

Seeing the Genocide against the Tutsi through someone else's eyes: Prosthetic memory and *Hotel Rwanda*

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Abstract

Alison Landsberg's theory of 'prosthetic memory' suggests that memories are not 'owned', that is they do not depend on lived experience, but rather they can occur as a result of an individual's engagement with a mediated representation (e.g. a film, a museum, a TV series, a novel). One of the best-known mass cultural responses to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda is Terry George's 2004 feature film, *Hotel Rwanda*. While the film was a huge commercial success, Rwandan survivor testimonies paint a very different picture of what happened in the real 'Hotel Rwanda' (the Hôtel des Mille Collines in the Rwandan capital of Kigali). This article discusses the different versions of the 'Hotel Rwanda' story through the lens of prosthetic memory and considers the usefulness of Landsberg's theory for analysing memory narratives from or about Rwanda. While Landsberg promotes prosthetic memories as 'in the best cases' capable of generating empathy and political alliances, I show that, when mass-mediated representations create revisionist false 'memories', this can have harmful consequences for survivors of trauma. After focusing on the ethical implications of what Landsberg describes as 'seeing through someone else's eyes', I conclude that prosthetic memory is a concept that should be treated with caution.

Keywords

Alison Landsberg, Genocide against the Tutsi, *Hotel Rwanda*, Paul Rusesabagina, prosthetic memory, Rwanda, testimony

Since 1994, a significant number of writers, artists, filmmakers and curators have attempted to find ways of commemorating the Genocide against the Tutsi while also informing the rest of the world about what happened in Rwanda. One of the best-known cultural responses is British director Terry George's feature film *Hotel Rwanda* (2004). Billed as a true story, the film tells of how Paul Rusesabagina, the real-life former manager of Kigali's Hôtel des Mille Collines, saved 1268 people from death at the hand of the génocidaires by offering them sanctuary in the hotel and bribing the killers with money, alcohol and Cuban cigars. The film stars US actor and activist Don Cheadle

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in the role of Paul, and British actress Sophie Okonedo as his wife Tatiana. Despite the fact that, in George's (2005: 23) own words, 'Hollywood has almost no interest in African topics', the film has been a huge commercial success. Since its release, *Hotel Rwanda* is estimated to have made almost 34 million US dollars at cinema box offices around the world. It was also nominated for three Academy Awards in 2005, including best actor for Cheadle.

For many non-Rwandans, George's film is the only knowledge they have of Rwanda, so in terms of popular culture, *Hotel Rwanda* controls the international narrative of the Genocide against the Tutsi. Yet, testimonies from survivors who took shelter in the hotel challenge the veracity of that narrative, reacting strongly both to the film itself and to the ensuing celebrity of Rusesabagina. For these survivors, the film is 'wildly inaccurate' (Kayihura and Zukus, 2014: xxxii) and fails to represent the reality of their own lived experiences. Two volumes of survivor testimonies (Kayihura and Zukus, 2014; Ndahiro and Rutazibwa, 2008) have been published since the film's release, but these Rwandan versions of the 'Hotel Rwanda' story are not well known.¹

The question of how best to analyse cultural responses to the genocide has posed an important challenge for scholars working in this field, many of whom are based outside Rwanda. To date, the majority of published criticism has tended to draw on trauma theory, a distinct but dominant strand of Memory Studies, which dates back to the classification of PTSD in the wake of the Vietnam War (Whitehead, 2009: 114) and is influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis, deconstruction and Holocaust Studies (Whitehead, 2004). Despite increasing interrogation of the appropriateness of trauma theory for analysing non-western stories (Andermahr, 2016; Bennett and Kennedy, 2003; Craps, 2013; Craps and Buelen, 2008; Luckhurst, 2008;), researchers working on Rwanda continue to acknowledge its influence on the way we think about cultural responses to genocide (e.g. Cieplak, 2017; Gilbert, 2018). Very recent work by Zoe Norridge (2019) moves Rwandan memory studies in a new direction by discussing the sharing of family memories through Marianne Hirsch's (2012) concept of affiliative postmemory, but this is a rare example of applying an approach that moves beyond the Yale School of trauma theory (Caruth, 1995, 1996; Hartman, 1995).

