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Ousskirts online journal

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Between Whores and Heroes: Women, Voyeurism and Ambiguity in Holocaust Film

An ever-expanding literature has established films about the Holocaust as a crucially important means of representing this traumatic past; however, little substantial attention has been given to the representation of women's complicity. Indeed, Holocaust film has frequently proven a problematic site for portraying women's behaviour; the prolific use of images of women as sexualised and eroticised objects has repeatedly combined with narratives that pivot on men's experiences. With Holocaust films often painting the past with heavily gendered meanings and (re)inscribing patriarchal understandings of the event, the question of how women's complicity can be depicted proves particularly contentious. Taking this issue as its central focus, this paper examines filmic representations of women who are portrayed as complicit in some way in Nazi Germany's (mostly successful) attempt to physically destroy all traces of European Jewry during World War II.

The past decade has witnessed increased cinematic attempts to shed light on the motivation(s) and behaviours of (male) Holocaust perpetrators, signifying a growing interest in moving away from the commonplace Nazi stereotypes of indoctrinated, malignant racists or bumbling, inefficient fools. The 'humanisation' of Adolf Hitler in Oliver Hirschbiegel's German film *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*, 2004) provoked a hotly contested debate over how perpetrators should be represented, particularly in terms of the film's perceived encouragement of empathic identification with Nazi leaders on the part of viewers (Von Moltke). Likewise, director Stephen Daldry's dramatisation several years later of Bernhard Schlink's illiterate, morally ambiguous concentration camp guard Hanna Schmitz in *The Reader* (2008) also attracted international attention to the issue, only this time it was a female character at the centre of discussion. Schlink (130-31) has himself written of the widespread criticism of his strategy of depicting Hanna with 'a human face', which he sees as indicative of 'the fear that writing about Germans as victims might damage the image of Germans as perpetrators'. Given the extensive scholarship recently responding to Daldry's well known film (see, for example, William Donahue's *Holocaust as Fiction: Bernhard Schlink's 'Nazi' Novels and Their Film*), we focus here on other recent depictions of women's complicity in Holocaust cinema.

While many films continue to exemplify the ways in which women have been objectified, eroticised and demonised in popular Holocaust screen culture, some filmmakers have made concerted attempts to represent these figures on the screen in a more nuanced manner. We argue that the imperative to entertain audiences through the (perceived) need to resort to black-and-white binary oppositions of 'good' and 'evil' has significant implications for the representation of gender in relation to the Holocaust, and this is no more evident than in the realm of women's complicity. Informed by a broad investigation of Holocaust cinema's treatment of women generally, this article focuses on the particularly problematic depiction of the 'evil woman' in Robert Young's *Eichmann* (2007), a film that goes to great lengths to portray deviant and aggressive female sexuality as responsible for the moral corruption of the narrative's male protagonist, Adolf Eichmann, who was one of the major players in planning the deportation of Jews to extermination camps. Eichmann is then contrasted with Cate Shortland's recent film *Lore* (2012), which takes a considerably different approach when engaging with women's role(s) in Nazism and the Holocaust.

Eroticised Bodies and Complicit Women in Holocaust Screen Culture

In her introduction to a special journal issue on *Representing Perpetrators* published this year, Jenni Adams (3) writes that the present work of Holocaust scholars

manifests a necessity of attending critically and consciously both to issues of guilt and complicity and to the manner in which these signify culturally. Nevertheless, an uneasy lack of definition remains regarding the boundaries of appropriate enquiry into this topic: where exactly does alert, self-conscious and critically mobilised interest shade into sensationalising fascination? At what point does the attempt to explore these ideas in fiction collapse into the promotion of uncritical identifications with and exculpations of these figures, or into the quasi-fascist celebration of kitsch and death?

These are particularly pertinent questions in the context of how the complicity of women is negotiated

FURTHER INFORMATION

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through various cultural texts, with such figures making frequent appearances in Holocaust films as eroticised 'Others'. A number of scholars have pointed to the frequently sexist nature of Holocaust films (Fuchs 49-56; Magilow et al.; Reading 95; Weckel 558); however, this attention has been limited overall, and has often focused (as has historical writing) on women as victims and rescuers. Accordingly, the majority of the rapidly growing literature on Holocaust cinema reveals a need to more critically reflect on the intertwined nature of Nazism and patriarchy.

