

<b>Institution: University of Westminster</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: UoA 34; Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory</b>
<b>Title of case study: Genocide and Genre</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Genocide and Genre is an AHRC-funded documentary film research project, exploring performative methods to investigate the 1965-66 genocide in Indonesia and its current ramifications. Following the first public showing of its initial film output <i>The Act of Killing</i> in August 2012, the project has had extensive impact of two kinds: on cultural life, particularly in North America and Europe, and on civil society and public discourse, particularly in Indonesia. Widely acclaimed at film festivals in North America and Europe, <i>The Act of Killing</i> has prompted intense discussion among film critics, filmmakers and film-audiences. In Indonesia, widespread unofficial showings of the film have served to invigorate the work of human rights activists, and prompted new nationwide public discussion of a previously largely taboo topic.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The Genocide and Genre research project was conceived by Joshua Oppenheimer and developed in collaboration with Joram ten Brink from 2005. It built upon previous research on re-enactment in documentary film, particularly in the work of Jean Rouch, undertaken by ten Brink from 2002 onwards (see ten Brink, ed., 2007), and on the work of Oppenheimer in Indonesia from 2003 with victims and survivors of the 1965-66 massacres, and on his resulting encounters with perpetrators. Ten Brink was successively full-time Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Reader, Professor, University of Westminster 1989 to present; Oppenheimer was Research Fellow, University of Westminster, March 2007 to March 2011 full-time, March 2011 to October 2011 half -time, Reader full-time Jan 2013 to present.</p> <p>The project used practice-based research to explore four interrelated research issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The use of re-enactment in documentary film production in the context of a nation's history of mass political killings.</li> <li>• The role of fantasy, fiction and cinematic genres in both the performance and remembrance of mass violence.</li> <li>• The development of nonfiction filmmaking methods to excavate the implication of fantasy, fiction and cinematic genres in the performance and remembrance of mass violence.</li> <li>• The use of feedback as a documentary tool to confront perpetrators of violence with their actions.</li> </ul> <p>The major resulting research output is the film <i>The Act of Killing</i>. This formally innovative work contributes to critical understandings of how individuals and groups perform, remember and re-tell acts of genocidal violence. It recovers crucial details about the genocide, and analyses the cinema genres and grammars through which both political violence and its subsequent official history have been staged in the city of Medan in North Sumatra, Indonesia.</p> <p>Reflection on the issues addressed in the Genocide and Genre project is provided in the edited collection <i>Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory and the Performance of Violence</i> (ten Brink and Oppenheimer, Columbia University Press, 2012).</p> <p>Research for the project was conducted in Indonesia and the UK by <i>The Act of Killing's</i> director Joshua Oppenheimer and co-director Christine Cynn (Technician, University of Westminster, 2008-9), supported by Joram ten Brink as producer and AHRC principal investigator.</p> <p>Pre-production and filming for <i>The Act of Killing</i> were conducted between 2003 and 2010, editing and post-production from 2009 to 2012. Because of current political conditions in Indonesia, several Indonesians who worked on the film have had to remain anonymous. One worked as a co-director with Cynn, and as a translator during editing.</p> <p>The key research insights of Genocide and Genre for which impact is claimed are the exploration</p>

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of the behaviour of perpetrators of the Indonesian genocide through their re-enactment of their killings, often in genres familiar to them through their knowledge of Hollywood cinema, and the documentation of their status and views in current Indonesian society. In *The Act of Killing*, victorious and seemingly unrepentant perpetrators of genocide draw on their cinematic fantasies to dramatise their roles in the killings, suggesting genres, writing scripts and directing scenes. Through this disturbing dramatic space, the work investigates not only the routines of violence, but also how an entire society (in this case contemporary Indonesia) has been built on the basis of terror and trauma. The film discovers and presents the conditions for a new form of nonfiction film: a documentary of the imagination. Through the perpetrators' re-enactments, and observational footage documenting their filmmaking process, it documents how perpetrators wish to be seen, and how they imagine themselves and the society they built and rule over. Through this novel approach to the study of power and impunity, *The Act of Killing* pioneers a new approach to nonfiction filmmaking, historical filmmaking, the investigation of political violence and the social imagination.

**3. References to the research**

1. *The Act of Killing* (2012) film in three distinct versions: a 159-minute director's cut; a 115-minute standard cinema version; and a 95-minute broadcast version. Directed by Joshua Oppenheimer, co-directors Christine Cynn and Anonymous. First shown publicly at the Telluride Film Festival, August 2012.
2. ten Brink, Joram and Oppenheimer, Joshua, eds (2012), *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory and the Performance of Violence*, London: Columbia University Press. (Introduction by ten Brink and Oppenheimer, essays by ten Brink and Oppenheimer).
3. ten Brink, Joram, ed. (2007), *Building Bridges: The Cinema of Jean Rouch*, London: Wallflower Press. (Introduction, essay, and three interviews by ten Brink).

