

KOSFILM IN ASSOCIATION WITH TELEWIZJA POLSKA S.A., ODRA-FILM, NARODOWE CENTRUM KULTURY  
AND STUDIO A PRESENT A POLISH FILM INSTITUTE CO-FINANCED PRODUCTION

*Birds*  
*Are Singing*  
*in*  
*Kigali*



**Karlovy Vary**  
**International Film Festival**  
Official Selection – Competition

## SYNOPSIS

A picture of the psychological consequences of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 that changes into an engaging tale – which is full of drama, but also hopeful – about the meaning of life and an existence marked by trauma.

Claudine Mugambira (Eliane Umuhire), of Tutsi descent, is a daughter of a renowned Rwandan ornithologist. After the massacre, in which Claudine's father gets killed, Anna Keller (Jowita Budnik) – a Polish ornithologist who has researched the vultures in Rwanda alongside Claudine's father for years – helps her escape to Poland. Anna, herself a witness to the violence, is deeply affected by it; even now, after her return to Poland, it echoes in her memories. The brutality she has experienced makes her unable to accept the slow and peaceful flow of existence and people's indifference towards the events in Rwanda.

She feels a need to radically change her life and escape the painful past, but her desire is made impossible by Claudine's presence. Both women, suffering deeply, engage in a complex and intense psychological process of healing and restoration of their daily lives.

Many movies have been made about the genocide in Rwanda. Excellent ones have also been made about the role of women in the modern world. *Birds Are Singing in Kigali* by Joanna Kos-Krauze and Krzysztof Krauze is the first film that focuses on both Rwanda and women. It is both intimate and universal, an example of auteur cinema with a commercial potential and an ability to move people's hearts all around the world.



## JOANNA KOS-KRAUZE & KRZYSZTOF KRAUZE

directors, screenwriters



Fot. Grażyna Gudejko

Having worked together for over twenty years, directors and screenwriters Joanna Kos-Krauze and Krzysztof Krauze (1953–2014) made numerous highly successful documentaries and feature films. The artistic tandem's successful collaboration started with *The Debt / Dług* (1999) and TV films, i.e. *Big Deals / Wielkie rzeczy* (2000), and continued with the widely internationally recognized productions: *My Nikifor / Mój Nikifor* (2004) – Grand Prix, Best Director and Best Actress Prizes at the KV IFF Grand Prix of the Chicago IFF and Denver IFF, and dozens of other awards around the world; *Saviour Square / Plac Zbawiciela* (2006) – Best Director and Best Cinematography Prizes at the Camerimage IFF, Grand Prix of the Trieste IFF, Special Jury Prize and the Best Actress Award at the Valladolid IFF and many others; and *Papusza* (2013) – Special Jury Mention at the Karlovy Vary IFF, Best Director Prize at the Valladolid IFF, Open Horizons Prize at the Thessaloniki IFF, etc. *Birds Are Singing in Kigali / Ptaki śpiewają w Kigali* (produced by Joanna) is their last joint film.

### Filmography (feature films):

1988 – *New York, 4 a.m. / Nowy Jork – czwarta rano*  
 1996 – *Street Games / Gry uliczne*  
 1999 – *The Debt / Dług*  
 2004 – *My Nikifor / Mój Nikifor*  
 2006 – *Saviour Square / Plac Zbawiciela*  
 2013 – *Papusza*  
 2017 – *Birds Are Singing in Kigali / Ptaki śpiewają w Kigali*

