



Documenting atrocities around the world: Why engage with the perpetrators?

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Abstract

Following a century filled with violations of human rights, a significant number of documentary films have appeared since the first decade of the current century that report these events. Traditionally this process is carried out from the victims' point of view. However, a new tendency has emerged in which the films deal with the perpetrators' perspective. It is easy to understand how establishing a relationship with a person who has committed atrocities may be problematic. So, why should we engage with perpetrators? The overarching purpose of this article is to attempt to offer some answers to this question. To this end, two methodological approaches are carried out in parallel: first, this article explores a sample of five documentary films and the filmmakers' considerations of what their engagement with the perpetrators was like. Second, this article reviews the related literature and the controversial reception of these films by some scholars. In doing so, I also posit a theory that 4Rs (remembrance, recognition, remorse, and redemption) are a necessary prerequisite for the fifth R, of reconciliation. The final elaboration of this schema is mainly based on an example of interpersonal reconciliation.

Keywords

crimes against humanity, documentary film, genocide, human rights, Malte Ludin, Errol Morris, Joshua Oppenheimer, Lissette Orozco, perpetrator, reconciliation

Following a century filled with crimes against humanity, genocides, war crimes and violations of human rights, a significant number of narratives have appeared that address these traumatic events. Traditionally this process is carried out from the victims' point of

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view. However, a new tendency has emerged in recent decades; there has been a considerable increase in the number of narratives exploring these atrocities from the perpetrators' perspective. This exploration, as in the case of literature and cinema, has been mainly focused on the Holocaust as the most notorious historical example of crimes against humanity. But other atrocities were committed over the past century in different geographical and historical contexts, among them we can mention, as examples, the Indonesia and the Cambodian genocides. The documentary film is one of the major cultural products to deal with this traumatic past in the present. Since 2000, a significant number of interesting documentary films have been released developing a new cinematic trend worldwide. Because of the controversy it has aroused, among other reasons, Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* (2012) is one of these films that more social impact has reached. Some scholars have suggested that the relationship with the perpetrators explore in this film is much more difficult terrain than taking the moral high ground by engaging with the victims (Buruma, 2015; Luszti, 2013). Indeed, it is easy to understand how establishing a relationship with a person who has committed atrocities would be problematic. So, why should we engage with perpetrators? Or, to rephrase the question, how could such engagement benefit society in general and the community that suffered the atrocities in particular? To offer some answers to these questions is the main goal of this article.

The growing interest in this tendency, mainly expressed through this change in the point of view of who is given space to speak, is also being explored in academic publications. In 2006, among her many works on this topic, Erin McGlothlin published a book on second-generation Holocaust literature. Although this literature deals mainly with the perspectives of children of survivors, in her study McGlothlin (2006) also includes texts written from the point of view of the children of perpetrators. In 2013, Jenni Adams and Sue Vice outlined their approach to the figure of the perpetrator in their co-edited book, in which their contributors mainly explore how the Holocaust perpetrator is depicted in literary and cinematic works of fiction (all the contributions first appeared in a special issue of *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* in 2011). A third publication is a monograph by Joanne Pettitt, who analyses a large corpus of novels about the Holocaust perpetrator, dating from the 1940s through to the present (Pettitt, 2017). She is especially interested in how these literary works articulate a discourse that humanizes the perpetrators, thereby eliciting a certain degree of sympathy toward them. Ingrid Lewis also covered this extensive period in another monograph published in 2017, but in her case the object of study is fiction films made in Europe, and she focuses on the cinematic depiction of women as perpetrators, victims and resisters (Lewis, 2017).

In 2010, Jonathan Dunnage edited a special issue of *Memory Studies* titled 'Perpetrator Memory and Memories about Perpetrators', in which he widens the study of perpetrator memory beyond the Holocaust to other contexts: the Algerian War of Independence, the left-wing German terrorist movement, and the East German secret police. This special issue thus explores different geographical and historical contexts, offering interesting conclusions about how each context influences the perpetrators' construction of their memories. In 2015, Cathy J. Schlund-Vials and Samuel Martinez co-edited a special issue for the *International Journal of Human Rights* with the main objective of initiating an interdisciplinary debate about 'the terms through which perpetrator figures are read

via law, society and culture'. They were particularly interested in the notions of 'violation' and 'culpability', contextualizing their proposal within the sphere of human rights (Schlund-Vials and Martinez, 2015: 550). This special issue also explores the topic in relation to a variety of different contexts, such as the Cambodian genocide, the Yugoslav Wars, Kenya's presidential abuses, or the experience of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. In Raya Morag's publications, mainly in her book titled *Waltzing with Bashir: Perpetrator Trauma and Cinema* (Morag, 2013), only one context is explored: Israeli involvement in the Lebanon wars and the occupied territories. She addresses how this particular national trauma is represented in the new wave of Israeli documentary cinema. In this literature the main object of study, unlike in the previous paragraph, is non-fictional cases, using material such as biographies, photographs, press documents, interview data, judicial and archival records of international criminal courts, anthropological fieldwork, and documentary films.