In a field that has so far been dominated by trauma studies, Alison Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory is seldom deployed in discussion of memory narratives from and about Rwanda. In her 2004 book, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, Landsberg argues that memories are not 'owned' – they do not depend on lived experience – but rather they can occur as a result of an individual's engagement with a cultural representation of a lived experience.² To date, the only example of a critical engagement with prosthetic memory in relation to the genocide against the Tutsi is by intercultural communication experts Aoki and Jonas (2016). In an article about representational space and collective memory, the authors give an account of their experience of watching Kenyan filmmaker Patrick Mureithi's 2009 documentary *Icyizere: Hope*, a film about a community-based reconciliation workshop in Rwanda. Drawing on Landsberg's work, they describe how what they identify as the prosthetic memories generated by the film become part of their own lived experience and change the way they think about Rwandan history. The power of a filmic text to transform a viewer's relationship to the genocide against the Tutsi is also discussed in Landsberg's (2015: 47–54) reading of George's *Hotel Rwanda* in her most recent book, *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge*.

What Aoki and Jonas say they experience as they watch *Icyizere* closely echoes Landsberg's analysis of *Hotel Rwanda*. In *Engaging the Past*, Landsberg explains that she sets out to delve deeper into the implications of prosthetic memory for the way we understand and learn about history (2015: 3), focusing specifically on visual culture, notably film, television and online exhibitions. She reads George's *Hotel Rwanda*, as a film that 'draws the viewer into proximity' to the Genocide against the Tutsi, 'fostering a sense of intimacy or closeness but not straightforwardly

through the eyes of someone living at that time' (2015: 27).³ While she does not explicitly classify the film as prosthetic memory, Landsberg's analysis reads very much as an example of the kind of experiential encounter that is key to understanding the concept that her earlier work defines: prosthetic memories are generated by an individual's affective engagement with someone else's memories, which they experience through a mass cultural medium such as film (Landsberg, 2004). Writing about *Hotel Rwanda*, Landsberg (2015: 52, 53) describes viewers as positioned 'in such a way that they recognise their distance and difference from the Tutsis but come to feel that the Tutsis' story is important to them and can in some way affect their own view of the world'.⁴

This article examines the mass cultural mediation of memories of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi through the lens of prosthetic memory. Focusing in particular on survivor responses to *Hotel Rwanda*, I show how lived experiences of Rwandan Tutsi survivors have been misrepresented in George's film and consider the ethical implications of creating memory encounters based on the traumatic histories of others. I propose that, while prosthetic memory might offer a useful way of thinking about how mass cultural narratives might generate cross-cultural alliances, Landsberg's theory takes insufficient account of the negative effects such 'memories' can have when they are generated by narratives that are biased or revisionist. The role of mediators of memories is critically important, as my case study shows. In conclusion, I suggest that what could be described as 'false prosthetic memories' generated by a film like *Hotel Rwanda* can reopen scars and even create new psychological wounds for the survivors of traumatic histories such as genocide.⁵

Prosthetic memory

While Landsberg's work on prosthetic memory focuses mostly on historical film, she also discusses the mediation of memories through cartoons, novels, museums and TV series. Her case studies include Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Toni Morrison's fiction, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and Alex Haley's *Roots*, alongside a range of American movies. For Landsberg, what she classifies as 'mass culture' allows memories to be acquired by anyone. Through what she describes as an experiential encounter with a memory site, a prosthetic memory can be created. What this means, according to Landsberg (2004: 2), is that an individual 'does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live'. Prosthetic memory is an artificial, 'not natural' form of memory (2004: 20). According to Landsberg (2004: 9), just as someone wearing a prosthesis remains conscious of its presence, so 'people who acquire these memories are led to feel a connection to the past but, all the while, to remember their position in the contemporary moment' (2004: 9). Taking on a prosthetic memory, she argues, can have important ethical ramifications, facilitating identification, developing empathy, and potentially leading to radical political engagement (Landsberg, 2009). While she is careful to make clear that there is nothing 'inherently positive or progressive about this new form of memory', Landsberg (2009: 154) nevertheless stresses that prosthetic memories can bring about social justice because these experiences put people 'in the position of seeing through someone else's eyes', which 'might change how one sees the world and one's place in it' (2009: 101). What she fails to address is what happens when collective memories, such as those of Rwandan survivors, are misrepresented in mass culture and false memories created. What kinds of prosthetic memories might be generated then? What are the implications of someone 'suturing' themselves (Landsberg, 2004: 14) into the space of a revisionist historical narrative?

To illustrate her theory of prosthetic memory, Landsberg (2004: 25–28) begins with a 1908 Vitagraph film, *The Thieving Hand*, in which a rich man buys a prosthesis for a one-armed beggar he passes in the street. Unfortunately for the beggar, the prosthetic arm has its own memories: having previously belonged to a convicted thief, it continues to steal of its own accord and is

eventually reunited with its original owner when the beggar ends up in jail. Landsberg uses *The Thieving Hand* to show how an individual can be transformed by the acquisition of someone else's memory (in this case, a beggar becomes a thief) through an embodied experience (in this case, wearing a prosthetic arm). But, as Landsberg ultimately concedes, the film very much emphasises the relationship between memory and an individual's lived experience since the arm cannot stop stealing, even when it is attached to someone else's body. When the arm eventually reattaches itself to its rightful owner, the film strongly suggests a relationship of authenticity between a memory and its owner, a relationship that Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory then attempts to overturn.

