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Freek Bakker and Lucien van Liere (eds.)

Trauma, Memory and Religion

SCHÜREN

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In the first months after the *coup d'état* of September 30st, 1965 in Indonesia thousands of alleged communists were arrested on the charge of being involved in a movement aimed at toppling the government and the top of the army. Many of them were killed. This photograph shows the fear of many who were arrested.

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Trauma, Memory and Religion in Film

Editorial

On 29 October 2015, the Dutch research group *Moving Visions / Film and Religion* held a symposium entitled “Trauma, Memory and Religion in Film” at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. During this meeting, two films were screened and discussed: *THE ACT OF KILLING* (Joshua Oppenheimer, GB/DK/NO/ 2012) and *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* (Stefan Ruzowitzky, DE/AT 2013). The principal objective was to look for possible relationships between memory, trauma and religion in two completely different world regions, Indonesia and Europe, based on portrayals of these themes in the two films. These regions differ greatly not only in climate and landscape, but also in culture and religion. It seemed possible that by scrutinizing these differences we would encounter something universal, something common to all human beings. Yet we must be careful not to jump to conclusions. We hope this special issue will offer new analyses of, and thus new insight into, this topic.

During the preparation of this special issue we recognized that examination of Michael Haneke’s *DAS WEISSE BAND / THE WHITE RIBBON* (DE/AT/FR/IT 2009) would contribute to a comprehensive reflection on these themes. This volume therefore also presents an analysis of this film.

Before we introduce the articles to our readership, we provide a short reflection on what it means to screen trauma. We then take note of the approach followed by Haneke in his *The White Ribbon*, as it is different from the approaches employed in the other two films. Haneke’s movie does not explicitly deal with trauma. Our focus then turns to the role of religion in the three films discussed. Finally, we provide a short introduction to the four articles discussing these subjects.

SCREENING TRAUMA

How can we screen trauma? This question might lead the perception of documentary movies about atrocities in the 20th and 21st centuries, like *S21 THE KHMER ROUGE KILLING MACHINE* (Rithy Panh, CAMB/FR 2003) about Cambodia, *THE LOOK OF SILENCE* (Joshua Oppenheimer, ID/DK 2014) about Indonesia or *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* about Nazi-Europe. The first concern emerge as we watch mov-

ies on atrocities is whether these artistic representations perhaps guide the public away from what “really happened”. There certainly is a huge gap between, on the one hand, the immediate experience of the event that lies behind the interpretative screening and, on the other hand, watching the director’s material while neither part nor ever having been part of the event. Yet often filmic representations are not intended to show what happened; instead they present case studies to be explored in the present. Rity Panh, director of *S21*, argued in an interview with Joshua Oppenheimer, that if we can’t distinguish between perpetrator and victim, it becomes impossible to mourn.¹ For Panh, his film is more than historic interpretation or a perspective on memory; it poses the broad question of how we think about perpetrators and victims in multiple contexts. In *S21* Panh shows how in post-genocide Cambodia perpetrators are confronted by one of their victims. The question of *why* they acted as they did is swiftly transformed into a question of *how* they did so. The confrontation is set in Tuol Sleng, a former high school in Pnhom Penh where torture was carried out during the Khmer Rouge regime. In films like *S21*, *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* and *THE ACT OF KILLING*, one question continually resounds for the audience: Is this what we are as human beings? What appears on the screen therefore challenges the audience with a moral question: what would you do? It is this question, heard in the present, that makes movies like *S21*, *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* and *THE ACT OF KILLING* so immediate. In a way they look to confront a public that might already know the language of human rights. Breaking through established idioms by portraying perpetrators in specific situations, sometimes with the perpetrators playing themselves as in *S21* and *THE ACT OF KILLING*, seems a missionary purpose for these directors. Indeed, their movies are hardly about a past; they establish a critical link between past and present and break through the dichotomic simplicity of good guys and bad guys.

But the questions raised by the movies are hardly open questions. Often the movies contain an inherent critique of genocidal violence and present humanistic perspectives on obedience. Mostly, these movies underline the humanity of the victims, seeking to give names, faces and biographies so that they are much more than just numbers.

According to historian Richard Bessel, since the Second World War remembering violence has largely been about remembering the victims of violence. Central to the commemoration of acts of violence, he continues, is a sense of empathy, of identification with the victims.² This framing emphasizes a duality of innocent victim and evil, or at least ignorant, perpetrator. A new perspective has also unfolded, especially since Vietnam War veterans in the United States

1 Oppenheimer 2012, 255.

2 Bessel 2015, 244.

have been regarded, according to Derek Summerfield, “not as perpetrators and offenders but as people traumatized by roles thrust on them by the US military”.³ For Summerfield the recognition that traumatic war experiences could cause PTSD legitimized the victimhood of the soldier, and as a result, perpetrators too could identify as, and be seen as, victims.

VIOLENCE IN MOVIES

Can movies present violence? Where the goal of violence is often to claim retaliation, vengeance or power, the goal of movie-making is often to provide information, as in documentary films, or entertainment. Sometimes films play an important role in the construction of memory. The portrayal of the Second World War in films like *SCHINDLER’S LIST* (Steven Spielberg, USA 1993), *SOPHIE’S CHOICE* (Alan J. Pakula, USA 1983) or *SARA’S KEY* (Gilles Paquet-Brenner, USA 2010) has contributed significantly to the visual memories of post-war (American) generations. According to microsociologist Randall Collins, who has carried out extensive research into the escalation of violence in public spaces, violence is not committed easily. Contrary to the message given by entertainment movies that suggest that violence is somehow natural or uncomplicated, “real” violence is disturbing, fear arousing and destabilizing.⁴ We might wonder if cinematic violence has anything to do with real violence. Bessel has observed that contemporary commercial entertainment is saturated with staged violence, and he argues that there is a huge difference between a real death and a staged killing.⁵ Because many directors see their work as a form of “question” towards their public, the challenge for them is how to bridge the gap between a real death and a staged killing. In other words, the director, and the audience too, must consider how documentary movies like *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* or *THE LOOK OF SILENCE* can implicitly refer to real death by staging death.

TRAUMA CULTURE

Movies contribute to how a past is remembered in the present and to what past is remembered. Pictures, narratives and impressions all co-construct (popular) memory. In this sense, memory can also function as a strategy to “re-member” an individual into a group, with memory reshuffled, remodelled and re-accommodated in light of the discourses and material culture (pictures, movies, social media, buildings, places) of the present group to which the individual wishes to

3 Summerfield 2001, 95.

4 Collins 2008, 10–19.

5 Bessel 2015, 35.

belong. The social context in which we remember determines which elements in our narrative of re-membrance provide us with that recognition.⁶ Social recognition is an important element of remembrance. As Jan Assmann argues, the “wish to belong” is present in every memory.⁷ In this sense, to remember always serves the present. How do these memories then determine what we perceive as important elements of the past and how are these memories related to the topics formative for the groups we belong to? Making a film about the past is always about the present.

In 1978 Mark Snyder and Seymour W. Uranowitz published an article that addressed the memory of past events from a cognitive perspective. They argued that a person’s current beliefs reconstruct that person’s memory. Information is never fixed in a person’s memory but instead is repeatedly and actively reconstructed. We do not remember events, they suggested, “by activating or ‘replaying’ some fixed memory trace. Rather, we construct a schematic representation of our past experience by piecing together remembered bits and pieces with new facts that we (knowingly or unknowingly) supply to flesh out or augment our emerging knowledge of the past.”⁸ Conducting research with this thesis in mind, the authors witnessed how stereotypes provided after an event could nudge people to recall information that was predominantly consistent with that stereotype. Despite some criticism, the research was repeated by many others, and the evidence grew that people who after an event were given information that contained a stereotype about the event adapted their memories to the subsequently provided stereotype.⁹ Memory, so it seems, is modified by “current” information. Ap Dijksterhuis showed that an a posteriori stereotype renders the memory of information about an event inaccessible if the information contradicts the stereotype, but information that suits the stereotype is rendered accessible.¹⁰ Stereotypes have an impact on what we remember in that they ensure we selectively recollect information about events. Film-making deals with present stereotypes as current frames for a past that might have been discarded. However, whereas “entertainment” provides the simple stereotype duality of perpetrator and victim, often evoking feelings that vengeance is just, documentary movies like *S21*, *THE ACT OF KILLING* and *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* present a more complex characterization. Oppenheimer for example has explicitly argued in several interviews that for him *THE ACT OF KILLING* is about

6 As documented by the case of Binjamin Wilkomirski and his work *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood* (1996; German ed., 1995). In his book Wilkomirski depicted cruel events he had witnessed as a child during the Holocaust. After publication of the award-winning book, Wilkomirski’s memories were identified as invented. See Wilkomirski/Mächler 2001.

7 Assmann 2006, 4.

8 Snyder and Uranowitz 1978, 942.

9 Dijksterhuis 1996, 4–5.

10 Dijksterhuis 1996, 12.

the question of who we really are, an approach that avoids that stereotypical duality of perpetrator and victim.

There remains, however, a tension in how, what and why atrocities are remembered in a specific context, whether in films, literature or political, academic or religious discourse. Victims' memories of cruelty in contexts where this cruelty is not recognized as such but instead profiled as necessary or even glorified as heroic are often silenced or suppressed; they may deform memory and/or lead to traumatic disorders, as was the case for victims of the Cultural Revolution in the Chinese context, victims of the communist hunt in Indonesia during the reign of Suharto, and victims of the expulsion of Germans from the East in post-war Europe. Perpetrators' memories of cruelty in contexts where these perpetrators are deemed to have been on the wrong side of history can also lead to suppression, silencing and traumatic disorders. Being a victim in a context where narratives of victimization are dominant brings acknowledgment, and being a perpetrator in a context where narratives of heroism frame past atrocities can similarly generate social acknowledgement. Being a victim in a context where victimhood is not acknowledged or where victims are seen as having brought the persecution upon themselves can lead to silencing and to the suppression of memories. But in all cases, the context stipulates how victims and perpetrators remember what happened. What there is to tell depends on what has been told, believed and framed as part of cultural, political and religious representations and discursive traditions.

This tension between what is remembered and how the past is represented in political and cultural discourses comes strongly to the fore in *S21, THE ACT OF KILLING* and *THE LOOK OF SILENCE*. These movies can be understood as attempts to articulate certain trajectories of what Assmann calls "cultural memory". Assmann distinguishes between collective memory and cultural memory: where collective memory is related to the dominant view of a group on a past that it claims as its own past, cultural memory contains a chaotic archive of documents that are not necessarily so well remembered, with material that might be discarded, neglected or contested at the point where the group "remembers", as for example in the case of Dutch colonial history in Indonesia or conquest by settlers in North America. Assmann understands collective memory as bonding and cultural memory as containing also the non-instrumentizable, heretical, subversive and disowned.¹¹ Cultural memory involves, so to say, at the same time the uncanny of the past and the familiar, yet incongruous with the group's self-understanding. An interesting example of the difference between collective memory, as stipulation, and cultural memory is found in how the atrocities of 1965 and 1966 are "remembered" in Indonesia and how they are screened in Oppenheimer's movies *THE GLOBALIZATION TAPES*, *THE ACT OF KILLING* and *THE*

11 Assmann 2006, 27.

LOOK OF SILENCE. The killings are retold in the discursive style of collective memory but precisely this approach evokes the uncanny of cultural memory.

OTHER APPROACHES

In his film *THE WHITE RIBBON*, Michael Haneke has chosen to approach the origins of violence performed by Germans in the First and Second World Wars from a specific perspective. He takes his audience to a communal setting in the north of Germany on the eve of the First World War. His focus is on the generation of Germans who would “later” commit atrocities. He emphasizes childhood, for childhood is important, even decisive, for later behaviour. Haneke chose a village setting for his movie because at the start of the 20th century most Germans lived in villages. His film is in black and white, indicating that the narrative is about the past. He portrays the villagers of this period living in a hierarchical context in which some prominent citizens, such as the baron, minister, doctor and schoolteacher, set the course. The film shows a series of incidents, accidents and atrocities, cruel situations that seem to have been initiated by a group of village children, although who is in fact responsible remains unclear. Moreover, the initiators of the attacks go unpunished. That point is made even more strongly when, at the climactic moment, with one or two of his children under strong suspicion, the minister refrains from punishing them, even though he conducts a veritable reign of terror over his children. There is discipline, but at the same time there is disorder and injustice. The discipline claims to be just, yet injustice prevails, or more importantly even, insecurity dominates. Given the prominent role of the minister and his children, the church, or religion, is part of this system. In spite of the weekly sermons given by the minister, which are not screened, religion is not able to halt injustice in the village. Remarkably, the only sermon that is depicted is given by the baron. Is Haneke’s message that religion is powerless in the face of the atrocities of war? Or is the role of religion ambiguous? The film also poses another stimulating question: did the perpetrators subsequently act violently because of their earlier traumatic experiences, the traumas they had lived in their childhoods? Certainly, Haneke’s film is an interesting effort to understand perpetration as more than individual’s choice.

RELIGION

In all three films, the human experiences discussed in this special issue in some way relate to a religious worldview. *THE WHITE RIBBON* reflects a culture in which Protestantism prevails. In *THE ACT OF KILLING* we are confronted with a world in which the main protagonist is afraid of the ghosts of the dead. He asks if he has sinned, and he explicitly states that he fears the judgment of God at the end of

the world (02:03:11–02:05:12). In *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* religion is rather more in the background, but it is not completely absent. Although religion is not addressed directly, the unease and guilt the soldiers feel have religious connotations. Lutheranism, for example, is about guilt and about wrestling to be released from this guilt. Although religion is not always and everywhere present, these films and their analysis in the contributions to this volume certainly articulate religious trajectories.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

In the first article Lucien van Liere analyses *THE ACT OF KILLING*. In his examination he shows director Joshua Oppenheimer's individualistic approach to movie-making. Filmmaking is for Oppenheimer a therapeutic process, for he searches for answers to questions about humanness, responsibility and authenticity. Through this quest he hopes to encounter a deeper layer within human beings, a humanity that all humans have in common. But this approach has roots in a Western view of life and in what making a good movie requires. In the end van Liere considers whether Oppenheimer was in fact successful with this approach.

The second article, by Hessel Zondag, interrogates the approach used in *THE ACT OF KILLING* and *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE*. The former film is about trauma, the latter about conformity. These perspectives are applied to the actions of the perpetrators and reveal what occurs before the killing and what the consequences of that killing are. They claim to elucidate what changes men into mass murderers and what their participation in mass killing can mean for the rest of their lives. Yet these perspectives also conceal certain crucial issues.

Gerwin van der Pol is the author of the third contribution, the article about *THE WHITE RIBBON*. He seeks to show that Haneke tried to put his finger on the motives of people who committed atrocities in the Second World War by going back to the situation and society of their youth. In this earlier context, too, atrocities happened. How did the adults, in particular, deal with such barbarism? And what role did religion play in these circumstances?

In the fourth article, Freek L. Bakker compares *THE ACT OF KILLING* and *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* by means of close reading and analysis of what is shown in these two movies, in particular when women and children are involved. The regional, religious, political and military contexts of the two films differ widely, yet in both instances the perpetrators buckle when women and children are victims of their actions. How can we explain what is happening here? Through analysis that draws on the thought of Zygmunt Bauman and Emmanuel Levinas, Bakker seeks deeper insight into what takes place in these films, and perhaps also in the real world.

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The Banality of Ghosts

Searching for Humanity with Joshua Oppenheimer in THE ACT OF KILLING

ABSTRACT

In *THE ACT OF KILLING* (Joshua Oppenheimer, GB/DK/NO/ 2012), Joshua Oppenheimer searches for humanity by assessing the rituals, routines and words of former perpetrators who participated in the 1965/66 genocide in Medan, Indonesia. This article puts *THE ACT OF KILLING* in the context of Oppenheimer's writings on film and violence and explores how his film negotiates humanity by working with a missionary paradigm of expressive guilt that serves not only the director but also a critical audience to give a happy ending.

KEYWORDS

Perpetrators, re-enactment, Indonesian genocide 1965/66, Joshua Oppenheimer, ghosts, archaeological performance

BIOGRAPHY

Lucien van Liere is Associate Professor at Utrecht University, where he teaches religious studies in the Faculty of Humanities. His academic work explores the relationship between religion, representation and violence. He has published on subjects ranging from the Ambon civil war to the place of Islam in secular politics and the future of religious studies.

PRELUDE AND QUESTION

For Joshua Oppenheimer cinema is a means and an object of research.¹ Movie-making, he asserts, can be understood as a research tool and a research method. In his movie *THE ACT OF KILLING*, which is about the perpetrators of the mass

1 Oppenheimer 2009.

killings in Indonesia in 1965/66, the filmmaker becomes a therapeutic researcher looking for answers to questions about humanity, responsibility and authenticity. Through his encouragement of former killers to make a movie about the Indonesian purges, the protagonists become mediators of their own truths, with Oppenheimer, and behind him a global public, as moral researchers.

For Oppenheimer, the movie addresses a general issue about what happens if killers are not convicted, when a state of “impunity” – a term he repeatedly mentions – suggests the killings were justified and subjects collective memory to a strategy of forgetting. What Oppenheimer expects to see and hear (his amazement about what happened in Indonesia), what he wishes former killers to express (regret, confrontation) and how he understands the link between a violent past and an adjured present expressed in the gestures, rituals and routines of his protagonists form a soteriological perspective on humanity.

My object of study is *THE ACT OF KILLING*, along with Oppenheimer’s effort to restore the humanity of the killers through re-enactment and confrontation. I will argue that Oppenheimer believes in a humanity that reveals itself in revulsion at killing. This belief not only leads to the decision to follow former death-squad leader Anwar Congo on his way to “regret”, but also opens up the missionary plot of the movie. The director sees the absent victims still present as “ghosts”, haunting through the silence, grammar and routines of the killers. The unease created by their presence leads Congo to a “conversion” in front of the camera. For Oppenheimer, an act of killing seems to be a violation of the sacredness of human life. Such an act demands remorse. The discovery of humanity in *THE ACT OF KILLING* is related to this conversion of Congo. The other killers, however, like Adi Zulkadry, do not show any remorse in the film. In following Congo, a clear decision seems to have been made, reflecting a missionary trajectory that leads to an expression of regret as a confession of guilt. Impressive gangster Koto and intellectual former killer Zulkadry drop out of the movie towards the end. Oppenheimer’s film circulates around representations of the banality of killing with impunity and concludes with the conversion of the sinner as an answer to historical pessimism.

CONCISE HISTORIC TABLEUX

Although Oppenheimer chooses to neglect the historical frame within which the killings happened and the creation of the killers’ impunity (covered in only a few lines at the beginning of the film), a snapshot of the historical background can explain the atrocity-silencing situation in which Oppenheimer found his subjects. The absence of a clear historical context lives up to one of the goals of the movie, namely to understand these killings not only in light of Indonesian politics in particular, but also as a wide-ranging reflection on human nature in general.

During the night of 30 September/1 October 1965, soldiers belonging to the Tjakrabirawa Regiment, Sukarno's elite guards in Jakarta, staged a military coup.² The putschists took control of the national radio and announced they had prevented a coup against the president. That night six generals were taken from their homes and executed. Other departments within the military under the leadership of General Suharto, relatively unknown at the time, quickly gained control of the city and the radio waves. The coup is generally referred to as the *Gerakan 30 September* (The 30 September Movement, or the G30S).

Because of the chaos in the days immediately following the coup, the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI – Communist Party of Indonesia) had trouble choosing sides, and partly as a result of the clumsy response of the PKI, the central committee of the party was blamed for orchestrating the coup. In the years before the coup, the PKI had been a vociferous presence in Indonesian public space and its growing political influence over President Sukarno had been viewed with distrust. A number of influential generals in the Indonesian military had seen the PKI as a real political threat. In parts of the country (East Java, for example) where a strong PKI had clashed with local leaders and landlords over land reform, tension involving branches of the PKI was tangible. The PKI proved too reluctant to condemn the coup, with some regional PKI departments even openly supporting the takeover and seizing control locally.

When the communist newspaper *Harian Rakjat* published a cartoon in favour of the coup, many anti-communists took their chance and blamed the whole party.³ Rumours about the sexual torture of generals carried out by *Gerwani*, the women's organisation allied to the PKI, spread rapidly. A massive anti-communist hate campaign was launched and was enthusiastically received, especially by Indonesia's many religious youth groups like ANSOR, the youth organisation of the Muslim Nahdlatul Ulama on East Java and the Pemuda Pancasila, a nationalist movement in North Sumatra, where Oppenheimer would find his killers forty years later.⁴ A ban on communist news media followed, while the population was whipped up against communists and communist sympathisers. As rumours proliferated, tension increased. Communists were depicted as malevolent.⁵

Many people participated in the mass killings that followed, as perpetrators, bystanders and accusers. With the military as facilitators, the killings were predominantly carried out by civilians who were members of youth groups and paramilitary groups. The vehemence of the victorious killers correlated with the paralysis of their many victims in an example of the process described by Randall Collins

2 Anderson 2012, 270.

3 Hughes 1967, 77.

4 Anderson 2012, 273.

5 See Collins 2008, 118.

as “asymmetrical entrainment”.⁶ Its use of civilians as killers was viewed as one of the main successes of the early New Order regime. General Sarwo Edhi, who was responsible for “pacifying” Central and Eastern Java, explained: “We decided to encourage the anti-communist civilians to help with the job. In Solo we gathered the youth, the nationalist groups, the religious organizations. We gave them two or three days’ training, then sent them out to kill the Communists.”⁷ Hughes noted hardly a year after the killings that these civilians had killed with “fanatical relish”.⁸

Estimates of the number of people killed varies between 300,000 and 2 million.⁹ After the genocide, communism was portrayed as a great threat to Muslim, Hindu and Christian communities, taking up the atheist feature of classic communism that had never characterised the PKI. Tales of black lists found in communist homes circulated and continued to inflame anti-communist sentiment long after the genocide.

SILENCE

During and after the atrocities, the government organised systematic discrimination against family members, with the children of murdered or imprisoned PKI members excluded from schooling. In this way the next generation was discouraged from writing about the genocide, a strategy manifest in THE ACT OF KILLING (see figure 1). “Communist” became a term of abuse and being a communist was officially prohibited. The government set the terms by which the atrocities were to be remembered by emphasising that the killings had prevented a genocide of the Indonesian population being carried out by the communists. With many people having had a role in the killings, as perpetrators or bystanders, few people in Indonesia were prepared to raise their voices in favour of the victims. The genocide took place at the height of the Cold War, which explains the lack of international pressure. Other than China, countries were reluctant to take the side of the Indonesian communists.¹⁰ Mass graves were many and became uncanny, haunted places.¹¹

PENGGHIANATAN G30S/PKI

To model collective memory around the atrocities, Suharto’s New Order regime sponsored a movie about the killings. In 1984, PENGGHIANATAN G30S/PKI

6 Collins 2008, 103.

7 Hughes 1967, 151.

8 Hughes 1967, 151; see Collins 2008, 119.

9 Cribb 1990, 12.

10 Mehr 2009.

11 See Sukanta 2014, 24.

(TREACHERY OF G30S/PKI, Arifin C. Noer, ID 1984) was screened in Indonesian cinemas. The movie was a docudrama that became obligatorily educational material for primary and secondary schools and was understood as the central bonding narrative of New Order Indonesia. A clear effort to establish a collective memory, the movie contained ghastly portrayals of the communists as evil, sadistic and sexist torturers, while Suharto was depicted as a calm and strong leader. In *THE ACT OF KILLING*, Congo recalls that the movie was indeed obligatory viewing and was traumatic for younger children. Yet although he realises the movie was made to demonise the communists, he makes clear that it felt somehow good to have killed the horrid people in the movie.¹² Even for a killer like Congo, the movie seems to have distorted memories of the atrocities.

The regime was very successful in its efforts to construct a collective memory about the G30S. A few years into the post-New Order era (Suharto “stepped down” in May 1998), *Tempo Magazine* conducted a poll of 1,101 secondary school students in Indonesia’s bigger cities. To the question of where they had learned about the G30S, 90 per cent responded “film”.¹³ For many, the film had been the primal gate to knowledge about the G30S. The movie shows blood flowing from the heroic generals. Oppenheimer and Michael Uwemedimo analysed the film in an article in which they explored the meaning of the extreme violence: “The film graphically demonstrates the way in which New Order history at once conjures the PKI as a spectral power and condenses that power in spectacular images of violence, so as to claim that power for the shadowy techniques of state terror. The spectral subsists in the spectacle.”¹⁴ Indeed, the generals depicted as victims in *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* mimic the alleged communist victims of the G30S. Congo remembers his killings in light of the film, and claims that he went much further with his victims than is shown in the movie.¹⁵ There is, however, no hint at the mass killings, which makes the blood in the film a twisted reference to the killing machines. The victims of G30S remain unnamed, but – as Oppenheimer and Uwemedimo rightfully observe – the massacres haunt the movie. The film, they assert, “exists almost wholly to justify the massacres and the regime founded upon them”.¹⁶

With collective memory intended as bonding memory, the narrative of the communist threat linked Indonesians to their past. General Suharto and his response to the imminent threat became the foundational myth of the nation. Being anti-communist meant being a good Muslim or good Christian, with the

12 Cf. scene 00:37:25 in *THE ACT OF KILLING* (Joshua Oppenheimer, GB/DK/NO/ 2012, dir. cut).

13 Heryanto 2012, 225.

14 Oppenheimer/Uwemedimo 2012, 290.

15 Cf. scene 00:37:30 in *THE ACT OF KILLING* (Joshua Oppenheimer, GB/DK/NO/ 2012, dir. cut).

16 Oppenheimer/Uwemedimo 2012, 290.

communists depicted as atheists. Only since Suharto stepped down have careful efforts been made to understand what happened at academic,¹⁷ artistic¹⁸ and social¹⁹ levels.