In order to offer some answers to the questions formulated above, I focus on the documentary films because of their current relevance, as it has already been mentioned. To this end, two methodological approaches are carried out in parallel: first, this article explores a sample of five documentary films and the filmmakers' considerations of what their engagement with the perpetrators was like. The films selected, as representative of different historical moments, geographical contexts and type of perpetration, are: Malte Ludin's *2 or 3 Things I Know About Him* (2005) on the legacies of the Nazi atrocities; Errol Morris's *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008) on the US-operated prison Abu Ghraib in occupied Iraq; Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* (2012) and *The Look of Silence* (2014) on the Indonesian genocide; and Lissette Orozco's *El pacto de Adriana* (Adriana's Pact, 2017) on the Chilean dictatorship. Second, this article reviews the related literature and the controversial reception of these films by some scholars. In doing so, as an inductive finding of this analytic and theoretical approach, I also posit a schema of 4Rs and a fifth and final R, in which I argue that, from the perpetrator's perspective, the 4Rs (remembrance, recognition, remorse, and redemption) are necessary steps toward the fifth and final R, reconciliation. The final elaboration of this schema is mainly based on an example of interpersonal reconciliation found in Oppenheimer's *The Look of Silence*. As I seek to demonstrate, this kind of relationship is one of the main reasons justifying involvement with perpetrators, since reconciliation should be read as a mutual process that requires not only the participation of the victims but also the participation of those who perpetrated these acts.

Understanding perpetration: interplay of structure and agency

One of the first aspects we should address is whether perpetrators' narratives undermine the legitimate central role of the victims. As Adams points out, it is not difficult to understand the reluctance to approach atrocities from the perspective of the perpetrator out of a fear of a 'risk of obscuring or de-emphasizing victim perspectives and experience' (Adams, 2011: 2). Two of the three reasons that Bill Nichols (2010) puts forward to

criticize Errol Morris's *Standard Operating Procedure* are related to Morris's apparent preference for the perpetrator over the victim. First, Nichols criticizes 'the painfully limited perspective of the guards', and, second, 'the complete absence of the voices of the Iraqi detainees' (Nichols, 2010). In this same vein, he aims his criticism at another documentary film, Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing*. In his analysis of this film, he again expresses his concern about the perpetrators being the only ones who are given the opportunity to offer their testimonies to the viewers. Indeed, as I have discussed elsewhere (2018), Oppenheimer's decision to engage with the perpetrators of the Indonesian genocide was branded as inappropriate by various scholars.

According to Warren Crichlow, 'departing from a tradition of narrative testimony by survivors [... and] foregrounding [the perpetrators] risks significant ethical and moral slippage' (2013: 38). To defend his argument, Crichlow draws mainly on the ideas of Dominick LaCapra, who warns about the problematic nature of encouraging the reader or viewer to identify with the perpetrators' 'beliefs or actions in a manner that may well subvert judgment and critical response' (LaCapra, 1997: 202–3). However, in quoting LaCapra, Crichlow omits an aspect that I believe should be highlighted: LaCapra stresses that the spectator–perpetrator relationship is rendered problematic by 'certain forms of seeming empathy with perpetrators' (1997: 202–3). This claim should at least invite us to ask about the circumstances in which the relationship with the perpetrator may become problematic and what the consequences might be, because it seems to suggest that it is limited to particular cases rather than categorically ruling out any approach to traumatic events from the perpetrator's point of view. Indeed, in relation to Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (1996), LaCapra argues that the 'thick description of the world of the perpetrator' proposed by Goldhagen is undertaken through 'his own identification with certain victims' (LaCapra, 1997: 120). According to Crichlow, '[t]his theory is worth exploring in *The Act of Killing*', since even though the perpetrators' perspective is omnipresent throughout all the film, 'survivors are ... subtextual subjects in the film's thick descriptions' (Crichlow, 2013: 42, note 7).

However, it is worth asking whether this kind of implicit presence is conveyed strongly enough to the spectator. Although Nichols recognizes this intention in *The Act of Killing*, he doubts its effectiveness, and calls for more evident forms of moral orientation (Nichols, 2013). For example, he mentions the palpable role of Jean Cayrol's voice-over in Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog* (1956); Cayrol's commentary in this film 'provides a clear perspective on the Nazis' heinous acts of genocide' (Nichols, 2013: 28). He also references Rithy Panh's *S21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003), in which the perpetrators are confronted by the victim. According to Nichols, it is the voice of the latter that 'guides us toward a moral perspective of crimes against humanity that haunt him and the entire Cambodian nation' (Nichols, 2013: 28–9).

The above example returns us to Nichols' criticisms of *Standard Operating Procedure*, because he uses Panh's film to question the effectiveness of approaching human rights violations from the point of view of the perpetrators. In this earlier article, Nichols (2010) also mentions Alain Resnais and adds Ari Folman, Claude Lanzmann, Alex Gibney and Rory Kennedy to his list of positive examples. Nichols points to the work of these filmmakers as reflective of a better approach to documenting atrocities because all their

films, either through voice-over narration or through the onscreen presence of the victims, offer a voice that clearly counterbalances the perpetrators' version of events. In this way, these narratives offer a more appropriate and less ambiguous framework for the viewers' moral judgements. Nichols (2010) is convinced that the only way to set the 'moral center' of the film is by counterbalancing the perpetrators' testimonies, and he suggests that this intention cannot be found in Morris's work. In the same vein, Thomas Austin also questions the appropriateness and effectiveness of Morris's method because, he suggests, such an approach may elicit ambiguity and uncertainty in the viewers due to its failure to put the viewers 'into the bodies of the prisoners' (Austin, 2011: 355).

