

A “MOUSE-TRAP” FOR INDONESIAN KILLERS: OPPENHEIMER’S *THE ACT OF KILLING*

This paper was inspired by the documentary *The Act of Killing*, directed by an American-born, British filmmaker Joshua Oppenheimer and released in 2012. Provoked and appalled by what is described as one of the worst mass murders in the 20th century, the movie director focuses not so much on the crime itself but the perpetrators of the crimes and the ensuing consequences. Apart from the need to bring to open and discuss this part of Indonesian history, as well as the consequences of the communist and subsequent anti-communist political rules, this paper deals, on the one hand, with the question and the essence of human nature capable of such monstrosity and on the other, with the role that art must take in understanding and healing of the open wounds in any nation’s history as well as individual perpetrators of the crimes. For this purpose, the ideological framework of Erich Fromm as given in his study *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* and also philosophical ideas of Hanna Arendt, specifically concerning the nature of evil itself were used as theoretical framework.

Key words: Arendt, art, documentary, Fromm, human, Indonesia, nature, killing

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INTRODUCTION

This paper was inspired by the documentary *The Act of Killing* which was directed by an American-born, British filmmaker Joshua Oppenheimer and released in 2012. The movie was widely acclaimed and awarded with many prizes including European Award for Best Documentary in 2013 and British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) in 2014.¹ It is partly about horrific Indonesian killings perpetrated during 1965/66 when armed forces under General Suharto ousted Indonesia's founding president Sukarno and started an era of military dictatorship that lasted for thirty years. Suharto's rule was notorious for anti-communist purge targeting (alleged) leftists, landless farmers and ethnic Chinese; the number of his victims range between one and three million people. Being provoked and appalled by what is described as one of the worst mass murders in the 20th century, the movie director focuses not so much on the crime itself but on the perpetrators of the crimes and the ensuing consequences. At certain points, this extraordinary movie feels almost like a parody since viewers, in our opinion, cannot help but wonder if the characters are real and their reactions genuine: namely, it is not just that the killers depicted in Oppenheimer's film show the lack of regret or remorse for committed atrocities, but (as it is evident and punctuated by some scenes) they even feel proud and self-confident about their monstrous past. Thus, apart from the need to bring to open and discuss this part of Indonesian history, as well as consequences of the communist and subsequent anti-communist political rule, the greatest concern expressed in this paper deals with the question and the essence of human nature capable of such monstrosity and perpetrators' utmost unawareness of the inhumanity of their deeds.

ABOUT THE MOVIE

The documentary *The Act of Killing* (2012) was actually a side project by its director, Joshua Oppenheimer, who visited Indonesia for altogether different reasons. Namely, he went to Indonesia to produce *The Globalization Tapes* (2003), a case study about the experience of the palm oil plantation workers and their exploitation by the global economic institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization. While shooting for this film, Joshua Oppenheimer and his

¹ It was also nominated for an Academy Award in 2014 but, due to deservingly suspicious reputation of the Academy (accusations of commercialism, of bias and a lack of diversity), we do not include this information in the body of our text. However, since the Academy Awards are considered to be the most prominent, prestigious and certainly the most popular movie awards, we felt that it would be unfair to the documentary not to mention it even if in passing.

colleague Christine Cynn learned about the mass killings of 1965/66 and the impenetrable silence surrounding the historical circumstances of these events. It was actually, as Oppenheimer himself admits in the interview with Antonia Lo Giudice (2013), the idea of one of the survivors to make a film with perpetrators of the crimes as its main protagonists since, this man thought, they would gladly talk about the crimes and even boast about them (Lo Giudice, 2013). This was the beginning of an entire decade which Oppenheimer invested in making of this movie with his Indonesian crew who could not be credited for safety reasons. The unnamed initiator of the movie was right: as the director claims, he did not have to invest much effort to gain the killers' trust since they were very open about their killing of the communists. They felt they did not have anything to hide: they were more than willing to speak about the crimes, show places of torture and even reenact the scenes so that the idea of filming their dramatization came spontaneously, says Oppenheimer. Simple request "Go ahead and show me what you've done" became an utterly new and groundbreaking way of making a documentary.