## KRZYSZTOF PTAK

cinematographer



Fot. Marcin Kułakowski, PISF

For over 30 years he collaborated with the most influential Polish documentary and feature film directors, such as Wojciech Marczewski, Jan Jakub Kolski, Joanna Kos-Krauze, Krzysztof Krauze and Andrzej Wajda, co-authoring the unique visual style of Polish cinematography. He received numerous national and international awards, including the eight Eagles for the Best Cinematography (awards of the Polish Film Academy), the Best Cinematography Prize at the Camerimage IFF (twice), the Best Cinematography Prize at the Gdynia and Kraków FFs, as well as the nomination for the Best Cinematography Prize of the European Film Academy in 1989. Selected films: Bogdan Dziworski's *A Few Tales About a Man / Kilka opowieści o człowieku* (1983); Witold Starecki's *Dog Eat Dog* (1993); Grzegorz Królikiewicz's *Klejnot wolnego sumienia / The Supreme Value of a Free Conscience* (1980); Andrzej Barański's *Taboo / Tabu* (1986); Leszek Wosiewicz's *Kornblumenblau* (1988); Andrzej Wajda's *Ms Nobody / Panna Nikt* (1996); Jan Jakub Kolski's *The Story of a Cinema from the Village of Popielawy / Historia kina w Popielawach* (1998), *Pornography / Pornografia* (2003), and *Jasminum* (2006); Wojciech Marczewski's *Weiser* (2001); Piotr Trzaskalski's *Edi* (2002); Joanna Kos-Krauze & Krzysztof Krauze's *My Nikifor / Mój Nikifor* (2004), *Papusza* (2013) and *Birds Are Singing in Kigali / Ptaki śpiewają w Kigali* (2017).

## JÓZEFINA GOCMAN

cinematographer



Student of the 5th year at the Krzysztof Kieślowski Film School in Katowice, Poland. She worked as an in game cinematic designer at the TopWare Interactive, as well as a director of photography of a number of short and documentary films, like Anna Urbańczyk's *Doctor Faustus / Doktor Faustus* (2015), presented at the Camerimage IFF, or Jakub Radej's *Dust / Proch* (2017), awarded at the Kraków IDSFF. *Birds Are Singing in Kigali / Ptaki śpiewają w Kigali* (2017) is her feature-length film debut. She is currently working with the Romanian director Ciprian Mega on his film *The Nobel Prize*.

## WOJCIECH STAROŃ

cinematographer



Born in 1973. Graduate of the Cinematography Department at the Łódź Film School. Cinematographer of numerous feature and documentary films which have achieved international success, like Joanna Kos-Krauze and Krzysztof Krauze's *Saviour Square / Plac Zbawiciela* (2006) and *Papusza* (2013), Marcin Janos Krawczyk's *Six Weeks / Sześć tygodni* (2009), Jerzy Ślaskowski's *Vodka Factory / Fabryka wódki* (2010), or Paula Markovitch's *The Prize / El premio* (2011) – the one that earned him the Silver Bear for the Best Cinematography at the Berlinale 2011. He directed several documentary films of international renown, including: *Siberian Lesson / Syberyjska lekcja* (1998), awarded at IDFA, Cinema du Reel, and Kraków IFF; *Argentinian Lesson / Argentynska lekcja* (2011), that won Cinema Eye Honor, DOK Leipzig, and Camerimage FFs, and recently *Brothers / Bracia* (2015), awarded at the Locarno IFF's Critics Week 2016.

## PAWEŁ SZYMAŃSKI

music



Fot. Anna Jordan-Szymańska

Born in 1954 in Warsaw, Poland. He completed his composition studies under Włodzimierz Kotoński at the Academy of Music in Warsaw, and later studied with Roman Haubenstock-Ramati in Vienna. Winner of numerous national and international music competitions, including Sacred Music Composition Contest of the Internationale Bachakademie in Stuttgart in 1985, the Benjamin Britten Composing Competition in Aldeburgh in 1988, and the Grand Prix of the Culture Foundation in 1994. His music compositions are performed all over the world, including Austria, the United Kingdom, Canada, Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Japan, Hungary, Mexico, Sweden, Italy, and the United States.

He is the author of music to many feature and documentary films, including *Schizophrenia* (2001) by Vita Zelakeviciute, *One Day in People's Poland / Jeden dzień w PRL* (2005) by Maciej Drygas, *Abu Haraz* (2012) by Maciej Drygas, as well as *Saviour Square / Plac Zbawiciela* (2006) by Joanna Kos-Krauze and Krzysztof Krauze (2006) that won him the Best Music Prize at the Gdynia FF and a nomination for the Eagle, Polish Film Academy prize.