SCREENING THE GENOCIDE IN THE POST-SUHARTO ERA

In post-1965 movies, allusions to the atrocities are rare, even absent. Narratives that ran counter to PENGKHIANATAN G30S/PKI were dangerous to tell. Since the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998, however, the atrocities have been themes in some Indonesian drama-movies and documentaries. Some of these films narrate stories that are carefully situated against the background of the 1965 coup and the subsequent purge, but without addressing the mass killings directly.

GIE (Riri Riza, ID 2005) follows Soe Hok Gie, an independent and critical student. The PKI is represented by Gie's friend Tan, who is seduced by the party not knowing what awaits him. Although Gie urges his friend to relinquish his ties with the PKI, Tan does not listen. Another example is the intense movie PUISI TAK TERKUBURKAN (UNBURIED POETRY; released in English as A POET: UNCONCEALED POETRY, Garin Nugroho, ID 2000). The film was nominated for the Silver Screen Award for Best Asian Feature Film and won the Silver Leopard Video Award in the year 2000 at the Locarno International Film Festival. This movie shows the experience of Ibrahim Kadir, played by Kadir himself, as a prisoner falsely accused of being a communist. His fellow inmates are communists who are executed one by one. The movie is a tense way of witnessing and – in the end – challenging the violence of the New Order regime.

Other undertakings are the work of Putu Oka Sukanta from the *Lembaga Kreativitas Kemanusiaan* (Organisation for Human Creativity, LKK). Sukanta, who was imprisoned on account of his membership of an organisation allied to the PKI, has made an enormous effort to give the victims of the G30S and their children a voice, but, as Ariel Heryanto observes, the films made by the LKK have had limited impact owing to their subject matter, the people in the movie (most are elderly) and the style of delivery.²⁰ Among the very small number of movies addressing the violence directly are PUTIH ABU-ABU: MASA LALU PEREMPUAN (GREY WHITE: WOMEN'S PAST, Syarikat, ID 2006) and the documentary movie MASS GRAVE (Lexy Rambadeta, ID 2002). The former film was made by secondary-school students and contains six short movies of interviews with

17 Luhulima 2006; Ling 2010; see also: Hughes 2002; Roosa 2006.

18 Latief 2000.

19 Anderson 2012, 274.

20 Heryanto 2012, 228.

people opining about the G30S.²¹ Heryanto notes that the movie was produced by Syarikat, a Yogyakarta-based NGO related to the Nahdlatul Ulama. Because Nahdlatul Ulama organisations participated in the killings, this production can be seen as “one of the first initiatives by the Muslim communities with culpability in the 1965–66 killings to foster reconciliation”, Heryanto writes.²² MASS GRAVE is one of the first documentary movies on the G30S to include original material and footage of strong anti-communist sentiments.²³ The movie contains interviews with victims, survivors and witnesses and shows how the reburial of relatives killed during the purge meets resistance from local Muslim organisations in Temanggung. Most of these movies challenge the violence itself, but not the powers that drove the purges nor the people that took up, in some regions so enthusiastically, the acts of killing.

WORKING TOWARDS THE FILM

With a large anonymous Indonesian crew and docu-masters Werner Herzog²⁴ and Errol Morris²⁵ as its executive producers, *THE ACT OF KILLING* is an effort to make suffering visible through the boastful memories of killers who were active during the Indonesian genocide of 1965/66 in Medan. The film shows former killers challenged to make a movie about how they killed their victims. With the re-enactment set in a context of impunity the movie shows how the gentle-going protagonist Anwar Congo is confronted by his memory through role-play. Two years later, Oppenheimer made a follow-up film, *THE LOOK OF SILENCE* (Joshua Oppenheimer, ID/DK 2014), about victims confronting the killers of their families while these killers are still in power. For this later movie, Oppenheimer followed Adi Rukun, an optometrist who confronts the men who killed his brother. Both films provoke their audiences with the uncanny or, using Oppenheimer’s term, with the “ghosts” of history.

THE ACT OF KILLING is not Oppenheimer’s first project on the Indonesian genocide of 1965/66. In 2003 together with Christine Cynn he produced *THE GLOBALIZATION TAPES* (ID 2003), directed with a large local crew. Part of the film was shot at a plantation on Sumatra by the plantation workers themselves. The movie portrays the lines between world capital on the one hand and inhuman sacrifices made by workers on the other, but a second interpretative trajectory considers the local history of the G30S and its aftermath, with former killer Shar-

21 Heryanto 2014, 96.

22 Heryanto 2012, 229.

23 Heryanto 2014, 102–103.

24 Cf. *FROM ONE SECOND TO THE NEXT* (Werner Herzog, USA 2016); *LO AND BEHOLD: REVERIES OF THE CONNECTED WORLD* (Werner Herzog, USA 2013).

25 Cf. *THE FOG OF WAR* (Errol Morris, USA 2003).

man Sinaga and with workers discussing what happened and why. At one point the camera's focus is on Sinaga as he recounts how he tortured people while his wife laughs and encourages him in the background. Sinaga enthusiastically boasts about how he killed, narrating grisly details while the camera moves to a young girl (Sinaga's granddaughter?) sitting at the table. In a close-up, the girl looks back, somewhat shocked or amazed (00:25:52) and while the suggestion is made that her amazement might be because of Sinaga's horrific story, the girl is looking straight into the camera, which might be the reason for her surprised face. The producers seem to have been seeking to contrast the killing narrative of Sinaga and the innocence of a subsequent generation that has grown up with the G30S genocide normalised. The discussions of the workers, who share a local context with Sinaga and killers like him – they are probably referring to Sinaga when they speak about “the old man” – focus less on Sinaga's crimes than on the causes of the killings: the massacre was because of businessmen, they recall (00:25:36), and the killer Sinaga is obviously not a businessman.

METHODOLOGY

In 2004 Oppenheimer defended his PhD thesis at the University of the Arts London.²⁶ His thesis shows a fascination similar that which lies behind *THE ACT OF KILLING*. Based on interviews he conducted in Indonesia, his thesis comprises more than 100 hours of video. These interviews contain “revelatory primary research” into the Indonesian genocide, the author claims.²⁷ Oppenheimer describes his project as a new model for film-making which he terms “archaeological performance”. With this approach, he desires to go “beyond” the more interview-based approaches of works such as *SHOAH* (Claude Lanzmann, FR 1985) or *HÔTEL TERMINUS: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF KLAUS BARBIE* (Marcel Ophüls, BRD/FR/USA 1988). Archaeological performance covers a form of movie-making in which a buried historical event is restaged with historical actors. Oppenheimer recorded, “this method opens a process of simultaneous *historical excavation* (working down through strata), and *histrionic reconstruction* (adding layers of stylised performance and recounting). An ‘archaeological performance’ entails successively working with, and working through, the gestures, routines, and rituals that were the motor of the massacres.”²⁸

This description of archaeological performance has a focus on gestures, routines and rituals related to the killings. In Oppenheimer's description, the method works “with” and “through” these phenomena, as if the filmmaker is

26 Oppenheimer 2004.

27 Oppenheimer 2004, 5; 10.

28 Oppenheimer 2004, 79.

digging into discursive memories and revealing a past hidden in the present. Archaeological performance assumes that memories have historical layers. Oppenheimer wants to “work down” through these layers by “working up” what he calls “histrionic stagings”. This method of working down and up at the same time can lead to the deconstruction of “scripts, clichés and generic codes that inflect the historical performances being excavated”.²⁹ Everyday language is insufficient to express this movement up and down, to reveal the subject’s link to the past. With the killers still in power, victims, survivors and killers speak about what happened in a fashioned language that reveals the modalities of the dominant power structures. In footage on the killings near Snake River in North Sumatra, two former killers speak about the murders as routine. In an article on this material published in 2012, Oppenheimer and Uwemedimo observe sharply that these killers, Amir Hasan Nasution and Inong Syah, explained the routine of the killings, not particular killings: “Even the performances that seem most graphic appear not to be rendered as singular explications of specific events, but rather ... as rehearsal of genres whose register is the graphic”.³⁰ It is as if the many victims have imploded into a single ritual routine. Oppenheimer’s work wants to break through this routine. By “deconstructing” gestures and language, this “method” breaks through this singular mode of talking about the killings by making them more visible. Filmmaking is thus a method of research while at the same time an object of research.

THE IDIOM OF GHOSTS

Oppenheimer walks a speculative path in adapting a language of spectres, ghosts and powers. This is, he claims, the language with which the participants in the movie articulate the archaeological performance of their history in the interviews:

In the villages of Serdang-Bedagai Regency where the films are being made, extermination and the dead are inevitably thought through the idiom of ghosts, and explored through spirit possession (*kemasukkan*) and the calling of ghosts through a spirit medium (*panggil roh*). The prominence of spectrality and ghosts, as discursive register, evidences the hold exerted by the dead on the speech of the living. The language of ghosts figures the spectral not merely as a discursive construction but as a populated realm, and it is precisely this fact that allows us, in this writing, to trace the interaction between the massacres as spectre, on the one hand, and the quotidian, on the other; between *spectral forces* and actual force.³¹

29 Oppenheimer 2004, 244.

30 Oppenheimer/Uwemedimo 2012, 293 [italicized in original text].

31 Oppenheimer 2004, 46.

In a contradictory sense, because they were killed the dead are not dead. In Oppenheimer's view, the ghosts create relationships, not entities, that pop up in the discursive registers of the killers. But while for Oppenheimer these ghosts haunt through these discursive registers, for many Indonesians these ghosts are as real as the space they inhabit and they cause fear. "Haunted grounds" related to the G30S can be found all over Java, Bali and parts of Sumatra. People still consider these places haunted. In a collection of victim and perpetrator narratives, Sukanta writes, "Many people do not dare to plant things on these grounds. Sometimes people living nearby hear screams in the middle of the night in these places".³²

The link between past and present is mediated by the relationship with ghosts. In *THE ACT OF KILLING*, Zulkadry does not doubt the ghostly existence of the murdered communists (*sekarang yang tinggal roh* – what is left of them are ghosts).³³ Oppenheimer takes up this language about ghosts as revelatory and as related to the missing community. He notes that *dukuns* are afraid of communicating with the ghosts of the 1965/66 victims.³⁴ These ghosts have become hungry as a result of the attitude of Suharto's New Order regime that requires that the dead are not mentioned and not given names, that no reference is made to the killings and that the children of communists are not allowed to learn to read and write. Hence the deep fear, even among the younger generation, of a resurgence by the communists.³⁵

While Oppenheimer was working on his PhD project, in April 2004 world media covered the Abu Ghraib affair. In the "Director's Statement" of *THE ACT OF KILLING*, he reports being confronted by the photos of Abu Ghraib. He was struck by pictures of American soldiers smiling at the photographer while posing before their humiliated victims, with smiles on their faces and giving a thumbs-up, as if expecting approval from the (American?) public. Oppenheimer writes that the most unsettling thing about these pictures is "not the violence they document, but rather what they suggest to us about how their participants wanted, in that moment, to be seen. And how they thought, in that moment, they would want to remember".³⁶ In an interview with Henry Barnes on the impact of *THE ACT OF KILLING* in the United States, Oppenheimer notes about Abu Ghraib: "I made this film in pace with this evolving nightmare in the US in which torture was being not just condoned, but celebrated."³⁷ What Oppenheimer wants to show using the metaphor of ghosts is not limited to the Indonesian context but draws upon social and political consequences of indifference towards acts of violence.

32 Sukanta 2014, 24.

33 Cf. scene 00:48:22 in *THE ACT OF KILLING* (Joshua Oppenheimer, GB/DK/NO/ 2012, dir. cut).

34 Oppenheimer 2004, 119.

35 Heryanto 2012, 225.

36 Oppenheimer, Director's Statement.

37 Barnes 2013b.

THE ACT OF KILLING is set in Medan, a highly multi-ethnic Indonesian city in North Sumatra.³⁸ The film follows a group of “preman”, or free men, around former death squad leader Anwar Congo. Back in the 1960s, these men were fans of Marlon Brando, John Wayne and other American movie stars. They saw themselves as cowboys, selling and reselling cinema tickets. In Medan, this group was deeply involved in the killings of thousands of “communists”, as they claim them to have been, and Chinese. The film does not provide information or tell stories but challenges the perpetrators to re-enact the killings they performed while Oppenheimer is behind the camera. The result is, in Oppenheimer’s words, a “non-fiction fever dream”.³⁹

The film director was initially struck primarily by the boasting of these killers. He recalls filming in 2004 former death-squad leaders who demonstrated to him how in less than three months their squads had slaughtered more than 10,000 people in a clearing by a river. That experience inspired him to try to understand such bragging and how it was related to impunity. In Oppenheimer’s own words, quoted in the *New York Times*, “Here are human beings, like us, boasting about atrocities that should be unimaginable.”⁴⁰

For Oppenheimer, and for many people watching his work on the G30S, this boasting appears as a strange ritual of exorcism. In THE ACT OF KILLING Oppenheimer searches for moments when ghostly apparitions are articulated non-discursively. To find these moments, he focuses on “symptoms”, so on shivering, uneasiness, angeriness, loud voices, laughter and silences. For him, symptoms are “telling”. He understands his role as a cinéaste as similar to that of a midwife, as he explores “how to massage reality so that it gives birth to those metaphors that are immanent in it”.⁴¹ His perspective is, however, more similar to that of a priest, as I will show in my analysis of Scene Three below. Moments and symptoms hidden in these metaphors make visible how people cope with the “good” killing of “bad” people, as the Suharto New Order regime has portrayed this history for decades. The boasting of the cocky killers is such a symptom. Boasting, Oppenheimer claims, is a means of hiding. It means “desperately running away from the guilt”, he told *kunstundfilm.de* during an interview.⁴² Silence in the movie is another symptom, especially present in the director’s cut. These moments of silence, Oppenheimer assumes, are “haunted landscape shots”. The absent victim seems to appear in the silence, as if this victim “haunts every frame of the film”. This haunting becomes tangible in portrayals of the dead who are continually addressed, as cut-off heads, bleeding victims or happy mur-

38 Anderson 2012, 274–279.

39 Louisiana Channel.

40 Rochter 2013.

41 Louisiana Channel.

42 Barnes 2017, *kunstundfilm.de*.



Fig. 1: Suryono telling his story. THE ACT OF KILLING (Joshua Oppenheimer, GB/DK/NO 2012), 00:55:28 director's cut.

dered communists in the hereafter. While victims are present in silence or as the haunting frame, in Scene One, discussed below, a victim speaks and appears in the midst of the boastful killers.

I will not discuss the plot of the film but instead have selected three scenes in which the ghosts become tensely sensible.

SCENE 1: SURYONO'S STORY

When the killers are asked to “show” how they interrogated, martyred and murdered communist suspects, they discuss how they are going to perform those acts. “It must be exactly as we have done it”, one person says. Then comes Suryono’s story (00:49:11–00:52:45).⁴³ Suryono is one of the “neighbours” helping on the film and earlier we saw him playing a harsh interrogator. Suryono’s narrative is interesting because it is a clear effort to break through the routine of abstract killing and demonstrates how artefacts of memory are reburied once they have gone “up” through performance and gesture.

Suryono tells about a time when he was 11 or 12 years old. He woke to a knock on the door in the middle of the night, which his stepfather answered. The only thing Suryono remembers is hearing his stepfather screaming for help (*tolong!*). His terrified family did not dare to go to the door. The next morning he found his stepfather killed and cut up, crammed in an oil drum. Together with his grandfather, the boy took the man’s body to the roadside and buried him “like a goat” (*seperti kambing*). “Nobody dared to help us”, Suryono recalls. He goes on to tell how his family was forced to move to a slum because of their communist “contagion” and how he never was allowed to learn to read and write.

Suryono tells this story to people who had murdered hundreds of individuals like his stepfather without legal consequence. Hearing him narrate the events

43 See van Liere 2015, 116–117.

surrounding his stepfather's murder and watching the gestures of his body, it seems as if he is telling a good joke. He makes fun of the strange looking limbs of his tortured and murdered stepfather, laughing continually. Suryono wants his story to be told, even played, and hastens to add, "This is no critique". The killers listen patiently and after he has finished his story, they argue that the movie cannot contain every story: "Everything is planned already, there is no room for all the stories, the movie would take an eternity" (00:51:43). The only way for Suryono to tell his story is not by claiming victimhood, but – on the contrary – by making fun of the victims, by telling the suppressed narrative of violence in the modus of a joke. The ghost who has been conjured up is swiftly expelled. When Suryono participates in a role-play a few minutes later, in which he plays a communist who is to be strangled by an iron wire, he can no longer speak. The discursive routine is broken, not even the language of the joke remains, and Suryono seems to be overcome by an intense grief.

SCENE 2: KILLING A DOLL

The ghosts seem to jump out of the screen in a scene where Anwar Congo is shown stabbing a doll. The doll represents a baby offered to him in his role as killer by Herman Koto (02:12:20), one of his accomplices in 1965, who plays a mother begging for her life. The doll is nonchalantly but effectively cut by Congo, who routinely puts his knife several times into the doll while calmly smoking a cigarette. The scene, published as a director's cut and not shown in the cinema version, is harsh. The doll is "just" a doll, but for Oppenheimer the doll is possessed. Now the ghosts disturb not the killers, but the director himself. He refers to this scene as "filthy, tainted, a tsunami of shit"⁴⁴ and recalls having a terrible evening after shooting it and the nightmares that followed over the



Fig. 2: Anwar Congo "killing" the doll. THE ACT OF KILLING (Joshua Oppenheimer, GB/DK/NO 2012), 02:12:20 director's cut.

44 Louisiana Channel.

next eight months. This scene comes very close to what he has identified as the routines of violence that made the massacres possible, the routines through which the ghosts become visible for the director.

SCENE 3: OPPENHEIMER AS A PRIEST

As noted, Oppenheimer understands his method of filmmaking as archaeological performance, for he scrutinises the gestures, routines and rituals that were the motor of the massacre as well as the language and genres of its historical account. For this project, designed to make the violence visible in uncanny, ghostly layers, Oppenheimer's function as man behind the camera is decisive. In the last scene I will discuss, Oppenheimer adopts the role of "priest" when his main character, Congo, pulls him invisibly into the movie. Oppenheimer is a conundrum, Benedict Anderson writes.⁴⁵ But even as a conundrum, through his "intervention" he leads the movie to a finale in which the ghosts seem to be exorcised from Congo's body, allowing the public to breathe again. In the end, a humanity does remain.

The scene starts when Congo plays a victim. This role reversal seems to be too much for him. ("I can't do it" 01:39:40). Watching a scene played by himself a few minutes later in the film, Congo shows a moment of empathy for his victims. He asks Oppenheimer whether he has "sinned" (*dosa*). By taking up a ritualised role as victim in his own movie, he could feel, he claimed, what his victims had gone through. At this point the filmmaker intervenes to distinguish sharply between what Congo feels and what his victims felt: they knew that they were going to die, Oppenheimer argues. However, Congo does not seem convinced. The scene breaks through the spectral power of the communist framing and throws light on a point of shared humanity in fear. In the words of Larry Rochter in the *New York Times*: "eventually, though, the re-enactments appear to lead Mr. Congo to some sort of remorse and moral awakening".⁴⁶

Soon after, at the end of the movie, much time is given to showing Congo vomiting. This scene has drawn much discussion. Robert Cribb, for example, notes that it seems staged.⁴⁷ Indeed, Congo does appear to fake his actions. Yet this does not make the scene less powerful within the film's soteriological plot. On the contrary, this scene enters a domain beyond the grand narrative of the state, a locus where ghosts appear and violence is remembered – the body. Frankfurt philosopher Theodor W. Adorno has written about the recognisability of humanity under totalitarianism. In a speculative effort to save humanity from

45 Anderson 2012, 284.

46 Rochter 2013.

47 Cribb 2012.

erasure by totalitarian jargon (useful/not useful, worthy/unworthy etc.), he points to bodily responses (shivering, repulsion) to its violence, which he calls “das Hinzutretende” (addendum).⁴⁸ They form a non-rational addendum to total rational control. Violence may be justified, legitimised, denied, celebrated or glorified, but these discourses cannot prevent the body from responding. For Adorno, this response is an a-rational and almost Messianic sign of a truly free humanity, which through a “natural” modus resists violent categorical identifications. Despite Congo’s justification and proud acknowledgement of his role in the killings, the ghosts that have been fanatically denied reappear in his dreams and finally find a physical way out. The fever dream ends in a disgusting scene at a former killing site (*kantor darah*, or blood office, as Congo calls it). Congo has stated at the beginning of the film that this place is inhabited by “many ghosts”.

The “some sort of remorse and moral awakening” that Rochter identifies makes the film more acceptable. The public has been waiting for such recognition of guilt, and despite its significance, this makes the message of the film less powerful. This moment of implicit conversion finally exposes Congo as the vulnerable grandfather in ways that the audience can relate to. But this scene, with a trajectory for Congo that is not shared by the other killers who feature in the film, leads away from Oppenheimer’s initial intent to show the impact of impunity. It is, however, in line with the profound humanity that Congo assumes, evident in his vomiting, a physical expression of the collision of his impunity and his humanity. He has been found guilty, but not by the legal courts but by something within himself that breaks through the powerful categorisations of the New Order regime. The other killers, by contrast, continue to reside in their ghost-filled banality. Their strategies of adjuration will never allow these ghosts to haunt. This “happy ending” makes the movie powerful for a Western public which has seen their Nazis convicted, but less powerful for an Indonesian public that still awaits reparation by the state.⁴⁹

FINALLY UNCOVERING HUMANITY

THE ACT OF KILLING is not about the G30S. Facts and details are missing, as are victims other than Suryono. Because such information for the specific case of the G30S is lacking, the movie reaches more general concerns about human violence. Although analyses of violence suggest it is an exception and normally hard to perform and left uncelebrated,⁵⁰ we have many instances of routinised violence, remorseless killers and readiness to adapt categories of power. The

48 Adorno 1966, 226.

49 Bjerregaard 2014.

50 Collins 2008.

killers filmed by Oppenheimer on Sumatra are only one such example. *THE ACT OF KILLING* is about how people live with themselves in the face of atrocities, how they deal with their pasts in the present and how they tell themselves stories about who, how and what they are. In this sense *THE ACT OF KILLING* explores memory, seeking access not to the atrocities themselves but to how people relate to a violent past in a present that will not hear accusations based on moral condemnation. The film searches for an existential framework that allows mass killings to be condemned even in a political context that denies moral or legal evaluation. This search by the movie prompts a religious-humanistic, anti-nihilistic, almost Messianic approach. The traces of humanity Oppenheimer looks for tie together European historical and collective memory with Indonesian collective memory, and at the same time this approach looks for “humanity” beyond acts of European or Indonesian mass killing.

Oppenheimer’s urge to understand what happened in Indonesia is strongly coloured by Europe’s Nazi history, for the events in Indonesia suggest what might have happened in Europe had the Nazis remained in power and portrayed the Holocaust as necessary. The Nazi ghosts exorcised by human-rights advocacy and moral condemnation reappear when Oppenheimer gives us the killers playing themselves and their victims. Penelope Poulou quotes Oppenheimer saying, “My God! It’s like I’ve wandered into Germany 40 years after the Holocaust if the Nazis have never been removed from power and if the rest of the world had celebrated the Holocaust and participated in it while it took place.”⁵¹ The persistent effort to expel the Nazi ghosts links the Western world to the Indonesian context, and then on to other contexts and even, more generally, to what human beings are capable of. This makes Oppenheimer’s project a mission-like search for humanity in the radical circumstances of political forgetting. Indeed, his film project has a mission throughout: “I was trying to expose a regime of impunity on behalf of a community of survivors”⁵² That the stories sicken the public is evidence of the movie’s engagement of a fundamental question about “the self” in relation to its ghostly others. This nausea discloses a (physical) link that makes Congo in the end recognisable and acceptable. In this sense, Congo’s repulsion conflates with the public’s nausea. For a Western public, the response that Congo provides to the issue of the “banality of evil” is filtered through the Nazi past. In the end, evil cannot be ignored for it strikes back at the perpetrator.

But Oppenheimer’s project is not only about genocide. He wants his work to be a mirror, encouraging a link between killer and audience. In a sense, the audience becomes a bystander. If “those stories are powerful, if they really are

51 Poulou 2016.

52 Barnes 2013a

impactful, it's because there's a moment when you watch the film where you recognize yourself", Oppenheimer is quoted by *VOA News Asia* talking about *THE LOOK OF SILENCE*. And he continues, "it is where you feel: 'Oh no! Is this what we are as human beings? Is this what we can do to each other? ... Yes, it is.'"⁵³ In a more general fashion, Errol Morris, one of the executive producers, said to the *New York Times* just after the movie's first screening: "The most you can ask from art, really good art, maybe great art, is that it makes you think, it makes you ask questions, makes you wonder about how we know things, how we experience history and know who we are. And there are so many amazing moments like that here."⁵⁴ The mission-like nature of the project is fulfilled with this link to the subjective self: what would you do?