Documentary film, as defined in Encyclopedia Britannica, is a "motion picture that shapes and interprets factual material for purposes of education or entertainment" (2018). Conventionally, this has been done by using pictures ("photo slideshow technique") or interviews with people involved in real events ("talking heads technique") to provide authenticity to the filmed material; "recreation" or "drama" is also used in cases of historical documentaries lacking footage on events that have already taken place and still need to be dramatized (Desktop Documentaries, 2018). What makes *The Act of Killing* unusual and unconventional is that recreation storytelling technique is actually performed by the perpetrators themselves. Oppenheimer and his co-director Christine Cynn got these people to reenact their crimes for the camera however they saw fit. As Richard Whittaker of *The Austin Chronicle* observes,

they saw themselves as suave heroes, birthed from the Hollywood classics for which Congo used to scalp tickets when he was a young street thug. That self-image is reflected in the vignettes they create. Dancing girls sway in front of a giant fish like an opium-doused Busby Berkeley routine. The murderers dress as Bogart-style gangsters, cleaning the streets. In one chilling scene, they burn the village to save it, Platoon-style, and are greeted by cheering crowds. It is the story of the massacres from their viewpoint, no matter how subjective, self-serving, and ultimately self-incriminating. (...) The result mixes bizarre re-creations with "behind the scenes" footage and interviews, creating something that is as much a making-of as a film in its own right. (2013, para. 3)

One of the most revealing and the most disturbing scenes from the movie is the scene in which the murderer, skinny, grey-haired Anwar Congo (at the time of shooting the film in his seventies) reenacts one of the killing techniques used. In this scene, Congo's friend, with his hands tied behind his back, "plays" a prisoner and Congo portrays the executioner: he puts a wire around the prisoner's throat explaining calmly to the camera that "this is the proper way to do it, without too much blood". Immediately after this reenactment, he admits right into the camera how he tried to forget the killings by using alcohol, marijuana, ecstasy or dancing so he could "fly" and "be happy". To further make the point and show how it is possible to feel happiness even after killing one thousand people, Congo ends his exposé with light cha-cha and spontaneous laughter.

It should be mentioned, though, that there was nothing special or unique about Anwar Congo. He was one of approximately ten thousand executioners and one of 41 executioners that Oppenheimer filmed, adding four to ten hours of footage for each interviewee. What they all had in common, besides their murderous past obviously, was their boastfulness about that past and eagerness to reveal to the world what they saw as heroism and resistance against communism. Consequently, there was nothing deceitful about their reenactments because they were not used, as Oppenheimer reminds us, as a method to lure these people to open up – "the method was a response to their openness" (Whittaker 2013, para. 9).

Another important feature of this original documentary is an attempt to record inner life of the criminals in miniature dream-like sections of the movie which are, by default, unorthodox and even anti-documentary. Such is, for example, the opening sequence of the movie that depicts a line of supposed-to-be sexy young girls who are coming out of a gigantic fish's mouth or another scene with Anwar Congo in front of a waterfall who is reaching out to the external world and exaggeratingly emanating "God, happiness, forgiveness"; in this latter scene, Congo is accompanied not only by the dancing girls in their shiny revealing outfits, but also his friend and colleague criminal Herman Koto, who is for this special occasion but for unspecified reasons wearing a female evening gown. The surrealism of the scene immediately shakes the viewer out of their comfort zone by making them surprised and unprepared for whatever is coming next.

Indeed, what follows is the mentioned garrote scene in which a killer is disturbed not by the horrible nature of his act but with his looks and "acting" which, in his opinion, were not very convincing! "Isn't it wrong", asks Congo in this reconstruction of history, "that my hair is white?" He thinks he should dye it. With that, as eminent film critic Stuart Klawans notices,

The Act of Killing departs from a realistic use of performance and enters a mode of parody, travesty, and delirium. Congo and Koto accept Oppenheimer's invitation to reenact their crimes as they would like to envision them: as scenes from the American movies they love. The two gangsters and others in their circle begin to appear in the costumes and mise en scène of films noirs, Westerns, horror movies, even musicals. (2013, para.11)

What the criminals Congo and Koto feel towards popular Hollywood-style movies reveals their fascination with the American pop culture and possibly, at least to a certain extent, provides the rationale behind their willingness to participate in portraying their bloody works of genocide: now, they get to be the very cowboys and the mobsters and the movie stars they once admired. With this brilliant move, *The Act of Killing* provides killers with an opportunity to turn their wild imagination into reality – not to indulge them, of course, but to expose their transgressions, document them and hopefully to catch the conscience both of the murderers and their audience. So, this amazingly noble and original film, suitably called “a documentary of genocidal imaginary” (Klawans, 2013, para. 6) is before everything else – its historical context, foreign and interior politics, social structure, even the killings themselves – a study of human nature and human disposition to evil.