**EVIDENCE OF QUALITY:**

*The Act of Killing* is submitted in REF2 for Joshua Oppenheimer in REF 2014. DVDs and hard-copy portfolio available in REF documentation.

*Killer Images* is submitted in REF2 for Joshua Oppenheimer in REF 2014.

*Building Bridges* was submitted for Joram ten Brink in RAE 2008.

**FUNDING**

AHRC Research Grant 'Genocide and Genre': £395,350, March 2008 – February 2011; University of Westminster New Directions Fund: £60,540, March 2007 – February 2008; Danish Film Institute Development Grant, 2008: £17,137; Danish Film Institute Production Grant, 2009: £91,399; Danish Film Institute Production Grant, 2010: £68,549; Norwegian Film Institute, 2009: £51,412; Nordic Film and Television Fund, 2009: £51,412; Ford Foundation, 2010: £161,000; Ford Foundation (second grant): £130,000; Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009: £45,700; Frit Ord Foundation, 2009: £20,565; Rogaland Film Fund: £22,355; Stavanger Kommun Kulturfond: £25,706; ZDF/Arté, 2009: £76,690; Danish Broadcasting (DR): £4,570; Finnish National Television (YLE): £6,817; Channel Four Television (UK): £30,000; Swedish National Television (SVT): Norwegian National Television (NRK): £10,282; Dutch National Television (VPRO): £4,261).

**4. Details of the impact****IMPACT ON CULTURAL LIFE IN NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE**

*The Act of Killing* was first shown publicly at the Telluride Film Festival in August 2012, followed by screenings at the Toronto International Film Festival, the Berlin Film Festival and more than twenty other film festivals over the following year. It was exhibited in cinemas in Denmark (November 2012 - January 2013), France (April – May 2013), Netherlands (May 2013), the UK (from June 2013) and the USA (from July 2013). As of June 2013, *The Act of Killing* had won 24 awards. These include the Berlinale Panorama Audience Award for Best Documentary 2013, the Danish Academy Award for Best Documentary 2013 (Robert Prize), Amnesty International Award, Indie Lisboa 2013 and the Aung San Suu Kyi Award, Human Rights Human Dignity Film Festival 2013.

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The film festival and public showings have prompted numerous enthusiastic press reviews, mostly awarding the film their highest star rating and singling out for comment the film's innovative approach and emotional and political impact.

For example Peter Bradshaw in the *Guardian* described how "The memory of this mass murder is reawakened by film-maker Joshua Oppenheimer in a remarkable and at times unwatchably explicit film. It could be a *Marat/Sade* for our time... It is a gut churning film: and a radical dive into history, grabbing the past in a way conventional documentary would not" (*Guardian*, 27 June 2013). Nigel Andrews in the *Financial Times* commented "First, the film beggars belief. Then it sends belief running into the hills, screaming for help and understanding. The Act of Killing is like no movie seen before" (June 27 2013), while the Danish daily *Politiken* stated that "'The Act of Killing' simply sets a new benchmark for how a historical event can be re-told dramaturgically, analytically and documentarily." (30 October 2012).

These reactions have extended from the elite to the popular press. Chris Tookey in the *Daily Mail* described *The Act of Killing* as "An astonishing documentary that's essential viewing for anyone wishing to understand the darker aspects of the human condition... Because of its revelatory honesty this might be the most important documentary ever" (27 June 2013). Farran Smith Nehme in the *New York Post* observed, "The cumulative impact is devastating, and very far from a western country's brutality. In forcing viewers to hear the boasts of genocide's perpetrators *The Act of Killing* puts a harsh spotlight on all celebrations of bloodshed from Hollywood to the op-ed pages" (19 July 2013).

Alongside reviews the film has been the subject of feature articles in major newspapers discussing its innovative methods, for example, "A Movie's Killers are all too Real" by Larry Rohter in the *New York Times* (12 July 2013) and "Indonesia: the Art of Atrocity" by Bryan Appleyard, *Sunday Times* (12 July 2013). The portfolio submitted to REF2 includes a fuller listing of press coverage. Further reviews and comments can also be found online at <http://theactofkilling.com/reactions-3/>

#### IMPACT ON PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN INDONESIA

In reaction to a late rough cut of the *The Act of Killing* (its working title was still *Freemen*), human rights organisations in Indonesia recognised its potential power and committed themselves to its distribution. In 2011 the Indonesia Rights Commission on Human Rights wrote to the filmmakers expressing their excitement at helping to release the film. "If we are to transform Indonesia into the democracy it claims to be, citizens must recognise the terror and repression on which our contemporary history has been built. No film, or any other work of art for that matter, has done this more effectively than *Freemen*." Owing to the current political situation, which *The Act of Killing* documents, the filmmakers adopted a careful strategy about releasing the film in Indonesia, in order to avoid the film being officially banned. In the autumn of 2012 closed screenings were held for journalists, filmmakers, celebrities, intellectuals, artists, survivors' groups and human rights activists, in order to build up cultural, media and political support for the film, before more general release.