The categories of 'bystanders', 'collaborators' and 'perpetrators' often fail to capture the complexities of the (often enthusiastic) behaviour of women under and in aid of Nazi German rule. Women were deeply involved (directly or indirectly) in the processes and practices of genocide, indoctrinated into and inspired by the racialised ideologies that permeated the regime (Koonz 6; Martin 24). Even the more clear-cut cases of the 3,000-5,000 women estimated to have served as guards in concentration camps are complicated by these same women's vulnerability to discrimination and prejudice based on their sex (Bock 89; Milton 225). While this tension does not exculpate female perpetrators who worked in the camps, it is an important part of the socio-historical context of women's experiences that needs to be kept in mind. The crucial issue in film and elsewhere is that the complex phenomenon of women's complicity has consistently been portrayed in simplistic and problematic ways. The central concern for this analysis is therefore the representation of women who were complicit in Nazism, not a moral discussion of their complicity.

Laura Mulvey's influential essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' argues that the viewer's perspective is aligned with that of the male protagonist, hence positioning the woman as the object of a voyeuristic male gaze. Mulvey (11) argues that women's 'appearance [is] coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*'. She argues that this is the case because 'man is reluctant to gaze on his exhibitionist like' (12), and must therefore control the 'look'. The woman is the 'bearer, not the maker of meaning'. Mulvey's work has been criticised for its rather prescriptive and pessimistic assumption that these practices of looking are 'central to the construction of our (sexed) identities and *unconscious*', therefore limiting the possibilities for change (Thornham 220), and for failing to recognise that both texts and audiences will be sites of 'a struggle over meaning' (Thornham 221). Nevertheless, it remains a useful starting point for discussing the ways that voyeurism can be facilitated or negated through the medium of film. While some feminist scholars have discussed Holocaust films using Mulvey's concept of the cinematic gaze (Cottino-Jones; Waller), the number and variety of films examined has thus far been limited. For example, Liliana Cavani's controversial Italian film, *The Night Porter* (1974), has been strongly criticised for eroticising the female body in its portrayal of the tormented post-war sexual relationship between Max, a former Nazi officer, and Lucia, the female prisoner he raped in the camp. Identifying eroticism as the 'central trope' in *The Night Porter* and similar texts, Rebecca Sherr (279) contends that a form of 'sexual paranoia' is projected onto the sexualised bodies of women, positioning the audience to navigate 'between sex and violence and sex and death, in a fictional Holocaust universe'. As the following analysis will reveal, Sherr's sentiment applies not only to the representation of female sexuality in *The Night Porter*, but to a number of other Holocaust films that derive voyeuristic value from the exploitation of women.

The female body has been linked to sexual perversion, sadomasochism, nymphomania and highly problematic representations of rape in numerous Holocaust films, not least in *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS Special Section* (1975). Analysing its abundant scenes of physical torture and sexual exploitation, Lynn Rapaport (63) argues that 'the Holocaust is not just being sexualized [in the film], but it is also being gendered – a woman in power is evil, a Nazi, a feminazi'. The character of Ilsa is reportedly inspired by the (in)famous figure of Ilse Koch, an SS officer's wife in Buchenwald concentration camp renowned for using her body to trap prisoners into being brutally beaten. Koch was labelled the 'Bitch of Buchenwald', among other gendered titles, indicating the role that misogyny has played in the representation(s) of her behaviour over decades (Kaplan 72; Przyrembel). A similar argument can be made regarding the vast majority of representations of Irma Grese, the notorious guard in Auschwitz-Birkenau who was nicknamed the 'Beautiful Beast', the 'Bitch of Belsen' and the 'Blond Bitch of Belsen' (even though she spent very little time in Belsen). Reflecting on this, Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry (60) point out that 'monster, mother and whore narratives' often characterise depictions of Koch and other female Nazi perpetrators.