## RADOSŁAW OCHNIO

sound designer



Born in 1977 in Ciechanów, Poland. Graduate of the Television and Film School in Wrocław. He collaborates with the best independent film directors and visual artists in Poland, such as Jerzy Skolimowski, Michał Marczak, Kuba Czekaj and Katarzyna Kozyra. In 2016 he received the European Film Academy Best Sound Design Prize for his work on *11 Minutes / 11 minut* (2015) by Jerzy Skolimowski.

**JOLIE CLAUDINE MURENZI**  
production designer, costumes

Born in 1971. Studied at the Academie des Beaux Arts de Bruxelles and the Kunst University of Berlin. Production designer at numerous films which have achieved international success, such as *Shooting Dogs* (2005) by Michael Caton-Jones, *Sometimes in April* (2005) by Raoul Peck, *Shake Hands With the Devil* (2007) by Roger Spottiswoode or *The Day God Walked Away / Le jour où Dieu est parti en voyage* (2009) by Philippe Van Leeuw. She is also the producer of films, including *Kinyarwanda* (2011) by Alrick Brown, awarded the Audience Prize at the Sundance IFF, and co-producer of international projects, like *Thilt* – a TV series made with Film House Germany and Muganga.

**AGNIESZKA ZAWADOWSKA**  
production designer, costumes

Graduated from the École des Beaux-Arts et art Applique Aix-en-Provence; art director, production and costume designer, curator. Between 2012 and 2015 she was Managing Director of the Studio Gallery at the Studio Theater in Warsaw. She collaborated with many prestigious theaters, like the National Theater, Ateneum, Powszechny, Współczesny, Dramatyczny, Lalka, Nowy Praga, and also with the Nowy Theater in Łódź, Słowacki Theater in Kraków, Polski Theater in Poznań, Mickiewicz Theater in Częstochowa, and Polski Theater in Wrocław. She is an art director for feature films, like *Bellissima* (2000) by Artur Urbanowski, *Ubu, the King / Ubu król* (2003) by Piotr Szulkin, or *Game On / #WszystkoGra* (2016) by Agnieszka Glińska.



**JOWITA BUDNIK**  
(Anna Keller)

Born in Warsaw in 1973. Graduated from the Institute of Applied Social Sciences of the University of Warsaw. At the age of 11, in 1985, she made her screen debut in a supporting role in Radosław Piwowarski's acclaimed *My Mother's Lovers / Kochankowie mojej mamy* (1985). A student of Halina and Jan Machulski's famous Theater Group at the Ochota Theater in Warsaw, she later collaborated with various prestigious theater scenes in Warsaw, like the Ochota Theater, Powszechny Theater, Prezentacje Theater, Kamienica and the Studio.

She starred in numerous highly popular TV series, such as *A River of Lies / Rzeka kłamstwa* (1987); *In the Labyrinth / W labiryncie* (1988–1990); *Transforming Machine / Maszyna zmian* (1995); *Mothers, Daughters, Lovers / Matki, żony i kochanki* (1995–1998); *Kate & Tom / Kasia i Tomek* (2002–2003); or *L For Love / M jak miłość* (2000–2017), as well as feature films, including Sławomir Fabicki's *Retrieval / Z odzysku* (2005), Wojciech Pacyna's *Never Say Never / Nigdy nie mów nigdy* (2009), Katarzyna Roślaniec's *Baby Blues* (2012), Michał Orlowski's *Jeziorak* (2014) or Anna Kazejak's *The Promise / Obietnica* (2014). Since the late 1990s she has been collaborating with Joanna Kos-Krauze and Krzysztof Krauze on all of their films, starting with *Big Deals / Wielkie rzeczy* (2000) and *The Debt / Dług* (1999), continuing with the award-winning *My Nikifor / Mój Nikifor* (2004), and the leading roles in *Saviour Square / Plac Zbawiciela* (2006) that brought her the Best Actress prizes at the Gdynia FF, the Polish Film Academy's Eagle prize, and the Valladolid IFF Best Actress Award; *Papusza* (2013), awarded in Karlovy Vary, Valladolid, Thessaloniki, Pune and Istanbul; and recently *Birds Are Singing in Kigali / Ptaki śpiewają w Kigali* (2017).