Prosthetic memory does not create new memories, nor is it really a new form of shared or collective memory; rather, it describes a brief encounter with the story of someone else's lived experience as translated by a third party, just like the beggar in *The Thieving Hand* who receives a prosthetic arm that once belonged to a thief from a wealthy passer-by. According to Landsberg, (2004: 48) a prosthetic memory can sometimes – 'in the best cases' – generate cross-cultural empathy and political alliances. But this does not always happen: drawing on a more recent example, Landsberg writes about Alex Hayley's ground-breaking 1970s US TV series *Roots* that 'it enabled many whites to see through black eyes for the first time' (2004: 105). But what does it mean to see through someone else's eyes? Landsberg (2004: 106) makes it clear that prosthetic memory is linked to cross-cultural empathy, but she also suggests that it goes further than this: prosthetic memory can encourage viewers to reconsider and challenge national memory narratives. 'Seeing through someone else's eyes' (2004: 101) involves not only empathy with events in the past experienced by others, but also defamiliarisation of the present in which viewers find themselves.⁶ This process, Landsberg acknowledges (2015: 105), does not always generate radical political engagement: in the case of *Roots*, white American viewers developed a newfound interest in tracing their own ancestry rather than being prompted to find out more about the history of slavery. While they can be moved by the experiences of others, viewers and readers are also challenged to see themselves differently, which may – or may not – lead to progressive social change.

Landsberg is not the first to write about the power of painful memory narratives to generate alliances across differences. As she acknowledges in *Engaging the Past* (65-66), an emphasis on cross-cultural engagement (or empathy) is a dominant feature of trauma studies (Caruth, 1995: 11).⁷ Dominick LaCapra (1997: 267) writes about what he calls 'empathic unsettlement' in which secondary witnesses, including viewers and readers, are disturbed by what they see or read and so empathise with the victims of traumatic experiences. An extreme example of this would be what McCann and Pearlman (1990) define as 'vicarious traumatising', a condition they have identified in some trauma counsellors and therapists and which has been picked up by some trauma theorists as a possible outcome of the viewing/reading process. Whereas LaCapra (2001: 21) stresses the separation between viewer and trauma victim, such that empathy does not become identification, E. Ann Kaplan follows McCann and Pearlman in seeing the boundary between viewer and victim as less clearly defined. Kaplan (2005: 90) writes that, while some viewers of traumatic stories experience vicarious traumatising, others 'feel the pain evoked by empathy – arousing mechanisms interacting with their own traumatic experiences'. For Landsberg (2015: 148), empathy has an important role to play in driving social change: 'knowledge of past atrocities is understood to have the potential to shape or inform present and future political action in part by fostering empathy: a connection with another that is predicated on distance and difference, not on sameness'.

In the case of a memory narrative, the degree of empathic connection is manipulated by the extent to which the narrative is mediated. While Landsberg (2015: 72) agrees that all historical narratives are constructed and subjective, she is interested not so much in questions of authorship or narration as in formal elements of textual mediation. She does not consider the fact that all film

narratives are mediated not only through the vision of their director, but also through that of the editor, the producer, the actors, the marketing department and the narrative voice. In the case of *Hotel Rwanda*, the viewer's experience of seeing the story of Rwandan survivors through someone else's eyes is complicated by the fact that the director of the film is a white British man and the narrative based on the story of one particular individual whose version of what happened in the hotel has been repeatedly challenged. Even Rusesabagina's status as an indigenous mediator is complex: as a Rwandan Hutu, he is not, strictly speaking, a survivor of the Genocide against the Tutsi.⁸ However, in protecting Tutsi from the massacres by sheltering them in the hotel, he was putting his own life and that of his family at risk. Moreover, Hutu men like Rusesabagina who were married to Tutsi women, or tried to protect Tutsi were targeted by the killers as 'cockroach' lovers (Rusesabagina, 2007: 112).⁹