While Nichols is not at all concerned with knowing the reasons behind the abuses, Morris's purpose is to explore them in order to explain why such inhumane human action occurs. To this end, Morris gives the soldiers the opportunity to explain what happened beyond the frames of the photographs and thus to demonstrate that they are less culpable than it may appear for what these pictures portray (the most notorious being the case of Sabrina Harman). Their testimonies reveal that they are victims of what Richard Crownshaw (2011: 76) defines as the 'American as perpetrator', although I believe it would be more precise to describe it as the 'American administration as perpetrator'. Morris tries to demonstrate the culpability of the Bush administration by creating the milieu of ambiguity and impunity that facilitated the perpetration. Linda Williams claims that when Susan Sontag wrote that 'these "photographs [from Abu Ghraib] are us", she meant that we as a nation are responsible for what they show: the corruption, waste, and immorality of our occupation of Iraq' (Williams, 2010: 49). I would like to believe that Sontag is not talking about all Americans but only about those who accept and support these acts. Williams also quotes Morris, when at the San Francisco Film Festival he suggested that 'the photos represent a picture of American foreign policy in total' (Williams, 2010: 65). I feel this is a more accurate interpretation because it focuses on those in power rather than assigning the guilt to the whole of American population. I would prefer to exclude from Sontag's 'us' the part of that population that actively rejects and fights against the abuses that its administration unjustly commits on its behalf.

According to Austin, any use of the photographs reproduces the shame of the victims, and he asks: 'is this a price worth paying to investigate the scandal, the scapegoating of MPs, and the culpability of the Bush administration?' (Austin, 2011: 354). Unlike Austin, I believe in the usefulness of this not only because it exposes the administration's guilt, but also because it shows the harmful consequences of participating in abuses and can play an educational role that might help to prevent viewers from repeating the same behaviour in the same circumstances. Obviously, nobody would want to be a victim of the US administration or to be among those branded as 'bad apples', especially when that administration uses you as a scapegoat in order to exonerate itself of its responsibility for a standard operating procedure at Abu Ghraib, which followed the protocols at Guantánamo established by Major General Geoffrey Miller with the consent of US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

Likewise, Tristan Borer (2003) addresses the involvement of structure in perpetration when she points out that in South Africa young Afrikaner soldiers were forced to be part of perpetration and, therefore, they could be considered victims of societal factors (2003).¹ As Hannah Arendt (1963) documented, it is usually the perpetrators who present themselves

as a piece of a machinery, that could easily have been replaced by another, as a bureaucrat executor who was merely following orders, in the vein of Stanley Milgram's (1974) situationist thesis on the obedience to authority. Albert Bandura also claims that the perpetrators, in order to justify their acts, commonly use the stereotypical argument that they were committed 'in the name of righteous ideologies, religious principles, and nationalistic imperatives' (Bandura, 1999: 195). In doing so, they move responsibility for their acts toward the external political/military/ideological structure. Bandura describes this displacement of responsibility as a kind of 'moral disengagement practice' (1999: 207).

However, Don Foster adds a second dimension, formulating the following question: 'are they merely cogs in a political machine, or are they to be held accountable for their dreadful deeds?' (2000: 3). If we focus on the first part of the question, we underline the influence of structure. If we move our attention toward the second part, we focus on agency, since the perpetrators are not only part of a structure but also individuals. Therefore, their choices in the same situations and their behaviours in the same role might be different, thus emphasizing their individual agency. The role that the perpetrators play within the structure is also relevant, because it could determine their level of responsibility and, consequently, the reasons that they could put forward to justify their acts. If the perpetrator is the one who gave the orders (commissioners, high-ranking commanders, thinkers, indirect participants), that is different from being the one who executed them (executioners, ordinary guards, brainwashed, direct participants). These two categories coincide with the two main common views of the perpetrators observed by Michael Mann: 'peculiar people' and 'ordinary people' (2000: 332).² Here, I claim the importance of both dimensions, structural/situational vs personal/dispositional, and their 'synergistic interaction' (Bandura, 1999: 207) to better explain the reasons why the perpetration occurs.³

The (non-)obscenity of understanding the perpetrator's reasons

This section seeks to continue digging into why perpetrators' participation is necessary in order to understand the reasons behind any perpetration, despite the rejection of this by some authors, such as Claude Lanzmann, who vehemently argues that '[t]here is an absolute obscenity in the very project of understanding'. To justify his argument, he uses the testimony of Primo Levi, who narrates how an SS guard explained to him the meaning of Auschwitz when he first arrived at the camp: 'here there is no why'. For Lanzmann: 'this law is equally valid for whoever undertakes the responsibility of such a transmission ...' (1990: 279). He defended his position forcefully in a talk that he gave in April 1990, at the Western New England Institute for Psychoanalysis (WNEIP), where he was invited to discuss a film on Dr Eduard Wirths, who as camp doctor at Auschwitz was responsible for some infamous experiments. Lanzmann saw the film two days before the event and he refused to screen it. As for Nichols, the experience of watching the film was very problematic for him. As Lanzmann recognizes, this film represented what he has always fought against with all his power as a creator (1991: 480).