Danielle Mina Dadras has argued that Congo's success in the film is "his ability to tap into our – and Oppenheimer's – desire for recognizable narratives of cinematic redemption; that is, films that validate our deeply held belief in the power of stories and their ability to illuminate, in this case, the entanglements of history, guilt, and truth in the horror-show of post-60s Indonesia."⁵⁵ The redemption theme is taken up by movie critics such as Henry Barnes, who, writing in the *Guardian*, observed, "The monster who had caused misery for thousands was the dapper gent serving him sweet tea, playing Cliff Richard records and teaching his grandchildren to care for injured animals." For a post-Second World War Western audience, Barnes contemplates, "It's this dissonance that makes the film so disturbing. It forces you to relate to a mass murderer."⁵⁶

The real issue in the movie, however, is not Congo, but his accomplice Zulkadry, who shows no remorse, who has learned to master his ghosts through therapy (00:48:23–00:48:25) and who advises Congo to do the same (00:48:46). Zulkadry points to the natural way of things and bounces the question of responsibility back to the audience: war crimes are defined by the winners, he argues (01:07:45). Or member of the Pemuda Pancasila Herman Koto. In the film Koto does not ask a single question about what was done. He seems to accept the grand narrative of the killers as saviours of the nation. These complicated perpetrators, able to keep the ghosts at a distance, are the real challenge of Oppenheimer's film. Zulkadry, too, opines that the government should apologise (00:47:00) and speaks about reconciliation (*saling memaanfaatkan* – forgiving each other, 00:47:15). Koto is not a one-dimensional gangster but, as Oppenheimer points out, "one of the few people brave enough to hold screenings of the film in the city of Madiun, where we made it."⁵⁷ These complex men

53 Poulou 2016.

54 Rochter 2013.

55 Dadras 2014.

56 Barnes 2013a.

57 Prigge 2014.

show no visible repentance and thus do not satisfy a democratic audience. But the very complexity of these men evokes the ghosts of Oppenheimer (“Oh my God”) and they can live happily ever after with their banality of ghosts. These men do not vomit to save the director’s idea of humanity. They are complicated perpetrators who can be found in many post-genocide contexts.⁵⁸ The Indonesian situation however poses a real challenge, for here we must think about what was done from a context in which collective memory has been politically constructed such that it portrays good killers and bad victims. Oppenheimer believes that such a strategy cannot eradicate a fundamental humanity that erupts as the result of the re-enactment of categorical routines as he makes Congo perform his happy ending. But the complicated gangster Koto and the intellectual and rational debater Zulkadry generate the unease integral to the movie. The ghosts Zulkadry claims to have mastered are the ghosts of the audience precisely because they are not feared. Their apparitions are the real challenge of Oppenheimer’s work on the G30S. Amidst this unease, *THE ACT OF KILLING* is a feel-good discursive ritual that tries to expel these ghosts by telling the story of a single redemption.

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58 See, for example, Drakulic 2004; Glover 1999; Hatzfeld 2005.

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Trauma and Conformity

Psychology in THE ACT OF KILLING and DAS RADIKAL BÖSE

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the psychological aspects of two documentaries about violence: *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, GB/DK/NO 2012) and *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE (THE RADICAL EVIL)*, Stefan Ruzowitzky, DE/AT 2013), specifically the concepts of trauma and conformity. Both perspectives are revealing and provide insight and structure. But question marks hang over both concepts because they hide important elements of the violence described in the documentaries. In the case of *THE ACT OF KILLING* the difference between perpetrators and victims should not be neglected; in the case of *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* conformity should be recognised as not simply a moral failing.

KEYWORDS

Trauma, conformity, violence

BIOGRAPHY

Hessel J. Zondag studied cultural psychology in Nijmegen and was lecturer and researcher at the University of Tilburg and the Radboud University Nijmegen. His research and publications deal with the psychological consequences of individualisation processes, the meaning of religion for personal well-being, and religion and psychology in the visual arts, literature and film.

The documentaries *THE ACT OF KILLING* (Joshua Oppenheimer, DK/NO/GB 2012) and *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE (THE RADICAL EVIL)*, Stefan Ruzowitzky DE/AT 2013) are about mass killing, a form of violence in which well-armed and efficiently organised perpetrators kill helpless victims on a large scale.¹ Frequently, perpetrators and victims confront each other directly during such slaughter, which might take place in the context of war, civil war, revolution or a coup d'état. *THE ACT OF KILLING* is about the mass killings that occurred in 1965 and 1966 in Indonesia after the alleged coup by the Partai Komunis Indonesia (Communist

1 De Swaan 2014.

Party of Indonesia). *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* deals with the large-scale murder of Jews in Eastern Europe by German *Einsatzgruppen* (special task forces) during the Second World War.

Both directors, Joshua Oppenheimer (*THE ACT OF KILLING*) and Stefan Ruzowitzky (*DAS RADIKAL BÖSE*), direct attention to people who were guilty of involvement in these mass killings, men who were perpetrators. In this article I look at the psychological perspective adopted by the directors, an exploration that is easier for *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* than for *THE ACT OF KILLING* as Ruzowitzky makes explicit use of social psychology. The concepts of conformity and obedience and the bystander effect are the point of departure for his film. In the last 70 years much social-psychological research has investigated the destructive attitudes of so many individuals during the Second World War. The psychological perspective adopted by Oppenheimer is instead implicit as he explores the idea of trauma. His approach is to describe the actions of only one, although the most prominent one, of those portrayed as perpetrators. Ruzowitzky, by contrast, aims to provide insight into the actions of all the perpetrators.

The psychological analysis of *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* is therefore more elaborate than that of *THE ACT OF KILLING*. Moreover, *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* is more fitting for such analysis than is *THE ACT OF KILLING* because of its explicit use of concepts derived from social psychology to investigate mass killing in the Second World War. The trauma idea is only peripheral to *THE ACT OF KILLING*, both in the documentary itself and in the reflections of its director.

The approaches of the directors are dissimilar. In *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* the director seeks to explain how the killing was able to take place. How did ordinary men become mass murderers? What led them to kill men, women and children who had no role in the military hostilities? *THE ACT OF KILLING* focuses on the life of a mass murderer after the large-scale slaughter. How does this man look back at that period, which at the time the documentary was made was already 40 years in the past? *THE ACT OF KILLING* is about how a mass murderer views himself; *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* is about how someone becomes a mass murderer.

Both perspectives are revelatory and provide insight and structure. But question marks hang over both stories, for while they disclose they simultaneously conceal. That dual character is inevitable, I propose, as every approach, including the filmic, requires a certain perspective. And each perspective discloses and conceals.

THE ACT OF KILLING AND TRAUMA

THE ACT OF KILLING looks back to the mass killings in Indonesia in the mid 1960s. These murders began after an alleged communist coup d'état. The documentary presents us with a number of murderers who relate their stories about the

killings. We listen to them, but we also see how they re-enact episodes from that earlier period. The spectators are shown how these perpetrators intimidated their anxious and helpless victims, how they interrogated them and how they strangled them with iron wire. In these re-enactments the murderers play both perpetrators and victims.

ANWAR CONGO

One of the perpetrators stands out. Anwar Congo attracts attention because of his complicated character and because viewers will be ambivalent towards him. At the time of the killing, in which he was very active, Congo, who had been a small-time criminal before the coup, was in his twenties. Now he suffers as a result of his past actions. He is both a brutish and unscrupulous murderer, and a charming man. The audience is captivated when he has mercy on young, still-downy duck with a broken leg and warns his grandchildren to be careful with this duck. Completely bizarre is the scene in which he cherishingly takes his grandchildren onto his lap to show them a video with re-enactments of the events of the 1960s. The grandchildren see how their grandfather, made up as a severely wounded victim, is cruelly interrogated. But Anwar Congo is also terrifying when he demonstrates how he used iron wire to strangle the people he had arrested. He killed thousands in this way. And the spectator is unlikely to feel compassion when they see him as an old man walking or, better, lumbering down the stairs, for now he suffers as a result of his past. When he leaves the location where he had created so many victims, he vomits, nauseated by his actions and by himself.

The director portrays Anwar Congo as traumatised but does not use the term *trauma* anywhere in the movie. In interviews, however, Oppenheimer has repeatedly remarked that Congo is traumatised, as for example in a conversation with the *Hollywood Reporter*. In this interview Oppenheimer also relays the meaning of the re-enactment scenes for Anwar Congo. He refers to Anwar Congo's "horrifying and traumatic set of memories" and notes:

But for Anwar, I think the real story of why he wants to make these fiction scenes about what he's done is more complicated. I think he's trying to work through his pain and remorse – and his disgust in himself. He just didn't have the language to put it that way. He's trying to do it by transforming this horrifying and traumatic set of memories, into contained ideally heroic film scenes – to replace this miasmatic, unspeakable horror, which is haunting his dreams.²

It is risky to diagnose at a distance for one too quickly runs to stereotypes. But the images that are shown suggest we see Anwar Congo as traumatised. He

2 Brzeski 2013.

suffers as a result of his memories of the slaughter, with the dead occupying his mind. The victims appear in his nightmares. He sees them lying with open eyes staring up at him. For years he lived in a fuddle, intoxicated by alcohol and drugs, his way of attempting to cope with the dark side of life. Now he asks himself whether he has sinned. When he takes on the part of his victims in the role-play, he wonders whether they met with the same fate as he in the re-enacted scenes, whether they felt themselves as humiliated as he and whether he took away their dignity. Although role-playing is “nothing more” than acting, a well-staged play can provide an overwhelming representation of the past.³

Anwar Congo shows many signs of trauma. We can ask questions about Anwar Congo and his suffering which cannot be asked of many others who are traumatised by their pasts. We might deem such questions inappropriate, even impertinent. The question is, are we to be pleased that Anwar Congo suffers now as a result of his past? That question stems from our knowing him to be guilty of murder – and what kind of world is this if murderers do not suffer for their actions?

To explore this subject I will first present a short exposition of the concept of trauma. Then I will discuss the position of perpetrators and victims in traumatic events. Finally, I indicate how we should look at the traumas of perpetrators such as Anwar Congo.

TRAUMA

Trauma can be defined in terms of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.⁴ For convenience here I use simply the term “trauma”. We can diagnose trauma in light of symptoms such as the repeated replaying of memories, the experience of disturbing dreams that make reference to the sufferer’s past and intense negative emotions suffered over a period of at least one month.

For this diagnosis such symptoms must be the result of an event in which the sufferer was exposed to death, including the threat of death or severe wounding, or sexual violence. The patient may have been the victim or may have witnessed someone in their direct environment become a victim, perhaps a partner, relative or friend. So when the sufferer’s trauma resulted from having someone very near to him as victim.

This definition is derived from DSM-5, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, an all-encompassing handbook published by the American Psychiatric Association, a professional association of psychiatrists and psychologists, which has appeared since the 1950s. The DSM is regularly reissued. The current issue, from 2013, is the fifth edition, hence known as DSM-5. The manual provides the leading classification of psychiatric symptoms and has a central role within mental

3 Scheff 1979.

4 American Psychiatric Association 2013.

health care. It summarises current thinking on trauma, and I therefore use it as point of departure for my description of this phenomenon. There is a lot of criticism about the use of the DSM, but to go into this extends the scope of this article.⁵

We should note that the DSM's description of trauma refers not only to events that have happened directly to the patient but also to events in which the patient is only indirectly involved, for example, as a witness to a trauma-causing event or as a close friend to someone who has been affected by severe misfortune. The concept of trauma is applied broadly here, an approach also adopted with the contention that role in the original incident is not a determining factor in the diagnosis of trauma – both perpetrator and victim can suffer as a result of events of the past; the sufferings of each are not distinct.

PERPETRATORS AND VICTIMS: DOES THEIR SUFFERING MEAN THE SAME THING?

If both perpetrator and victim suffer as a result of their pasts, is their suffering identical? There is no doubt that Anwar Congo suffers, but does his suffering have the same meaning as that of his victims? On this point the rough-woven understanding of trauma and violent events proves inadequate, unable to provide careful and accurate analysis of this phenomenon. The positions of perpetrator and victim are, in fact, radically different. The victim suffers as a result of the misfortune they were forced to undergo; the perpetrator suffers as a result of inflicting harm. This difference cannot be conjured away. Reflection on trauma must not focus too much on symptoms, paying little or no attention to the role of the person – perpetrator or victim – concerned in the original incident.

Previous editions of the DSM provided more opportunities to distinguish between perpetrator and victim. In these versions helplessness is mentioned as characteristic of a traumatising event. The inability to act in a situation that requires action for self-preservation is found pre-eminently among victims, who had no choice. By contrast, perpetrators remained “in control”. The concept of helplessness can be applied to distinguish between perpetrators and victims even within the terms established by the DSM, at least in its earlier editions.

Congo suffers; he is traumatised by his role as a perpetrator. Should we not be glad that he is suffering? He killed on a large scale. Let us imagine that the responsibly for such killing left no impression on the perpetrators, that they carried out their actions without any negative emotional effect. Would we not understand that response as unbearable indifference to human life? Such nonchalance is seen in *THE ACT OF KILLING*, in a scene in which one of the perpetrators tells of the rape of young girls. Forty years later he still enjoys the memory, relating that the experience was “heaven” for him.

5 See Dehue 2008 and Dehue 2014 for a critique of the DSM.

In *THE ACT OF KILLING* we see that Anwar Congo's suffering takes the form of awareness of having been morally evil. He asks himself whether he has sinned or has robbed people of their dignity. He tries to imagine himself experiencing the suffering he caused for others. He even goes one step further: he empathises with his victims. Many of those who have carried out such actions are well able to imagine the suffering they have inflicted on others. The man who continues to enjoy the memory of the rapes he committed 40 years earlier says that the abuse was like hell for the girls. He knows what they felt, but it does not interest him. For Congo the situation is different. Unlike so many perpetrators, he empathises with his former victims, This empathy can lead to remorse, a sense of guilt and subsequently a confession of guilt.

This guilt can generate a type of suffering that therapy cannot alleviate. To help people who are experiencing this kind of suffering, they must be allowed to confess and do penance, for example by admitting their guilt directly to their victims and their victims' surviving relatives. To the victim such a confession can serve as a recognition of the pain they endure.

Nonetheless confessing guilt and penance is rare. Only a fraction of perpetrators ever admit to have done wrong.⁶ Estimates for the percentage of perpetrators who suffer as a result of inflicting violence vary, with some estimates rising to 20 per cent.⁷ But of this estimated 20 per cent who suffer from nightmares, from hearing the anxious cries of their victims, from physical symptoms, all symptoms of trauma, only a very small proportion ever show repentance. The suffering of the perpetrators appears to accommodate very well with a lack of awareness of having sided with immorality. Very seldom do perpetrators experience their own suffering in moral terms, let alone confess their guilt.

DAS RADIKAL BÖSE AND CONFORMITY

Director Stefan Ruzowitzky makes explicit use of social psychology in his documentary *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE*, for he even bases his movie on the results of this branch of psychology. He shows classic social-psychological experiments to cast light on the genocide committed in the Second World War by the *Einsatzgruppen*, special troops active on the Eastern Front between 1941 and 1943. The experiments are found in all handbooks of social psychology, evidence that their results belong to the core of this discipline. Moreover, these experiments have been carried out repeatedly.⁸ In this case the reproach that psychology often jumps to far-reaching conclusions on the basis of limited empirical research cannot be sustained.

6 Baumeister 1997; De Swaan 2014.

7 Lifton 1986.

8 Hock 2006.

The experiments shown by Ruzowitzky have one common characteristic. All of them demonstrate how social pressure drives people to formulate opinions and act in the presence of others differently from how they would express themselves and behave when alone. They show how social pressure can bring people to commit mass murder at times of war. They demonstrate how individuals can become murderers through the presence of other individuals and through orders they receive.

The men who killed were “ordinary”. They were policemen redeployed to fight in the war and soldiers of the *Wehrmacht*, the German army. We have no reason to expect them to be more readily violent towards civilians, a violence that was expected of members of the SS. (We know now that SS soldiers also did not differ greatly from a cross-section of the German population. The similarities between SS troops and the modal German population were considerably greater than the dissimilarities.)⁹

The next section of this article deals with three social-psychological experiments that according to Ruzowitzky explain the killing carried out by *Ein-satzgruppen*: the conformity experiments of Solomon Asch, the obedience experiments of Stanley Milgram, and the bystander-effect experiments of John Darley and Bibb Latané. I conclude with a reflection on the explanation for the killing given by Ruzowitzky.

CONFORMITY

In the conformity experiments carried out by Asch, participants had to judge the length of lines.¹⁰ The experiments were performed by groups of eight persons, of whom seven were actors and only one a real test subject. This one person supposed that all participants were test subjects. The participants received a card with a single line on it, and were then shown a card with three lines, of which one was the same length as the line on the first card. The subjects had to determine which of the three lines was the same length as the line on the first card. The seven actors unanimously pointed to the wrong line. What would the test subject do?

The most important result of the experiment was that many test subjects accommodated themselves to the evidently wrong judgement of the others in their group. They adjusted their own view to the views of the others. What is less well known, however, is that about 60 per cent did not conform. We do not know anything of the personal characteristics of these last individuals, just we know nothing of those who did adapt to conform.

There was no explicit coercion in Asch’s experiments. The only pressure came from the presence of people who judged incorrectly, with whom the test subject formed a temporary group during the experiment.

9 De Swaan 2014.

10 Asch 1951.

OBEDIENCE

In addition to the conformity experiment carried out by Asch, the documentary shows Milgram's obedience experiment, the results of which caused great turmoil.¹¹ The tests were devised as a means to establish why during the Second World War so many men had been prepared to commit mass killings. How easily do people obey and how far will they go to follow orders? How readily or how hesitantly will people comply with orders to kill? Milgram began his experiments just after the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, which had brought these burning questions to the attention of a larger public.

In its basic form Milgram's experiment proceeds as follows. Three participants each adopt a separate role: the test subject plays the role of teacher; a co-worker plays the pupil; and another co-worker leads the experiment and gives the instructions. The teacher does not know that the pupil is also a co-worker and supposes that the pupil is also a test subject. The teacher gives assignments that the pupil must carry out; if the pupil fails, the teacher must administer a punishment in the form of an electric shock. After each failure, the voltage of the electric pulse is increased. If the teacher hesitates to carry out the punishment, the leader of the experiment states that the teacher has no option other than to continue.

What made the experiment controversial was that many participants were prepared to continue to give electric shocks even at 450 volts, a fatal level. The proportion of people willing to administer this value even reached 65 per cent on occasion. Before Milgram started the experiments, he had asked a number of experts to predict what percentage of participants would be willing to administer the maximum voltage. Their highest estimate was three per cent. In some instances, that figure was multiplied twentyfold. Yet many other participants refused to continue and even withdrew from the experiment. This aspect of the data received less attention.

Whether the participant obeyed or refused could be dependent on attributes of authority they encountered. When the leader of the experiment wore a white coat, he was more frequently obeyed than when he wore everyday clothes. In one version of the experiment a fourth role was introduced, that of assistant to the leader. When assistant and leader appeared to differ on whether the experiment should be continued, the number of test subjects prepared to carry out the punishment decreased almost to zero.

We know nothing of the characteristics of those who did not conform, as was also the case for Asch's experiment. The researcher's purpose was to investigate the impact and power of orders. The experiments were not designed to establish personal characteristics that might be associated with refusal or obedience.

11 Milgram 1974.

BYSTANDER EFFECT

A third social-psychological phenomenon addressed in DAS RADIKAL BÖSE concerns the failure to respond when another individual is in danger or suffering, behaviour that has been termed the “bystander effect”. This behaviour has been explored in various forms, in particular in the experiments of Darley and Latané, which sought insight into what people do when they detect a threat.¹² The main purpose of this research was to detect how people were influenced by other individuals’ failure to act. The experiment followed the murder of a young woman in New York in 1964. Kitty Genovese was raped and killed in the street at night. More than 35 persons saw or heard something, but nobody alerted the police. Why did they fail to act?

In one of these experiments, the test subjects were confronted with signs of danger: their room was filled with smoke, which suggests fire. Participants who were alone in this room responded on average in four seconds. If they were together with people who did not react, actors naturally, it was 20 seconds on average before they themselves reacted. It thus took five times longer for them to respond to a danger when they were in the presence of passive others. In another version of this experiment, someone appeared to become unwell. Seventy per cent of the test subjects offered help if they were alone with the person who became unwell. If they were together with others who did not help, only 40 percent offered assistance. In short, when people are alone they respond more actively to signs of danger that might cause suffering than when they are in the presence of others who remain passive.

In Ruzowitzky’s documentary the images of the experiments are effectively interwoven with images drawn from letters written by military men in which they described the horror of killing and / or attempted to justify their deeds; with comments from experts such as Benjamin Frencz, lead prosecutor in the post-war trial of members of the *Einsatzgruppen*, and Christopher Browning, author of an academic study of one of those *Einsatzgruppen*; and with the narratives of witnesses of these massacres, Ukrainian villagers who had seen Germans take their Jewish neighbours off to be killed.¹³

CONFORMITY AS FORCE OF EVIL

DAS RADIKAL BÖSE is a product of the anti-authoritarian atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s. It assumes that those who do not conform, obey orders, or let themselves not be guided by the initiatives of others will not commit genocide. People – men – who act autonomously without being influenced by situational pressure will not become mass murderers. The documentary suggests a one-

¹² Latané/Darley 1970.

¹³ Browning 1992.

to-one relationship between a certain social-psychological profile and morally desirable behaviour, between autonomy and acting humanely, between sensitivity to social pressure and a readiness to commit murder.

The experiments shown in the movie were used in explanations of the genocide carried out during the Second World War. Yet there is also much which is not explained by these experiments. We do not know about the personalities of those who refused to kill (only a few military men refused to participate in the executions). What were the life experiences of those who proved more, or less, susceptible to social pressure? Those who killed were not robots, responding as if machines, as Abram De Swaan demonstrated in his work on genocide.¹⁴ Drawing from Milgram's obedience experiments, De Swaan concludes that we are not able to explain who might make an unwilling, indifferent or willing executioner, or in other words, who might react with resignation, aversion or delight at the thought of killing. Our ignorance should not be read as a reproach of experimental social psychology, which has brought us new insight into the forces active in social situations in various forms. In these studies, however, everything that suggests "conformity" is regarded as an evil.

But is conformity always evil? Conformity is firmly rooted in the human species and has brought great advantages.¹⁵ Humans are basically social beings and they must rely on co-operation with others to survive. They must therefore continually orient themselves on their fellow humans. We have good reason to look again at the bystander effect. The experiments show how strongly the demeanour of others influences one's own behaviour. For those who are sceptical, these experiments merely illustrate human docility or – more cynically – the human inclination to servitude. These experiments also demonstrate, however, how people rely on the opinions and actions of others in creating their own views and in determining their own actions. They show that people strive for consensus and co-operation, a co-operation they need if they are to survive.

Conformity has powerful positive functions. Some people are unbearable both for themselves and for others, if they are not limited by some conformity. Conformity certainly does not always end in disaster, and non-conformity, in turn, does not guarantee a good result. This reading is neglected in DAS RADIKAL BÖSE. Admittedly, we might wonder if it is fair to demand the director relate both sides: a documentary that lack a clear perspective because it wishes to discuss everything loses its power.

Yet what would have been the message of DAS RADIKAL BÖSE if the documentary had dealt with Anders Breivik? In July 2011 Breivik carried out an attack in which he killed 77 people. Breivik was a lone wolf. He did not kill in the service

14 De Swaan 2014.

15 Coultas/Van Leeuwen 2015.

of any regime other than the regime that he had established for himself. Breivik withdrew from social pressure and murdered. Does the killing carried out by Breivik suggest that social pressure can also be valuable and has the power to channel certain behaviours.

TRANSGRESSING PSYCHOLOGY

In this article I have discussed the psychological perspectives in two documentaries about extensive and well-organised violence against defenceless people. *THE ACT OF KILLING* is about trauma; *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* is about conformity. These perspectives are applied to the actions of the perpetrators and reveal what might occur before a mass killing and what the consequences are. They elucidate what makes individuals mass murderers and what their killing can mean for the remainder of their lives.

The adoption of these perspectives also hides however, certain crucial issues from view. The use of the concept of trauma blurs the distinction between perpetrator and victim, while the concept of conformity is employed such that its potentially beneficial functions are concealed.

In both cases the use of psychological concepts needs interpretation that extends beyond psychology. We require a more normative reading that indicates that on essential points the trauma of the perpetrators is incompatible with the trauma of the victims. We also require an interpretation that points out that conformity as such is not necessarily unwelcome, but that it sometimes has undesirable consequences.