Hotel Rwanda

When Landsberg writes about audiences, she seems to assume them all to be like her (western and white), despite her admission (2015: 20) that affective engagement is 'not the same for everyone'. Her conclusion that 'part of the work of the film [*Hotel Rwanda*] has to do with the viewer's being forced to grapple with his or her own relationship to historical events in Rwanda' (Landsberg, 2015: 50) fails to consider the film's reception by viewers from Rwanda. To illustrate her point, she gives the example of a recorded interview with UN Colonel Oliver (played by Nick Nolte), which is replayed in the film on a small TV screen.¹⁰ In the interview, the Colonel reassures a reporter that the UN will not withdraw its troops from Rwanda. Landsberg reads this as a moment in which, although the (white western) viewer's distance from the genocide is confirmed by what she terms a 'frame narrative' – in this case, the use of the small television screen – she is nonetheless implicated in the memory process. Landsberg (2015: 52) concludes that, 'our expectations of our own role and commitment are confirmed: the UN peacekeeping force will remain'. Of course, this is not what happened in Rwanda. On 21 April 1994 (just two weeks into the genocide), the UN Security Council passed a resolution to withdraw the majority of its peacekeeping forces (Willard, 2018: 146) and this is confirmed just a few scenes later in the film when the now drunken Colonel tells the hotel manager, 'They're not gonna stay, Paul. They're not gonna stop the slaughter'.

The failure of the international community to intervene in the genocide is an important theme in the film which, according to Landsberg, creates a sense of 'obligation' among its viewers and, in doing so, potentially leads to what in her earlier work she describes as 'alliances across differences' (Landsberg, 2004: 153): 'We have a relationship of obligation to these others [Rwandans] precisely because [. . .] – despite our geographic and cultural difference from them – they are literally asking us for help' (Landsberg, 2015: 54). While Landsberg is right to draw attention to *Hotel Rwanda*'s cinematic attempts to foreground the western superpowers' collective failure to stop the genocide in 1994, the suggestion that prosthetic memories foster a sense of obligation in their owners (in this case, white western viewers) comes uncomfortably close to what Teju Cole (2012) calls the 'white-savior industrial complex' (Cole, 2012). While, if we follow Landsberg's definition, we are encouraged to acknowledge our shared responsibility in the genocide as citizens of the world, prosthetic memory leaves us with a lingering sense of duty not to repeat the mistakes of our privileged past and to protect people in vulnerable nations in the future. As Cole explains and Landsberg's analysis demonstrates, the white saviour complex is 'not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege' (Cole, 2012).

Big emotional experiences are central to the theory of prosthetic memory, which focuses on bodily engagement, on 'feeling' (Landsberg, 2015: 54). As Marco Abel (2006: 382) notes in his review of *Prosthetic Memory*, Landsberg is more concerned with the '*realness of experience*'

generated by the memory encounter than with the authenticity of the memories that generate this experience. Indeed, while Landsberg (2015: 48) acknowledges in her book that the historical narrative of *Hotel Rwanda* has been challenged, she does so only in a single sentence and accompanying footnote, comparing the criticisms of George's film with those of many other historical films. While she convincingly demonstrates how the film draws attention to the ways in which the events of 1994 were mediated to the Rwandan people and the international community (most notably through the radio), and how this reminds us that the story is now being mediated to viewers through the medium of film, she does not consider the mediation of the narrative by Paul Rusesabagina, the former manager of the hotel. This is an important omission when we realise that, as Khor (2016: 60) confirms, Rusesabagina was instrumental in shaping the presentation of himself and his story in *Hotel Rwanda*, acting as consultant to George the director, and having meetings with the screenwriter, Keir Pearson, in the pre-production phase. Furthermore, George has described the film as based on the 'authentic testimony' of the former hotel manager, a claim which, as Dokotum (2013: 132) rightly suggests has, 'far-reaching consequences on genocide memory, the healing of the survivors of Mille Collines, and postgenocide reconciliation'.¹¹

Survivors' stories

In his testimony *Inside the Hotel Rwanda: The Surprising True Story and Why it Matters*, genocide survivor and former Rwandan public prosecutor Edouard Kayihura, who sheltered in the Hôtel des Mille Collines during the genocide, condemns George's film as 'present[ing] a story filled with falsehoods' (Kayihura and Zukus, 2014: xxxi). Another testimony by fellow survivor Ancilla Mukangira, who was brought to the hotel for safety by Senegalese UNAMIR Captain Mbaye Diagne, describes how she walked out of the film in disgust because 'Hotel Rwanda shows neither the horrors we experienced nor the way Paul Rusesabagina frustrated our efforts to find a way out of that terrible situation' (Ndahiro and Rutazibwa, 2008: 49). Mukangira's account of her time in the Mille Collines is included in Alfred Ndahiro and Privat Rutazibwa's 2008 book published in response to the success of *Hotel Rwanda*.¹² In this book, 74 survivors give statements about living in the hotel for their own safety, most of them testifying that Rusesabagina charged them for rooms and made them pay for food and drink. If they had no money, refugees were asked to sign pledges that they would repay the manager once the genocide had ended.