The eroticised bodies of women, and the positioning of these bodies through a male gaze (both within the films and via the camera), is evident in a number of other Holocaust films. In addition to *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS*, further infamous (semi or fully) pornographic productions include *Salon Kitty* (1976), *Deported Women of the SS* (1976) and *SS Hell Camp* (1977), among many other Nazi (s)exploitation films of the 1960s and 1970s. While we do not suggest that all Holocaust films which eroticise the female body fall into the same category, what are commonly considered 'low-brow' films (such as those mentioned above) and 'more serious' attempts to represent certain events and behaviours of World War II often share important ideological similarities. More serious cinematic examples include Sidney Lumet's *The Pawnbroker* (1964), Lina Wertmüller's *Seven Beauties* (1975) and Paul Verhoeven's *Zwartboek* (*Black Book*, 2006). In these films, the apparent attempts to critique and undermine the fetishistic aspects of Nazi ideology and practice can potentially reinforce these same ideas via their voyeuristic exploitation of women. Interpretations of such films have varied, although critics consistently overlook the ways in which the female body is either appropriated to stand as a metaphor for an amoral wartime Europe, or exploited to progress the development of the films' male characters.

Female complicity has been thematised to varying degrees in a number of Holocaust films; however, the 'screening' of this complicity generally involves as much a process of *concealment* as one of *exposure*. The anxiety on the part of filmmakers over how to grapple with women's role(s) in the Nazi regime can be

seen in the simultaneous screening and shielding of their complicity; for example, in the representation of Hitler's young and beautiful secretary, Traudl Junge, in Hirschbiegel's *Downfall*. Portrayed as tangled in a web of ignorance and innocence while the chaos of Nazi Germany's last days surrounds her, Junge has recently been condemned by Matthew Boswell (168) as 'just about the most unwitting agent in war crimes and genocide imaginable'. A similar marginalisation of women's complicity can be found in Holocaust films as diverse as Steven Spielberg's Hollywood blockbuster *Schindler's List* (1993), Roberto Benigni's controversial Italian film *Life Is Beautiful* (1997) and Donna Deitch's *The Devil's Arithmetic* (2004), in which female SS officers are either briefly present or relegated to the background. Fleeting depictions of unnamed, aggressive and excessive female characters can be found in other films depicting the Nazi camps, including Gillo Pontecorvo's *Kapo* (1959), Alan J. Pakula's *Sophie's Choice* (1982) and Robert M. Young's *Triumph of the Spirit* (1987), whereas the portrayal of male perpetrators in these films is decidedly more complex. Such a trend threatens to demonise and de-humanise women who were involved in Nazism, both diminishing their importance and characterising their experiences as marked only by viciousness. The prevalence of eroticised voyeurism and the common intertwining of themes of sex, death and 'moral compromise' in relation to the female body have resulted in the establishment of a highly problematic cultural context for any filmmaker who attempts to represent women's complicity. This tension can also be seen in films as recent as Robert Young's *Eichmann*.

'Fair Is Foul': Lady Macbeth in Robert Young's *Eichmann* (2007)

The figure of Adolf Eichmann, an *SS-Obersturmbannführer* who was intimately involved in the implementation of the 'Final Solution', continues to provoke controversy to this day. Having fled to Argentina after the war, Eichmann was captured and kidnapped by Mossad agents in 1960, and was subsequently tried and executed in Israel. After attending part of his trial, German-American writer, philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt published *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), in which she tried to come to grips with a man who claimed not to be an antisemite, yet who was directly implicated in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Europe's Jews. Stressing the desensitising bureaucratic processes employed by the Nazi perpetrators, Arendt (276) wrote: 'The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal'. Arendt's comments (particularly about Jewish culpability) attracted much criticism (Isaac 194; Robinson); nevertheless, her thesis on the 'banality of evil' continues to be highly influential in contemporary reflections on the Holocaust and in other contexts (see Ambos et al.), and this is no clearer than in Young's historical drama *Eichmann*, released in the United States in 2007.

Eichmann is based on the recordings of Eichmann's pre-trial interrogation in Israel by a young police officer, Avner Less. The published transcripts of much of Less's interrogation (Von Lang and Sibyll) reveal a consistently evasive, inconsistent, dishonest and self-exculpating Eichmann whose actual beliefs and sentiments are impossible to pin down. Throughout the narrative of Young's film, there appears to be an attempt to balance Arendt's 'banality of evil' with evidence of Eichmann's anti-Jewish prejudice. The former perpetrator is constructed as a man of fluctuating conviction, fleeting conscience and ambiguous motivation. Thomas Kretschmann sheds his more benevolent personas from other Holocaust-related films such as Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* (2002), *Downfall* and Bryan Singer's *Valkyrie* (2008), giving an impressive performance as Eichmann, although the film as a whole entails considerable ideological problems. In his exaggerated depiction of the violent protests among the Israeli population regarding Eichmann's forthcoming trial, Young draws an implicit connection between the public's hysteria and German antisemitism of the 1930s. As Danielle Christmas points out, this is complemented by a broader Israeli-Nazi parallel developed throughout the film via similarities between the the Nazi bureaucracy of the wartime years and the efficient efforts of Israeli officers gathering information about Eichmann's activities. However, most significant to the film's portrayal of Eichmann's (mostly) mild-mannered personality, mysterious motivation and growing moral corruption is the depiction of the negative influence of women.