Like many fiction and non-fiction examples, the film on Wirths delves into the past, with the intention of exploring the perpetrator's childhood. Such an approach attempts to

explain how an innocent child could grow up to be a perpetrator of atrocities. For example, this was the purpose of the historian-journalist Ron Rosenbaum when he wrote his book entitled *Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil* (1998). As Steven K. Baum suggests, 'the simple juxtaposition of name and photo [on the cover of the book] commands the observer to ask: between then and now, what happened?' (2008: 117). It is precisely the 'discrepancy' manifested in this 'gap' that Lanzmann calls 'obscurity' (1991: 480). Later, the discrepancy between Hitler's past and the consequences of his acts in the present is so huge that he substitutes 'abyss' for 'gap' (Lanzmann, 1991: 481). In doing so, Lanzmann highlights an important aspect of the atrocities: the magnitude of their consequences. No reasons could justify or explain Hitler's barbarism and therefore, as Lanzmann suggests, his particular abyss 'will never be bridged' (1991: 481).

According to Lanzmann, trying to bridge the abyss or, put another way, the obscurity of trying to understand the evil, only results in what he calls in French '*élever le niveau du débat*' ('raising the level of the debate') (1991: 481). He mentions the discussion that Jean-Marie Lustiger and Elie Wiesel had on French television as an example of this tension between people who are on the same side, given that both are Jews, when they could be devoting all of their efforts to fighting the enemy. Lanzmann quotes Lustiger: 'the real question is not the question of the crimes against mankind, against humanity. The real question is that these crimes are crimes of *mankind*, crimes of *humanity*' (1991: 482). Thus, the debate seems to be between those who focus their attention on who committed the atrocity and those who, conversely, focus their attention on its consequences. While I believe that to document the latter is clearly necessary, I also believe it is necessary to address the former, because those who commit the atrocities are also human beings and, therefore, we need to try to understand their reasons, even if this understanding might seem obscene. For this reason, I defend the need for approaches that explore not only the acts and their consequences but also the people who commit them and why they do. Adopting such a perspective may help us better to understand the problem and thus facilitate the process of finding solutions that could prevent future cases.

However, this process is always problematic. Another example of this is Arendt's (1963) approach to the figure of Adolf Eichmann. It is well known that many in the Jewish community have accused Arendt of betraying them by reporting on Eichmann's trial. Her famous theory of the 'banality of evil' was controversial at that time and still is. Not surprisingly, Lanzmann completely rejects Arendt's thesis (1991: 489; LaCapra, 1997: 262–3).⁴ He defends his position again by focusing on the acts: 'what they were doing was not banal at all', and furthermore, 'they knew that what they were achieving was really not banal' (1991: 489). But this argument raises again the same question: how do we know what they think if he does not ask them? In fact, Lanzmann did ask them in his project to document the Shoah, but he is concerned only with the description they offer, 'minute by minute, of the machinery of murder'. In no case he is interested, like Nichols, in identifying the reasons that allowed this 'process of destruction'. But at least he recognizes that the presentation of the perpetrators' testimony is equally necessary, even if it is only for the purpose of the description, because 'these things have never been said' (Lanzmann, 1991: 488). Clearly, the best way to understand how the system works is from inside the frame, as we have seen above with Morris's approach.

Even the victims are aware of the importance of knowing both sides of the story. As Oppenheimer notes, the victims invite him to ask perpetrators about the crimes: 'Can you talk to him? Maybe he knows how my son was killed' (quoted in McClendon, 2013). In the same vein, Irene Lusztig reminds Oppenheimer in her interview with him, 'Primo Levi talks about perpetrators as primary witnesses, the only ones who have a real understanding of the system that allows genocide to happen' (2013: 49). Panh himself, from his perspective as a victim, recognizes that 'we the victims also need the words of the perpetrators' (Mohamed, 2015: 1196). Even Panh, in his documentary *Duch, le maître des forges de l'enfer* (2011), engages with one perpetrator, Duch, out of a desire 'to give him a chance to explain, in detail, the death process he organized' (Panh and Bataille, 2012: 26).

Since Oppenheimer is interested not only in how the victim was killed, but also in 'why' the crime was committed, he 'utterly disagree[s]' with Lanzmann's theory of obscenity and suggests instead that those who commit the acts are human beings and therefore need to be confronted in order to draw out the reasons. Panh also invokes the idea that those who commit the crimes are human beings, a fact he finds very problematic: '[w]hen you are so close to a perpetrator, the problem is that you discover that behind the killer there is a human being. It's very complex and very disturbing to your mind'. Yet such engagement is necessary because, as he suggests, it is important to know why a person becomes a perpetrator. He sought 'to understand the mechanism of becoming a killer' (quoted in Boyle, 2014: 34).

Remembrance and recognition: the two first steps toward reconciliation

This article continues its journey by dealing with the perpetrators' refusal to remember and recognize any kind of responsibility about what happened in the past. To this end, I focus on two documentary films in which the relationship between second-generation filmmakers and their relatives who took part in the atrocities is the kernel of both. According to Lanzmann, '[the perpetrators] just wanted to escape, to escape justice and escape execution and to escape the truth, and to escape history' (1991: 482). This psychological process, unfolding more or less consciously, works as a self-defence mechanism, whereby the perpetrators try to avoid having to remember, and if they are forced to do so they abdicate any kind of accountability for what happened or/and divert their responsibilities toward the structure. This more or less voluntary amnesia, rejection or denial becomes the main obstacle in any process of reconciliation. For this reason, if we want to achieve this desirable and essential goal it is necessary to force the perpetrators to face their past, because, as I want to argue, remembrance is the first of four necessary steps in the process toward the final R of reconciliation. Christine Schliesser (2018) argues that both, remembrance and reconciliation, are connected.