Although Rusesabagina in his autobiography, *An Ordinary Man* (2006: 137), denies charging refugees for rooms, former hotel employees corroborate the survivors' statements and confirm that Rusesabagina disconnected all the telephone lines to the hotel except the one to his own office. They add that he refused to grant refugees permission to use the phone, even when this might have led to them being evacuated from the hotel (Ndahiro and Rutazibwa, 2008: 41–66). Serge Rusagara, who was 14 in 1994, describes how he and other Tutsi children were only allowed into the hotel when some of the adult refugees pledged to pay for their food and accommodation (Ndahiro and Rutazibwa, 2008: 52, 53).¹³ Another survivor, Immaculée Mukanyonga describes how the refugees were refused water if they had no money, so were forced to drink from the hotel pool (Ndahiro and Rutazibwa, 2008: 54).¹⁴ This claim and all the others are corroborated in fellow survivor Kayihura's separately published 2014 testimony (Kayihura and Zukus, 2014: 73).

Survivors' statements also confirm that members of the genocidal government, the army and the interahamwe militia often visited the hotel as guests of the manager. Védaste Rubangura recounts how a bomb was found between his and his children's room in the hotel, which he claims must have been placed there by Rusesabagina's guests (Ndahiro and Rutazibwa, 2008: 59). Other evidence relating to the manager presented by Ndahiro and Rutazibwa (2008: 62–69) suggests an even greater degree of complicity with the genocidal government of Rwanda, including working

for the intelligence services and passing on information to the *genocidaires*.¹⁵ Furthermore, statements from some of the UN peacekeepers who were stationed outside the Mille Collines, including General Roméo Dallaire, describe how Rusesabagina tried his very best to have them removed (Kayihura and Zukus, 2014: 102).¹⁶

Memory competition

In 2006, just two years after the release of *Hotel Rwanda*, Rusesabagina published his autobiography, *An Ordinary Man*, co-authored with American freelance journalist and writer, Tom Zoellner. First published in the US by Penguin (Rusesabagina, 2006), the book was released the following year by Bloomsbury in the UK (Rusesabagina, 2007). The cover of the original Penguin version presents the book as 'An Autobiography' by Paul Rusesabagina 'who inspired the film *Hotel Rwanda*'. One year later, the Bloomsbury version removes the generic description of the book as an autobiography, describing the book instead as 'the true story behind *Hotel Rwanda*'. This intriguing shift from the presentation of Rusesabagina's text as autobiography to the 'true story' behind George's film maps the way in which the hotel manager seems to have quickly adopted the version of himself created by the film. Despite Rusesabagina's (2007: 242) repeated attempts in the autobiography to position himself as an ordinary man who never saw himself as a hero, Rusesabagina does seem to have become, as Ndahiro and Rutazibwa suggest (2008: 89), a 'hero made in Hollywood'. Certainly, the character of the hotel manager is at the centre of the film. Whereas Landsberg (2015: 48) focuses on the way in which the viewer's implication in the film goes beyond simple identification with characters, the majority of film critics emphasise the humanity and courage of the central character, describing Rusesabagina as 'risk[ing] everything in an uncommon act of courage' (Clinton, 2004), the 'designated hero and moral grounding wire' (Holden, 2004), 'brave and honourable' (Winter, 2005) with a 'neat and tidy brand of heroism' (Brooks, 2005).

Despite many years of genocide survivors campaigning to out Rusesabagina as a false hero, he has received numerous awards for the humanitarian actions carried out by his fictional representative in George's film, including a US presidential medal delivered by George W. Bush. When they heard of his nomination in 2011 for the prestigious Lantos Human Rights prize, Rwandan survivor associations IBUKA, AVEGA and GAERG mounted formal protests including an online petition, but the prize was awarded to Rusesabagina despite the survivors' condemnation. Njoya (2011) explains the decision by the Lantos Foundation as a reflection of the US public's ignorance about Rwanda, suggesting that 'the release of *Hotel Rwanda* marked the first time a larger American public heard about the genocide. Clinton had done a mighty good job of preventing the UN from declaring the slaughter genocide'. Survivor Jean de la Croix Ibambasi confirms this when he states that 'Rusesabagina has exploited the naivety and ignorance of the Western world' (Ndahiro and Rutazibwa, 2008: 61). Since the film's release, Rusesabagina's post-genocide identity seems to have been constructed on the basis of Don Cheadle's representation of him in the film: Rusesabagina has become 'the real-life hero of *Hotel Rwanda*'.¹⁷ In this case, it seems that prosthetic memory has created not just misplaced affective engagement but also illegitimate celebrity. By taking on the false prosthetic memory of what happened in the Mille Collines hotel, viewers suture Rusesabagina into that memory as a hero of the genocide.