The narrative of Young's film is principally devoted to the sessions during which Less questions the stubbornly evasive and equivocal Eichmann. These sequences are separated by short scenes of Less's home life and a series of flashbacks to Eichmann's wartime behaviour, including his visit to Auschwitz and his engagement in multiple affairs with beautiful women (about which very little historical information exists). Early in the film, Less confronts an indifferent Eichmann with his reputation for being a philanderer, listing 'three maids, two secretaries, a businesswoman and a mistress on a stolen farm in Austria'. Yet the most crucial liaison Eichmann engages in is revealed in a pivotal sequence portraying his affair with a particularly lascivious woman, Baroness Ingrid von Ihama, who seems to have a substantial impact on his mindset and activities. The character is very loosely based on Ingrid von Ihne, who is briefly described as 'a good-looking and wealthy divorcee' (187) in David Cesarani's influential biography on Eichmann. The marketing and packaging of the film highlights the problematic importance placed on Ihama's influence over Eichmann, with one version of the DVD cover situating the Baroness directly behind the protagonist, her cold sideways glance contrasting markedly with the SS officer's clearly more emotive expression. This extra-textual element is comparatively minor when compared with the problematic ideas that the film itself generates in its depiction of one of the most extreme femme fatales ever to grace the screen. Nevertheless, the DVD cover does serve to illustrate the over-emphasis placed on a figure whose overall presence in the film runs to just over five minutes.

In what is perhaps an even more extreme version of a 'Lady Macbeth' figure than that in Luchino Visconti's anti-Nazi film *The Damned* (1969), the Baroness is portrayed as pushing Eichmann further and further into spiritual turmoil. At the beginning of the sequence in which Ihama appears, shot-reverse-shots show Less questioning Eichmann at length about the Baroness, ironically noting that it must have

been difficult for Eichmann to 'indulge her expensive tastes' when he also had a family to support back in Germany. When Eichmann claims ignorance of what the police officer means, Less describes the 'twin twenty-four carat suicide rings' Eichmann had made (within the film's story) for the Baroness and himself. Gesturing to his teeth, Less reminds Eichmann that the rings, which held cyanide capsules, were made from three hundred grams of dental gold, presumably taken from the mouths of the Nazis' victims. At the moment Less mentions the rings, the recorder being used in the interrogation room runs out of tape, capturing the attention of both characters. While on one level the close up shots of the tape coming to a final halt seem to imply that the audience is about to be treated to little known information, a more critical eye might read this in hindsight as signalling that the film's dramatisation of Eichmann's life and statements, until now based at least loosely on historical sources, is about to delve into pure invention. We by no means wish to suggest here that the fictionalising process inherent in feature films (or any other medium for that matter) should keep to documented chronology and what are commonly perceived as literal 'facts' to the highest degree possible. Indeed, the 'essence' of a historical event – particularly one as traumatic and ethically fraught as the Holocaust – can be captured more effectively by a more flexible relationship with source material, among other means (Brown 152; Doneson 181-82). In doing so, fiction films can certainly be the 'object and vehicle of ethical inquiry' (Saxton 9); however, the 'poetic licence' taken in *Eichmann* and simultaneous embracing of misogynist stereotypes and exploitation of the female body exemplifies how the figure of the 'evil woman' can be used to reconfigure meanings about the past through a patriarchal framework.

