrative through Salgado. Rather than “produc[ing] multiple vantage points and put[ting] into question the very possibility of a single narrative logic or perspective,” the projected layered mirror employed by Wenders refuses to allow for any kind of deviation from Salgado’s view

(Alter, *The Essay Film* 7). In this sense, it keeps the visual narrative focused squarely on Salgado through repeatedly emphasizing the interwoven nature of the images and their creator. By contrast, Odenbach's dual screen installation video create the atmosphere common to what Nora Alter refers to as the in-between genre of essay films in that it performs a kind of "cognitive anamorphosis" that "draws the spectator into an intricate process whereby the perspective of the filmmaker is folded onto the spectator's own in the production of signification" (*The Essay Film*, 7). This effect not only adds yet another interpretive layer to an already complex piece but shows that the truth of Odenbach's work on the Rwandan genocide lies somewhere among these competing images and layers of viewing, much like the truth of the Rwandan experience lies somewhere among the actions of the everyday, scenes of violence, and aftermath of genocide.

While Wim Wenders' *Salt of the Earth* and Marcel Odenbach's *In stillen Teichen lauern Krokodile* both focus on the Rwandan genocide, this chapter has shown that they not only take different narrative and formal approaches to telling this story, but that these approaches also contain ramifications for the way that coming to terms with the genocide becomes conceptualized in its aftermath. It remains clear that while Wenders' main focus of his film is not on the genocide itself, the genocide plays a central role in the biographic unfolding of Salgado's life, particularly in his artistic self after the photographic witnessing of the 1990s. In the end, though, the way that Salgado's experience comes to fore relies heavily on classical conceptions of trauma theory and leads to a lack of mourning and coming to terms with the past in the film. The understanding of Rwanda as the rupture or a state of exception in both Salgado's personal and professional life means that the attempts at returning to normal life after genocide necessarily fail; yet it also

remains clear that, in being primarily about a white Western man, the film has no real stake in showing that anything else is possible. Wenders's conventional use of potentially disruptive filmic devices provide the visual support for these conclusions. In contrast, Marcel Odenbach's *In stillen Teichen lauern Krokodile* offers a different look at the Rwandan genocide, one that alternatively focuses almost exclusively on the experiences of the Rwandan peasantry and their almost pervasive need to carry on after the events of 1994. Through relying on the dual screen projection as his medium, Odenbach subtly weaves together competing narratives of violence with innocuous everyday activities to highlight not only the precariousness of Rwandans' situations, but also to show them "figuring out how to stay attached to life from within it, and to protect what optimism [they] have for that, at least" (Berlant 10). What emerges is a powerful picture that simultaneously denies easy closure and answers but also provokes intense thought. It allows for a reading that does not assume a privileged Western sense of security but rather acknowledges the prevalence of everyday stressors far beyond what one might imagine. In many ways, asks us as viewers not only to imagine ourselves in the shoes of these people, but to recognize the precariousness inherent in our own lives. Though it certainly may manifest itself in different ways than in the Global South, this precariousness remains part of life for a good number of our citizens. Especially in a current political climate in which white supremacists and other hate groups appear to enjoy a particular access to voices of power, it remains doubly important to examine the wide swath of the precariousness of the everyday, not just the exceptional events that disrupt a so-called normal life. Odenbach's work provides us with a model for doing this,

offering a path for future engagement beyond the simplistic binaries of trauma both through alternative formal and narrative strategies.

CONCLUSION

PICTURING CONTINGENCY THROUGH AN AESTHETIC OF PRECARITY

You have to live with the brokenness, and you have to live with surprise, and you have to live with contingency. And you have to live with the pleasure of not knowing, if you can bear it. But how you have to live with it is another story – Lauren Berlant

In the summer dusk, an elderly woman gazes into the distance, hands clutching the loosely wrapped cotton scarf on her head. The field she stands in, with its lush green grass and fertile red earth, is bathed in the orange glow of the evening sun as it sinks slowly down the horizon into darkness. At her feet lies a tangle of thick green vines connected to several ripe yellow squashes, lined by two carefully tilled segments of earth that run away from the camera. Behind her, the tall trees lining the field reach up to the fading blue sky and melt into the rows of green corn that frame both sides of the photograph. Face turned down from the camera and mostly hidden by her brown and white shawl, the woman's expression is impossible to read. Yet her body language, with arms raised and face concealed, suggests a kind of quiet contradiction of her peaceful bucolic surroundings.

Part of the 2017 series *Odvale Samo u Harem/ From Here Only to the Grave* by young Bosnian photographer Sulejman Bijedic, this enigmatic image becomes emblematic for Bijedic's work, which focuses on the last remaining inhabitants of the Bosnian Muslim town of Počitelj. Their families destroyed by the genocidal events of the early 1990s, the elderly residents that Bijedic photographs are forced to survive not only

without their children and grandchildren, but also must shoulder the physical burden of caring for the town, the fields, and themselves. The images in Bijedic's series, as a result, become deeply rooted in the aesthetic of precarity present in Odenbach's piece. On the surface they show nothing out of the ordinary, yet the consequences of a violent past hovers over the wizened shoulders of this old woman and her fellow townspeople like a heavy shroud. Backs bent as if they are carrying a heavy load, the elderly of Počitelj go about their daily tasks, gathering water from the well, tilling the fields, praying in the mosque, drinking afternoon tea with their remaining friends and families. Each image is thoroughly permeated with the exhaustion of old age and of the constant effort it takes to keep going. At the same time, the pictures also possess the suggestion not necessarily of hope, but of a future, precisely because they insist that life does not stop with traumatic events and that to fight to survive is not a rejection of the traumatic past any more than it is a refusal to honor those who have succumbed to it. They highlight that the deep sadness of the past and the beautiful struggle of the present cohabitate in the people and surroundings depicted within their frames.

The result is an aesthetic that touches us deeply, that not just mirrors but draws us into the perhaps unwelcome but not altogether unknown recognition that we too find ourselves all too often in these kinds of constellations, that we too must keep going although we feel all has been lost. Through these images, we learn what it means to live unsettled lives, to not know what the future holds, and to continue carrying on nonetheless. More generally, in looking at images and image production through the lens of precarity, we realize that not only does this approach offer new affordances for understanding, it also connects us more profoundly than ever to what it means to be

human in a time of increasing uncertainty, disenfranchisement, and displacement.

Perhaps not quite hopeful but still, an existence to be embraced after all.

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