Since 1994, the history of Rwanda has become something of a memory competition, a concept that Rothberg (2009: 7) describes as an 'ugly contest of comparative victimization'. This ugly contest is played out in both scholarship and (social) media as a highly polarised debate: on the one hand, there are those who accept the Rwandan national narrative of the Genocide against the Tutsi; on the other, those who seek to revise that narrative by claiming the retaliatory killings carried out by the RPF against presumed Hutu perpetrators and their families as another genocide, and/or by

challenging the number of Tutsi victims. As the Rwandan priest and human rights activist André Sibomana (1997: 117) puts it, 'They are trying to outbid each other'. While *Hotel Rwanda* does not deny that the Genocide against the Tutsi happened, the film has generated yet another version of the Rwandan memory competition in which survivors from the hotel strongly contest the narrative created by George and Rusesabagina.

In *Prosthetic Memory*, Landsberg (2004: 146) describes audiences today as 'consumers' of memories: she writes about how we can choose which memory to access (for example, which movie to watch) and then choose again whether or not to take on that memory for ourselves in prosthetic form. If, as she claims, such representations can potentially promote ethical engagements with other people's history, then how do we make informed choices when the memories are not our own? As Huyssen (2003: 17) reminds us, 'many of the mass-marketed memories we consume are "imagined memories"', which he describes as 'pillaged from the archive' (166), separate and distinct from memories grounded in lived experience. Huyssen's distinction between 'lived' and 'imagined' memories offers a useful starting point for thinking about false prosthetic memory which, I argue, emerges when a viewer or reader adopts a revisionist imagined memory of someone else's lived experience.

False prosthetic memories

Scholars investigating the malleability of human memory have shown that, as Loftus (2005: 365) writes, 'misinformation can enter consciousness and can cause contamination of memory'. Memories that are false can become stories that are remembered (Loftus and Pickrell, 1995: 725).¹⁸ Of course, the concept of false memory further complicates Landsberg's theory: if through the creation of prosthetic memories, false narratives win the memory contest, then the consumers of those memories potentially – and unwittingly – become complicit in revising the narrative of the genocide. Since 1994, the fight to combat revisionism has been a top priority for the Rwandan government and for genocide survivors. It underpins the ongoing commitment to large-scale commemoration (*Kwibuka*) events as well as the decision to display the bones and skulls of victims at many of the country's memorial sites. Survivors play a key role in genocide commemoration, acting as guides at memorials and giving testimony during *Kwibuka* events all around the world.

The fight against revisionism is also what has prompted many survivors to write about their experiences, most commonly in the form of testimony, but also as fiction. Rwandan survivor and author Camille Karangwa (2003: 6) prefaces his novel *Le Chapelet et la machette*, [The Rosary and the Machete], published just 9 years after the genocide, with a statement against revisionism: 'Il est regrettable de voir que certaines personnes nient toujours ou minimisent sciemment le génocide rwandais. Cela dérouté tout le monde et porte un coup dur au Rwanda qui lutte actuellement pour sa reconstruction globale' [It is unfortunate that people deny or knowingly minimise the Rwandan genocide. It throws everyone off course and really hurts Rwanda which is currently fighting to rebuild itself completely].¹⁹ Karangwa's aim, he explains, is for readers to experience the kind of experiential encounter Landsberg describes as the origin of prosthetic memory. He writes, 'Notre souhait est que le lecteur sonde et pénètre lui-même le fond du génocide rwandais' [I hope that readers will probe and penetrate the depths of the Rwandan genocide for themselves] (Karangwa, 2003: 120).

Landsberg, however, goes further than Karangwa in her analysis of how we carry the memories of others. Whereas Karangwa invites his reader to experience the genocide through his fictionalised account and be unsettled by what she reads, Landsberg describes readers and viewers as permanently changed by affective engagement with other people's memories.

Prosthetic memories, she writes, ‘derive from a person’s mass-mediated experience of a traumatic event of the past’ (Landsberg, 2004: 19) but ‘like an artificial limb, [they] often mark a trauma’ (2004: 20). This suggestion that non-Rwandans might be traumatised by their experience of a mediated representation of the genocide is a polemical one and pushes the concept of prosthetic memory into the realm of vicarious traumatising. Meaningful prosthetic memories for Landsberg are those that leave a scar – in this case, the suggestion would be that viewers of *Hotel Rwanda* would be scarred by their traumatic experience of watching the film. Yet, Landsberg’s theory fails to consider the scars that might be left on survivors by revisionist retellings of their stories.