Judging an action as conformist or non-conformist in a social-psychological sense is not the same as judging whether that action is unjust or just. What is desirable is determined from a substantive, normative position. Here we can turn to one of the experts in *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE*, priest Patrick Desbois, who does his utmost to record the graves of the Jewish victims of the *Einsatzgruppen* in the Ukraine. Desbois suggests that the moment people claim to be superior to others can be regarded as the first step towards the destruction of those considered inferior. Those who claim their own humanity to be superior may then deny any human status to those that they deem inferior, and if they are not human, they can be destroyed. Much social psychological research confirms this suggestions by Desbois.¹⁶

Declaring others to be inferior can be a prelude to the destruction of these others. Do we not therefore have good reason to encourage conformity to the recognition of the equality of all peoples?

¹⁶ Smith/Mackie 2000.

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Punishment and Crime

The Reverse Order of Causality in THE WHITE RIBBON

ABSTRACT

This article explores, within a sociological-psychological framework, the problematic moral emotions of spectators evoked by watching the film *DAS WEISSE BAND* (THE WHITE RIBBON, Michael Haneke, DE/AT/FR/IT 2009). As always in Michael Haneke's films, the spectator's moral system is severely put to the test upon watching the unimaginable actions people are capable of. At first sight the atrocities shown that remain unpunished seem to cause the spectator's distress. The real horror, however, lies in the fact the evil occurs within the boundaries of a religious society that hails itself as good and just. The word of God as a moral guide becomes ineffective in this film, and also in *DOGVILLE* (Lars von Trier, NL/DK/GB/FR/FI/SE/DE/ IT/NO 2003), a film used as comparison. Both films exemplify that in the end the most difficult conclusion to process by the spectator is that the worst crime is feeling morally superior and teaching others how to behave. In *The White Ribbon* this teaching is projected as the punishment that causes the crimes.

KEYWORDS

THE WHITE RIBBON, belief systems, spectatorship, psychology, DOGVILLE

BIOGRAPHY

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WATCHING AND UNDERSTANDING THE WHITE RIBBON

THE WHITE RIBBON is a haunting story of the feudal village of Eichwald, set in 1913, in which the villagers are repeatedly alarmed by serious attacks on members of the community. The spectator is in constant suspense about who will be next, and although the arbitrariness of the incidents is troublesome, the realisa-

tion who the perpetrators are is even more alarming. The title of the movie refers to the white ribbon that the pastor's children have to wear to remind them (and the community) of the concept of purity and good behaviour. The film thus openly discusses morals, punishment and crimes. With the pastor as the strong defender of morals, the film seems to focus on religion and morals, and it would be tempting to interpret the film in the specific terms of religion. This article will deviate from this path by using a different, sociological, framework. The definition of religion that I adhere to in this article is neatly summarised by Grace Davie: "the sociology of religion aims to discover the patterns of social living associated with religion in all its diverse forms, and to find explanations for the data that emerge. It is not, in contrast, concerned with the competing truth claims of the great variety of belief systems that are and always have been present in human societies."¹

Throughout this article I will refer to the spectator as both male and female or will use the inclusive first-person plural. This article describes part of the viewing process as a universal, human endeavour. Naturally, every spectator is free to have a private, unique viewing experience while watching a film, but that private part is not addressed here. For example, we all recognise the pastor as a pastor, but how we feel towards him is in part influenced by our private and specific thoughts, beliefs and emotions concerning religion. I do, however, write about morals, because every human being functions on the basis of a moral system, strongly influenced by society, history and personal experience.

The film *THE WHITE RIBBON* is set in rural Eichwald in 1913. The film presents in chronological order, solemnly, calmly and precisely, the many atrocities that happen in the span of a year. It ends with the arrival of the news of Franz Ferdinand's assassination and with rumours of an impending war spreading. It is difficult to summarise the story as hardly any conclusions are reached and most crimes remain unsolved. The film is a series of seemingly unrelated events, some of which are gruesome while other scenes merely show the habitual events one could expect of a village, of every feudal society where men – the baron, the steward, the pastor, the doctor and the schoolteacher – are in power, and women, servants and farmers obey them. And we expect it to be, like any society, a place where children learn to behave and grow up in the footsteps of their fathers and mothers.

On many levels the film is very difficult to process for the spectator. His/her morals are put to the test, but how that occurs has remained only partly explained, even in the thorough analyses from Martin Blumenthal-Barby,² Claudia

1 Davie 2013, 6.

2 Blumenthal-Barby 2014.

Fig. 1: A still representing the “objective” view on the world of *THE WHITE RIBBON* (Michael Haneke, DE/AT/FR/IT 2009), 00:17:08.



Breger,³ Garrett Stewart,⁴ Kumar Niven and Lucyna Swiatek,⁵ and James Williams.⁶ They explore certain threads that meander through the film, in an attempt to find its overall meaning. I understand those articles as articulations of the spectator’s efforts to process the film. As is usual for the detective genre, the spectator tries to find logic, causality and explanation. Unusually for that genre, however, the crimes remain unsolved. As in most of Haneke’s films, the spectator is given multiple clues to an answer, but few firm conclusions.

Most spectators (layman, film enthusiasts and/or scholars) of the film *THE WHITE RIBBON* will agree that the film makes us aware of “immoral” behaviour – a term that describes that behaviour as mildly and generally as possible. There is no mention made of the film that does not contain a reference to “morals”. All articles, reviews and witnesses highlight one or more aspect of the moral problems portrayed in the film: the fact that the crimes committed are horrific, the fact that the crimes are probably committed by children, the fact that there is no motive for committing the crimes, the fact that the crimes remain unsolved and unpunished and the fact that the guilty children will later become actors in both World Wars.

My problem with these five conclusions is that they are all external to the spectator. They are moral problems of either the characters in the film, the film itself or (German) history. Without rejecting the importance of these interpretations, my claim is that the most profound moral problem – even moral crisis – occurs within the spectator. I want to explore questions such as, how is the spectator triggered to find meaning in this film that so obviously and obnoxiously withholds it? And how does the process of film viewing lead to moral crisis?

The articles about the film previously referenced are awash with implicit references to spectators, as representatives of the society that is shocked by

3 Breger 2016.

4 Stewart 2010.

5 Niven and Swiatek 2012.

6 Williams 2010.

the horrors witnessed, for example by seeing the unimaginable, as Niven and Swiatek theorise. But the act of seeing itself has been given too little attention, with the possible exception of the response of Blumenthal-Barby. He describes the film in terms of Michel Foucault's ideas about surveillance and draws attention to the characters' problems with surveilling and not-surveilling, and how that is complicated by the surveillant gaze of the film(maker) and of the spectator. Blumenthal-Barby suggests, "The most prominent 'disciplinary' discourse in Haneke's film undoubtedly is that of education, including the work of the schoolteacher, whose voice-over guides us through much of the film, but also the rigid educational regime enforced by the pastor and symbolised by the white ribbon that he ties around his children's arms or into their hair."⁷

Despite recognising this "prominence", even Blumenthal-Barby leaves it at that. In my opinion surveillance – knowing and seeing – does not form the core of the film's meaning. And "education" in a Foucauldian universe is merely a synonym for discipline. From a Brechtian perspective, teaching has different connotations. Bertolt Brecht called his plays *Lehrstücke* and translated that concept both as *learning plays* and *teaching plays*. These complexities of learning and teaching help to elucidate the film, the spectator and the characters.

As such, *THE WHITE RIBBON* (the film) teaches the spectator just as the white ribbon (the object) teaches the characters in the film.

THE LEARNING SPECTATOR

Even without a Brechtian definition, every film is a learning process for its spectator. He is thrown into an unknown world and builds this world with scraps of information he receives from the film to form a coherent unit. The static black-and-white images of *THE WHITE RIBBON*, the long takes, the restrained movement of the characters suggest a clarity that should be easy for the spectator to handle. The incompatibility with the information given by the film, however, is a source of frustration.

Even the simple beginning of the film is problematic: we see a horse tripping over a wire and its horseman, a doctor, falling and getting hurt. We see Anna, the doctor's daughter, running out of their house towards him, coming to the rescue, as the voice-over narrator helps to explain. He tells us that the accident left the doctor hospitalised for months. The next shot shows the midwife, Mrs Wagner, who takes care of the doctor's children, Anna and Rudi, walking hastily to fetch her own child Karli, who is mentally disabled, from the schoolteacher. We do not know why she is hurrying. Is it because her life is so busy, with looking after the doctor's children, being a midwife, and now also having to deal with the doctor's mishap?

7 Blumenthal-Barby 2014, 96.

By then the narrator, the schoolteacher, has already explained what is forcing him to tell this story: maybe these strange events can explain something about what happened later. The spectator at this point does not know that “later” could be a reference to the two World Wars. “Later” in the film we learn that the midwife is the doctor’s mistress and was his mistress long before his wife died. We see the doctor and Mrs Wagner having sex after his return from hospital. Later we have to witness the doctor sharply telling her that he hates sex with her because he is appalled by her ugliness and her character and that he cannot stand her and would be happy if she died.

If we take the schoolteacher’s comments rather differently, restricting them to the span of the film, a new meaning appears for the opening scene. In the very first scene, Anna arrives immediately after the doctor has fallen off the horse, as if she might have been waiting for that event, and she looks first to see how the horse is doing and only then turns to her father. We also see that the hurried walk of Mrs Wagner could suggest that she is fleeing the scene of the crime.

This conclusion is suggested by the film’s ending. Mrs Wagner borrows a bicycle from the schoolteacher and goes to the police in another village because she knows “who did it”. She never returns. The doctor, Rudi and Karli have by then disappeared from the village. And Anna, at that moment at school, says nothing.

Because Mrs Wagner left so mysteriously and could not defend herself, in the aftermath of the events she is blamed for all the crimes.

Very few spectators will have noticed Anna’s first checking the horse’s health and only then giving her attention to her father. I cite this detail here only to show that the film goes very far in giving information that obscures, rather than clarifies, the film’s meaning.

Although characters refuse to talk and we have to guess the motives for their actions, most of which are hidden from sight, certain crimes/accidents/attacks indisputably occur:

- The doctor’s horse trips over a wire, leaving the doctor seriously hurt; it takes him months to recover.
- The wife of farmer Felder falls to her death through the rotten floor in the sawmill.
- Max Felder ruins the cabbage field.
- Sigi, the baron’s son, goes missing, is later found severely beaten, and takes a long time to recover.
- The steward’s baby almost dies of pneumonia because someone intentionally left a window open on a winter’s night.
- The barn goes up in flames.
- Karli, the midwife’s mentally handicapped son, goes missing and is later found with his eyes severely wounded; he has been left almost blind.

- Sigi's flute is snatched by Ferdinand, the steward's son. Sigi is thrown in the water but eventually saved from drowning by Ferdinand's brother.

As there are no obvious culprits and no legal process, no police able to solve the crimes nor absolute knowledge about the causes of the events, the film cannot be done justice unless every detail is mentioned. The smallest element might be the clue that allows the spectator to solve the crimes.

The spectator is an attentive learner, hoping to find meaning. But every new piece of information in this film obscures its meaning. We have difficulty attuning what we see with what we hear and what we infer. For example, when we see children (Klara and the rest) ask how the doctor is doing, it is the narrator who says that in hindsight this was strange; not the fact that they were informative and friendly, but that they were always present after the evil has happened. We come to understand that nothing is what it seems: being friendly works here as a cover-up of crimes.

Another example: as the schoolteacher recounts that he finally had the opportunity to visit Eva at her house – a long walk from the village – to ask her to marry him, we see a winter landscape and a man walking. In the next scene, we see Eva and the schoolteacher chatting in the living room, with Eva's sisters and brothers as audience. Then the door opens, and in comes Eva's father, who looks just like the man we saw walking outside. Was it the schoolteacher we saw walking, after which he would have entered Eva's house and sat waiting for Eva's father? Or was it Eva's father we saw walking while Eva and the schoolteacher chatted, and he then entered the house? Typically for this film, no definitive answer is given.

These descriptions help us classify the film. Although it is advertised as a European Art Film and shown in art-house cinemas, the film finds itself somewhere between classical and art film. Classical cinema is described by David Bordwell as a transparent style of narration with psychologically motivated characters and a clear causal chain of events within a logical space-time continuum.⁸ Art film is by nature the opposite of classical cinema and thrives on subjectivity, and the belief that concepts such as objectivity and truth are illusions.⁹

THE WHITE RIBBON with its clear, objective, almost distant images, its omniscient narrator and causal chain of events presents itself as a classical film. Slowly the spectator comes to realise, although not consciously, that the film is an art film in disguise. The omniscient narrator leaves essential information out, and the causality that drives the chain of events is never shown nor explained. This defines THE WHITE RIBBON as an art film.

8 Bordwell 1985, 156–204. Although “classical” is often used to refer to the specific Hollywood era that ran from 1917 to 1960, mainstream cinema worldwide remains predominantly classical, albeit with some adaptations.

9 Bordwell 1985, 205–233.

LEARNING TO RECOGNISE CHARACTERS: PROBLEMS OF ENGAGEMENT

Murray Smith explains that spectators engage with characters on the basis of a mixture of information, emotion, judgment, time spent with the characters and moral evaluation of their actions.¹⁰ Watching films is a process of getting to know others, some of whom become significant others whom we care about.

In classical cinema this process is all perfectly aligned. We know who the main character, the hero, is and happily side with him/her. We recognise him/her as having morals and inclination to act that we in turn would like to have in the situations that are portrayed. We think that our engagement with film characters is specific to film, but our impression formation, our liking or disliking of characters, stems from our everyday routines of judging and engaging with people.

The indistinctness of art cinema problematises the spectator's engagement and impression formation. In some cases this complication even generates moral stress for the spectator.¹¹ The anxiety that is felt in watching *THE WHITE RIBBON* does not come merely from engaging with immoral characters. The problem is that our everyday moral compass fails us. The spectator is not complicit in the crimes but is complicit in the morals of the criminals. And on top of that, the spectator is constantly reminded of the suffering of the victims.¹²

In *THE WHITE RIBBON*, the process of engaging with the characters is seriously thwarted. For example, our initial sympathy for the doctor, who has suffered as a result of falling from his horse, becomes a burden when he reveals himself as an insensible, heartless, sadistic man who takes joy in destroying Mrs Wagner's self-esteem and has sex with his own daughter. If we had seen him first as the sadistic man and child abuser, we would not have engaged with him, and would not have felt any sympathy or empathy when he fell from the horse. This is not to claim that the film tricks us into engaging with characters we come to loathe. Nor is the film, or the narrator, unreliable. The film presents the events as they occur, and how the spectator chooses to engage with certain characters is the spectator's own responsibility. When those choices appear to have been poor choices, the spectator is regularly reminded of that misestimation.

10 Smith 1995.

11 Van der Pol 2015.

12 Although in all fiction films characters perform acts and therefore both behave morally and demonstrate moral flaws, usually (in classical cinema) the moral imperfections do no harm to the spectator. The spectator stays on the safe (moral) side because the character's intentions are usually good and/or the film obscures the effects of the immoral acts as much as possible. And even if we are engaged with evil characters, then we do so knowing that they are evil, in effect suspending our disbelief.

Breger¹³ and Stewart¹⁴ both focus on the film as a story about a collective or even a nation, on the basis of the schoolteacher's introductory suggestion that the events in this film might explain events later in history (so, the First and Second World Wars). But if we want to explore the spectator's engagement with the characters, the suggestion by Breger and Stewart that we engage with the characters as a group is insufficient. The film has so many characters, who are given almost equal screen time, that it is hard to talk about one main character. The film simply has many characters, and the spectator has to choose – and choose wisely – with which character to engage the most.

Two characters do have more screen time than the others: the schoolteacher and the pastor. It is not very difficult to engage with the schoolteacher; he is a friendly, reasonable and somewhat shy young man; he is the narrator and he is our moral guide. He has more knowledge than the other characters; he is both young and old (he tells the story as an old man); and he has hindsight. He is friendly and timid. He falls in love with Eva, who looks after the Baroness's twins but is sent away after Sigi's wounding. The schoolteacher helps Eva, but cannot prevent her from leaving the village. He goes to visit her at her parents' home, and her strict father suggests that he can marry her if he still wants to after a year.

In one sparse moment together, Eva and the schoolteacher set off to have a picnic. Suddenly she tells him that she does not want to go to a remote spot. He says he was not planning anything dishonourable and does as she asks. She thanks him for that. At the end of the film he recounts that he finally left the village, fought in the war, and started a shop, never returning to the village. Strangely, he does not mention whether he eventually married Eva.

The pastor is the central moral character. He gives long lectures to his children about moral behaviour. He is a natural leader. He is seen studying scripture. He is authoritative, strong and never shows his emotions. But it is the Baron, the leader of the village, who gives a speech on morals in the church, rather than the pastor.

Klara and Martin, the pastor's two oldest children, are difficult to engage with. They group together with the other children, and we come to believe, at the suggestion of the narrator, they are jointly culpable for the crimes. How are we to engage with them in light of the following events?

- That first day Klara and Martin come home too late and are severely punished by being strongly reprimanded and beaten. From then on they both have to wear a white ribbon, in order that they are constantly reminding of the concept of purity.

13 Breger 2016.

14 Stewart 2010.

- Martin becomes sad, and the pastor suspects he is masturbating and orders his hands bound at night.
- At Christmas the pastor frees them of their ribbons and restraints.
- At the end of the story, we see Klara standing on watch as the schoolchildren make a mess of the classroom before the pastor and schoolteacher arrive. The pastor publicly reprimands Klara, after which she faints.
- We see her killing her father's bird and putting it on his desk shaped like a cross.¹⁵

This list is as problematic as the whole film. How do these episodes define Klara and Martin? They are all extremely meaningful and traumatic events, but they pass without explanation, and without much emotional display. The only fact we can recognise is that Klara leads her brothers and sisters in a group that is present before and after the crimes, and when people ask what they are doing, she responds, "We want to help, how is the victim doing?" Are her words a kind gesture or a pretence, hiding their guilt?

ENTERING AN UNJUST WORLD

All human beings constantly try to make sense of the world they live in by deducing a cause-and-effect chain of events, a stacking of new information into appropriate categories. If new information does not fit, we remain restless and unsatisfied. The basic assumption of this film is already discomfiting. We want the romantic image of a friendly village a century ago that is rudely disrupted by the outbreak of the First World War. What we get is a story about a village that is more vile and gruesome than a war could ever be. How can we process such information?

Taking a step back, we can endlessly discuss ways in which a spectator can temporarily, hesitantly or wholeheartedly engage with movie characters, but with the film *THE WHITE RIBBON* engagement remains seriously problematic. Our moral judgment is strongly questioned, as can be explained with the help of a theory developed by Melvin Lerner.

From a sociologist's perspective, Lerner sought to explain the human moral system irrespective of religion and culture. He termed his theory "belief in a just world".¹⁶ His position is a reaction to developmental psychologist Jean Piaget's theory of how children learn to understand justice.¹⁷ Piaget suggested that children start off believing in a just world. For children what is just is based on effect rather than intention. Someone who unintentionally breaks two dishes is seen

¹⁵ To be precise: we do not see Klara kill the bird, but we come very close that moment. We see her opening the cage and grabbing the bird; in the next shot we see the dead bird on the table.

¹⁶ Lerner 1980.

¹⁷ Piaget 1948.

as more to blame than someone who intentionally breaks one dish. Later in life children come to reverse that interpretation: it is not the effect that counts, but the intentionality.

Lerner agreed that we may cognitively develop into people who *know* that in evaluating moral actions intention is more important than effect. But, he suggested, our emotional system does not develop accordingly. Lerner claims:

the reason that people who “know better” continue to blame themselves and others for “accidents,” stupid, thoughtless decisions, not doing enough, letting themselves go, not having enough courage, being selfish, cruel – is because these blaming reactions are so ingrained in our own thinking and our cultural assumptions that they are simply the automatic expression of a long-standing habit. They are automatically elicited, habitual reactions, which one cannot turn off simply because one has learned subsequently that they are inadequate or inappropriate.¹⁸

Life confronts us constantly with facts and experiences that “go against the grain” because our emotions are not in line with our knowledge of a just world. But rather than give up this belief in a just world, we stubbornly hold onto that belief, and fortify it against attacks, because it seems to be the pillar of our existence.

We have, as a society, developed rational strategies – a police force and courts, for example – to protect justice. We also adopt irrational tactics to deal with injustice, by resorting to denial or victim blaming. Or we conclude that although an injustice is not resolved now, it will in the end be punished.

By these means we can uphold our belief in a just world. However, we may have difficulty doing so when we see severe injustice, countries at war, starvation or criminal acts beyond our imagination. To be able to live with such instances (as we must do while watching the daily news) we construct an opposite world, an unjust world, a world that is not ours, where different rules function. We position ourselves outside this Unjust World.

This response is seen in the pastor. When the schoolteacher eventually confronts him with the suspicion that Klara and Martin are behind most of the crimes, the pastor, who is quick to publicly attack his children for the smallest flaws, he is outraged at such accusations and refuses to see the schoolteacher ever again. His strong reaction is a defence mechanism: by believing the schoolteacher, he would have entered the Unjust World. By calling the schoolteacher a liar, he upholds his own belief in a Just World.

The worst thing that can happen is that the atrocities and immorality we are confronted with can no longer be explained within the boundaries of the Just World. What the pastor seeks to prevent is what happens to the spectator

18 Lerner 1980, 121.

of THE WHITE RIBBON. We are thrown into the Unjust World, and despairingly search for a way out. In the Unjust World there is no (poetic) justice, no hope, no redemption. We have methods that prevent us from falling into this unjust world, but we lack resources to help us escape.

What also is disconcerting is that we are not allowed to look away. We are confronted by all those self-righteous people who create and uphold a stifling community. And we are also not allowed to look away from the effects of the crimes. On the contrary, suffering and the consequences of immoral acts are shown relentlessly.

We may seek shelter in the idea that the film is just a film and its story is fictional. But the problem is that all these characters are too familiar, and their actions are cruel but not unlikely. The film does not show us the aberrations of human nature; it shows us the evil roots of human nature, which we know about but do not want to be confronted with. It shows us who we really are. Reasoning the depiction away as fiction does not work. The characters may be fictional, but the message is not. And at the end of the film reality hits hard, with the realisation that all this (could have) happened at the outset of the First World War. The First World War is not a fiction.

LEHRSTÜCK DOGVILLE

How did the spectator become entangled in this Unjust World? To clarify this predicament, it is helpful to compare the film to a similar *Lehrstück*, DOGVILLE, that portrays a similar small village isolated from a more “civilised” town.¹⁹ Just like in THE WHITE RIBBON, one of the protagonists openly sets a moral example for the community, a lesson from which to learn.

The film DOGVILLE, by Lars von Trier, is well known for its aesthetics: the contours of the buildings of the village are painted on the floor. And beyond some props, the scenery is only suggested. Dogville is a fictional American village in the 1930s. A narrator tells a story about this village, where the main character, Tom Edison, philosophises about the possibility of showing the moral nobility of the village. When Grace arrives, seeking refuge from her persecutors, Edison and the villagers see her as a perfect test-case for their moral “experiment”. They welcome her, hide her and take care of her. Then, as a reward for their

19 There is a long tradition of films showing the horrors of a closed society. Works by Lars von Trier, Michael Haneke, Bela Tarr and Rainer Werner Fassbinder come readily to mind. Particularly unsettling are the films THE BABY OF MACON (Peter Greenaway, NL/FR/UK/DE 1993), AUCH ZWERGE HABEN KLEIN ANGEFANGEN (EVEN DWARFS STARTED SMALL, Werner Herzog, DE 1970), and DIE SIEBELBAUERN (THE INHERITORS, Stefan Ruzowitzky, AT/DE 1998). DOGVILLE has been chosen for comparison because it too has a protagonist who provides a moral test-case for a poor, small community. Also, both films are fictional but in the end make a link to reality, in the case of DOGVILLE by referring – through documentary photos – to the Great Depression.

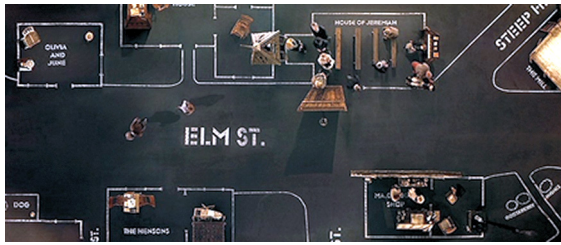


Fig. 2: A still representing the “objective” view on the world of DOGVILLE (Lars von Trier, NL/DK/GB//FR/FI/SE/DE/ IT/NO 2003), 00:23:35.

kindness, Grace offers to help the villagers in all possible ways. Later, when a price is put on her head, the villagers take their moral-balance metaphor very literally. They reason that as she could be turned over for money, they are losing that same amount of money as long as they keep protecting her and not turn her over. In this logic, the “cost” of protecting her has grown, so Grace must increase her duties in compensation. Her situation goes from bad to worse. She flees the village but is returned by the villagers, after which everyone takes even greater and more gruesome advantage of her, raping her and chaining her like a dog.

In the end her father, a gangster boss, finds her. He had been searching for her only in order to have a conversation with her in which he could defend his morals against hers. She had believed in the goodness of people, that people do their best in life, whatever the circumstances. In such circumstances she would have acted similarly, she would have done her best like the villagers. Her father asks a rhetorical question: “But was it good enough?”