ON HUMAN NATURE: IS BIOLOGY A DESTINY?

On the one hand, the film inspires a set of questions about murderers' lack of awareness and their initial motivation: what was it that made these people kill thousands upon thousands of other people, their neighbors, and compatriots? How was it possible that these killings became the source of national pride and individual happiness of the perpetrators? How was it possible for these criminals to continue their lives after the monstrosities they committed without ever trying to redeem themselves? How could they laugh when talking about them? How could they not realize the full horror of their actions? How could they not “see”? On the other hand, one might ask, if they *were* fully aware of those crimes, how was it not possible that their entire being did not revolt against such abomination? Or could it be, crushingly, that they simply did not care; that they even enjoyed their crimes because they were “evil” by nature? Is human nature innately “good” or “bad”? These are the questions that, we propose, plague every morally conscientious viewer of the film and that correspondingly we are going to try to answer, or at least hint at the answers which are, of course, very complex and empirically unattainable. The greatest help at reaching satisfactory conclusions was Erich Fromm's theory of aggressiveness expounded in his invaluable book *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973)

that, besides Fromm's own theoretical perspectives, also includes a detailed overview of Sigmund Freud's theory of aggressiveness and destructiveness.

It is a well known fact that human nature has been a constant subject in the history of western thought. The theories about human nature usually occupy one of the following five positions: optimism (that humans are inherently good), pessimism (that humans are inherently evil), dualism (that humans are endowed with both of the characteristics), neutralism (that humans are neither good nor bad) and individualism (only individuals can be good or bad) (Perrett, 2002, p. 7). Perrett swiftly dismisses the last two positions as implausible because we all possess some innate dispositions that we also share as members of the same species. His conclusion is substantiated by many modern studies which admit genetic influences and once and for all reject outmoded "blank slate" models which basically negate human nature per se (Orians, 2008, p. 4). For our research, the first two positions are especially important since the authors we turn to in this paper, Freud and Arendt, belong to precisely these two, mutually opposing, theoretical camps.

Firstly, Sigmund Freud fits into the category of pessimists who propose that men are ruled by their animal instincts which need to be restrained and put under control. This conclusion is only partially present in his earlier and more famous theory of libido which deals with aggressiveness only as part of sexuality and which, therefore, was not of much importance for our purposes. However, this is not the case with his latter theory that focuses on a new dichotomy between an instinct to preserve living (also called Eros) and the instinct seeking to dissolve the unit (instinct of death or destructive instinct²). According to this theory, fully elaborated in *The Ego and the Id* (1923), the death instinct is the innate impulse that pushes men to aggressiveness either towards themselves or the external world. This essentially tragic idea follows the same line of thought as does Freud's earlier idea of sexual release and retention – two alternatives of being a happy pariah or a socially accepted neurotic are now transformed into equally repressive alternatives of being the sufferer, the one who destroys oneself, or a sadist who projects self-destruction into destruction

² There are other names that Freud uses in reference to the death instinct, such as instinct of destruction, the instinct for mastery or the will to power, but these are, according to Erich Fromm only adding up to already rather significant degree of confusion and contradiction in Freud's theories (reason for that is that he tried to fit his new findings about innate aggressiveness within the mold of his older theory which was not sustainable). In Fromm's opinion, the mentioned instincts do not refer to the same tendencies at all and cannot be thought of as equal one to another. The term "Thanatos", often used as synonymous to the death instinct, was never used by Freud himself.