False prosthetic memories can screen us against the horror of what really happened in Rwanda in 1994 and prevent understanding of the specific lived memories of survivors of the genocide. Of course, Karangwa’s invitation to his reader to engage actively with a fictionalised version of his own memories might also be read as an encouragement to acquire a prosthetic memory: empathising with unfamiliar events and seeing ‘through another’s eyes’. There are, however, some important differences: Karangwa’s novel, unlike *Hotel Rwanda*, is not a mass mediated representation of the Genocide against the Tutsi and his text presents documentary evidence of Karangwa’s own lived experience. Furthermore, Karangwa’s novel is not mediated through the eyes of a white British film director and his production team. Unlike George’s film, Karangwa’s book is presented not as a true story, but as a work of fiction, yet it also contains a series of personal photographs: pictures of the author, his wife, and the ruins of his former family home and his grandfather’s house, both destroyed in the genocide. Unlike *Hotel Rwanda*, Karangwa’s text does not invite its audience to accept without question a fictionalised memory narrative. This is not to say that fiction cannot elicit empathy or create prosthetic memories that lead to positive political action. On the contrary, I suggest that inviting a reader to imagine a traumatic experience through fiction can be an extremely powerful way of generating affect and mobilising engagement. Like many fictional responses to the Genocide against the Tutsi (Hitchcott, 2015: 191), Karangwa’s novel strongly implicates the reader and invites them to reflect on their own role in the processes of acknowledgement and commemoration. Like the bones and skulls exhibited at memorials in Rwanda – often without explanation – Karangwa’s documentary evidence both corroborates his fictional story and, through what I have elsewhere identified as a ‘documentary pact’ (Hitchcott, 2019), compels readers to interpret the evidence for themselves.

Conclusion

This article does not set out to dismiss all popular cultural forms of remembrance. It agrees with Huyssen (2003: 18) that we can no longer talk or think about memory without considering the influence of new media, just as it is no longer appropriate or useful to dismiss memories mediated through popular, globalised cultural forms. Yet, although traumatic memory and entertainment memory often occupy the same public space, this article has shown that the memory industry must be treated with caution. A powerful and more recent example of the pain that mass cultural revisionist memories can evoke occurred on 12 April 2019, just 5 days into the annual period of commemoration of the Genocide against the Tutsi, when French broadsheet *Le Monde* published a cartoon by Serguei simply entitled ‘Rwanda’. The image, a single frame, depicted two semi-naked, headless men fighting with machetes while, in the foreground, their severed heads lay on the ground, one head speaking to the other, asking, ‘Et si on se réconciliait?’ [How about reconciliation?] The image was immediately posted on Twitter by Franco-Rwandan activist, Jessica Mwiza, with the following comment:

Le génocide c/les tutsi: des décennies de préparation par les intellectuels extrémistes. +d'1 million de morts. 25 ans de recherches scientifiques depuis 94. @lemondefr a mis 5 min à piétiner notre histoire en utilisant l'imagerie génocidaire et négationniste. #RwOT #Kwibuka25

[The genocide against the Tutsi: decades of preparation by extremist intellectuals. +1m dead. 25 years of academic research since 94. Le Monde took 5 mins to trample on our history using genocidal and negationist imagery. #RwOT #Kwibuka25]

Mwiza's tweet was retweeted 854 times, liked 987 times, and provoked 83 Twitter comments, including calls for legal action against *Le Monde*. Later that day, the newspaper's editor Jérôme Fenoglio (2019) withdrew the cartoon from the online edition and published an apology on *Le Monde's* website. In his apology, Fenoglio condemns the cartoon as an 'inappropriate' mediation of memory that should not have been published. He also acknowledges that this particular representation upset members of the Rwandan community, echoing Mwiza's claim that Sergeui's image 'trampled' on Rwandans' painful past.

Whereas commemorative cultural works can, as Huysen (2003) shows, help individuals to work through traumatic memories, revisionist memorial narratives can have the opposite effect, particularly if they then become normalised through processes of mass dissemination and prosthesis. False prosthetic memories can reopen the wounds of those with lived experience as they struggle to challenge and disprove the revisionist 'memories' created and adopted by others. *Hotel Rwanda* is a powerful example of this. Kayihura describes the distress he and his fellow survivors experienced after watching the filmic version of their story and their subsequent desire to challenge the narrative: 'We all felt the need to correct the record, to let the world know where the film had gone wrong. But would listen?' (Kayihura and Zukus, 2014: xxxii). Just as the genocide in Rwanda was not acknowledged by the international community in 1994 (Stanton, 2004: 218–220), so the survivors of the Mille Collines hotel feel that their own memory stories, eclipsed by George's successful film, have not been heard.

