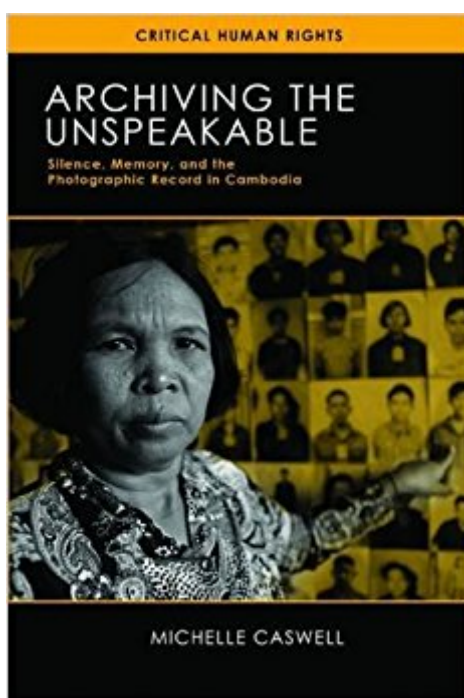


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Archiving The Unspeakable: Silence, Memory, And The Photographic Record In Cambodia (Critical Human Rights)



Synopsis

Roughly 1.7 million people died in Cambodia from untreated disease, starvation, and execution during the Khmer Rouge reign of less than four years in the late 1970s. The regime's brutality has come to be symbolized by the multitude of black-and-white mug shots of prisoners taken at the notorious Tuol Sleng prison, where thousands of "enemies of the state" were tortured before being sent to the Killing Fields. In *Archiving the Unspeakable*, Michelle Caswell traces the social life of these photographic records through the lens of archival studies and elucidates how, paradoxically, they have become agents of silence and witnessing, human rights and injustice as they are deployed at various moments in time and space. From their creation as Khmer Rouge administrative records to their transformation beginning in 1979 into museum displays, archival collections, and databases, the mug shots are key components in an ongoing drama of unimaginable human suffering. Winner, Waldo Gifford Leland Award, Society of American Archivists Longlist, ICAS Book Prize, International Convention of Asia Scholars

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“An exemplary work. Caswell’s biography of an archive is made compelling by her fine scholarship, skilled storytelling, and passion for justice.”
—Verne Harris, author of *Archives and Justice*
“An important book that will reward re-reading for years to come. Using an archival frame of reference, Caswell describes the reasons for the creation and subsequent uses

of the familiar yet tragic mug shots of Tuol Sleng prison victims, demonstrating the many silences these records encode and illustrating how they can be employed to transform narratives of victimhood into narratives of agency and witness. — Andrew Flinn, University College London; Caswell pays homage to the subjects of the heart-breaking mug shots taken at a Khmer Rouge prison and examines the impact that the photographs have had over the years on different viewers. Her humane, sophisticated, and unblinking book sharpens and enhances our understanding of the so-called Pol Pot era. — David Chandler, Monash University — “A worthy attempt to foreground the importance of archives by revealing the layers of silences associated with the mug shots of the Tuol Sleng victims and demonstrating how their re-usages contribute to the disclosing of lost narratives. — Testimony (Belgium) — “A welcome contribution to scholarship on photography, human rights, and the making of historical memory in Cambodia and beyond. In Caswell’s account, the [Tuol Sleng Prison] archive, its material contents, and history itself are revealed to be open-ended processes rather than fixed contents. Like the struggle to hold perpetrators accountable, remember the victims, and rebuild a devastated country, the photographs of Tuol Sleng remain unfinished. — Pacific Affairs Book Review

Michelle Caswell is an assistant professor of archival studies in the Department of Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she is also an affiliated faculty member with the Center for Southeast Asian Studies.

I should have read more on the description before buying the book, it was more about the medium of pictures in history than about the atrocities or history of the Khmer Rouge. I still managed to read the book and got some interest out of it, that is why I gave it three stars, this may not be fair to the genre of the book as academics in this field would no doubt judge it differently.

So clearly written for an academic book! This book taught me so much about archives, the history of the use of the mugshot, and got me thinking about the interplay between power, archival sources, and the creation of memory -- all in the context of the compelling and moving story of victims of the Khmer Rouge.

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