In her documentary *El pacto de Adriana*, Lissette Orozco tries to learn more about her national past. She is a Chilean, born after the coup d'état staged by Augusto Pinochet, with the support of Henry Kissinger (US Secretary of State at that time), against the legitimate president of Chile, Salvador Allende. But for Orozco this historical journey

represents not only a national but also a familial process. Indeed, it was a family event that prompted Orozco to explore her nation's traumatic past: her aunt, Adriana Rivas, was unexpectedly arrested by Chilean authorities, for allegedly having worked for the Pinochet dictatorship's machinery of repression, the National Intelligence Directorate (DINA). Orozco's journey reveals, on the one hand, evidence that clearly identifies her aunt as a collaborator in torture and, on the other, her aunt's obstinate denial of the fact, claiming that she only engaged in bureaucratic tasks within the system. This contradiction makes Orozco's relationship with her aunt extremely problematic. As Orozco herself recognizes, she 'was constantly struggling with a desire to believe her', but finally she had to accept the evidence of her aunt's guilt and resist her emotional blackmail (quoted in Traverso, 2018: 14). At the end of the film, in their last conversation, we can see how Rivas, cornered by the social pressure, tries desperately to manipulate her niece into believing her innocence as her last emotional support. Rivas's overwhelming personality prevents Orozco from being able to confront her with the other reality that has been revealed to her throughout the documentation process.

Rivas is not willing to acknowledge her own guilt and she is thus incapable of moving onto the second necessary step, or second R, of recognition. As several scholars have argued, clinging to denial is a very common attitude among the perpetrators (Andrews, 2003; Barcus and Bernstein, 1997; Staub, 2006; Gobodo-Madikizela, 2012; Shnabel and Nadler, 2008). Ernesto Verdeja (2009), in his exploration of the status of perpetrators in the reconciliation process, argues that the perpetrators must reflect on their acts, critically recognizing the immorality of their actions and their responsibility, also they must recognize the victims as the injured parties and the moral status of the victims. Instead of recognizing these requests, Rivas refuses all responsibility and claims to be the victim of what she considers an unfair media trial. The victim role is another possible refuge for perpetrators to take. But like Orozco, we must ensure that we do not fall into the trap of this sympathetic strategy that may distort our moral judgement through our engagement with a perpetrator who tries to manipulate us.

In Orozco's case, her judgement may have been undermined by an emotional engagement motivated by the familial bonds between her and her aunt, making the filmmaker-perpetrator relationship more problematic. The problematic legacy of the perpetrator is particularly significant in the context of post-Nazi Germany. The atrocities committed by the Nazis still have contradictory consequences, not only for the second generation but also for the third generation of post-war Germans. During the first decade of this century, several documentary films addressed this legacy, which also deeply affects family relationships. Sussane Luhmann examines three recent examples of this corpus, Michael Gaumnitz's *Exile in Sedan* (2002), Jens Schanze's *Winter Children: The Silent Generation* (2005) and Malte Ludin's *2 or 3 Things I Know about Him* (2005), concluding that 'these three films highlight the affective and psychic legacies that denied and repressed histories of guilt and shame have on [the] subsequent generation' (Luhmann, 2011: 116).

The purpose of the filmmakers in making these documentary films, as members of this subsequent generation, is to break the silence regarding the criminal past of their ancestors. In doing so, they force themselves – but also their own relatives – to deal with this unpleasant family legacy. However, unlike Orozco's film, in these cases the perpetrators are not able to present their version of events because they are dead. Nevertheless,

the role of maintaining their innocence and denying all responsibility is taken up by members of their family. In these cases, the filmmakers do not have to confront the members of their family that committed the atrocities but the ones who preserve their legacy. For example, in Ludin's *2 or 3 Things I Know about Him*, the perpetrator whose past is explored is his father, Hanns Ludin, who was executed for war crimes, while Malte's siblings, especially Barbel (the eldest), have assumed the role of protecting their father's reputation.

The first sentence of the film expresses Malte Ludin's intention: 'It is my right to see my father the way I want to see him'. Next, Barbel answers him, stating her position just as clearly: 'Not the way I want to see him, the way I do see him'. Later, she adds: 'And if you thought that you could change anything with this film, then you are unfortunately mistaken'. This opening shows how problematic their relationship will be throughout this process and how difficult it will be for the filmmaker to get his sister to accept any change to the official family narrative. Thus, while the filmmakers aim to uncover the perpetrator's past by comparing family memories with historical facts, trying to set aside any family involvement that would complicate the process emotionally, their relatives try to protect that past by stubbornly resisting any ethical reinterpretation of it. The family conflict is thus fed in the present by these two opposing approaches to the past. The radicalization of those who do not want to recognize the responsibilities of their legacy makes the achievement of reconciliation impossible.