Mass cultural representations can, as Landsberg, suggests, bring audiences closer to other people's memories, invoking empathy and the possibility of social change. But they can also be harmful if they encourage us to take on prosthetic memories without critical interrogation. Indeed, Landsberg's (2015: 155) work reminds us not to underestimate the power of visual media to convince viewers that a particular memory narrative is 'truth'. Yet, while she advocates for 'the possibility of a responsible mass cultural transmission of memory' (2004: 111), she does not interrogate the position of the producers of those mass cultural products she identifies as transmitters of prosthetic memory. The choice of *Hotel Rwanda* as a film in which viewers should 'make sense of the historical circumstances and use that knowledge to inform the way they will act in future' (Landsberg, 2015: 48) exposes cracks in prosthetic memory as an ethical framework. While, as Landsberg suggests, prosthetic memories can be helpful if they lead to empathy and political alliances, it is important to remember that prosthetic memories are not really memories at all. Berger (2007: 605) suggests that 'much of what [Landsberg] calls "memory" would better be called "knowledge"' but of course this knowledge is never objective. These so-called 'memories' are, like the thieving hand, artificial, unreliable, and sometimes revised or even false accounts of the lived experiences of others. In the case of a film like *Hotel Rwanda*, prosthetic memory proves to be a problematic theoretical tool.

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Notes

1. Ndahiro and Rutazibwa's (2008) book is now out of print.
2. For a discussion of prosthetic memory, see the forum dedicated to Landsberg's (2004) book in *Rethinking History*. The issue contains two articles by Berger (2007) and Munslow (2007) followed by Landsberg's (2007) response.
3. Throughout the book Landsberg wrongly dates the film as 1994 (the year of the Genocide against the Tutsi).
4. Landsberg (2015: 32) also discusses *Hotel Rwanda* in a chapter which describes cinema as a key site for 'the acquisition of what [she has] called prosthetic memories'.
5. Thanks to my colleague Margaret-Anne Hutton and the anonymous *Memory Studies* reviewers for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.
6. Reading Landsberg through Levinas, Abel (2006: 385) warns that seeing through someone else's eyes can be 'akin to a kind of subjective imperialism in which my-seeing-through-the-other's-eyes ends up controlling the others' vision'.
7. Although he does not make reference to Landsberg's 2004 book, Rothberg (2009: 19) also demonstrates how memories are 'difficult to contain in the moulds of exclusivist identities' and can lead to 'unexpected acts of empathy and solidarity'.
8. The Rwandan government's decision to rename the 1994 genocide as the 'Genocide against the Tutsi' was ratified by the United Nations General Assembly in 2018. Although both the UN and the Rwandan government acknowledge that many Hutu were targeted and killed, the renaming makes it difficult for Rwandan Hutu to be identified as survivors.
9. 'Cockroaches' (*Inyenzi* in Kinyarwanda) was the name given to the Tutsi by the genocidaires. Rusesabagina's wife Tatiana is a Rwandan Tutsi.
10. Colonel Oliver in the film represents Lieutenant General Roméo Dallaire who was Force Commander of UNAMIR, the UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda during the genocide.
11. Pearson (2005: 21) notes that George purchased Rusesabagina's life rights. Rusesabagina (2007: 241) himself describes the film as 'very close to the truth'.
12. Alfred Ndahiro is an adviser to Rwandan President Paul Kagame who has openly denounced Rusesabagina as a fraud (Waldorf, 2009: 102).
13. Rusagara also gives testimony in Kayihura and Zukus (2014: 65–67).
14. According to Rusesabagina (2007: 140, 146), all the amenities except the phone line to the fax machine were disconnected by the genocidaires.
15. According to Rusesabagina (2007: 189), when he organised a failed attempt to evacuate some of the refugees, including his wife and children, he heard their names broadcast on the hate radio station RTL and speculated that someone must have stolen the list or purchased it from the Rwandan army or the UN.
16. Conversely, Rusesabagina (2007: 99, 100) criticises Dallaire and the UN mission for failing to protect him and his family when the genocide first began and then later claims his request for more UN soldiers to be stationed at the hotel was refused (132) until his last night in the hotel (193).
17. See the mission statement of the Hotel Rwanda Paul Rusesabagina Foundation. Available at https://www.facebook.com/pg/Hotel-Rwanda-Rusesabagina-Foundation-107533569296635/about/?ref=page_internal (accessed 19 September 2019). In an interesting discussion of what he calls intertextual 'contamination', Dokotum (2013: 137) notes that the principal source of reference in Rusesabagina's autobiography, *An Ordinary Man*, is the screenplay of *Hotel Rwanda*.

18. For film scholar Tybjerg (2016), the very concept of prosthetic memory is contaminated by notions of fraudulence and brainwashing, grounded as it is in science fiction films about false memories (*Blade Runner* and *Total Recall*).
19. Karangwa's novel is the first fictional work published in French by a Rwandan author in response to the genocide (Hitchcott, 2015: 42).

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