

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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