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Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur
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Cannes 2009 Exclusive: My Neighbor, My Killer Director Anne Aghion On Rwanda (Video)



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Coming to Cannes is usually a no-brainer for any film that gets invited. But for film-maker Anne Aghion, accepting an invitation to bring her documentary My Neighbor, My Killer was a genuine risk. For a decade, she has been documenting life in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide. Aghion has released a series of acclaimed documentaries that have been seen in Rwanda and around the world, focusing especially on the gacaca trials.

This film was set to debut in Rwanda as part of the 15th anniversary ceremonies marking the genocide. Then Cannes made its offer with the usual proviso that the film could not debut elsewhere. Aghion deliberated and regretfully chose to decline the honor of the initial Rwanda premiere in exchange for the chance the film had to be seen by the worldwide media and get its story out to a wider audience. And all this was done with the knowledge that -- Michael Moore notwithstanding -- documentaries, especially ones not in Competition, rarely get any attention at the festival.

That risk paid off. The film has received a lot of notice and strong across the board reviews, with Screen International calling it "remarkable," Hollywood Reporter describing it as "excellent," Newsweek saying it is "worth your time" (high praise at a festival loaded with hundreds if not thousands of movies), and the Los Angeles Times labeling it "quietly devastating."

The gacaca trials are an extraordinary event: people who watched their families get slaughtered are asked to confront the killers in the hope of some sort of reconciliation. The killers, in exchange for an admission of guilt, get a reduced sentence. (The accused invariably try to admit to as little as possible while the survivors fight despair and hopelessness just to find the strength to take part.) It's not forgiveness as such, perhaps, but just the ability to live in the same community. These

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hearings have been held all over Rwanda.

Aghion is invariably asked, "Do they work?" That won't be known for many years. But two things are clear: the example of the gacacas have been spread by Aghion's films and inspired other violence-wracked communities around the world to adapt them to their own needs. And more important than the question of whether the gacacas or indeed anything can bring a resolution to such a terrible event as the genocide is this fact about the process: it happened. The gacaca trials took place and that is remarkable in and of itself.

I spoke with Aghion in the midst of Cannes. The 30 minute interview is below broken into four sections. It was shot on a Flip Video and there was no lighting or makeup or extra mike for sound (which is low, but clear). She is facing the sun so that is a factor as well. Aghion was generous with her time and accepted the crude conditions for this filmed chat and I thank her.

Go to [the film's website](#) for more information.

Anne Aghion Interview Part One

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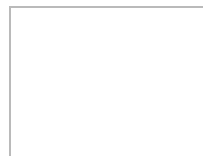
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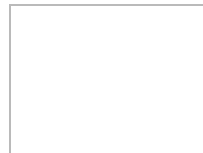
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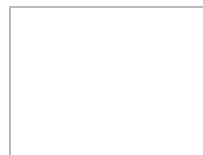
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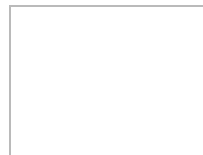
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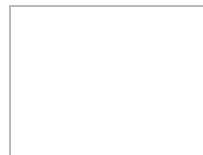
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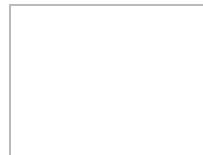
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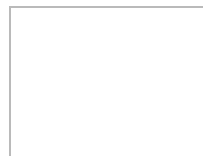
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It remains a quiet fest in the market and late at night but definitely exciting and vibrant when it comes to the new films screening in and out of Competition.



Karin Badt: Cannes 2009: The Underside of the Philippines
What I want to show in my film is the abuse of power; the police are like god. They can butcher people. I don't expect people to like the film, but I want them to think about it after they go to bed.



Karin Badt: Jane Campion's "Bright Star" Premieres at Cannes
Fanny lies alone on her bed with a white gauze curtain billowing, as her legs, slightly parted, tremble under her frock.

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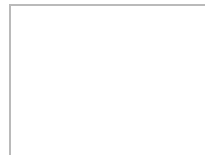
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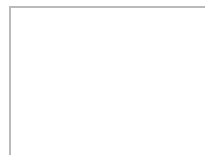
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