The halting of the tape recorder seems to encourage the formerly reticent Eichmann to reveal the details Less has been avidly searching for. Leaning forward, a downcast Eichmann positions himself as a tragic hero: 'Fool that I was in those mad times as the Reich collapsed, I had fancied in Hungary I had found my fellow soul'. With light, even romantic, music merging the scene in the present with a flashback to the war, the film adopts this same sentiment regarding Eichmann's morally flawed status, placing much of the blame for this squarely on the Baroness. As Eichmann waits patiently in a luxurious mansion, a caption informs the viewer that this scene takes place in Budapest in the year 1943, adding to the sense of historical 'authenticity' created around the film's plot. The young and beautiful Ihama claps her servants away and moves slowly and seductively down a huge staircase, while Eichmann silently stares from his chair. Her dialogue moves straight to the revelation that her elaborate white dress is 'worn with nothing underneath' before she slips it off for Eichmann's viewing pleasure. A close-up of Eichmann's face shows him licking his lips as the now naked Baroness approaches; the camera's eroticising gaze shifts to a low angle shot of her swaying bare buttocks as she moves in to circle the Nazi, who still sits fully clothed in his uniform. Appearing to know exactly how to impress his mistress, Eichmann moves quickly to boasting about how 'in six months I cleansed Vienna of every Jew'. Massaging his face from behind, Ihama tells Eichmann that he does not go far enough, before moving around to straddle him. Desperate for her physical contact, Eichmann hangs on her every word and she teases him by stopping his groping hand from reaching her breast. Clearly possessing more ideological fervour and commitment than the perpetrator, the Baroness chides him: 'Out of 900,000 Hungarian Jews, you have killed only half a million. You're careless. You let them slip through your fingers'. When Eichmann promises to follow the already successful murder of three million Polish Jews with '120,000 Germans', she corrects him and makes him identify them as 'Jews'.

What follows is a voyeuristic presentation of simulated sex as a fully naked Ihama grinds back and forth on Eichmann's lap, encouraging him to continue to list the victims of the ongoing killings throughout Europe. Images of her bare breasts, gyrating pelvis and the increasing pleasure in her facial expression combine with a disturbing staccato list that connects orgasmic (female) sexual pleasure with genocide:

Eichmann: 700,000 Russians.
Ihama: More.
Eichmann: 75,000 French.
Ihama: More.
Eichmann: 100,000 Dutch.
Ihama: More.
Eichmann: More?
Ihama: More. Not enough.
Eichmann: Over four million Jews are already processed.
Ihama: Killed. Use the right words or you'll never become a master race.

The last comment by the Baroness above has curious implications, as it links the Nazis' commonplace use of euphemistic language with cowardice and a lack of the requisite masculinity, while positioning her ultra-aggressive version of femininity to be the more hardened – if not 'ideal' – approach to killing millions of people. It also implies culpability in the genocide on Ihama's part, as she appears even more aware of the acts and their implications than Eichmann himself. When she taunts Eichmann with the observation that 'you'll never become a master race', Ihama clutches his face violently before kissing him passionately as his arms wrap hungrily around her body. The music reaches a brief crescendo; the deal is struck, Faust has accepted the bargain. Ihama's portrayal feeds into deep-seated myths of the female sexuality as a corrupting or polluting force, arguably abjecting it. The film literalises these myths by equating her seduction of Eichmann with inciting him to commit genocide.

In a sense, the Baroness stands for evil in all its 'purity', tempting Eichmann to overcome and transcend his limitation: having some level of 'humanity'. This is crystallised in the following scene, when Ihama demonstrates the most extreme form of maternal deficiency by enlisting the services of German soldiers to kidnap a Jewish baby from a traumatised mother. Eerie music plays on the soundtrack as the Baroness carries the baby down a dark, smoke-filled alleyway and literally disappears into the

blackness, reinforcing her status as non – or *other* than – human. Moments later, she interrupts Eichmann's paperwork as she walks into her office carrying a basket, telling him matter-of-factly that 'this infant has a hereditary sickness of the blood. Now, do your duty for the great Reich'. Significantly, when Eichmann first rises from his seat upon the Baroness' entrance, he removes his glasses and, in a purposeful close-up shot, places them on his desk and pushes them away from him and toward the camera. This small metaphorical act might be read as connoting a separation of the kind of administrative work Eichmann had been performing moments earlier (much of which involved the organisation of trains to deport half a million Jews from Hungary to Auschwitz) and the direct killing he is now ordered to perform by his mistress. Making such a distinction in a scene that aims to further establish Eichmann's moral ambiguity is contentious at best, though the main point here is that it is through the demonisation of the Baroness for her complicity in – or instigation of – murder that the male perpetrator's status as a human being is established.