The act of reconciliation in the look of silence: remorse and redemption

In any social and political context where society excuses genocide and lauds the perpetrators as heroes, where the perpetrators not only deny any kind of responsibility but even boast about what they did, as we can see in the both of Oppenheimer's documentary films, engaging with the perpetrators is all the more justified. Their privileged social and political position of the perpetrators allows them to speak openly about their crimes without feeling the need to concoct a softened version of events that would make their acts seem less atrocious. As a result, the magnitude of the atrocity and the monstrous nature of those who committed it is laid bare. Thus, Oppenheimer's films aim not to glorify the violence but to question the official discourse and the role of the perpetrator/hero vs the victim/villain. In *The Act of Killing*, Adi Zulkadry, a colleague of the film's protagonist, Awkar Congo, and one of the death squad leaders, as Oppenheimer points out, realizes that re-enacting the violence committed against the communists turns them into victims, and thus delegitimizes the official discourses that they were monsters who deserved to die (Roosa, 2015).

Perhaps this recognition allowed Zulkadry to realize Oppenheimer's purpose in making this film, and thus to change his initial position. As Oppenheimer comments, he initially recognizes their responsibility and advocates a government apology for the sake of national reconciliation. This made Zulkadry just the person that Oppenheimer was looking for: 'I was dying for someone to come into the movie and say the things I was thinking' (Behlil, 2013: 29). But his interest in reconciliation changed during filming, much to

the frustration of the filmmaker. In this way, Zulkadry not only becomes another example of the common pattern, of boastful recognition with no remorse, but even encourages Congo to repress his guilt. This change turns Zulkadry into the main obstacle to Oppenheimer's aspiration to elicit remorse from his protagonist, Congo, for what he did. Thus, in this case the relationship between filmmaker and participant becomes problematic not only because of the hypocrisy of the latter, as Oppenheimer suggests (Behlil, 2013), but also because he frustrates the objectives of the film, and thus the subject becomes an obstacle to the filmmaker's purpose.

One of the main objectives of engaging with the perpetrators is to push them toward the third step, the R of remorse, in order to expose the negative consequences of being a perpetrator. The portrayal of this burden helps to reduce the debt the perpetrators owe the victims (Baumeister et al., 1994; Shnabel and Nadler, 2008). Questions can be raised about the extent to which Oppenheimer encourages Congo to take this step, whether it was the result of their long-term relationship, or whether the remorse he does ultimately express is staged or real, but what is undeniable is that his first re-enactment of the atrocities he committed on the rooftop at the beginning of the film is markedly different from his second performance in the same location at the end. As I have pointed out elsewhere, while in the first scene, on the first day Oppenheimer met Congo in 2005, Congo conforms perfectly to the common pattern, and ends the re-enactment of his crimes by dancing a cha-cha-cha, in the second scene, five years later, he feels remorse and shows physical signs of what we may believe to be genuine anguish (Canet, 2018: 164). In doing so, Oppenheimer presents, as he himself suggests, what are in fact two sides of the same coin: boasting and remorse (Roosa, 2015).

Oppenheimer chose Congo to be his protagonist after two years of filming 40 candidates (2003–5). One possible reason for his choice, as Oppenheimer himself recognizes, is because he saw in Congo the potential for what he ultimately did not get from Zulkadry: the expression of remorse as the morally necessary ending for his film. It is at this stage that the relationship with the perpetrators might become problematic in sympathetic terms, since his expression of remorse might undermine our antipathy toward him as a monster. The reason is because Congo finally comes, as Oppenheimer points out, to 'the moment where the mask is off' (Lusztig, 2013: 52), the moment when his humanity is exposed and therefore it is possible to elicit a certain pro attitude toward him (Canet, 2018: 164). According to Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (2002, 2008), when perpetrators experience remorse they are reclaiming their humanity. In this sense, what Orozco wanted, in making her film, was to give her aunt 'the opportunity to reclaim her humanity', but her aunt missed it by clinging to her denial (quoted in Traverso, 2018: 14).

We could use Raya Morag's (2012: 104) idea of 'redemptive narrative structure' to describe the structure of *The Act of Killing*, but we need the victims' participation to take the next step, the fourth, R of redemption. So, despite Congo requesting their participation near the end of the movie in a surrealistic staged performance (in which a victim awards Congo with a medal 'for executing [him] and sending [him] to heaven'), it is only possible in the second part of Oppenheimer's diptych, *The Look of Silence*, in which Rukun, its protagonist, is the one who facilitates the redemptive narrative structure, a necessary structure if the purpose of the filmmakers is to encourage the act of reconciliation.

Rukun asked the director, Oppenheimer, for the opportunity to talk with the murderers of his brother, who was killed two years before Rukun was born. On his side, as a victim, Rukun is eager for reconciliation because he does not harbour a radicalized need for revenge. Thus, he is able to set aside this negative feeling, 'which so often lead[s] to repetition of old scripts of hatred and violence' (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2018: 113), and cling to positive feelings as the only way to resolve the conflict between both parties. However, such willingness is not easy to find on the perpetrators' side, and it is even more difficult if the perpetrators are still in power, as in such cases there is no real pressure on them to undertake it because the social institutions do not obligate them to do it and, therefore, they do not need to reduce their penalty, to confess their crimes in exchange for pardon (gaining political benefits) or to ask for amnesty. This is one of the main reasons for Rukun's failure to achieve his mission in the documentary filming process. His confrontations with the perpetrators force them to remember, but they are unwilling to acknowledge any responsibility for what they did. In doing so, they could lose, among other things, the privileges of the status quo, limiting their dominance and asymmetric power over the victims (Rouhana, 2004).