One result of these early screenings was to prompt the editors of *Tempo*, Indonesia's leading news magazine, to research and publish a special edition of the magazine on the 1965-66 killings (1-7 October 2012). As an article in *Tempo* on the anniversary of that special edition explained, "Arif [Arif Zulkifli, the editor of the Tempo Media Group] stated that the idea for the special edition was taken from the documentary film *The Act of Killing*, directed by Joshua Oppenheimer. 'We developed the idea further by looking for the locations of murders in other regions.'"

The resulting special issue of *Tempo*, entitled "Executioners' Confessions", praised *The Act of Killing* as "the most important work in any medium ever produced about our nation," and included dozens of pages of perpetrators' testimony from around the country – something unprecedented in the history of Indonesian journalism (*Tempo* 1-7 October 2012). The issue sold out on the first day, went through two re-printings, and has now been published as a book by Tempo Media Group.

Everyone who saw the film in the early screenings was facilitated to take the film back to their networks and communities and hold invitation-only screenings. (Invitation-only screenings fall through a legal loophole: a film need not be submitted to the censors unless screened publicly).

The release began on International Human Rights Day, 10 December 2012, with 50 screenings in 30 cities. Screenings averaged 200 people each, so approximately 10,000 Indonesians saw the film on the first day. By summer 2013 there had been 1,100 screenings in 118 cities, and almost all of these screenings were now open to the public. The reason why people felt increasingly able to hold public screenings, and the reason why these showings did not provoke a ban on the film, was probably due to the reaction of the Indonesian and international media. There have been more than 500 articles published in the Indonesian media about the film. By summer 2013 approximately 200,000 Indonesians had seen the film. (To ensure an even wider release, Oppenheimer has since made the film available for free download for everybody in Indonesia.)

These showings have often involved considerable efforts of organisation and evoked powerful responses among viewers. For eyewitness descriptions of two such screenings see Caroline Cooper's, "The Act of Seeing *The Act of Killing*" (*Guernica* 13 June 2013) and Sara Schonhardt's, "Act of Killing': In small screenings, by word of mouth, Indonesians learn of a dark past" (*Christian Science Monitor* 13 December 2012). The film's impact in Indonesia has also been the subject of considerable coverage in international news media (for example, "Indonesia film on mass killings stirs debate", *Al Jazeera* English, 8 October 2012; "101 East – Indonesia's Killing Fields" *Al Jazeera* English, 30-minute documentary, 19 December 2012; "The Act of Killing' helps Indonesia confront its dark past", *CNN*, 30 September 2013; "Film gives Indonesia view of bloody, obscured past", Margie Mason, *Associated Press*, 4 October 2013).

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

### IMPACT ON CULTURAL LIFE IN NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE

All the reviews below are available on request from the HEI

- 1) Nigel Andrews, *Financial Times*, 27 June 2013.
- 2) Peter Bradshaw, *Guardian*, 27 June 2013.
- 3) Dorte Hygum Sorensen, *Politiken*, 30 October 2012, in Danish, English translation available.
- 4) Chris Tookey, *Daily Mail*, 27 June 2013.
- 5) Farran Smith Nehme, *New York Post*, 19 July 2013.

### IMPACT ON PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN INDONESIA

All the reviews, articles and letters below available on request from the HEI

- 1) *Tempo* special edition, 1-7 October 2012, in Indonesian, partial English translation available.
- 2) 'Tempo Luncurkan Buku Pengakuan Algojo 1965' *Tempo*, 30 Sep 2013, partial English translation available.
- 3) "Indonesian Film on Mass Killings Stirs Debate", *Al Jazeera* English, 8 Oct 2012, / "101 East – Indonesia's Killing Fields", *Al Jazeera* English, 21 Dec 2012.
- 4) Caroline Cooper, "The Act of Seeing The Act of Killing", *Guernica*, 13 June 2013.
- 5) Sara Schonhardt, "The Act of Killing': In small screenings, by word of mouth, Indonesians learn of dark past", *Christian Science Monitor*, 13 December 2013.
- 6) Letter from executive director of Partisipasi Indonesia (Indonesian Human Rights organization), in Indonesian, English translation available.
- 7) Letter from vice chairman of Indonesia National Commission on Human Rights.
- 8) *The Act of Killing*: Dossier for 2013 PUMA Impact Award, BRITDOC Foundation.
- 9) "Film gives Indonesia view of bloody, obscured past", Margie Mason, *Associated Press*, 4 October 2013.