The narrator recounts what Grace thinks:

If she had acted like them, she could not have defended a single one of her actions and could not have condemned them harshly enough. It was as if her sorrow and pain finally assumed their rightful place. No, what they had done was not good enough. And if one had the power to put it to rights it was one’s duty to do so for the sake of other towns. For the sake of humanity and not least for the sake of the human being that was Grace herself. ... If there is any town the world is better without, this is it. (02:35:44–02:38:10)

The spectator who at first strongly sympathised with Tom Edison, who is friendly and a moral compass, slowly comes to understand that he is conformist and dangerous. Throughout the film we prefer to engage with Grace, a refugee who has been treated unfairly. Our engagement is strong but troubling, for we have to witness and suffer all the atrocities the villagers inflict upon her. And we strongly hope that she will survive, and that justice will be done.

Grace’s rescue does not bring the spectator relief. In the end, she has all the villagers murdered, which is not the poetic justice that the spectator had wanted.

Several similarities to *THE WHITE RIBBON* are striking. Christian morals are set as a guiding principle and as a symbol for a rural community to live up to. Men assume power over women. The strict logic of the starting point is followed through to the end. If there is balance in the world, then one good deed has to be rewarded by another good deed. That seems natural. But when it means rape and starvation, something must be wrong with the equation. The most striking similarity is that in the end the spectators find their moral values shattered.

The main difference between the films is that *DOGVILLE* has a narrator who is not part of the story but knows the characters' motives and narrow-mindedness. That knowledge reveals even greater ugliness, and we might be pleased that we do not have to hear the hateful thoughts that likely populate the mind of Klara in *THE WHITE RIBBON*. As a matter of fact, in the rare instances when characters speak out in *THE WHITE RIBBON*, their speech is uncomfortably straightforward. We might feel that the most hideous acts in the film involve the spectator, but the doctor's denigrating of Mrs Wagner is in fact far worse.

ORDER AND LOGIC

What does *DOGVILLE* tell us about *THE WHITE RIBBON*? It hints at another aspect of the immoral world: self-righteousness. Setting a moral example, bragging about it, feeling superior because of it, displaying it as a trophy – such acts open a Pandora's Box.

Almost all the characters are guilty of imposing on others to behave in certain ways and of applying rules they have learned without considering of the effect on others. For example, Martin orders God to punish him (for what?) and when he is not punished by God believes that God approves of his acts. As a result the crimes continue. The doctor obeys the commandment to speak the truth, but humiliates Mrs Wagner by saying how he loathes her.

A comparison of these films suggests that the real culprit in *THE WHITE RIBBON* is the pastor. In a sense, he is also the narrator of the film, as he is responsible for its title. Although we do not get to hear him preach in church, the word of God resonates in the speeches of this man, who thinks of himself as a pure and righteous person whose moral compass guides his children throughout.

However, he is dumbfounded when his youngest son offers him his precious pet bird, which he had rescued from certain death, as comfort following the killing of his own bird. He can merely stutter "thank you", understanding that this boy, who performs this simple act of consolation, has probably internalised the concept of righteousness far better than he himself could fathom in all his years of being a pastor. Maybe this act also holds him back from punishing Klara for killing his bird, and granting her the ritual of confirmation to become an official member of the church.

Both films thus show a plethora of immoral actions. People hurt each other, physically and emotionally. People lie and cheat. And all the characters act out of a feeling of moral superiority. They act immorally to defend their own morals. This paradox is not resolved; instead the films ensure the friction is severe.

PUNISHMENT AND CRIME

In 1940 George Bernard Shaw famously stated: “We ought to have declared war on Germany the moment Mr. Hitler’s police stole Einstein’s violin.” *THE WHITE RIBBON* can be seen as such a rewriting of events, although for the First World War rather than the Second. Here we see criminal acts, unresolved and unpunished, carried out by those who will subsequently fight in the war. Shaw’s remark seems morally sound. Just like Shaw, the spectator eagerly waits for the characters to be punished. But the film has a different logic. There are punishments, but they come before the crime; even worse, they cause the crimes. And the crimes themselves are left unanswered.

Klara and Martin are reprimanded for not coming home in time; Mrs Felder dies. Ferdinand is reprimanded for saying out loud that he wished the baby to be a girl: the baby catches pneumonia because of the open window. The pastor’s bird is killed by Klara because the pastor had criticised her publicly. Karli is almost blinded directly after we have seen Klara at confession, with her father hesitating to offer her the wine to drink, she looking up to him, and he looking doubtfully at her (maybe reprimanding him with her eyes, she fighting his powers).

And even the horse’s tripping over the wire, the first event, is preceded by a punishment. After all, the pastor reminds the children that when they were younger they had to wear those ribbons, to make them recognise their moral purity. And even then, they must have taken it as a punishment. Although the pastor talks about the ribbon as some sort of trophy of moral superiority, he also, later, liberates them from this “burden”.

BALANCE

I have suggested that the spectator of *THE WHITE RIBBON* finds himself in the dark recesses of the Unjust World. It is difficult to find a way out. It is not just painful to witness immoral acts; it also becomes unbearable, because the immoral acts are based on the concept of the Just World. Balance, as the foundation of the Just World, leads to the horrors of *THE WHITE RIBBON*. It leads to punishment and crime.

But the film does not *teach* us that. Actually, it shows how detrimental such a logic of balance is to a society. The film shows moments that disturb this logic. And the spectator longs for those moments. We find solace in the few acts

of kindness, the works of mercy that remain unrewarded, unbalanced. Those moments of compassion that the characters perform, a kind gesture, a subtle touch, remain unanswered; they have no implications for the logic of events, and just because of that they are what matters, and what remains.

Maybe our belief in a Just World is shattered through this film, but belief in the power of kindness is restored. That belief helps us endure this film. But it brings only small relief after a prolonged stay in the Unjust World.

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Intercultural Perspectives on DAS RADIKAL BÖSE and THE ACT OF KILLING

Similarities and Dissimilarities in Coping with Trauma in Indonesia and Germany, in Southeast Asia and Europe

ABSTRACT

This article offers a close reading of DAS RADIKAL BÖSE (THE RADICAL EVIL, Stefan Ruzowitzky, DE/AT 2013) and THE ACT OF KILLING (Joshua Oppenheimer, GB/DK/NO 2012), films that provide access to the same topic by focusing on different facets of it. In referring to historical events distant from each other in terms of timing, geography and religious associations, these filmic works draw on very different situations and contexts. But even then, something universally human can be detected. The thinking of Zygmunt Bauman and Emmanuel Levinas assists the exploration of three scenes in which perpetrators seem to break down when they realise what they have done to women and children.

KEYWORDS

Shoah, Eastern Europe 1941–1943, Stefan Ruzowitzky, Indonesian genocide 1965/66, Joshua Oppenheimer, Zygmunt Bauman, Emmanuel Levinas, intercultural perspectives

BIOGRAPHY

Freek L. Bakker studied theology and Indology at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. In 2003 he was appointed Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Interreligious Dialogue at Utrecht University. He has written books and articles analysing Hinduism, religion and film and interreligious dialogue.

This article offers a close reading of DAS RADIKAL BÖSE (THE RADICAL EVIL, Stefan Ruzowitzky, DE/AT 2013) and THE ACT OF KILLING (Joshua Oppenheimer, GB/DK/NO 2012), two films that are very different but nevertheless provide access to the same topic by focusing on different facets. These filmic works arose from separate situations and contexts, from historic events distant from each other

both temporally and geographically. The mass killing that is their topic happened in Indonesia 25 years after that in Eastern Europe. Differences are at the core of my investigation: the differences between the films themselves, the images they use and their approaches.

I scrutinise the differences in the filmic representations. How did the German soldiers react to the orders they received? And how do the Indonesians, in particular Anwar Congo and Suryono, look back at what happened? I read the films as bridges between documentary representation and social memory of the massacres, with the psychic effect of the killing on the perpetrators playing an important role and differing widely in Europe and Indonesia. The differences in how these events are perceived retrospectively has probably to do not only with psychology, but also with religion.

At the same time, it cannot be denied that there are also strong similarities between the films, particularly when they are viewed more expansively. I seek to outline these aspects by analysing three key sequences in the films. Finally, and to permit more profound analysis, I have drawn on the thought of the Polish philosopher Zygmunt Bauman (1925–2017) and of the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995).

In the background of this academic exploration lurks the question of what I myself might have done in such circumstances. I am not sure that I would have acted differently.

TITLES

We start the comparison by looking at titles. *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* reminds us of a statement made by Hannah Arendt, in the Kantian tradition. Arendt wrote: “The radical evil is something that should have never happened, something with which one can never reconcile, and therefore also something which may never be passed in silence.” Arendt believed that the radical evil is an open wound which will never heal. Filmmaker Stefan Ruzowitzky deliberately went back to this statement by Hannah Arendt and not to her better known “*das banal Böse*” (the banal evil). “The banal evil belongs to Adolf Eichmann”, Ruzowitzky said, “the man killing people from behind his desk. This film is about people who did the shooting themselves.”¹

At the beginning of the film, frequent reference is made to the idea within the title “*THE ACT OF KILLING*”. Time and again filmmaker Joshua Oppenheimer asks Anwar Congo: How exactly did it happen? What did you do? This seems a questionable form of curiosity, a morbid interest even. Who would want to know how people kill other people? But in the course of the film it turns out that

1 Zawia 2014, interview with the director.

exact representation of what has taken place is key to a process in which Anwar Congo returns to his past and is almost submerged by his trauma. It seems that for the first time he has realised what he has done.

POEMS

Both films start with a poem. *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* begins with a text by Primo Levi:

Monsters exist, but
they are too few in number
to be truly dangerous.
More dangerous
are the common men.²

THE ACT OF KILLING starts with words of Voltaire:

It is forbidden to kill; therefore
all murderers are punished
unless they are in large numbers
and to the sound of trumpets.³

These poems reveal a difference in perspective. In *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* the danger comes from the common man, someone who does not seem to be a monster, which suggests that all of us can be such killers. This film aims to confront us with ourselves. *THE ACT OF KILLING* speaks about the very large number of victims – and also about the enormous number of killers? – whose number makes their prosecution impossible and therefore gives them a sort of protection. This scale is emphasised by the sounding of trumpets, which in Voltaire’s time would have been understood as a reference to army trumpeters. The image conjured up concerns the notion that killing a human being is always murder and therefore sinful – “it is forbidden to kill” even if the killing is on a large scale and carried out with the support of the people in power. *THE ACT OF KILLING* demonstrates that in the end the perpetrator feels the truth of this. Neither the support of the state nor the scale of the killing can nullify the perpetrator’s actions, which have brought negative karma.

FILMIC APPROACHES

The difference in approach across the two films is tremendous. *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* starts by asking how it was even possible that such ordinary men could

² Levi 2015, 191.

³ English translation of a statement found in Voltaire 1977.

become such dreadful murderers. This is Ruzowitzky's first question, to which he then adds many other questions, thus gradually making his point.

The movie is divided into 19 chapters. Many chapters begin with scenes showing German soldiers as extracts from letters they wrote home are recited. This start is followed by comments from experts and sometimes elements of already published research, in particular from *On Killing* by David Grossman.⁴ Some experts are Jewish, scions of the people that the soldiers tried to exterminate. Others are not, as in the case of a Polish Roman Catholic priest. An important detour is taken with *Bibrika*, a chapter about a town of that name in Ukraine. This chapter relates how normal life was in this city and how this normality was ended by the murderers. Because of the large number of Jews in the district in which these killing campaigns took place, the area was called Jiddishland. In some places Jews were even in the majority. The film starts by showing images of some of the accused at Nuremberg declaring "not guilty", and it ends with images of the conviction of all the accused at this trial, followed by pictures of some of these mass killings and an indication of the numbers murdered in these campaigns.

The structure of *THE ACT OF KILLING* is completely different. After the quotation of Voltaire a big metal fish emerges on the screen, located in a heavenly landscape. A row of men and women come out of the fish's mouth performing an Indonesian dance in the splashing of a waterfall. They appear like angels clothed in red and white, the colours of the Indonesian flag, and among them we find Anwar Congo, the main protagonist of this film. He too is dancing. Subsequently the story of the film unrolls. The filmmaker interviews proud murderers, Anwar Congo and Herman Koto, and proposes to them that a film be made of the killings so that Hollywood will be able to witness their great actions. I skip over the details here. It is not long before Congo starts to tell about his nightmares. After a scene in which they show how they set fire to houses in a village, Congo is increasingly silent. The heavenly scene returns once, when a victim thanks his murderer for enabling him to go to heaven sooner. At the end of the film, Congo is completely silent. He vomits because of what he has done. It hits him severely. A little later he leaves the place where, at the beginning of the film, he had proudly started to recount his great deeds. He walks through the shop below. His pride is entirely gone.

The different cinematic approaches mirror the huge differences between the historical circumstances on which the works draw. *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* is a filmic collage about German soldiers, particularly the special death squads (*Einsatzgruppen*) that operated in Eastern Europe. They were in a foreign country. They were not killing Germans. Time after time they explain in the film that they had killed Jews to prevent the Jews from killing them. They had to kill the women and the children, because "they", the propaganda stated, "would do exactly

4 Grossman 1995.

the same or ten times worse to their women and children”. Nonetheless they were deeply relieved when they learned that such killing was no longer required of them as it had become possible to gas Jews in large numbers.

THE ACT OF KILLING is about Indonesia, where in 1965 a coup d'état took place that according to propaganda had been initiated by the communists. In reality it was the work of discontented officers. Aidit, secretary of the Indonesian Communist Party, was also involved, but the party executive probably knew nothing, and the common party members were entirely in the dark. Nonetheless a campaign of mass murder was launched, not against foreigners, but against fellow Indonesians. A similar story circulated: if the Communist revolt had been successful, the murderers would have been murdered. After the death of at least 1 million people – estimations differ and the figure may have been higher – the frenzy died down. But unlike the German perpetrators, the Indonesian killers were proud of what they had done, and they remain proud. More than that, they reap benefits from their killing. For example, Herman Koto became a leader of the Pancasila youth movement. Such pride is absent among the Germans, but this could have been different if Hitler had won the war.

There are more differences, but before I discuss them, I wish to draw attention to two turning points, as I term them, in the films.

TURNING POINTS

First we note two sequences in DAS RADIKAL BÖSE. The first sequence is about the moment the soldiers receive the order to kill women and children. We see a small group of soldiers walking along the open doors of a large empty stable. One of them says:

“With the first train cars my hand was trembling as I shot. But you get used to it. With the tenth car I aimed calmly and shot confidently at all the women, children and infants.”

Now the screen shows images of young blond German girls with flowers in their hair. The soldier continues:

“When I think of my two infants at home. I know these hordes would do the same, probably ten times as cruel.”

We see the soldiers again, sitting. One of them lights a cigarette. Another soldier writes to his family:

“My dearest Mommy, Traudy and Hans-Peter, Daddy is waiting for a letter since 22 September. But unfortunately, no one arrived. So Blobel ordered me to shoot the children. I asked him who was supposed to perform this. He said: ‘The Waffen-SS.’ I objected: ‘Those are all young men.’”



Fig 1: German military and children (DAS RADIKAL BÖSE, Stefan Ruzowitzky, DE/AT 2013), 01:04:10.

The screen again shows images of German girls. The soldier continues:

“Can we take the responsibility for shooting little children?” Then he says: ‘Take your men.’ Once again I said: ‘How could they do it? They have little kids themselves.’”



Fig. 2: German soldier with rifle (DAS RADIKAL Böse, Stefan Ruzowitzky, DE/AT 2013), 01:12:40.

The screen is filled with pictures of German officers helping little blond German girls. The soldier goes on:

“This tug of war lasted ten minutes. I suggested that the Ukrainian militia should shoot the children. And nobody objected.”

The screen shows the soldiers again. Another soldier says:

“Picking berries would be nice. Yesterday was Thanksgiving.” (01:03:20–01:04:28)

In the second sequence one of the German soldiers tells about his nightmare the night before:

The soldier says:

“I had a terrible night. How can a dream be as true and expressive as reality?”

The screen is filled with images of soldiers walking with rifles through green pastures.

Next another soldier says:

“I tried to suppress the pictures of the past from my memory. But I couldn’t.”

Now his face appears on the screen looking into the darkness of the night. His glasses lie on a small nightstand next to his bed. A third soldier begins to speak. He says:

“Somebody told me that Blobel was lying in his room with a nervous breakdown. ‘My mood is very gloomy’, he said. I went into his room. Blobel was talking gibberish. He said it was impossible to shoot so many Jews. The sight of dead bodies isn’t jolly, especially women and children.” (01:12:59–01:13:21)

Both sequences reveal that the soldiers feel a strong repugnance at killing women and children. But then they recall the explicit propaganda statements that explained why they must kill them. “These hordes would do the same, even worse.” Simultaneously, however, the soldiers try to dodge this task, passing it on to others, to the Ukrainian militias; nobody objects. The second sequence is about nightmares and again the focus is on the killing of women and children.

Now we shall give particular attention to a sequence in *THE ACT OF KILLING* that shows a re-enactment of the chasing down and torturing of women and children, as well as the setting alight of houses in a village. The men wear the same red-black shirts and black trousers as they did in the 1960s. Afterwards one of the women who participated in the re-enactment faints. A girl, the daughter of one of the perpetrators, cries. These acts were horrible. The camera focuses on Anwar Congo, the man who was so proud of his role in the killings.



Fig. 3: Women pulled out of a burning house (*THE ACT OF KILLING*, Joshua Oppenheimer, GB/DK/NO 2012), 01:58:29.

Eight persons surround the woman who has fainted. “She must calm down.” Another woman and a man kneel down. The man stretches his arm around her shoulder; the woman caresses her. Another man sprinkles Eau de Cologne on her head. Congo looks at them. Two men take the head of the woman in their hands. One blows on her forehead. In the next scene one of the perpetrators says to Febby, his crying daughter:

“You played excellently, Febby. Now you must stop crying. I am ashamed of you. Movie stars never cry long.”

Meanwhile we see people wearing Indonesian straw hats looking at the houses; some of these homes are still burning. Another perpetrator also looks at the scene. He seems to be very content and takes a puff from his cigarette. Then the camera focuses on Congo, who likewise takes a puff from his cigarette.

“I regret one thing”, he says, “I had never thought that this scene would be so horrifying. My friends said: ‘You have to play this more sadistically.’ But then I saw those women and children.”

The women and a girl appear on the screen. Congo goes on:

“Imagine the future of those children. They are tortured and now their houses burn down. What kind of future they will have? They will curse us for the rest of their lives. It was very (*sangat*), very ..., very serious ...” (2:00:34–2:02:18)

Here too it is women and children who unlock Congo’s emotions. Suddenly he imagines their future and their expectations, what could have become of them. He realises what he had taken away from them. “They will curse us for the rest of their lives. It was *sangat* ..., *sangat* ... It was very, very serious.” Previously Congo had told of a nightmare that was disturbing him. Once, when it was completely dark, he chopped off a man’s head with a huge chopping knife. He can still hear the death rattle. “I saw his head on the ground”, he says, “and his eyes looking at me. On my way home I asked myself why I didn’t close his eyes. That is the cause of my nightmares. I am constantly haunted by his eyes looking at me, those eyes I didn’t close. Now these eyes are permanently looking at me in my nightmares. It confuses me heavily.” – “Is this the revenge of the dead?” he had asked earlier.

Later in the film Congo speaks about karma. “Karma”, he says, “is the law of nature constituted by God.” Congo believes that the souls of the dead have returned and that they send him these nightmares.

In *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* one of the soldiers is ordered to kill women and children. At first he obeys. But later the soldiers are able to dodge this task, leaving it to the Ukrainians. Despite all the propaganda they find the order dreadful. One of the experts interviewed in the film, psychologist Robert Jay Lifton, points out

that above all they exhibit self-pity, as they constantly complain that they were assigned to this battalion. They had tough luck. They would have preferred to have been assigned to a battalion that was not ordered to kill Jews. Apparently Lifton is right. The soldiers express this sentiment loudly and clearly. Nonetheless we may wonder whether there is not also something else happening. One of the soldiers says to his fellow soldiers – I follow here the German text – that it is impossible to shoot so many Jews. His words are: “Der Anblick der Toten darunter die Frauen und Kinder ist auch nicht um aufzumuntern” (The sight of the dead, among them those women and children, does not pep up). This is the unemotional tough talk of men, but even here we hear that seeing the dead bodies of women and children causes great mental confusion. While this response might be termed self-pity, in my opinion it is rather horror, an intense feeling of shock accompanied by an indomitable will to run away from this experience.

For Lifton self-pity means that these soldiers think it dreadful that they belong to this battalion while not thinking of what they did to their victims. It may also be, however, that these words express that they did not want to carry out this killing and that they will not want to do so in future as well. Later in the film one of soldiers says that he is afraid that he will never forget, which makes it impossible for him to return to a normal life. In other words, these memories will always be with him and will constantly haunt him.

The idea of being haunted by the souls of the dead is entirely absent from *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE*. What haunts the soldiers is what they have seen and experienced. In *THE ACT OF KILLING*, by contrast, people repeatedly talk about being haunted by the spirits of the dead. I will return later to the important distinction that this contrast highlights.

THE PARALLEL

Before I turn my attention to this difference, I wish to point to a remarkable parallel. However great the distance between Eastern Europe and Indonesia, however different the situations – the massacre of Jews who are deemed not to belong to the killers’ people and the killing of compatriots – and however far apart in time the events, the films deal with processes that are also closely akin to each other.

Both movies deal with a “purification” that has some form of government backing, a purification of elements that are supposedly no longer at home in the country where they live. This purification was part of the vision of the government for the future of the country. This vision determined who might be deemed pure or impure, who was good and who was bad, who had the right to continue to live and build a future in the country and who had to be removed.

In each instance the latter disturbed the happiness of the former. Zygmunt Bauman has proposed that a vision is a necessary impetus to such “cleansing”. A forest, a mountainside, a pasture or an ocean, or nature in general, distinguished from human culture, is neither clean nor dirty in and of itself. Human behaviour defiles and besmirches nature, whether with the remnants of a Sunday picnic or the waste of chemical factories. Human behaviour creates the distinction between dirty and clean.⁵ Impurity is understood in terms of the presence of something that is not natural, something that causes irritation and must therefore be removed. A vision based on purity is related to a desire to create order, an order that stems from the presence of that which belongs and the elimination of that which does not belong. The world of those striving for such purity is too small to provide space for the other.⁶

Even before he was inaugurated as president of Indonesia, President Soeharto had introduced the concept of *Orde Baru* (New Order), in opposition to the concept of *Orde Lama* (Old Order), for which President Sukarno was responsible in the form of the so-called Nasakom order, which had room for nationalists, religious people and communists. The New Order had no space for communists. Something similar can be said of Nazi Germany. The German saying “*Ordnung muss sein*” (There must be order) has been identified as a fundamental of German culture.⁷ “*Ordnung muss sein*”, President Hindenburg stated in 1930.⁸ Adolf Hitler implemented this maxim by explicating that there was no longer room in the German Reich for Jews, gypsies, homosexuals and the disabled, nor for communists.

Bauman repeatedly references differences in forms of dirt. Cockroaches, flies, spiders and mice need no invitation to enter a house. They might be present for a long time without the other occupants being aware. The filthiest dirt, however, may be invisible to the eye – carpet mites, microbes or viruses, for example. What appears safe and clean may not be safe and clean. Hygiene is important. Dirt is not innocent. It can endanger health and must therefore be controlled constantly.⁹

If human beings are regarded as dirt, the message is that they need to be removed. Bauman points out that an atmosphere can change suddenly. Despite contemporary anti-Semitism, Jews in Germany appeared to be increasingly accepted, especially if they assimilated and their behaviour conformed to that of a “good” German citizen. In Indonesia the communists were also accepted. Their political party was the biggest in some populous provinces and they therefore

5 Bauman 1998, 5.

6 Bauman 1998, 6

7 Tomalin 2006, 37.

8 Graudenz 1930.

9 Bauman 1998, 6–7.

participated in provincial administration. They were even represented in parliament. Moreover the Indonesian air force and navy were “reddish”, as was said at the time. Many teachers and farmers were communists. In other words, communists and Jews participated in Indonesian and German society respectively. They were not denied that role.

The situation changed in German in the 1920s and early 1930s and in Indonesia in fall 1965. Suddenly communists and Jews were seen as dirt and deemed infectious, a threat to the health of each country.