Sitting in a corner of the room, lhama exhibits demonic coldness – the cold-hearted 'bitch' – as she attempts to provoke the flawed human to ruin; her hat casts a shadow over her eyes and pallid complexion while a fox skin is draped around her shoulders, positioning her as a predator. As Eichmann looks down both sympathetically and fearfully upon the child, she continues to goad him without a hint of emotion: 'Nothing will remain of your decision. The child's flesh will feed your dogs, and the bones they don't eat will be ground down to make fertiliser. You have always boasted Auschwitz grows the best cabbages'. This acknowledgement of Eichmann's very black humour, which would seem to imply an enthusiastic participation in genocide, does not match his present composure. A visibly nervous, almost traumatised, Eichmann continues to linger uncertainly over the basket; the woman's reminder about the ease of getting rid of the evidence highlights that his hesitation emerges from a human conscience rather than fear of retribution. The Baroness's eyes narrow as she closely scrutinises Eichmann, who eventually unholsters his pistol and points it unwillingly at the baby. The camera alternates from the baby's frightened expression, to Eichmann's imploring glance up at his temptress, to her malignant stare. As Eichmann aims his gun, close-up shots clearly reveal the gold ring (complete with black swastika and forged from the dental work of dead Jews) that he wears on his hand – a symbol that makes clear both the depth of the Baroness' evil, and the close intersection of female sexual agency and death epitomised in the construction of her character. While not precisely a praying mantis-like 'man-eater', she is nevertheless portrayed as the sexually dangerous woman whose sexual appetite can corrupt a man's soul. As in the previous scene, this voyeuristic eroticisation of death and potential self-harm vis-à-vis female sexual pleasure and agency can be likened to a similar connection in Oskar Roehler's more recent film *Jud Süß: Film ohne Gewissen* (2010, released in English as *Jew Süß: Rise and Fall*), in which a German woman seduces the protagonist to have rough sex with her from behind as they stare out the window of a high-rise building while Allied bombs fall over Berlin.

When Eichmann's secretary unknowingly enters the room to find her employer about to shoot a baby, lhama sighs in annoyance at the distraction. With the child letting out a final cry, Eichmann raises his gun and fires at an unseen target. The scene's last frame comprises a zooming shot on the secretary's distraught reaction, revealing the 'appropriate' maternal response that the Baroness clearly lacked. The narrative then moves back to the present and Eichmann tells Less, who is packing up for the day, that 'I hadn't... found my fellow soul'. There is some ambiguity over exactly who it is that Eichmann shoots in this scene, particularly given that when he raises his gun just before firing, he seemingly holds the weapon higher than he had when aiming at the baby. On the other hand, the secretary's emotional gasp and fearful breathing is directed toward Eichmann and the baby in the centre of the room, seeming to suggest that he has shot the child. Eichmann's dismissal of the Baroness in his concluding comment that he had not in the end found his 'soul mate' could be read as either evidence that he had shot her or that her successful demand that he kill the child drove him away from her extreme proclivities. In either case, she does not reappear in the film, and Eichmann's comment therefore implies that he banished the seductress from his life just as she is banished from the film's narrative.

When *Eichmann* was screened in March 2012 to a public audience of over eighty viewers at the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne, Australia, there were a variety of viewpoints expressed during a lengthy open discussion, particularly on the issue of whom it was that Eichmann shoots (though no criticism was made of the film's representation of women). In the context of this paper, the identity of Eichmann's victim is less significant than the fact that whether Eichmann shoots the baby or the Baroness, the evil nature of the latter is evident. Indeed, if Eichmann is seen to have killed lhama, this act is positioned within the film as fully justified, and may therefore even translate into a somewhat virtuous act by the perpetrator. It must also be noted that the demonisation of lhama's character is reinforced throughout the film through the entirely positive portrayal of almost every other female character. From Less's ailing wife, to an Israeli journalist, to Eichmann's abandoned Jewish mistress, to the aforementioned secretary, these women are without exception well-kept, beautiful and mostly passive figures who, unlike the Baroness, are not sexualised and do not threaten the social and moral superiority of the men around them. 'Good' women, according to the film's logic, are not sexual agents – nor agents of any other kind.