Only in one case does he find any reason to keep hoping that reconciliation is possible. This finding bolsters Gobodo-Madikizela's (2012) claim that these moments are erratic in the history of atrocities. Rukun interviews a former death squad member, who unreservedly confesses to severing a Chinese woman's head and drinking her blood. This confession alarms his daughter, who was unaware of the atrocities committed by her father. She only knew the official discourse that the extermination of the communists was justified as necessary because they were a threat to national security, and that consequently her father is considered a national hero for his participation in this national crusade against the enemy. Thanks to Rukun, who gives her father the opportunity to remember freely without any fear of reprisal, the monstrosity can be uncovered and thus the official version of events can be called into question. While her father denies all culpability and even boasts about what he did, she recognizes the level of the atrocity he committed and feels the remorse that he does not. According to Andrew Schaap (2004: 147), the remembrance of past wrong fosters the reconciliation because 'new aspects of old injustices are revealed to future generations'. In the same vein, Verdeja (2009) argues that the delegitimization of the narratives that perpetrators used to justify their atrocities are crucial for reconciliation (2009).

What are the reasons for the different responses of father and daughter? A possible explanation, beyond generational differences, is the personal variances between the two. While her father 'lack[s] the capacity for the kind of empathic resonance that leads to remorse' (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2015: 1106), she is full of this empathetic approach in the relationship with the other. Thus, this relationship is a representative 'expression of the perpetrator's empathic response to the victim's pain' (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2018: 115). Several scholars argue the relevance of remorseful apology in the promotion of forgiveness (Bies and Tripp, 1996; Gobodo-Madikizela, 2002; Staub, 2006; Worthington, 1998). But previously, as we have seen above and as acknowledged by other scholars, the perpetrators' recognition of their wrongdoing is needed for forgiveness (Auerbach, 2004; Gobodo-Madikizela, 2002). Ervin Staub's findings endorse the schema that I am proposing here, since the participants in their research

make forgiveness conditional on both perpetrators' acknowledge and their apology (Staub et al., 2005).

However, forgiveness is also a psychological variable linked to the empathetic personal disposition toward the other and, therefore, as Verdeja (2009: 166) suggests, the perpetrator's remorse may not be even necessary, but without doubt it helps in inducing forgiveness as several studies have shown (Darby and Schlenker, 1982; Fehr et al., 2010; Ohbuchi et al., 1989). With or without the perpetrator's recognition and remorse, it is the victims who should voluntarily determine – free of any kind of social or political pressure, let alone the perpetrator's demand – whether the perpetrator should be forgiven since it is only the victims who have this right. Thus, the fourth step, the R of redemption, requires the participation of the victims, upon whom falls the task of forgiveness. By doing this, the victims also get their humanity back, thus helping to repair their own wounds at least in relation to the emotional dimension. All of these reasons, as elements of the 'apology–forgiveness cycle' (Tavuchis, 1991), make it feasible that the perpetrator could finally be redeemed and the victim mended as a result of a bidirectional rehumanizing process. Nurit Shnabel and Arie Nadler propose their 'needs-based model of reconciliation', drawing precisely on this idea of 'simultaneous and reciprocal satisfaction of the emotional needs of the perpetrator and the victim' (Shnabel and Nadler, 2008: 116–17).

In short, to achieve the final R of reconciliation depends on personal dispositions, such as empathy, which enable each side to see the other less as an ideological opponent or historical enemy and more as a human being. Seeing the other as a human being has been suggested by several scholars (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2002, 2015; Jansen, 2013; Laub, 1991). According to Staub (2000, 2006; Staub et al., 2005), the essence of reconciliation is precisely this psychological orientation toward the other. Other scholars have also pointed out the relevant role of empathy in interpersonal reconciliation (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2015; Halpern and Weinstein, 2004). This empathetic engagement between victim and perpetrator leads to the rehumanization of both. Verdeja (2009: 22) calls this process 'mutual respect', a normative concept that is at the centre of his multi-level theory of reconciliation that he offers as intermediated alternative model between the two poles 'ranging from a "minimalist" legal one predicated on coexistence to a "maximalist" approach based on mutual healing, restoration, and forgiveness' (2009: 12). He proposes four levels to better understand the reconciliatory process: political, institutional, civil society, and interpersonal levels (2009: 20).

Other scholars have already pointed out the multi-level nature of the reconciliation process (Dwyer, 1999; Halpern and Weinstein, 2004; Mamdani, 1997; Rouhana, 2004; Staub, 2006). Besides, some of them have underlined the relevance of the interconnection of these different levels (Halpern and Weinstein, 2004; Rouhana, 2004; Staub, 2006; Verdeja, 2009). Diana Dwyer (1999: 83) narrows down this multi-level approach, distinguishing between 'micro-level' and 'macro-level' reconciliation. Due to the characteristics of the empirical object of exploration here, in which the reconciliation is between two people, I include my reconciliation schema proposal within the former, micro-level, and as an example of the interpersonal level proposed by Verdeja. According to him, it is at this level that 'issues of repentance (regret, remorse), acknowledgement, forgiveness, pardon, and vengeance occupy the moral space between victims, bystanders, and perpetrators' (2009: 160). Bar-Siman-Tov (2004) also highlights the cognitive and emotional

aspects of reconciliation at this level. Other scholars likewise their exploration of reconciliation on the interpersonal relationships among former enemies in post-conflict societies (Gardner Feldman, 2012; Halpern and Weinstein, 2004; Leiner, 2018).