**ELIANE UMUHIRE**  
**(Claudine Mugambira)**

Rwandan actress, director, model and contemporary dancer born in 1986 in Kigali, Rwanda. In 2009 she joined Mashirika Performing Arts and Ishyo Arts Centre, where she creates and performs until today. She also writes and directs her own plays, such as *Syrian and Burundian Monologues*. Eliane is an ambassador of peace and reconciliation, and most of her work revolves around the preservation of the memory of the 1994 genocide against Tutsis, and participating in the reconstruction of the Rwandan society and local communities.

Eliane joined the movie industry with supporting character roles in such films as *Things of the Aimless Wanderer* by Kivu Ruhorahoza and *Behind the World* by Clementine Dusabekambo, both of which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. She later landed one of the leading roles in *Birds Are Singing in Kigali* by Joanna Kos-Krauze and Krzysztof Krauze, premiering at the Karlovy Vary IFF 2017.

## WORD OF DIRECTOR

*We come from a land where the Holocaust occurred. The consequences of genocide in Poland can be felt even today. It is simply our duty to revisit, in every generation, the fundamental questions of how it could have happened and how to live after the genocide. That is why it is so important to preserve the memory and the realization of where the cycle of violence begins. In the history of civilization genocide has never been a spontaneous act. It is something for which societies have to be prepped. The prepping usually begins with words.*

*We spent several years in Africa. The first time we went over we had no idea we would go on to spend the most difficult years there – the years of illness, departure, mourning, but also hope. We lived in South Africa the longest. Krzysztof spent his time in cancer treatment, but we also worked, closely watching the society which was so different from our own – scarred by the legacy of apartheid, unimaginable violence, racial tensions, shocking economical differences – yet, at the same time, much more tolerant than ours in many respects. Rwanda was initially a traumatic experience; I spent many weeks there attending exhumations and memorial sites. Everyone has their own story there. Everyone is either a victim or a killer there, or a killer's descendant. It is all very complicated. All those emotions have not cooled there yet. It is still an experience of collective trauma, and going through it is a task for many generations. Journeys like that one of ours really make you re-evaluate everything. We knew that those years of our experience would sooner or later find their reflection in film.*

Joanna Kos-Krauze



## ABOUT THE MOVIE

*Birds Are Singing in Kigali*, a film by Joanna Kos-Krauze and the late Krzysztof Krauze (1953-2014), depicts the process of recovering from a trauma, a tragic necessity to choose life after miraculously surviving the hell of extermination.

The plot is set in Poland and in Rwanda. The filmmakers chose the formula of an intimate tale, eschewing any pathos, sermonizing or graphic displays of cruelty. The main characters are two women: Anna, an ornithologist studying the vulture population in Rwanda, and Claudine, a young Tutsi woman.

The women are broken, incapable of re-entering the routine of daily life, of undertaking the arduous task of restoring their own capacity to experience feelings. But life goes on, and their decisions must either affirm or reject it. Their mutual indifference, dislike, and a sense of alienation gradually turn into a kind of brittle bond between the women, underlined by psychological wounds, concern, and a drop of hope.

Although focused on the psychological, subtle dimension of the plot, the film does not elude the realities. It chronicles the wrestling with Polish authorities, the living conditions at a refugee centre, the everyday reality of Polish backwoods, and, lastly, the overflowing Rwandan orphanages resulting from the slaughter, also as a consequence of rapes.

Most importantly, however, the film's authors set extreme experiences and intimate descriptions of suffering against the vast, mysterious and visually riveting presence of Nature. It is Nature that becomes the final comfort after the word "humanity" has proven to be empty of meaning. In this film, which continuously demonstrates the clash of cultures, skin colors and languages, relief comes from the open-ended, immeasurable diversity of other species and the protective, undisturbed presence of landscapes.

The filmmakers raise questions, boldly draw the drama surrounding their characters, but refrain from offering definite answers. They understand the challenge that the unfathomable and inexpressible reality of self-extermination of our species, which has been recurring through centuries, poses for rational humanism. Genocidal slaughter in Rwanda remains one of the most painful wounds of the modern world. The explosion of evil on such a scale cannot be expressed in words or related in a story.