of others. In both cases, men are slaves of their own nature and utterly tragic beings. This, of course, echoes an idea of another pessimist, Thomas Hobbes, an embittered English philosopher from 17th century, who believed that human beings were not dissimilar to wild hordes of animals and that they are urged exclusively by the right to preserve themselves and pursue their individual goals. Apart from his view of men as pathetic creatures, ultimately selfish and immoral, Hobbes devised an idea that a natural state of things is anarchy, or as he called it “war of all against all”. As an antidote to this chaotic state of affairs, Hobbes proposed an idea of “a leviathan” or a powerful government that protects people from one another and brings them to order (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018). Freud follows the same line of thought by putting the civilization before the individual and individual’s own desires, which he considers as an obstacle to one’s happiness. Such argumentation, shared by the pessimists, reaches an evident conclusion that a civilized man would not be prompted to be aggressive or destructive as a primitive man. Fromm rebutted this conclusion almost half a century ago on the premise that the prehistoric man was actually less aggressive than the civilized man. From today’s standpoint, some thirty years after Erich Fromm’s death, and taking into consideration enormous number of war conflicts in this period, we can only notice that Fromm’s conclusion is still valid since people grow increasingly more, and not less, violent with the progress of civilization and that the truth actually lives on the diametrically opposite side to both Freud’s and Hobbes’s assumptions.

Another theorist on human nature whose idea will prove correct in the specific case of the Indonesian killings and its perpetrators is Hanna Arendt. It is her idea of the “banality of evil” which she expounded in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1964) that is especially important for our purposes. In her famous report from the trial to a lieutenant colonel in the Nazi army and one of the major organizers of the Holocaust, Adolf Eichmann, Arendt defines the banal nature of the evil by claiming that this war criminal was not born a monster, but a regular citizen who turned into a monster only under the external and gruesome circumstances of war. She says:

Eichmann was not Iago or Macbeth, and nothing would have been farther from his mind than to determine with Richard III “to prove a villain.” Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all. And this diligence is in no way criminal; he certainly would never have murdered his superior in order to inherit his post. He merely, to put the matter colloquially, never realized what he was doing. (...) He was not stupid. It was sheer thoughtlessness – something by no

means identical with stupidity – that predisposed him to become one of the criminals of the period. (Postscript, no page)

It is easy to see why the book caused such uproar as it did. Arendt's view on the banality of evil could easily be misunderstood as a downplay of the crimes committed by the Nazis, which is certainly a shocking thought per se, but not the actual rationale for the uproar. What was more shocking about Arendt's interpretation of Eichmann's crimes was the whole idea behind the interpretation and the individual case of Adolf Eichmann. First of all, her proposition about the banality of evil suggested that ingrained evil or pathology is not a necessary precondition for committing unabashed crime and, consequently, implicated and identified *all* people as potential perpetrators. It seems that the case of the murderers from the movie *Act of Killing* proves her point.

MALIGNANT AGGRESSION

Erich Fromm's comprehensive analysis on the matters concerning human aggressiveness provides an overall social and psychological framework for Arendt's idea on the banality of evil. As expounded in his study *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, Fromm also favors anti-essentialist, materialistic view that human nature is not a predetermined, fixed or unchangeable entity and that calling it "innate instinct" is an oversimplistic attempt to rationalize human powerlessness to explain and fight this destructive behavior (Fromm, 1973, p. 2). According to him, human nature is indebted firstly to the fundamental existential contradiction of being a rational animal and then to the different ways of overcoming this contradiction which are ingrained into different cultural conditions. Fromm believes that man is secluded from his natural environment and his instinctual nature by being a rational, self-aware and creative being and considers this isolation as a kind of angst that all men seek to overcome. The ways they manage to do so are dictated by their passions, or as Fromm calls them character-rooted traits (love, hate, empathy), which are historical and cultural categories. What this actually means is that aggression is only one recognizable pattern of behavior by a certain category of people and that, what is even more important, it is socially conditioned. This type of aggression should by no means be confused or identified with the impulse to attack or flee when vital interests are threatened. The latter type is legitimate and common to all animals; it is defensive and in the service of survival unlike that typically human malignant kind which is not biological, not natural and is unprecedented in the world of mammals, especially primates. Fromm: "Man differs from an animal by the fact that he is a killer; he is the only primate that kills and tortures members of his own species without any reason, either biological

or economic, and who feels satisfaction in doing so.” (Ibid, 1973, p. 5) This abominable cruelty, specific exclusively to human species, however, is not essential to human character since its generation results from “*the interaction of various social conditions with man’s existential needs*” (Ibid, 1973, p. 218, Fromm’s italics).