Both Rukun and the perpetrator's daughter show an admirable degree of reciprocal emotional understanding (empathetic approach) that ultimately enables them, as the latter says in the film, to 'know each other now. We're like family'. This encounter serves as a significant example of interpersonal reconciliation between individuals on opposing sides, which is made public thanks to the documentary film, with the hope of extending this private act of reconciliation to other levels of society.

Conclusions

As I have attempted to demonstrate in this article, the participation of the perpetrators is necessary because they are protagonist of the 4Rs (remembrance, recognition, remorse, and redemption), that is, the steps needed to reach the fifth and final R, of reconciliation. The involvement of the victims is also relevant because the fourth R (redemption) falls largely upon them and their disposition to forgive the perpetrators. In this sense, interpersonal reconciliation should be read as a mutual approach that requires the participation of both parties, victims and perpetrators, in developing empathetic relationships that lead their rehumanization. As we have seen, this empathetic relationship, in which both parties to the conflict show mutual understanding, is a vital condition in the reconciliatory process. One of the documentary films explored here, *The Look of Silence*, has allowed us to find an uncommon case of interpersonal reconciliation. To this end, it is important not only to ensure the participation of victims and perpetrators but also their willingness to renounce radical positions that would prevent reconciliation. While filmmakers may try to impose a redemptive narrative structure, its final achievement depends on the protagonists of those narratives.

Although filmmakers may fail to achieve this utopian structure and bring about the act of reconciliation, the achievement of the first step, that is, the act of remembering, justifies the usefulness of engaging with the perpetrators, since, as has been demonstrated above, this step facilitates a global understanding of perpetration. Even in the cases in which perpetrators boast proudly of the atrocities they committed, this process is useful because it exposes their shamelessness, thereby enabling public acknowledgement and condemnation. This understanding entails answering two questions: how the atrocity was committed, and why it happened. Here, we find a division between those who are only interested in detailed descriptions of the atrocities and those who are also concerned about the reasons behind the perpetration. I personally identify with the latter group because I believe that to understand both the personal and situational dimensions that could lead a human being to commit such acts might help us to determine how to prevent future cases. Thus I argue that listening to the reasons of the perpetrators is worthwhile, despite the danger of subverting the moral judgement of the viewers. We need to be clear that understanding the reasons does not mean accepting them as reasonable motives that could justify the atrocities committed. In any case, this understanding should not be mistaken for forgiving or excusing (Foster, 2000).

In addition, in relation to situational factors, this understanding also allows us to see how the system works, and thus to identify higher levels of responsibility. In this sense, giving the perpetrators a voice may expose how the state tolerated or even encouraged the atrocities, and how the authorities manipulate public opinion by creating official narratives with the intention of covering up their responsibility. The perpetrators' testimonies may also be useful for the deconstruction of the official discourses and questioning their accountability for deeds perpetrated in the name of their state (Schaap, 2004).

If the second and third Rs (recognition and remorse) can be achieved, this will further benefit the move toward reconciliation because showing the suffering of the perpetrators might even be more effective than showing the suffering of the victims. We as human beings do not want to be a victim, we are not tempted to suffer, but we can be tempted to inflict pain. For that reason, it is very important to show the painful consequences of being a perpetrator, the psychological burden of the guilt and how this traumatic feeling could haunt you all your life. Thus, showing the perpetrators recognizing what they did and feeling remorse over it could act as a powerful deterrent against future atrocities. This explains why filmmakers attempt to film situations in which the perpetrators show the painful consequences in the present of what they did in the past.

In short, as I have tried to demonstrate in this article, the presentation of perpetrator narratives is clearly beneficial for society, and although engaging with the perpetrators may become problematic, the usefulness of such engagement is undeniable. Indeed, it is useful not only when there is no other way to document the atrocities, but even when the filmmakers are also able to engage with the victims, since the perpetrator's story could be even more effective as a framework for the viewers' ethical assessments than the victim's. Thus, although presenting the voice of the victim may be equally beneficial, I claim that it is not necessary as a counterbalance in an effort to provide more suitable or less ambiguous guidance for the viewers' moral judgements, because the support of filmmakers toward the victims is unquestionable despite their necessary involvement with perpetrators.

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Notes

1. In her article, Borer (2003) problematizes the intra-group homogeneity of victims and perpetrators. She also reconsiders the established differences between the two groups. As a constructive response to her own questions, she proposes a taxonomy of victims and perpetrators. Likewise, Mann (2000) and Yoel Elizur and Nuphar Yishay-Krien (2009) offer their own taxonomy but only of perpetrators.

2. In his article, Mann (2000) analyses the biographies of 1,581 people involved in the Nazi genocide. The findings of his research suggest that they resemble 'Real Nazis' more than they do 'Ordinary Germans'.
3. Foster proposes his own multi-level schema in order to explain the atrocities committed by perpetrators. Five dimensions shape his proposal: political understanding, individualistic psychological explanations, intergroup theories and social identities, situations or triggers of violence, and finally language and ideology that justify and encourage the perpetration (Foster, 2000: 6–8).
4. Arendt's theories were not only criticized but also supported by Holocaust scholars such as Bauman (1989), Browning (1992) and Hilberg (1985), as Foster points out (2000: 2).

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