"The end of poetry" declared by philosophers after the Holocaust meant that words must be viewed with suspicion, above all such words as Man, humanity, progress, and – finally – God. In Rwanda, just as in Europe during World War II, the inter-human covenant was breached. In 1994, our collective memory was wounded for centuries to come. As one of the film's characters puts it succinctly, "A million people butchered in three months... More efficient than the Nazis. And all killed by hand".

The choice of the unexpected "bird" theme, which ties together Polish-Rwandan human life stories into accidental relationships (beyond politics, humanitarian missions or the media), provides a capacious, suggestive metaphor. The birds' falling silent during the slaughter and their gradual return to singing several years later (as intimated in the film's title) are not just authentic facts. They are also a symbolic representation of the human experience of spiritual death and the slow process of revival.

Philosophically and symbolically, the film attempts to go further, to transcend species-centrism, or the conviction that homo sapiens are superior to the rest of the creation. The population of African birds, which seems to be cast in the role of a collective supporting character of the film, points to the fundamental question about the status of the human species, about human/non-human polarity, through which we strive to order and judge the world. Savagery, bestiality, being alien to "human" customs – these were the attributes assigned to the tribes of Africa during the centuries of colonialism.

We describe the cruelty of genocide as "animal-like", and the dehumanisation of victims is the necessary condition for genocide to take place. This is what the Nazis did by comparing Jews to vermin, just like those individuals who killed their neighbors and friends in Rwanda. "Tutsi are like cockroaches. They have infested our homes. They eat our food, they drink our water" – such words, inciting to murder, were broadcast by the public radio in Rwanda. With images and sounds of Nature – viewed here through the lense of science, but presented as the mystery of creation – the filmmakers point to the fragility of a moral order based on the unquestioned pre-eminence of the human/non-human opposition. They make us view this distinction with suspicion.

There is no answer to the question "Why?" put by the film's protagonist to one of the people who murdered her family. Why does a person kill their neighbor, friend or a child? We do not know. The wound torn in the very tissue of the human community during a genocide is also made in the language, in culture, and in the religious order.

Artists wrestle with the task of restoring continuity. "Hatred is incurable", says the film's main character. And yet the entire project of *Birds Are Singing in Kigali* makes an attempt at healing. This healing takes place through expression, through narration, through the language whose meaning we have to learn anew, even though we lost the confidence in it long ago.

The Polish-African story becomes a mournful meditation and a metaphor for the inexpressible. Human language, tainted forever by hatred, gives in, at a symbolic level, to the voices of birds, so that they, instead of human beings, can relate the story of human evil.

KAZIMIERA SZCZUKA  
(literary historian and critic, journalist, feminist, social activist,  
co-founder of the Congress of Women in Poland)

## CREDITS

Original title: Ptaki śpiewają w Kigali  
English title: Birds Are Singing in Kigali  
Country of production: Poland  
Year of production: 2017  
Running time: 113'  
Sound: 5:1  
Color: color  
Subtitles: English  
Directors: Joanna Kos-Krauze, Krzysztof Krauze  
Screenplay: Joanna Kos-Krauze, Krzysztof Krauze  
Producer: Joanna Kos-Krauze  
Photography: Krzysztof Ptak (PSC), Józefina Gocman, Wojciech Staroń (PSC)  
Music: Paweł Szymański  
Editing: Katarzyna Leśniak  
Production Design: Claudine Murenzi, Agnieszka Zawadowska  
Sound: Radosław Ochnio, Filip Krzemień, Jarosław Bajdowski, Artur Kuczkowski, Zofia Moruś  
Costumes: Claudine Murenzi, Agnieszka Zawadowska  
Make-Up: Joel Echallier, Agnieszka Echallier, Joanna Bocheńska  
Line Producer: Aleksandra Bielska  
Cast:  
Anna Keller - Jowita Budnik  
Claudine Mugambira - Eliane Umuhire  
Witek - Witold Wieleński  
Jean Paul - Ciza Remy Muhirwa  
Sebastian - Herve Kimenyi Rutaremara  
Marie-Christne - Didacienne Nibagwire  
Falska - Anna Ilczuk  
Produced by: KOSFILM  
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