In the particular case of military and paramilitary violence in Indonesia during 1965/66, that brought into prominence celebrity killers and the protagonists of the film *The Act of Killing*, their destructiveness was used as an ideological weapon against the alleged communists. The murderers from the film – Congo, Koto, paramilitary leaders and generals – echo the dogmatic, highly prejudiced view that the communists were cruel monsters who had to be dealt with for the mere purpose of survival (this is also the reason why ordinary people condone the violent past of their country and its perpetrators). So, this serves as an example of how defensive, benign aggression was used as a political tool to manipulate the masses, initiate and finally execute a large scale massacre. The murderers did not see themselves as murderers per se because the Indonesian government, the media and the society at large represented them almost as heroes and saviors of their traditional ways of life. The high level of indoctrination among Indonesians is best illustrated in the scene with the smiling female presenter of Indonesian Television Special Dialogue who hosts the murderers in order to commemorate “the crushing of the communists”. Excited for having such prominent guests in her show, she reminds the audience that Congo and his friends developed “a new, more efficient system for exterminating communists”, praising it for being “more humane, less sadistic”, and finally concluding, with the round of applause, that they “still wiped them out” (sic!). In aberrant cultural climate, pathology becomes the new normality.

The example of the television host and the audience watching the show prove that in extraordinary circumstances i.e. war ordinary people find it hard to differentiate between right and wrong. Finding the moral compass is particularly confusing when moral coordinates are disorienting yet hostile to objection and common sense. Such ethical precept is that obedience is the utmost virtue and disobedience sin, as Fromm reminds us while positing his antithesis that obedience breeds violence:

To be disobedient is the arch crime from which all other crimes follow. Abraham was willing to kill his son out of obedience. Antigone is killed by Creon for her disobedience to the laws of the state. Armies, especially, cultivate obedience, since their very essence is built on an absolute reflex like acceptance of commands that precludes any questioning. The soldier who kills and maims, the bomber pilot who destroys thousands of lives in one moment,

are not necessarily driven by a destructive or cruel impulse, but by the principle of unquestioning obedience. (Fromm, 1973, p. 207)

Seen this way, Indonesian violence fits well into Fromm's category of "conformist aggression" which is performed not out of desire to destroy, but out of the impulse to obey and conform. The aggressor, it follows, could be a regular, "normal" person whose main sin, ironically speaking, is actually his obedience and who could, at the same time, be a kind family man and a cruel killer - as is actually the case with the movie's protagonist, Arwan Congo.

Astonishingly enough, he is both charming and profoundly evil: he feels sympathy for the hurt duck and furthermore, he reprimands his grandson for hurting the duck and teaches him the lesson of apology and compassion. At the same time, as we are well aware from the numerous accounts in the movie and by his own admission, Congo proves to be a sadistic monster that killed and tortured over one thousand innocent people. Discrepancy in Congo's private and public beings mirrors the case of Adolf Eichmann, who 'only' due to the circumstances, his will to conform and a lack of sound judgment turned into ultimate monster and destroyer of human lives. As concluded by Dana R. Villa, the paradox of banal perpetrator is not necessarily generated by inner motivation or demonic character but mere obedience to a criminal regime (Duhaček and Savić, 2002, p. 61).

What happens to a conscience when faced with utter destructiveness and unspeakable cruelty? It depends on the level of indoctrination and the strength of the passions unleashed. In the case of Anwar Congo, his conscience is silent but not silenced: it continually tortures him in his sleep thus hindering all of his attempts at forgetting and being happy (his use of alcohol and drugs). And Congo, as he acknowledges to the director Joshua Oppenheimer at one point, is well aware of the origin of these nightmares: "I know my bad dreams come from what I did killing people who didn't want to die. I forced them to die." (Oppenheimer, 2012). We believe that this is an example of a person's human essence reacting against the unnatural violence and killing of fellow human beings. It is the life instinct struggling hard against the death drive, to borrow from Freud the terms for these two ultimate conflicting forces within an individual.