Once that label has been applied, two possibilities lie open. Those so identified might be compelled to assimilate completely, to come to resemble those who are accepted to the extent that the distinction has in effect disappeared. They might be “devoured”, in Bauman’s words. Or they might be excluded, “vomited”, deprived of the right to share a space with those who are accepted. According to racial thinking, the option of devouring the Jews was impossible in Germany; the racial distinction could not be overcome by assimilation, through education, training or other forms of socialisation.¹⁰ In Indonesia such a distinction was not made. But then the threat was deemed all the greater, for now communists were like carpet mites, microbes or viruses, unseen but evil. Extirpation was presented as the only option. This idea of purifying a country is found in an account of what occurred on the Indonesian island of Bali. Nationalist Ernst Utrecht recorded in 1967, one year after the killings, that the murderers had seen the killing of members of the Communist Party as a religious duty to purify the land.¹¹ The killings were regarded as a purification ritual comparable to existing rituals in the traditional Hindu religion of Bali.¹² The victims even offered themselves “voluntarily” to the murderers, although probably under heavy pressure. It was said that those who volunteered to die would not go to hell after their deaths. Often clothed in white robes, they were brought to a place where they were stabbed, shot or decapitated.¹³

I wish to add something to this analysis that in my opinion exerted much influence in both situations – the idea that if the others were not killed, they would take the lives of the killers. Their killing is then seemingly inevitable, for the failure to intervene puts the killers and their families at risk. In the movie we hear Germans talk about hordes that will rape and kill their women and children. In Indonesia something similar was said about the communists. For the perpetrators these narratives bring an urgency to their efforts at extermination. If they do nothing, it may be too late. In Indonesia those who were not communists feared the communists greatly. The communists had done very well in

10 Bauman 1998, 18–19.

11 Robinson 1995, 300.

12 Swellengrebel 1984, 45; Schulte Nordholt 1991, 33–39; Bakker 2001, 40–41.

13 Robinson 1995, 300–301; Vickers 1989, 171–172.

provincial elections in Central Java and East Java in 1957. They had taken a significantly larger proportion of the vote, which led President Sukarno to suggest they be included in the national government.¹⁴ After these electoral advances communists repeatedly organised demonstrations and campaigns in which other Indonesians were intimidated. Many non-communists believed it was only a matter of time before the communists would win a national election and assume power. The national election was repeatedly postponed. It was to have been held in 1960 and again in 1965, but it was not until 1971, so after the killings, that another national election took place in Indonesia.

A SUBSTANTIAL DIFFERENCE

Noting these parallels we now return to the significant divergence noted above. Anwar Congo spoke about the spirits of the dead who would return and give him nightmares, depriving him of a carefree life in a purified world. The Germans did not speak of the souls of the dead. I assume that this distinction has to do with the distinct German and Indonesian cultural and religious environments.

But before I scrutinise this perception more thoroughly, we can note another difference. *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE* was based on letters the German soldiers wrote to their families and friends back home after they had carried out the murders, sometimes immediately after, but sometimes days or weeks later. The temporal distance between the killings and their reports and reflections on those killings was much smaller than in Indonesia. Joshua Oppenheimer held his interviews with Anwar Congo, Herman Koto and others involved in the Indonesian massacres in 2012, so 47 years after the coup d'état and 46 years after the end of the killings, which continued into 1966. How people look back differs according to whether the event on which they are reflecting took place recently or far longer ago. In both instances we learn that perpetrators are haunted, but the Germans speak about what they saw, the act of killing, the sense of pleasure experienced by some of them, but also a disgust that they murdered defenceless people. Nobody speaks about being haunted by the spirits of the dead, with the idea of a spirit living on after death evidently absent. As a convenient shorthand, let us call this the Western perspective. For Anwar Congo, and also for other Indonesians, the souls of the dead are a bitter reality; they want revenge, haunt them and give them nightmares. The Western perspective is also known in Indonesia, with one of his friends advising Anwar Congo to visit a psychiatrist. Congo refuses.

We face the difference between an Eastern (Indonesian) understanding of the cosmos and a Western (German) view of the universe. The Indonesian in-

14 Ricklefs 1981, 248.

terpretation is full of imperceptible beings that are very real to the Indonesians and will certainly want revenge. Anwar Congo moreover fears the power of God, who will not leave his sins unpunished – he speaks of *dosa*, which means sin. This concept is missing in *DAS RADIKAL BÖSE*. There the view of the cosmos is much more secularised. Perhaps age is an explanation for this difference: the Germans are young, while the perpetrators speaking in *THE ACT OF KILLING* are much older. Those who know Indonesia will be well aware that the social imaginary is much more religious than the social imaginary in Western Europe. Large parts of Germany were Protestant, and the souls of the dead play only a small part in the Lutheran and Reformed traditions. The dead do not remain among the living; they go to heaven, to God, or to hell, so to a place somewhere outside this earth, although there are exceptions.

As a result, in the German context evil is more closely related to guilt. It was wrong to kill helpless women and children. The perpetrators knew the argumentation that justified these actions, but such justification was insufficient. The images haunted them. Nightmares and severe mental illness followed.

In Indonesia the perpetrators respond in terms of spirits of the dead who haunt them in combination with knowledge that they have sinned and that God will not leave their wrongdoings unpunished. But the Indonesian perpetrators are most tormented by the weeping, crying, pain and sorrow of the women and children. They are likewise haunted by nightmares. The outcome in the two instances is therefore the same. Oppenheimer's next film, *THE LOOK OF SILENCE* (ID 2015), reveals that in Indonesia many perpetrators also subsequently suffered severe mental illness. We learn in this movie that drinking the blood of the dead was one method used to counter such mental torment.

We can usefully draw here on ideas of Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas as formulated and summarised by the Dutch philosopher Ad Peperzak:

I possessed and enjoyed my world as my home. Full of joy about the good things of the earth; without any notion that I made other people poor, deprived them of their rights or even killed them by appropriating all these things. ... Then someone else rises in face of me. ... The Other presents himself. He looks at me. Even before he has said one word to me, his face speaks to me. ... His face, his eyes, totally uncovered, *nude*.¹⁵

For Levinas, the Other stands for God. With this in mind, what he says in the following quotation, cited from Peperzak, is very remarkable, for it is almost a direct response to Bauman's analysis. "If the Other [God] is really in the centre of one's thinking and doing, one has come to a movement that forces a breakthrough of the world and its orderliness but exactly because of this points to

15 Peperzak 1984, 9, cf. Levinas 1979, 194–204.

a Reality that has left a trace when passed by: the face commanding us from above but in humility.”¹⁶

In this way Levinas seeks to explain how the encounter with the Other leads to an ethical relationship in which the subject who meets the Other is forced to re-evaluate.¹⁷ Precisely this occurs in these two films, as the Other, in particular the sight of the women and the children, makes the perpetrators conscious of what they have done or – in the case of the Germans – are doing.

The social imaginaries differ, but the effect is nearly the same. In the German context guilt dominates; in the Indonesian context divine punishment and revenge undertaken by the souls of the dead are to the fore.

These differences naturally shape conversations with the perpetrators and how they cope with what they have done. The dialogue with the Germans thus deals with redemption, forgiveness and living with a bad conscience. The dialogue with the Indonesians also deals with redemption, but here calming the spirits and averting divine punishment are more significant. It seems very likely that rituals will be performed in the hope that they will counter some of the effects of their evil deeds. The rituals in the German context will be different. The church offers the opportunity to confess one’s sins and be forgiven or to talk about those sins in a pastoral dialogue, for everything can be brought to God in prayer, including remorse. Yet I expect that in Germany more secular means are also adopted to assist those who feel such guilt.

Will such opportunities be sufficient? My personal experience as a Protestant minister communicating with people who experience such trauma suggests that no relief can be total.

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16 Peperzak 1984, 11.

17 Levinas 1979, 195.

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Open Section

Representations of Religion and Culture in Children’s Literature

An Analysis of Othering Processes in Texts and Illustrations

ABSTRACT

Literature is an important medium for representing and communicating world-views and values. This article focuses on the representation of culture and religion and reveals constructions of identities in children’s literature. The analysis of selected contemporary German-language books considers through a discourse analytical approach the representation of the main characters and their cultural and religious backgrounds as well as their faith and its practices. The narrations analysed tend to specify difference by means of cultural and religious characteristics; instead of dissolving those categories, the narrations strengthen them. The article states the importance of literature in the mediation of knowledge, self-concepts, interpersonal perceptions and normative paradigms.

KEYWORDS

Othering, children’s literature, identity, religion, faith

Biography

Verena Eberhardt studied empirical cultural studies and German language and literature at the University of Tübingen. She obtained her Master’s degree in the study of religion at the University of Munich (LMU), where she is currently working on a doctoral thesis in the same field.

Media – and among them literature – have a significant role to play in the transmission of world-views, values and norms to children and adolescents.¹ Children’s books iterate, strengthen and reflect existing social structures. This article deals with children’s literature as it is concerned with, and constructs, “own” identities and “foreign” identities. The study examines the representa-

1 This article highlights the results of author’s unpublished Master’s thesis, Eberhardt 2017.

tion of identities in the context of immigration and religion and argues that in children's books the negotiation of values such as tolerance often paradoxically strengthens and generalises differences such as religious ones. Moreover, it illustrates modes of representation and views of cultural and religious identities in contemporary children's literature from the perspective of religious studies.

Children's and adolescent books articulate social communication for a specific biographical phase. Whereas children's books address readers aged six to twelve, adolescent literature is written for teenagers. Storybooks, produced for children between the ages of three and eight, tend to be educational and are characterised by thematic redundancy. Children's literature often has a pedagogical aim; it is intended to mediate norms, paradigms and images of society.

The article begins by outlining a theoretical framework where the concept of othering plays a central role. In a second step, after a short discussion of methodology, the results of an examination of selected children's books are presented. The analysis highlights othering processes in the representation of own and foreign culture and religion.

OTHERING, OWN IDENTITIES AND FOREIGN IDENTITIES

Constructions of own identities and foreign identities are imagined processes of demarcation that categorise individuals and groups as belonging to or not belonging to social systems. These processes of othering express constructions of identities. The analysis of children's literature illustrates that foreign identities are more clearly constituted than own processes of belonging. Conceptions of own and foreign identities are narrative and iconographic constructs which become manifest in delineations, judgments and classifications of persons and groups.²

Own identities are formulated via demarcation and differentiation from imagined foreign identities. Furthermore, foreign identities do not exist per se, but arise in confrontations between the familiar and the unknown, the confident and the unconfident.³ According to Stuart Hall, the representation of foreign identities does not occur uniquely but rather recurs in an identical or similar manner across media such as television, books or magazines. The intertextual accumulation of meaningful conceptions strengthens the representation of particular groups as different and foreign.⁴

Written and visual media are essential mediums of images, ideas and knowledge. Media devise foreign identities by means of categories such as back-

2 See Gernig 2001, 19.

3 See Gernig 2001, 15.

4 See Hall 2004, 111–112.

ground, nationality, religion and tradition, history and politics – the comprehensive framework that we term *culture* is of central importance in the construction of own and foreign identities. With the deconstructivist turn in the humanities, classifications of race, ethnicity and gender lost their postulated naturalness.⁵ However, in social reality these categories do not occur as social constructs at all times. Processes of “naturalisation” establish characteristics of foreign identities as unalterable and naturally constituted. In addition, “naturalisations” are often used to justify discrimination and exclusion. Difference and interpersonal perceptions are generated not only by experience, but also by imagination and concepts circulating in society.

Children’s and adolescent literature revises and strengthens prejudices and interpersonal perceptions in an early phase of life. Conceptions of foreign identities are not scrutinised but instead iterated as prejudged. Prejudices reduce the complexity of reality, are hard to modify and are linked with emotions. Moreover, prejudices coalesce with narratives, reports and personal anecdotes.⁶ Prejudices are similar to stereotypes, which are extenuated and undifferentiated perceptual patterns that do not allow one to draw one’s own conclusions.⁷ Whereas prejudices imply negative associations, stereotypes are utilised with both negative and positive connotations. However, positive stereotypes construct foreign identities just as do negative ones, for they oftentimes exoticise and mystify foreign cultures and religions in discourses of fascination.

Media represent religious practices and cultural ways of life as well as own identities and foreign identities in processes of othering and are conducive to creating conceptions of the world.

THEORETICAL REALM AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The following analysis of children’s books focuses on texts and illustrations that represent signs and symbols encoded in the construction of own and foreign identities. According to Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, “representation is one of the central practices that produces culture and a key ‘moment’ in what has been called the ‘circuit of culture’.”⁸ The “circuit of culture” (fig. 1) illustrates how societies produce meaning in connection with representation, production, regulation, consumption and identity. According to Hall,

Our “circuit of culture” suggests that, in fact, meanings are produced at several different sites and circulated through several different processes or practices (the cul-

5 See Knapp/Klinger 2008, 10.

6 See Eickhorst 2007, 37.

7 See Krickau 2007, 16.

8 Hall/Evans/Nixon 2013, xvii.

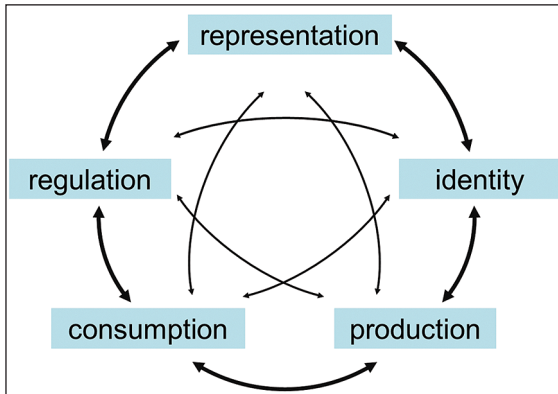


Fig. 1: The "circuit of culture" according to Stuart Hall/Paul Du Gay 2013, xvii.

tural circuit). Meaning is what gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and with whom we “belong” – so it is tied up with questions of how culture is used to mark out and maintain identity within and difference between groups.⁹

In order to examine the representation of own identities and foreign identities as well as the production of knowledge systems and narrative positions, the analysis here refers to the areas *representation* and *identity*. The article focuses on the construction of own identities and foreign identities, hence the literature is interpreted from a discourse analytical perspective. Dorien Van De Mieroop explains: “From a discursive perspective, the fluid nature of collective identity is emphasized, which means that every individual shifts in and out of diverse memberships in a multitude of social groups, resulting in a wide variety of potential collective identities that are each interactively constructed and negotiated.”¹⁰ I have chosen this methodological approach since discourse analysis is based on the assumption that societies construct reality, allowing one to analyse protagonists, identities, knowledge systems and power structures.

THE REPRESENTATION OF RELIGION AND CULTURE IN CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

The following analysis is based on two books in which cultural and religious identities in Germany play a central role. In their approach to religion, they are representative of a whole range of children’s literature where religions are depicted as institutions, inspired by “world religion” classifications and combined with representations of otherness in the context of migration.¹¹ Furthermore,

9 Hall/Evans/Nixon 2013, xix.

10 Van De Mieroop 2015, 410.

11 See Eberhardt 2017, 25.

they deal with such topics not only in the text but also with plentiful illustrations. Their selection is therefore based on both their content and their style.

The children's book *Lara Lustig und der liebe Gott* (Lara Lustig and beloved God) was published in 2006. The author, Elisabeth Zöller, was a grammar school (*Gymnasium*) teacher who wrote numerous children's books, many of which covered "difficult" topics such as death, anger, violence and grief.¹² *Lara Lustig und der liebe Gott* narrates in five chapters how pupils at a primary school get to know each other with regard to faith, religious practices and cultural traditions. The protagonists represent Catholic Christianity, Judaism and Islam and discuss their ways of life in class. The chapter titles are "Cornelius und die Erstkommunion" (Cornelius and the First Communion); "Joscha und das Laubhüttenfest" (Joscha and the Feast of Booths); "Bilal und die Blumen des Korans" (Bilal and the Blossoms of the Qur'an); "Tante Berthe und das Beten" (Aunt Berthe and Praying); and "Sternennacht" (Starry Night).¹³ The book was published by cbj Verlag – which belongs to Random House – a major publisher in Germany. cbj Verlag publishes children's and adolescent books on topics like friendship, anxiety, family and relationships, love, identity and adolescence as well as societal and personal issues.¹⁴ The intended readers of *Lara Lustig und der liebe Gott* are between the ages of eight and ten, and the book aims to inform children about diverse religious and cultural traditions.¹⁵

Starke Geschichten für alle Kinder dieser Welt (Strong stories for all the children of this world), a storybook published in 2016, operates in the same way. In six stories, five authors present religious and cultural traditions of Jewish, Christian and Muslim children from Poland, Turkey, Tanzania, Syria and China. The children meet in German-speaking environments. The anthology comprises the following individual stories: "Levent und das Zuckerfest" (Levent and the sugar feast); "Mwangaza und die Geschichte mit dem Zahn" (Mwangaza and the story with the tooth); "Lena feiert Pessach mit Alma" (Lena celebrates Pessach with Alma); "Lili und das chinesische Frühlingsfest" (Lili and the Chinese Spring Festival); "Jana und Teresa feiern Himmelfahrt" (Jana and Teresa celebrate Ascension Day); and "Huda bekommt ein Brüderchen" (Huda gets a baby brother). *Starke Geschichten für alle Kinder dieser Welt* was published by Carlsen and is intended for children aged three and up. The publishing house describes the content as follows:

12 <http://www.elisabeth-zoeller.de/index.php?id=0000003&SID=488458ec883812f3dc4fcc2b3fd8d682> [accessed 29 January 2018].

13 All translations of the sources from the German original are by the author.

14 <https://www.randomhouse.de/Kinder-und-Jugendbuchverlage-cbj-&cbt/aid77972.rhd> [accessed 29 January 2018].

15 See back cover, Zöller 2006.

Six stories recount the everyday life of children from different cultures who live with us. There is laughter and food, celebration and singing everywhere. All children are curious and want to get to know each other. No matter if they are from Turkey, Syria, Africa, China or another place in the world ... Strong storybook tales to look at and read aloud together.¹⁶

Beyond that, the publisher recommends the storybook to parents and educators and states that it is “checked and accompanied by experts”.¹⁷ Some of the five authors have migration backgrounds themselves.¹⁸ “Stiftung Lesen”, a foundation that promotes literacy and reading skills, has recommended the storybook.

The analysis of *Lara Lustig und der liebe Gott* and *Starke Geschichten für alle Kinder dieser Welt* focuses here on the representation of identity, culture and religion by means of diegesis and point of view, spaces and settings, character conception, culture and cultural imaginaries as well as faith and religion.¹⁹

DIEGESIS AND POINTS OF VIEW

The narrative voice mediates between diegesis and the reader; it determines how the reader is made aware of characters, storylines and emotional atmospheres. The analysis of narrative positions reveals how the narrative voice constructs closeness and distance as well as foreign elements and difference.

The chapters in *Lara Lustig und der liebe Gott* illustrate how a schoolgirl becomes acquainted with the religious and cultural traditions of her classmates from a homodiegetic perspective. Although the narrative voice – the schoolgirl – is a minor character in the storyline, the perspective generates a personal view. Pronouns like *I* and *we* provide insight into emotions and personal views. By contrast, *Starke Geschichten für alle Kinder dieser Welt* describes characters as well as their feelings and perceptions distantly, from a heterodiegetic perspective. The internal focus on characters that represent own identities has an alienating effect. By means of narrative conceptions, texts construct interpersonal perceptions on an intradiegetic level.

SPACES AND SETTINGS

A focus on spatial settings can illuminate the construction of difference in children’s literature and in particular the creation of own identities and foreign

16 See <https://www.carlsen.de/presse/hardcover/lesemaus-sonderbaende-starke-geschichten-fuer-alle-kinder-dieser-welt/66761> [accessed 29 January 2018].

17 See cover, Halberstam 2016.

18 See for example biographies of Agatha Ngonyani: <http://www.agathangonyani.com/>, Dagmar Yu-Dembski: <http://www.bebraverlag.de/autoren/autor/257-dagmar-yu-dembski.html> and Suleman Taufiq: http://www.nrw-kultur.de/de/programme/werkproben/autor_innen_2017_18/suleman_taufiq/#.

19 For narrative analysis in general see De Fina/Georgakopoulou 2015.

identities. Where are religion and migration mediated? How are spaces portrayed? Which spaces are meeting places; which spaces illustrate foreign places?

Most of the stories are not set in Germany explicitly, but the use of the German language, the narrative perspective evident, for example, in “the Chinese are celebrating spring festival”²⁰ and the description of the environment suggest Germany or another German-speaking country. In particular, the illustrations show scenes commonplace in Germany. Most of the stories about migration



Fig. 2: Spaces and settings in Yu-Dembksi/Leberer (illustr.), *Lili und das chinesische Frühlingsfest* (n. pag.) © Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2011.

and religion are set in a school or a nursery school (fig. 2), meeting places where children with diverse cultural, religious and national backgrounds come together. In addition, children who represent foreign identities often invite figures who represent locals into their private living environment to make the latter familiar with specific cultural practices such as festivities and customs.

REPRESENTATION OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS

Characters are central elements of the narrations and acutely important for analysis of own and foreign identities. Readers identify with figures who mediate sympathy and antipathy as well as world-views. The embodiment and representation of characters has a great impact on how recipients understand a story.²¹ Whereas one half of the narrations focuses on male characters, the other half deals with female figures. The analysis indicates that gender affiliations, roles and imagery are peripheral in children’s literature that addresses religion and migration. In the representation of foreign identities, the figures often appear to be somewhat genderless. The focus on characteristics of foreigners replaces a focus on the characteristics of gender – unlike in other children’s literature – and constructs otherness by background, religion and nationality.

The representation of own and foreign identities depends crucially on visual aspects. Nearly all the narrations show characters who represent own identities with blonde or red hair. Foreign identities are illustrated by figures with dark brown or black hair and a dark complexion. Although relatively few people are

20 Yu-Dembksi 2016, n. pag., emphasis added.

21 See Van De Mieroop 2015, 412.



Fig. 3: The Jewish character Alma with her friend Lena in Halberstam/Späth (illustr.), *Lena feiert Pessach mit Alma* (n. pag.) © Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2011.



Fig. 4: The Tanzanian character Mwangaza in Nkonyani/Flad (illustr.), *Mwangaza und die Geschichte mit dem Zahn* (n. pag.) © Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2011.



Fig. 5: Levent and Tom in Halberstam/Tüst (illustr.), *Levent und das Zuckerfest* (n. pag.) © Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2011.

blonde, let alone red haired, the construction of own and foreign identities uses those visual representations to demarcate difference (figs. 3–5). Furthermore, names are important indicators of otherness: characters who represent foreign identities are named Levent, Bilal, Jadi or Mwangaza, whereas characters who represent own identities bear names that are commonly used in Europe, like Emma, Jana, Louis or Lisa.

In addition, the children’s books analysed here create otherness with recurring role types. Those figures who represent own identities are characterised as particularly inquisitive. As a result, those characters who represent foreign identities explain their culture and religion in detail. “Huda bekommt ein Brüderchen” is a story about Huda, a little girl who represents own identities, whereas her Syrian grandmother represents otherness. Huda does not speak Arabic very well and is not familiar with her grandmother’s customs and traditions. She explores otherness by asking a lot of questions:

Grandma put some sweets on the table at home. She made tea and in the whole flat there was a magnificent scent. “What smells so differently?” Huda asks. “That is incense,” Grandma explains. “So that God gives us luck.” “What is that?” Huda asks curiously. “What does that say, Grandma?” Huda asks. “Noom al Hana” states grandma. “This is Arabic and means *unhurried repose*” grandma answers.²²

22 Taufiq 2016, n. pag., emphasis in original.

In this case, own and foreign identities are not illustrated by characters that differ in national, religious or cultural ways, but by figures that represent difference in terms of generations. Huda depicts what intended recipients would recognise, whereas Huda's grandma illustrates otherness. Questioning and responding exhibit nescience, as do also visual illustrations. The story "Lili und das chinesische Frühlingsfest" exemplifies the characterisation of own identities inasmuch as Emma is always depicted as uninformed and curious about the host's Chinese traditions (figs. 6–8).



CULTURE AND CULTURAL IMAGINARIES

The term "culture" is often used imprecisely in both academic and popular spheres. However, culture is a concept frequently used in contemporary children's literature in connection with religion and migration, employed to represent differences between own and foreign identities. Here the analysis focuses on the production of cultural meaning in light of the *cultural imaginary*. According to Hall, a group's identity is based on shared meanings that distinguish members of one group from members of another group.²³ Elena Croitoru notes,



The cultural imaginary can be said to make up for the loss of the sense of belonging, thus leading to the concepts of a nation as an "imagined community" (nationhood) and identity. Therefore, cultural imaginary is socially constructed to suit the needs of a community, of a particu-



Fig.6–8: A facial expression of nescience and admiration in Yu-Dembckj/Leberer (illustr.), *Lili und das chinesische Frühlingsfest* (n. pag) © Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2011.

23 Kramer 2008, 272.



Fig. 9: Emma perceives Chinese letters as “strange signs” in Yu-Dembski/Leberer (illustr.), *Lili und das chinesische Frühlingsfest* (n. pag.) © Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2011.



Fig. 10: Arabic language and lettering in Taufiq/ Spanjardt (illustr.), *Huda bekommt ein Brüderchen* (n. pag.) © Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2011.

lar group, on the one hand, and to form the sense of belonging to the community, on the other.²⁴

Traditions and customs as well as material culture keep communities together. This analysis focuses on cultural semantics with regard to language, tradition, clothing and interior design.

Language and lettering are important factors in the construction of cultural difference between own identities and foreign identities. The short story “Mwangaza und die Geschichte mit dem Zahn” was written in German and complemented with sentences in Kiswahili to represent the Tanzanian background: “‘Sala ya Watoto wadogo, Mungu mwema nijalie...’ This is Tanzanian language and means that God may bless the children.”²⁵ A character in “Bilal und die Blüten des Korans” states, “Bilal speaks German very well. His parents were born in Germany and attended school there.”²⁶ Bilal, a third-generation descendant of immigrants, is of course able to speak German fluently. The mention of his ability is deployed to mark otherness. Similarly, the illustration of writing systems represents cultural difference.