However, not all perpetrators have a disturbed conscience; some are completely indoctrinated by the official ideology and infested with pure sadism so that there is no room (or will) in them for questioning their obvious aberrant behavior. The cruelest among the killers portrayed in the film is a paramilitary officer who comments that he would "rape them all, especially 14-year-old girls" further admitting, without blinking an eye, that "it would be hell for them but heaven on earth for (him)". Apart from being

a symptom of an individual sickness, such utter emotional withdrawal can be the result of pathological social circumstances in which adversary is sometimes represented as less worthy or even as subhuman (slaves in Ancient Greece, black people during the colonization period, Hitler's "Untermenschen", "inferior people"). As Arundhati Roy observes in her wonderful article "Listening to Grasshoppers", whenever a perpetrator faces his victim, "in order to go about its business of wanton killing, it must first sever any human connection with it. It must see its victims as sub-human, as parasites whose eradication would be a service to society" (2008, para. 22). Therefore, when asked about the potential revenge of the communists' children, one of the murderers and paramilitary leaders replies that such thing is inconceivable because "we'd exterminate them all!" as if talking not about people but loathsome vermin.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

The problem with the scope of and attitude to violence in Indonesia is that it was legitimized and condoned by the government. More so, the people responsible for the atrocities are still part of the political elite so it is no wonder that any mention of the purges is strictly forbidden and considered taboo.³ Most Indonesian history books do not deal with the massacre or mention it only in passing when they are usually described as "patriotic campaign"; perpetrators were never held accountable and the victims never rehabilitated. Suharto's ban on Communist Party of Indonesia dating from 1965 is still in force. In some circles, as we have seen in the movie, the perpetrators of this gross violence are even celebrated and officially accepted as Indonesian benefactors. To turn this pathology into normalcy, it is imperative to recognize the crimes for what they really are, reveal their immorality and finally punish the perpetrators.⁴

Breaking the silence about the communists' killings in Indonesia, which is considered to be one of the worst genocides in the twentieth century, is actually one of the greatest things about the movie. By speaking

³ Jusuf Kalla, for example, the current vice-president of Indonesia, even appears in *The Act of Killing*, proudly wearing the colours of Pancasila Youth, far right paramilitary organization, only to express his admiration for the spirit of this gangster organization claiming that nation needs gangsters because „they get things done“ and because „beating up people is sometimes needed“ (and that is precisely what Pancasila Youth is used for).

⁴ Indonesian example serves as the answer to the question of what would have happened if Germans had won the Second World War. Just like Congo and other killers responsible for Indonesian killings and mass slaughter of the communists, Hitler and his Nazi loyalists would have been considered heroes and celebrated as nation's celebrities.

up for the murdered victims and their families, the *Act of Killing* presides in the case that was previously lost and compensates for the ills committed. Although officially banned by the government censors, the film has been screened thousands of times in Indonesia via underground canals (private screenings, YouTube, social media) and the impact it had on the Indonesian people has been huge indeed. Unfortunately, the dead cannot be resurrected, but it is still possible to seek justice and punish their killers. “Fifty years is a long time to not call genocide a genocide”, Joshua Oppenheimer said during receiving BAFTA award, and continued: “If we want to have a constructive and an ethical relationship with Indonesia moving forward, we have to acknowledge the crimes of the past and we have to acknowledge our collective role in supporting those crimes, in participating in those crimes and ultimately in ignoring those crimes.” (Sabarini, 2018, para. 2)

Oppenheimer uses this opportunity to also call for collective admittance of guilt accusing the United States government for taking part in Suharto’s purges as has been recently revealed. Namely, declassified CIA documents and investigative reports have showed that the US supported the communist purge by providing economic, technical and military aid to the army to such an extent that one may even accuse the US for planning this coup altogether. This is exactly what Bradley Simpson, professor of history at Princeton, does in his book *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S.-Indonesian Relations, 1960–1968*, where he recapitulates the relevant history leading to violence and then exposes the huge role the United States played in the fall of Sukarno’s communist regime (Morris, 2013). In fact, Simpson connects the events in Indonesia with the expansion of the war in Vietnam, which happened at the same time, arguing that Indonesia was an important part of the “domino theory” and that, as such, it had to be contained and ultimately brought to (American) knees. Having in mind the extraordinary gift America has in obscuring and negating its endless crimes, as well as in manipulating the masses – the gift that Pinter in his Nobel Speech called “a brilliant and highly successful act of hypnosis” (2005) – it is highly unlikely that either political current from the US (Democratic or Republican) will ever admit their past crimes but one’s moral duty is to press forward and insist on unearthing these crimes.

The movie *The Act of Killing* does precisely that. It works as a “mouse trap” not only for the Indonesian killers, such as Congo or Koto, but also for the entire Indonesian nation, as well as any other unknowing, passive spectator from the audience. Like Hamlet who wanted to lure and catch his murderous uncle by trapping his burdened conscience with a stage play, Joshua Oppenheimer sets the trap for the morally blind and unconscious killers from his movie. For Anwar Congo, at least, we know it worked since we witness his anagnorisis in the last scenes of the movie when he starts

questioning the moral nature of his past acts. It is watching the movie that makes him remember and remembering is alarmingly difficult to grasp: “Did the people I tortured feel the way I do here? I can feel what the people I tortured felt. Because here my dignity has been destroyed and then fear comes, right there and then. All the terror suddenly possessed my body. It surrounded me, and possessed me” (Oppenheimer, 2012). After gruesome revelation that one has actually sinned by killing hundreds of people – and that there is no excuse for doing such a thing, not even by the government – the adequate response is a bodily reaction that Anwar Congo experiences: firstly, the tears well up in his eyes and then this murderer experiences a kind of gut-like reaction that makes him vomit. Notwithstanding his ever present wish to be an actor, we believe that Congo’s epiphany was not a part of preconceived performance but a true response to a powerful piece of art which is meant to stir all those fine emotions that make us human. After all, as G.G. Simpson, the paleontologist, observed a long time ago, the essence of man lies not in his animality but his humanity (Fromm, 1973, p. 221).

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Svjetlana R. Ognjenović

„MIŠOLOVKA” ZA UBICE IZ INDONEZIJE:
OPENHAJMEROV ČIN UBIJANJA

Rezime

Rad je inspirisan dokumentarnim filmom iz 2012. godine pod nazivom *Čin ubijanja The Act of Killing* koji je režirao britanski autor američkog porijekla Džoša Openhajmer [Joshua Oppenheimer]. U filmu se Openhajmer ne bavi toliko obimom i kontekstom niza ubistava počinjenih u periodu 1965-1966. godine u Indoneziji za vrijeme Suhartove strahovlade, koliko samom prirodom ovih zločina i njihovih počinitelja, kao i posljedicama ovih ubistava. Prema tome, cilj ovog rada jeste otvaranje jednog kontroverznog poglavlja indonezijske istorije, ne da bi se prodiskutovalo o samim istorijskim događajima ili njihovoj hronologiji, pa čak ni posljedicama komunističke, odnosno antikomunističke političke vladavine, već da bismo postavili pitanje o suštini ljudske prirode koja je u stanju da počini zvjerstva poput ovih iz spomenutog perioda, a koji se smatraju jednim od najgorih masovnih ubistava u 20. vijeku. Isto tako, od posebnog je značaja podsjetiti na davnašnju ulogu umjetnosti kao „ogledala stvarnosti”, koje, kao takvo, ima snagu da izazove emocije i samospoznaju i kod najokorjelijih zločinaca kao što su ovi iz Openhajmerovog dokumentarnog filma – tek tada, jedna je od njegovih teza, moguće je otvoriti put pomirenju između krvnika i njegove žrtve i postepeno zacijeliti rane čitavog jednog naroda. U tu svrhu poslužićemo se ideološkim okvirom koji je Erih From ponudio u svojoj studiji *Anatomija ljudske destruktivnosti*, kao i filozofskim idejama Hane Arent, koje se uglavnom tiču njenog viđenja prirode samog zla.

Ključne riječi: Arent, From, Frojd, umjetnost, dokumentarni film, ljudska priroda, Indonezija, ubistva