Emma, a character in “Lili und das chinesische Frühlingsfest”, calls Chinese letters “strange signs” (fig. 9).²⁷ The author of “Huda bekommt ein Brüderchen” uses Arabic letters and explains, “أنا هدى” means “I am Huda” (fig. 10).²⁸

In both text and illustration, traditions and customs are strongly linked with otherness. The characters describe their activities in detail, which leads us to as-

24 Croitoru 2013, 28.

25 Ngonyani 2016, n. pag.

26 Zöller 2006, 87.

27 Yu Dembski 2016, n. pag.

28 Taufiq 2016, n. pag.

sume that they are not known to the intended reader. Thus, for example, we read, “Aunt Martha hangs a bunch of flowers behind the corner seat. ‘Now it will protect us from illness’, she explains” (fig. 11).²⁹

Those characters that represent own identities often visit the characters that represent foreign identities on religious holidays to learn about traditions and rituals. Each narration informs the reader about particular dishes that are prepared and eaten in specific foreign countries. The authors compare traditional dishes with food the reader may know: “Family Wang eat *Jiaozi* at the spring festival. This is pasta filled with meat and vegetables like ravioli or *Maultaschen*.”³⁰



Fig. 11: Customs and traditions in Pana/Bandlow (illustr.), *Jana und Teresa feiern Himmelfahrt* (n. pag.).

The illustrations of tableware and cooking utensils along with the interior design represent material culture and visualise own and foreign identities. The objects depicted are often accompanied by religious symbols. Levent’s Turkish background is evident from the many postcards from Turkey, posters with football players wearing the shirts of the Turkish national team, a doormat with the inscription “Merhaba” and an alarm clock in the shape of a mosque. An image of the *Basmala* “مي حرلا ن محرلا هللا مسب” (“In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful”) decorates his grandparents’ living room (fig. 12).



Fig. 12: Representation of Muslim identities in Halberstam/Tust (illustr.), *Levent und das Zuckerfest* (n. pag.) © Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2011.

29 Pana 2016, n. pag.

30 Yu-Dembski 2016, n. pag., emphasis in original.

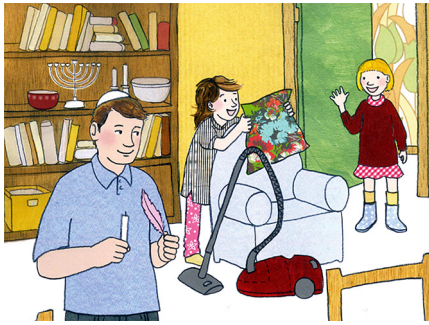


Fig. 13: Interior design and material culture in Halberstam/Späth (illustr.), *Lena feiert Pessach mit Alma* (n. pag.) © Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2011.



Fig. 14: Interior design in Yu-Dembksi/Leberer (illustr.), *Lili und das chinesische Frühlingsfest* (n. pag.) © Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2011.



Fig. 15: Fashion and clothing in Pana/Bandlow (illustr.), *Jana und Teresa feiern Himmelfahrt* (n. pag.).

The stories “Lena feiert Pessach mit Alma” and “Lili und das chinesische Frühlingsfest” represent religious otherness too (fig. 13–14).

Only a few stories illustrate the spaces in which the characters who represent own identities live, and such illustrations are not linked with any specific religious or traditional material culture. This conceptual decision suggests a need to represent foreign identities, whereas own traditions appear natural. This statement applies to fashion and clothing too. All the children – irrespective of national, cultural or religious background – wear similar clothes, whether trousers, skirts, blouses or shirts. The reader perceives the characters as equal. Instead parents and grandparents are the characters who tend to represent otherness in their clothing (fig. 15–17). This conception suggests that culture and religion are located in family structures.



Fig. 16: Representing the grandmother's Muslim identity in Taufiq/Spanjardt (illustr.), *Huda bekommt ein Brüderchen* (n. pag.) © Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2011.

Fig. 17: Jewish fashion and clothing in Halberstam/Späth (illustr.), *Lena feiert Pessach mit Alma* (n. pag.) © Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2011.

FAITH AND RELIGION

The analysis's approach to faith and religion assumes a non-restrictive concept of religion. However, the authors of the books examined here use institutionalised conceptions of religion. Specifically, the narrations refer to Catholic Christianity, Jewish traditions and Islamic ways of life. The short story "Lili und das chinesisches Frühlingsfest" mentions various gods; they are set in a context that is not religious but national. Religion is displayed as something special and uncommon as the characters learn about religious traditions on festive days and at celebrations.

The books discussed here presuppose either a Protestant or a general, unspecific Christian perspective. In *Lara Lustig und der liebe Gott*, we read, "Most of us are Protestant, like me. Only four are Catholic."³¹ The story "Lena feiert Pessach mit Alma" juxtaposes Jewish Pessach and Christian Easter. Own identities are clearly conceptualised as Christian: "Pessach is the Jewish festival of the matzah, we Jews celebrate it at the same time you celebrate Easter", Alma explains smiling.³² Religious otherness is constructed by using unknown terms: "The most important Jewish festivities are Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot; Hanukka, Pessach and Purim also belong to it." "Strange words!", Louis shouts.³³

The reader identifies religious rituals and festivities as unusual as they are pointed out with exoticising comments:

Everybody was dressed nicely: the girls with long white dresses, with flowers and floral wreaths in their hair, the boys in dark suits. And each child holds a beautifully

³¹ Zöller 2006, 7.

³² Halberstam 2016, n. pag., emphasis in original.

³³ Zöller 2006, 53.

decorated white candle. It almost made us envious, because we do not have such a festival in our church.³⁴

While the character admires the clothing of the children who celebrate their First Communion, she considers the Jewish identity of another classmate fascinating: “Joscha does not belong to our group primarily, but Cornelius and Joscha get along well and often talk to each other. Joscha is Jewish, and this is a little mysterious for us.”³⁵ The characters use first-person personal pronouns in narrations to mark religious affiliations: “Our Jewish religion looks back on a three-thousand-years old history. We Jews believe in one holy, invisible God who created and guides all creatures.”³⁶

In particular, *Lara Lustig und der liebe Gott* focuses on historical background and critical aspects of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Although the pupils discuss the extent to which the Catholic Church is responsible for wars against innocent people, the aunt of one schoolgirl relativises the discussion and emphasises the substantial message of Christianity. Unlike Christianity and Judaism, Islamic ways of life are quite clearly criticised in the narrations. The accusations concern gender roles, Ramadan and terrorism, with the pupils expressing their positions in a highly emotional manner: “‘Ramadan’ he [Bilal] says, ‘Muslims fast during Ramadan.’ Louis insults him, calling him a dunce.”³⁷ The emphasis on Islamic traditions results in the construction of the collective singular “Islam”. In this respect, this children’s literature is including itself in a popular critical discourse about Islamic ways of life.

The author of *Lara Lustig und der liebe Gott* describes religious traditions according to “Abrahamic religions”. The narrator expresses a view critical of religion and questions whether it is necessary:

“Why do people need religion?”, “It is a difficult question,” Aunt Berthe responds, but I noticed that she was thinking about it. “It is not easy to answer. But we will try.” [...] “Religions” she started “are bound to the big questions of humanity.” “Which questions?” “Where am I from? Where am I going? What is the goal, the sense of life? What happens after death? Why is there good and evil? Where does evil come from? Religions try to answer these questions. Different religions offer very similar answers.”³⁸

In addition, the characters ask about agnostic or atheistic positions:

“And those who think they can only believe in things for which there is evidence – what about them?” “That is a difficult question” mama responds. “It is the old con-

34 Zöller 2006, 10.

35 Zöller 2006, 16.

36 Zöller 2006, 64, emphasis in original.

37 Zöller 2006, 87–88.

38 Zöller 2006, 109.

flict between faith and rationality. We cannot prove or fathom logically whether God exists, but there is no evidence that God does not exist.”³⁹

The pupils spend one night at school, where they talk about faith, God and the infinity of the universe. The last part of the story demonstrates the author’s intention to represent faith in God as a proper way of life, with monotheistic religions portrayed as the ideal: “The one great God, the God of Christians, Jews and Muslims. The God in whom so many people of different religions believe in. All of them were looking for a way to God. Maybe those who did not believe also found a way to him.”⁴⁰ The narration constructs otherness by contrasting people who believe in God with those who do not.

CONSTRUCTING OTHERNESS

Analysis of these two children’s books in light of culture, religion and migration reveals processes of othering. All the authors and graphic illustrators tend to stereotype and exaggerate difference similarly. Although the narrations broach difference as a central paradigm, each story refers to friendship and sympathy. Understanding of foreign identities is a product of knowledge about different ways of life. The teacher in *Lara Lustig und der liebe Gott* insists upon tolerance as the children should know each other’s religious practices and cultural traditions and accept each other’s ways of life. The narrator – a schoolgirl – states:

And when I looked back in the hall, I saw Lara Lustig and our class. Everybody was different. Everybody has his legs, his nose, his thinking and feeling and also his culture and religion. And everybody had a mind full of images and ideas. Though, we were all together. Below the great, infinite starry sky.⁴¹

Although the narrator mentions difference beyond religion and culture, the demand for broad-mindedness and tolerance of foreigners consolidates and naturalises categories of difference such as culture and religion. People are diverse and prefer different ways of life, habits and moral concepts. The categorisation of culture and religion results in a construction of collective singulars, which are culturalising and essentialising. Culture and religion are fields that appear inalterable. But identities are interdependent – they are not based solely on nationality, culture and religion.

The narrations focus on a strong correlation of national, cultural and religious affiliations in their construction of own and foreign identities. Characters that represent own identities are not explicitly constituted as German, but, by con-

39 Zöller 2006, 49, emphasis in original.

40 Zöller 2006, 123.

41 Zöller 2006, 122–123.

trast, the representation of foreign characters is linked with national localisations: “This is Mwangaza. He is four years old. He has five sisters. Mwangaza’s mama comes from Tanzania, his papa comes from Germany.”⁴² “Teresa was born in Poland and lives with her family in Germany.”⁴³ “This is Huda. She is five years old and still attends nursery school. Huda was born in Germany, but her parents come from Syria.”⁴⁴ According to the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, a person has an immigrant background if he or she or at least one of his or her parents was not born with German citizenship.⁴⁵ On this basis, the characters that represent foreign identities have immigrant backgrounds. The narrations are unable to discuss the characters’ interdependent national identities since their speech produces a monolithic representation of otherness. The exploration of whether characters belong to specific groups or are foreigners presupposes a social collectivity or a majority within society that determines imaginaries, rules and norms and dictates inclusion and exclusion to regulate constructions of collective affiliation.⁴⁶ Although most of the characters were born in Germany, the readers perceive them not as German, but as foreigners.

Sociologist Minna-Kristiina Ruokonen-Engler points to important perspectives concerning immigration and globalisation: social realities, affiliations and behaviour patterns are no longer understood within the framework of nation states; rather, they operate in contexts of migration, diverse social realities, transnationalities, globalised economies and affiliations beyond the nation state.⁴⁷ The narrations examined here presume a strong connection between nationality and cultural identity. Cultural identity “can be defined as the broad range of worldviews and behavioural practices that one shares with the members of one’s community. Beside everyday practices, morals and religion take prominent roles in the individual’s conception of cultural identity.”⁴⁸ However, the books discussed here restrict the cultural identities represented and disregard individual conceptions of culture and religion; religions are conceptualised as monolithic entities that are related to the concept of world religions. Yet, as Tomoko Masuzawa has written,

These so-called great religions of the world – though what makes them “great” remains unclear – are often arranged by means of one or the other of various systems of classification, with binary, tripartite, or even more multifarious divisions. What

42 Ngonyani 2016, n. pag.

43 Pana 2016, n. pag.

44 Taufiq 2016, n. pag.

45 https://www.bamf.de/DE/Service/Left/Glossary/_function/glossar.html?lv3=3198544 [accessed 2 February 2018].

46 See Ruokonen-Engler 2016, 248.

47 See Ruokonen-Engler 2016, 250.

48 Thomas/Al-Dawaf/Weissmann 2016, 218.

these systems do, regardless of the variation, is to distinguish the West from the rest, even though the distinction is usually effected in more complicated ways than the still frequently used, easy language of “East and West” suggests.⁴⁹

The representation of religion in light of the idea of “world religions” fails to acknowledge individual faith and world-views and determines groups in apparently immutable constructions of othering. Media – including literature – contribute significantly to the transmission of those constructions.

Literature is an important instrument for enculturating and socialising children. Enculturation is a process of “growing into culture”; it comprises basic cultural skills such as language, communication and lettering.⁵⁰ In comparison to enculturation, socialisation includes the development of personality, knowledge and values, which enable individuals to act in society.⁵¹ Children’s literature is an important protagonist in enculturation as well as socialisation. Such books teach cultural skills as children read the texts and look at the illustrations. Literature, as an important form of communication, conveys knowledge, self-concepts, interpersonal perceptions and normative paradigms – this is particularly the case with children’s books. Unlike other forms of media, children’s books are often read many times. Their contents are repeated over and over again – and they include world-views, values and representations of otherness.

The narrations analysed in this article tend to specify difference by means of cultural and religious characteristics. But instead of dissolving those categories, the narrations strengthen them. Their claim to present national, religious and cultural diversity as “normal” and commonplace contradicts their explicit representation of own and foreign identities since, in fact, the books deal clearly with religious, cultural and national difference. To relate diversity as a commonplace, children’s literature could recount typical stories – about friendship, hobbies or adventures – with diverse characters and obviate distinct constructions of identity in terms of cultural background. To this end, literature might do better to assess culture and religion in a non-deterministic manner, as one of many constituents of an individual’s identity.

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49 Masuzawa 2005, 2.

50 See Wurzbacher 1963, 15.

51 See Plath/Richter 2012, 485–486.

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Media Review

Book Review

Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch (ed.), The Bible in Motion

A Handbook of the Bible and its Reception in Film,
2 volumes, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2015, 896 pages,
ISBN: 978-1-61451-561-6

This *Handbook* offers an illuminating insight into one of the most fascinating aspects of the history of the reception of the Bible. The two volumes explore many facets of the filmic adaptation of the Bible across cultures, religious and cinematic traditions and genres. The expression in the title *in Motion* refers to different aspects of the mutual influence of the Bible and film. On the one hand, *in Motion* focuses on film as the technology of moving images, which relates to the entanglement of religious traditions and media innovation. On the other hand, *in Motion* highlights the dynamics that keep alive a sacred text: transmission processes are possible only if each generation re-reads and adapts the text. Film can thus be understood as a crucial language in which biblical narratives have been re-read and received since the end of the 19th century. The rich collection of contributions is organised in two volumes, each with three parts. In this review, I will limit myself to introducing the main sections.

The first volume begins with “Biblical Characters and Stories (Hebrew Bible)”. In this part, filmic adaptations of principal characters and narratives from the Hebrew Bible are discussed: the articles focus on Adam and Eve, Noah, Moses, Samson and Delilah, David and Esther. The next part, “Film Genres and Stories”, is dedicated to the influence of the Bible on moving images in specific film genres. This section reaches from productions from the silent era to Western, horror film and comedy to anime, to name just a few examples. “Biblical Themes and Genres” analyses filmic contributions to central topics in the reception of the Bible: God, Satan, creation, theodicy, lament, afterlife and apocalypse.

The second volume starts with “Biblical Character and Stories (New Testament)”, with articles on Jesus, Judas and female characters in the Gospels, Paul and the early church, as well as Revelation. A chapter on Jews and Judaism completes this part. “Cinema and Auteurs” collects a highly interesting selection of studies on influential directors from different film traditions and the impact of

biblical references in their oeuvre. “Voices from the Margins”, the concluding part of the second volume of the *Handbook*, contains articles on key issues in the interaction of religion, film and society, such as antisemitism, ethnicity and slavery, imperialism and questions of gender.

The 56 chapters collected in the two volumes provide an encompassing introduction to the field of cinema and the Bible. Although most of the authors are from Anglo-American academic institutions, voices from other countries are also included, which is refreshing and opens up the field to new perspectives and approaches. The *Handbook* can easily be used as a source of inspiration for classes on film and religion in the study of religion or for introducing the influence of biblical texts on cinema within exegetical studies. Furthermore, it offers a huge number of sources and examples for approaching core topics in systematic theology or in the history of Judaism and Christianity.

Nevertheless, the value of this work goes beyond its introductory character. Reading across the articles, one becomes aware of its innovative impact on different aspects in the field of film and religion. First, the *Handbook* offers accurate analyses of the tight relation between film production and the transmission process of the Bible. From this perspective, the history of cinema can be reconstructed by following the stages and modes of re-enacting, dealing with, transforming, challenging, questioning or alienating biblical narratives, figures or symbols. Film brings the Bible in dialogue with different genres, narrative structures and techniques, and in doing so contributes to spreading the motifs of the religious traditions linked to this sacred text. Furthermore, cinematic discourses on biblical materials encompass variegated interpretations of the biblical tradition: in some cases, film is used to present biblical narrative in a new language, in others, to question and radically criticise religion.

Second, a cross-reading illustrates the complexity of reception processes of the biblical narrative given the intermedial character of film production. References to the Bible can be anchored in the main narrative structure of a particular work, but they can also be found in the form of selected tropes or symbols. Biblical elements can be presented in dialogues, in the composition of the visual style; they can be referenced by means of quotations from the history of literature, music, arts, theatre, liturgy etc. In many cases, all these procedures are used at the same time. Therefore, not only is film an important medium in the history of the reception of the Bible, but it also offers critical insight into the very process of transmitting and re-reading a sacred text.

Third, in comparing the many different ways of conceiving of the reception of the Bible in film represented in the articles collected here, readers of the *Handbook* are confronted with the fundamental question of how to conceive of the relation between film and religion. The work as a whole shows the limits of considering each element, religion and film, as an independent sphere of so-

ciety and stimulates a different approach to the relationship between the Bible and culture, which is always more entangled and complex. Film does not simply receive the biblical tradition but in a certain way it actively produces this tradition; cinematic imagination is not simply a reaction to the influence of religious traditions but itself contributes to the development and interpretation of religion, theology and exegetic reflexion.

As a last point in my response to this enjoyable and important work, I would like to mention the interaction between religion, film and technical possibilities that emerges from the various articles: from the silent production at the beginning to the introduction of sound and colour to the technical revolution by digitalisation, both film and religion have been transformed and changed, always providing new possibilities for the re-reading and re-enacting of biblical material.

In her introduction, editor Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch offers useful categories for understanding the multi-layered relationship between film and the Bible, providing a general orientation in dealing with the large number of films discussed in the individual chapters. Burnette-Bletsch proposes ten categories that – as she writes – may overlap but nevertheless highlight different strategies in dealing with biblical references within the history of film: (a) celebratory, (b) transposed, (c) genre-determined, (d) hagiographic, (e) secondary (tertiary, quaternary ...) adaptations, (f) the Bible as a book or cultural icon, (g) citations, quotations, paraphrases, (h) paradigms, (i) allusions and echoes, and, finally, (j) analogues.

With these categories, Burnette-Bletsch pre-empts a possible point of criticism by raising the question of the boundaries of the field. It is easy to recognise an explicit quotation of a biblical character or narrative, but what about ironic hints and subtle traces? A further element of the dilemma of whether the field of research is kept very narrow or, conversely, framed so broadly that it loses its profile is rooted in methodology. Burnette-Bletsch argues – in fact following the cultural studies paradigm – that the meaning of a film is not statically embedded in the work itself, but is generated in the dynamic interaction of between production, work and reception. Therefore, the relation of a film to the Bible can be established only in light of context, since it is always transformed by the religious and cultural setting.

A second concern expressed in the introduction deals with the selection of films and topics: are they representative? I think any criticism on this point would be moot considering the extensive film index and the impressive table of contents! The Handbook definitively offers a convincing overview of crucial aspects of film history, genres, and cinematic traditions in their dialogue with the Bible. *The Bible in Motion. A Handbook of the Bible and its Reception in Film* provides innovative, refreshing and enriching input to a complex cultural field, bringing together influential authors from all over the world, highlighting relevant facets, and raising and addressing questions about the relationship between film and religion in biblical tradition that can be developed further in future research.

Book Review

Wendy I. Zierler, *Movies and Midrash*

Popular Film and Jewish Religious Conversation. Foreword by Eugene B. Borowitz. Albany: State University of New York, 2017, xiii + 309 pp., ISBN 978-1-4384-6615-6.

With *Movies and Midrash*, Wendy I. Zierler makes a very welcome and important contribution to the field of film and theology by adding a Jewish voice to a (so far) mostly Christian conversation. In eleven chapters and a conclusion, each focusing on a different film, the author shows how the analysis of popular film can enrich and deepen the understanding of central aspects of Jewish theology, using a method she calls “inverted midrash” (14). The book emerged from a course taught by Zierler, a professor of literature and feminist studies at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute, together with the late Rabbi Dr. Eugene Borowitz, with the goal of “combining close analysis of film narrative and visuality with a study of an array of classical and modern text [...] as a means of deep textual engagement and Jewish religious return” (12).

Out of these commitments grows Zierler’s particular approach to contemporary film, inspired by Franz Rosenzweig’s “learning in reverse order”, that moves from non-Jewish knowledge back to the Torah as a means to overcome the modern alienation from Jewish tradition (14). Consequently, in their course (and in this book), Zierler and Borowitz “begin [their] learning with the profound matters that are raised by thoughtful, artistically rendered novels and movies and seek to show how they are analogous to or intersect with one or another aspects of Jewish thought, text study, practice, memory, and knowledge” (14). This approach is rooted in the midrashic tradition of biblical exegesis in which parables are used to contextualize the biblical text and make it relevant to a different context. In this book, the secular narratives and images of the films are understood as a *mashal* (parable) that finds its application (*nimshal*) in Jewish text study and theology, deepening the understanding of Torah (18). Thus the chapters move from film to Torah, and sometimes back again to the film, enabling an enriched interpretation of the film after the theological reflection it inspired. Drawing on Brent S. Plate, Zierler understands her stance in this endeavor of “Jewish Reel Theology” as one of “re-creative alienation” that

acknowledges the re-creative power of film, yet at a critical distance because of her Jewish theological and cultural commitments (20). While the author lays out this interpretative methodology of inverted midrash and the theoretical underpinnings of her theological engagement with secular films in the introduction, one would have wished for an occasional return to these questions in the following chapters as well, in which the film analyses and theological reflections would have provided rich opportunities for further meta-reflections.

Given these methodological decisions, the chapters in the book generally move from a close reading of a filmic *mashal* to the equally close textual discussion of the element from the Jewish tradition that the film is taken to elucidate, drawing on the full range of the tradition from biblical texts to rabbinical reflections to modern theology and philosophy, with additional references to novels or poems, showcasing the rich complexity of Jewish culture. Each chapter focuses on a film and a central theme, often also in close relation to a specific figure, be it from the biblical text or a thinker in the tradition. Thus, the first chapter looks at Peter Weir's film *THE TRUMAN SHOW* (US 1998), a film about a man who is unknowingly the protagonist of a reality TV show. Zierler's reading of the film focuses on the theme of truth, Truman/true-man's quest for the truth about himself and his life, and his dismantling of the false idol of the show's producer. Inspired by this analysis, she makes her theological move, a reflection on the discovery of God's truth. In doing so, the author turns to the book of Jonah, the sixteenth-century Midrash *Yonah* and the poetic retelling of Jonah's story by Canadian poet A. M. Klein, and parallels Truman's discovery of truth and reality with Jonah's discovery of God as a compassionate and gracious God, attributes that in the Hebrew Bible are often paired with truth. As in the film so also in the Jewish tradition, truth is seen as inhering in relationships, both among humans and between humans and God. A further connection between the film and the book of Jonah is their common genre of comedy, which aims at revealing hidden truths, exposing the limitations of knowledge, and opening up moments of salvation. As Zierler points out, the book of Jonah is the last of the Yom Kippur readings, when the listeners are already light-headed from fasting. Listening to the reading, they are jolted into smiling discoveries about themselves and God by the discrepancies of Jonah's comic lamenting of God's graciousness towards the people of Niniveh while enjoying God's kindness himself, his foibles and misfortunes.

The following chapters, all of which can also be read independently, look at such films as *MAGNOLIA* (Paul Thomas Anderson, US 1999), analyzing its complex fabric of interconnected story lines as a film that deepens the understanding of Judaism as confession and redemption, with the theological reflection focusing on the figure of Judah. The analysis of *THE KING'S SPEECH* (Tom Hooper, UK/US/AU 2010), with its story of the Duke of York's (Bertie) overcoming of his

speech impediment, understands the film as a *mashal* to think further about Moses's "heaviness" of speech, and more generally, the importance of words and hearing for Judaism. Comparing the halting, stammering speech of Bertie and Moses with Hitler's fluency and rhetorical skills, the reading of the film in relation to Moses's story in Exodus leads to the insight into the demonic qualities of fluent rhetorics over against a stuttering, stumbling approach to the unsayable truth of God. *A SERIOUS MAN* (Joel and Ethan Coen, US/UK/FR 2009), the only film discussed in the volume that is set in an explicitly Jewish context, is itself interpreted as a parable about parable and the use and function of parables in the Jewish tradition and theology. While each chapter focuses on one film, references to other relevant films are frequent and situate the respective film in the broader context of film history, and thus a filmography – in addition to the bibliography and index at the end of the volume – would have been very useful to readers.

The uniquely Jewish perspective of the volume is apparent both in the author's reference points in the Jewish tradition (although not exclusively so) and in her interpretative methods, such as the careful attention to the meaning of names and words and to etymological and semantic relationships across different contexts. Occasional comparisons to readings from a Christian viewpoint (for example in the discussion of *STRANGER THAN FICTION* by Marc Forster [US 2006] with regard to the religious significance of the central character) show clearly the impact of one's religious and intellectual tradition on one's interpretations, and thus underline the importance of broadening the scope of the film-and-theology conversation beyond the dominant Christian tradition in order to gain a fuller understanding of popular cinema's potential for theological reflection and insight. For readers not familiar with Hebrew or with some of the sources, the author provides sufficient explanation, context and transcriptions to guide them through her reasoning so that the volume is accessible to readers (like myself) from non-Jewish traditions as well, who will profit from her careful, complex film analysis and theological reflections.

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MAGNOLIA (Paul Thomas Anderson, USA 1999).

STRANGER THAN FICTION (Marc Forster, USA 2006).

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Vaughan S. Roberts

Music Review: U2, *The Joshua Tree* and Two Contrary States of Faith

**“The Joshua Tree Thirtieth Anniversary Tour”,
Twickenham Stadium, GB: Sunday, 9 July 2017**

We cross dirt roads and highways that mark the will of some one and then others,
who said I need to see what’s on the other side.
I know there’s something better down the road.
We need to find a place where we are safe.
We walk into that which we cannot yet see.

Elizabeth Alexander, “Praise Song for the Day”

So the hands that build
Can also pull down
The hands of love

U2, “Exit”

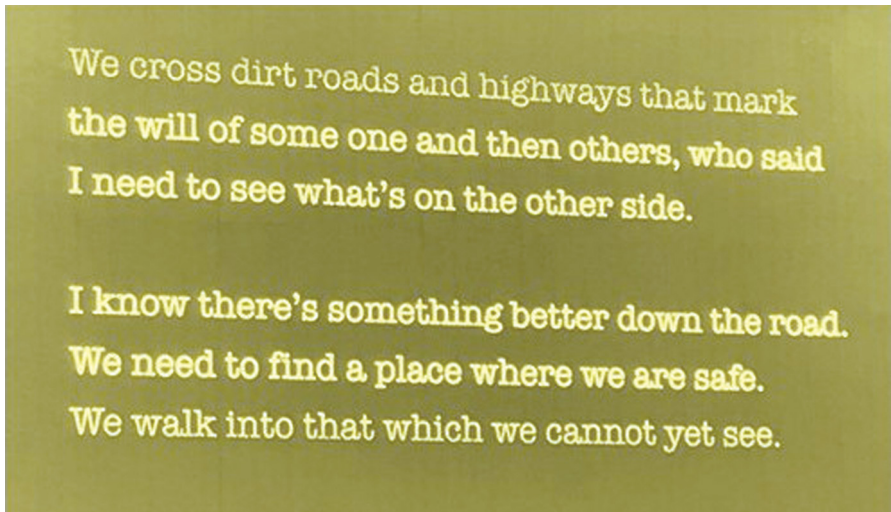


Fig. 1 “Praise Song for the Day” on screen, Twickenham, 9 July 2017.

BREAKING THROUGH

The Joshua Tree (1987) is a record of U2's discovery of America and, in a real sense, the Thirtieth Anniversary Tour was a road trip from the 1980s rerun three decades later. It began in Vancouver on 12 May 2017 and concluded in Sao Paolo on 25 October 2017. The centrepiece of each show featured the band playing *The Joshua Tree* (1987), frequently described as U2's "breakthrough" album, in order and in its entirety.

The concerts most often began with four songs released before *The Joshua Tree*: "Sunday Bloody Sunday", "New Year's Day", "Bad" and "Pride". These were followed by the eleven tracks of *The Joshua Tree*¹ and two encores (or one extended encore) including popular songs from the band's more recent work and, as the tour progressed, some tracks from their next album, *Songs of Experience* (2017).

These stadium concerts were presented in a relatively simple fashion over two stages within each amphitheatre and against the backdrop of a large LCD screen. The B-stage, in the shape of a Joshua tree cactus, extended into the audience, whilst the main stage provided the setting for *The Joshua Tree* songs, played against vivid images on the screen. This layout contrasted with U2's earlier arena tour for *Songs of Innocence* (2014), which had an innovative screen that extended far into the auditorium within which the band could stand and play, as well as move to the B-stage.

I saw the "Joshua Tree Tour" at Twickenham Stadium on the band's second London date on Sunday, 9 July 2017. The following are reflections on that concert (which is available online)² informed by observations from other commentators on the tour.

Elements in the show had clear religious aspects. Examples from the concert I attended include: an extract from The Revd. Martin Luther King Jr's "I have a dream" speech was given at the conclusion of "Pride"; at the end of "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" Bono seemed to give one of his regular references to making the show "a church";³ there were biblical references such as "Jacob wrestled the angel and the angel was overcome" in "Bullet The Blue Sky" and the use of a Salvation Army band in "Red Hill Mining Town". There were numerous other such references, together with potentially religious tropes that are open to interpretation and debate.

1 Songs of the record are: "Where The Streets Have No Name", "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For", "With Or Without You", "Bullet The Blue Sky", "Running To Stand Still", "Red Hill Mining Town", "In God's Country", "Trip Through Your Wires", "One Tree Hill", "Exit", "Mothers Of The Disappeared".

2 Part 1 here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtSaJvyYJCE> and Part 2 here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWlypubmHn8> [accessed 16 January 2017].

3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtSaJvyYJCE>, (00:34:40) [accessed 14 November 2017].

KUMBAYA?

As we might imagine, the @U2 fansite (<https://www.atu2.com/>) has given extensive coverage to the tour, itemising the songs played, the celebrities who attended the shows and comments about what took place. On 5 November 2017 the site published “Final Thoughts on *The Joshua Tree Tour 2017*” from @U2 staff. Many were complimentary, but Sherry Lawrence, a longstanding fan and contributor to the site, offered this sharp critique:

U2 had the ability to make a more compelling statement about the state of world affairs, and they chose not to. Instead, their inclusive “message of love” did little to change hearts and minds. This is why *The Joshua Tree 2017 Tour* will rank below PopMart for me. The band played it safe and did not take a risk. As I said on a recent podcast, this tour felt like a speed bump to *Songs of Experience*, and I hope the band regains its desire to be the proven risk takers they have been for decades. “Kumbaya” this tour was, and I expected more from them.⁴

Personally, I have some sympathy with Lawrence’s view and it articulates my own fear ahead of the show I attended. In an interview before the tour, U2 bassist Adam Clayton was quoted as saying, “*The Joshua Tree* seemed to in some ways mirror the changes that were happening in the world during the Thatcher/Reagan period. It seems like we’ve kind of come full circle and we’re back there with a different cast of characters.”⁵ Would this show be anything more than a rendition of Kumbaya?

“EXIT”

For me the track which best achieved that aim of holding up a mirror from the 1980s was “Exit”, the penultimate song on *The Joshua Tree* album. The Twickenham performance was an apocalyptic reclamation of a song that had been mothballed, for it had not been played since 1989.⁶ It is interesting to view that performance alongside its live-TV debut in 1987, when Bono introduced it as “a song about a religious man, a fanatic, who gets into his head the idea he calls ‘the hands of love’”.⁷

On the Wikipedia page for “Exit”, David Werther compares it to a track from U2’s follow-up studio album *Achtung Baby* (1991). “Until the End of the World” places listeners in the position of Judas Iscariot, and Werther notes: “‘Exit’ evokes feelings of fear, fear of losing control, giving into one’s dark side,

4 @U2 Staff 2017.

5 Mojo Staff 2017.

6 See the performance of “Exit” at Twickenham, 9 July 2017, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NB1EgOJ8JRo>.

7 See the first broadcast of “Exit” in 1987 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kl9uSNoXZg> [accessed 21 November 2017].

perhaps even taking one's life", contrasting it to the "waves of regret" experienced by Judas.⁸ The juxtaposition of Judas and Jesus from the latter song is often enacted in performance as a kind of duel played out between Bono and The Edge.

The connection with "Until the End of the World" is alluded to at a point just under three minutes into "Exit" at Twickenham, when Bono holds out his hand to The Edge in a way that is similar to their Judas/Jesus interaction.⁹ The dramatic connection is even clearer in the Dublin performance, where the two more clearly re-enact the characters of Jesus and Judas from "Until the End of the World".¹⁰

TWO CONTRARY STATES OF FAITH (1)

The idea of two contrary states of the human soul enters the work of U2 through their use of William Blake's volume of poems entitled *Songs of Innocence and of Experience Showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* of 1794. As already noted *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* are the titles of complimentary U2 albums released either side of the "Joshua Tree Tour", and I would contend that their reimagining of "Exit" with its dichotomy between the constructive and destructive sides of faith is making a strong statement about the positive and negative aspects of religion. But arguably this song is not just about faith and religion – it is also about faith and politics.

There is a sense in which in 2017 the North American part of the road trip started with the Obama presidency and concluded with the election of Donald Trump. The text to Elizabeth Alexander's poem "Praise Song for the Day", which was read at the 2009 Obama presidential inauguration, appears on the LCD screen before the show and a con man with the surname Trump appears at the start of the momentous rendition of "Exit". A clip from the 1958 CBS Western TV series *Trackdown* is played, showing a snake-oil merchant named Trump visiting a town and promising to build a wall, which stirs up disagreement between the townsfolk. As the song draws to a conclusion, Bono repeatedly urges the audience, "hold out your hand, hold out your hand". What could this call signify? I argue that it works at a number of levels. First, it is a reflection of the TV evangelists who were such a feature of American culture in the 1980s when *The Joshua Tree* was recorded and remain a significant factor now. Second, like Bono and The Edge playing Judas and Jesus in "Exit", the call to hold out hands could also be looking ahead to the broader critique of TV culture

8 Exit (U2 Song) 2018.

9 Starting at 2 minutes, 55 seconds in the recording of the Twickenham concert.

10 See the recording at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFWc8QAYmwg>, (00:02:42–00:05:10) [accessed 21 November 2017].

from the follow-up album *Achtung Baby*. And third, it could be referencing the screens of contemporary culture and the power of social media, particularly as harnessed by contemporary conman Trump and his use of media to “sell” his wall. How does Trump persuade townsfolk in 2017? The answer: with his hand – particularly through his tweeting.

Thus “Exit” contrasts not only two contrary states of faith in religion (Judas/Jesus) but also two contrary states of faith in US politics (Obama/Trump) which are revealed in “Praise Song for the Day” and the call to us to hold out our hands. This is a call that draws us into the pre-existing world of mainstream media and into the new world (created since *Achtung Baby*) of social media.

TWO CONTRARY STATES OF FAITH (2)

One tantalising footnote to William Blake’s two contrary states of the human soul and to specifically to the show at Twickenham on 9 July 2017 is that the concert was attended by Brian Eno. He was one of the producers for *The Joshua Tree* and was thanked fulsomely from the stage by Bono. Eno expressed a version of his own two contrary states of faith in an interview from 2007. There he described himself as an “evangelical atheist” and noted that religion has some positives, including giving us a chance to surrender: “What religion says to you essentially is that you’re not in control. Now, that’s a very liberating idea [...] everything else in a consumer society is trying to say, ‘You’re in control’ [...] whereas the message of Gospel music is ‘surrender.’”¹¹ In other words, it is possible to be an atheist but yet see religious faith as having value – thus, two contrary states of faith.

HEAR US COMING LORD?

The encore for the Twickenham show I attended comprised six songs: “Miss Sarajevo”, “Beautiful Day”, “Elevation”, “Vertigo”, “Mysterious Ways” and “Ultraviolet” and closed out with “One” from *Achtung Baby*. On the face of it that final track, titled as a singularity, seems the obverse of “two contrary states of faith”. However, a quote from Bono on that song’s Wikipedia page suggests that even “One” has an inherent dichotomy. He is quoted as saying:


There was melancholy about it but there was also strength. “One” is not about oneness, it’s about difference. It’s not the old hippie idea of “let’s all live together.” It is a much more punk rock concept. It’s anti-romantic: “we are one but not the same. We get to carry each other.” It’s a reminder that we have no choice. I’m still disappointed when people hear the chorus line as “got to” rather than “we get to carry

11 Eno 2017.

each other” ... The song is a bit twisted, which is why I could never figure out why people wanted it at their weddings. I have certainly met a hundred people who’ve had it at their weddings. I tell them, “Are you mad? It’s a song about splitting up.”¹²

It is clear from the titles of the albums *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* that William Blake’s poetic imagination and his two contrary states of the human soul are shaping U2’s own collective artistic vision in the second decade of the 21st century. Yet, it is arguable that in songs such as “Exit”, “Until the End of the World” and “One” a similar dynamic was already in play in both U2’s lyrics and their performance. In this respect the “Joshua Tree Thirtieth Anniversary Tour” was not an expression of “Kumbaya” but a re-envisaging of the two contrary states of religious faith and of political faith that have consistently informed U2’s music.

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¹² “One” (U2 Song) 2018.

Film Review

MOTHER! (Darren Aronofsky, US 2017)

It is customary to preface a film review with a brief synopsis. However, Darren Aronofsky's *MOTHER!* (US 2017) resists concise summarization, not because it lacks a discernable plot, but because the movie carries meaning on multiple levels.

First, there is the literal meaning of the film. Jennifer Lawrence plays Mother, the wife of Him (Javier Bardem), a poet numbed by writer's block. Lawrence spends her time attending to his needs and remodeling his fire-damaged childhood home as Bardem struggles to find inspiration. One day, a stranger (Ed Harris) arrives on their doorstep, apparently mistaking their house for a bed and breakfast. Bardem generously offers the stranger a place to stay, but we see that Lawrence bears the brunt of the work required to offer such hospitality. The men talk as she works in the kitchen and prepares the stranger's linens. It turns out, though, that the stranger is not the wayward traveler that he had presented himself to be. Rather, he is an admirer of the poet, and he is dying. Lawrence, understandably, meets this revelation with alarm, while Bardem appears flattered and doubles down on his offer of hospitality. Soon the stranger's wife (Michelle Pfeiffer) shows up at the door and Bardem welcomes her in, to Lawrence's dismay. Then the strangers' two sons arrive, quarreling over a detail in their father's will. The quarrel quickly turns violent and results in the death of one of the sons. Bardem accompanies the family to the hospital, leaving his clearly traumatized wife behind to scrub the blood off the floor. Eventually the extended family of the stranger arrive for the funeral of the stranger's son. Lawrence chases a couple from the master bedroom, a man verbally harasses her when she refuses his advances, and a couple sits on the not-yet-braced kitchen sink, which collapses and causes a large pipe to burst, forcing the crowd to leave the house. Then an argument between Lawrence and Bardem leads to sexual intercourse, and the first half of the movie comes to a close.

The next morning, Lawrence reveals that she is pregnant (seemingly intuiting this information), and Bardem, overjoyed, has found the inspiration that he needs to write his masterpiece. Fast forward approximately nine months and the couple are about to celebrate the extraordinary success of Bardem's new book with a dinner. Bardem is flattered when an adoring crowd suddenly ap-

pears on the lawn. The people force themselves into the house, and the movie quickly becomes nightmarish and violent. Fans seem less like admirers and more like cult members, building shrines to the poet inside the home and conducting orgiastic rituals. Inexplicably, the basement turns into a war zone. Bardem's publisher (Kristen Wiig) executes prisoners six at a time and riot police clash with protesters. When Lawrence suddenly goes into labor, Bardem carries her up to his office, where she gives birth to their son. She falls asleep and Bardem hands the child over to the mob. They pass the urinating baby above their heads until its unsupported neck breaks. They then ritually cannibalize the child. Lawrence assaults the priestly figure officiating at the cannibalization with a glass shard and several surrounding people, lacerating the faces of some children. The crowd proceeds to brutalize Lawrence in what is surely the most memorable, if horrific, scene of the movie. Bardem rushes in and cradles his wife, saying that they have to find a way to forgive the mob. She hurries to the basement, breaks a gas line, drops a lighter, and incinerates the house. Bardem then carries her badly burned but somehow still living body, places it on the table and asks her for one last thing: her "love". She consents, and he opens her chest to remove her heart, which takes the form of an ash-covered crystal. Upon placing the crystal on its decorative mount in his office, the house is restored and a new woman awakes in bed. The cycle continues.

The absurdity of the film's literal sense is amplified by its allegorical dimension. The events that unfold in the house mimic stories of the Bible. Ed Harris and Michelle Pfeiffer play the first humans, Adam and Eve. Their son commits the first murder, explaining the odd bloody orifice that forms in the floorboard ("And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand" [Gen. 4,11 ESV]). The increasingly chaotic funerary gathering represents the "increasing corruption on the earth" (Gen. 6,1–8 ESV), culminating in the burst water pipe, the Flood (Gen. 6–8). Jennifer Lawrence's pregnancy represents the incarnation of God's Son, Jesus, which provides the inspiration for God (Bardem) to compose his masterpiece, the New Testament. The subsequent pandemonium parodies the history of the Christian West. The publisher's role as executioner, for example, seems to stand in for fanatical violence committed in the name of religion: the Inquisition, the Crusades, or some similar example. The birth of the child is the Nativity, the child's cannibalization is the Eucharist, and Lawrence's brutalization is the disdain with which the Christian West has treated the earth/women. Finally, Mother (Nature, or perhaps Woman) has had enough and destroys the house with fire, echoing the biblical eschatological motif of the "day of the Lord" in which "the heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare" (2 Pet. 3,10 NIV). Of course, the film does not stop there. God asks one last thing of Nature,

namely, for its love. The whole process begins again as God smiles with joy. The film's departures from the biblical narrative are important. It depicts God neither as the loving and omnipotent creator God of the Hebrew Bible, nor as the New Testament "Abba" of Christ. Rather, *MOTHER!* allegorically portrays God as a megalomaniacal creator who does not truly love his creation, but simply loves that his creation loves him (see Lawrence literally giving him her heart). God's creative endeavors come at a cost: nature/the planet/Mother Earth must bear the burden of God's narcissistic thirst for worship.

So what are these deviations from the biblical narrative? Criticisms, perhaps? If so, what is being criticized? Abrahamic religion? Or is it, more broadly, a commentary on humanity's disdain for the planet/women? At this point the film's ambiguities become more apparent. Aronofsky has referred to the film as a "cautionary tale" that uses biblical narrative to illustrate the history of humanity's mistreatment of the earth.¹ But if the biblical narrative is supposed to be the pretext for illustrating human history as a whole, Aronofsky's portrayal of the God–Nature relationship and his shocking parody of the Eucharist distract from his purpose. Rather than making a broad statement about humanity's destruction of the environment, Aronofsky's critical attention seems to home in on something sinister and inherently ecocidal implicit in the logic of Judeo-Christian religion. Perhaps it is anthropocentrism. Or, perhaps it is an ethic of forgiveness that effectively functions as a blank check for environmental exploitation. In any case, Aronofsky asks us to sympathize with Lawrence/Mother Earth who just wants to be alone with her husband, and, thanks to her stunning performance, I did. But allegorically, Aronofsky asks us to see the God of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures as an impotent narcissist who values praise more than the well-being of creation, who instrumentalizes nature and history for his own creative compulsions. Finally, Aronofsky asks us to see humanity as a tragic aberration that destroys the pristine relationship between God and Nature.

Aside from the narrative confusions inherent in the jumbled blend of surreal domestic drama and deranged biblical recital, the film's greatest flaw is its haphazard aesthetic. Take, for example, the opening sequence. The film begins with a close-up shot of a woman wearing a defiant expression, engulfed in flames. As her hair and skin burn away, she closes her eyes. A tear falls. The sound of flames grows increasingly intense. There is a sudden cut to a silent, black screen. The title appears in white cursive font with Ralph Steadmanesque ink splattering. The exclamation point is then scrawled out and remains visible as the rest of the title fades. The title sequence prefigures a recurring problem in the film: there is a juxtaposition of disparate elements that aims to manifest the surreal perplexity of a dream but ends up coming across as confused and out of place. The film

1 Aronofsky 2017a.

is a gothic and psychedelic experience, to be sure, but it is not composed of the hallucinogenic fear and loathing that the Steadmanesque font might suggest. And why the extra emphasis on the exclamation point, hanging on after the title fades? Why the exclamation point at all? Aronofsky has referred to the film as a “fever dream” following “nightmare logic”, like a “funhouse built on a rollercoaster smashing into a wall”.² Perhaps he emphasizes the arbitrary and randomness for the sake of this “nightmare logic”, but the result is a fragmented and confusing aesthetic that, at times, distracts the viewer rather than immersing her in the fever dream. This seemingly random aggregation of allegory, horror, gratuitous blasphemy, and ecological commentary does not achieve the sublime disorientation of, say, a David Lynch script. Rather, it comes across more as a surrealist Tarantino film with a very, very loud environmentalist message.

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MOTHER! (Darren Aronofsky, US 2017).

² Aronofsky 2017b.



Calls for Papers

JRFM 2019, 5/1 CALL FOR PAPERS

Understanding Jesus in the Early Modern Period and Beyond

Between Text and Other Media

In the last decades a growing interest in theories and notions of religion in the early modern period has developed, and contemporary scholarship is paying increasing attention to representations of early Christianity and Jesus before the rise of 'scientific discourse'. The Protestant Reformation, Bildersturm, geographical explorations and missionary policies contributed to the deepening of religious strife. Interest in religion widened. Committed philologists and sophisticated apologists from different religious communities engaged in defining a wealth of issues: religion in general, the biography of Jesus, the rise of early Christianity and religious iconographies.

The issue of **JRFM** 2019 5/1 is devoted to the representation of Jesus, to different contexts of production and reception. Our interest lies especially in Jewish, Protestant and Catholic traditions, extending the focus to overlooked *media*. While we welcome analysis on textual traditions as they are embedded in prints, manuscripts, and marginalia, alongside with authorized and authorial perspectives, we encourage scholars to present counter-narratives and challenging views, focusing on other forms and fields of representation.

We are inviting articles considering and analyzing visual material, archival sources and fictional literature, in order to establish a more precise picture of both multiple representations and contrasting theories of religion. While the main focus of the issue is on historical studies, articles with a diachronic line of argument or concerned with a contemporary field of research are also welcome. Indeed, we invite scholars to think about what happens when a new medium appears, as in the case of cinema or photography. How does this new form of communication interact with traditional ones, and more broadly, how are religious experiences or historical facts narrated, represented, or performed? Especially with regard to the performative dimension of the narrative, new me-

dia are increasingly exploiting other forms of communication, such as music, speech, and modern technology to convey meaning.

We welcome articles that

- analyze images of and discourses about Jesus in his historical and religious context and emphasize how the past is addressed, how it is reconstructed, and how it is communicated, eventually censored or polished;
- address theological and religious problems of their respective periods and indicate how these conflicts were confronted or left unsolved through the selection of different media;
- focus on the material dimension of the discursive or visual representation, highlighting the relationship between the medium and the story which is narrated. Were certain media more effective in addressing questions of propaganda, of faith or ideology? Were some more dangerous than others?

The issue also has an open section for articles on other topics linked to the profile of **JRFM**. Contributions of 25,000–30,000 characters (including spaces) should be submitted online for peer review 1 November, 2018 through the journal homepage www.jrfm.eu. We kindly ask authors to register. Publication is scheduled for May 2019. For any questions regarding the call for papers or the submission and publication process, please contact the office manager of **JRFM** (natalie.fritz@kath.ch).

JRFM 2019, 5/2 CALL FOR PAPERS

Apocalypse and Authenticity

Ours is a time of crises: in political discourses, in the context of medicine and ecology, in newspaper coverage, and in what seems an obsession with catastrophic end-of-the world scenarios in popular culture, TV, and film.

At the same time, society seems to be concerned with and long for authenticity and a return to something lost, a return to a truer version of ourselves. But this longing is often disappointed by the uncovering that what seems authentic is often very carefully and artificially crafted.

Religion – broadly understood – is deeply intertwined in both these social discourses. Biblical imagery of the apocalypse continues to be repurposed in popular media today. But in its original biblical sense, the apocalyptic event was thought to uncover and reveal the truth. While in popular media, the term “apocalypse” is often used in an entirely different way, maybe the original biblical meaning can help us understand some of the contemporary phenomena.

The **JRFM** issue will feature select articles from the Apocalypse & Authenticity conference that took place at the University of Hull in July 2017 as part of the conference series of the Theology, Religion, and Popular Culture Network.

In addition to select conference papers, the **JRFM** journal would like to extend a Call for Papers on either the topic of the apocalypse, or the topic of authenticity, or on the apocalypse and authenticity.

The issue also has an open section for articles on other topics linked to the profile of **JRFM**. The deadline for submissions is 1 September 2018. Contributions of 25,000-30,000 characters (including spaces) should be submitted online for peer review through the journal homepage www.jrfm.eu. We kindly ask authors to register. Publication is scheduled for November 2019. For questions regarding the call for papers or the submission and publication process, please contact the **JRFM** office manager (natalie.fritz@kath.ch).