In its final scenes, the film moves away from the influence of women to focus squarely on the tense relationship that has developed between the Israeli interrogator and the German perpetrator. The last appearance of Eichmann sees him pleading with Less to post a letter to his family back in Germany. Tears stream down Eichmann's face as Less continues his attempts to confront him with his role in the murder of millions of Jews. While Less does not expose the conscience he seems to be searching for, he does push Eichmann to acknowledge that he views the killing of Jews differently than the killing of 'Aryans'. In the film's final minutes, having heard on the radio that Eichmann had been executed the night before, Less posts the letter to Eichmann's family and thus consummates their quasi-brotherly bond. This final act provides Eichmann with a minimal amount of dignity, whether he deserved it or not.

The Baroness gets no such reprieve, and while portrayed as an aesthetically beautiful woman, is rendered morally ugly through various filmic strategies, and is arguably positioned as more culpable for Eichmann's behaviour than he is himself.

'We're of the Same Species': Ambiguity and Complexity in Cate Shortland's *Lore* (2012)

While the 'evil woman' in *Eichmann* can be readily classified and critiqued as a dubious invention of the filmmaker, there have been some films that do effectively engage with issues of moral ambiguity and compromise, expose taboo issues of sexuality and rape in a more sophisticated manner, and subvert the widespread trend in Holocaust cinema to demonise and fetishise women's complicity with Nazism. Moral responsibility for the Holocaust must be attributed where it is appropriate to do so, but it can be done without demonising those who were complicit in it. Based on one of the three stories in Rachel Seiffert's 2001 novel *The Dark Room*, Shortland's film negotiates this tension in an effective manner by resisting spiritual triumph, emotional simplification, cathartic heroism and narrative closure. Set during the immediate aftermath of Hitler's suicide and the capitulation of Germany, the film provides a dark 'coming-of-age' story, which pivots on the experiences of fifteen year-old Hannalore Dressler.

The themes of complicity and suffering (particularly the suffering of women at the hands of men) permeate the film on a number of levels. A highly restrained musical score combined with uneven handheld camerawork gives *Lore* a particularly eerie atmosphere, creating a constant sense of foreboding. Numerous German civilians – men and women – throughout the film are shown burning their Nazi memorabilia or engaging in self-deception, claiming that photographs of massacre sites were falsified by the Allies. The film opens with Lore's father, an SS officer, returning home to destroy incriminating documents in the family home and move his wife and children into the forest. This sequence reveals that Lore's mother also played a role in her husband's activities, although the exact nature of this is never specified. She is a generally unsympathetic character who scolds her children and has an evidently strained relationship with her husband, whose wartime activities and inevitable future arrest she is fully aware of. Indeed, she personally helps burn documents that are clearly labelled as concerned with so-called 'hereditary diseases' and 'Action 14f13' (indicating the Nazi program that provided a clear link between the so-called 'euthanasia' programs and the systematic extermination of Jews). Further, her knowledge of atrocities is soon compounded by being forced to give herself up to the Allies to be imprisoned.

Before her arrest, Lore's mother is shown in one brief scene smoking a cigarette outside the family's new forest home at night. She fearfully backs away into shadows as the noise of American trucks and warplanes pass by the house the family is hiding in. Her implied complicity is combined with her fluctuation between aloofness and seemingly genuine maternal affection for her children. At one point, she emotionally gives Lore her wedding ring and jewellery to trade and instructions on how to reach the children's grandmother's house in Hamburg. Yet she displays no conscience over her recent past, instead engaging in the same denial and self-deception that so many other characters exhibit throughout. She tells Lore that she is being taken to a camp: 'It's not a prison. Prison's for criminals'. Significantly, in contrast to Seiffert's novel, the film renders the complicity of Lore's mother much clearer to the viewer (the opening scene, for example, was created for the film), even if the exact nature of her wartime activities is not evident. Nevertheless, the film also emphasises the suffering she experiences as a woman in a deeply patriarchal society, both as a victim of domestic violence, when her husband slaps her in the face for calling him a coward, and of sexual assault.

Just prior to departing for imprisonment, Lore's mother is revealed to be a victim of rape, as were thousands of German women in the final weeks and aftermath of the war. Gradually coming to realise the gravity of their situation, Lore finds her mother, who has returned to the children after attempting to barter cutlery for food, traumatised and injured; she struggles with firewood and wipes blood from her inner thighs. Indeed, the looming threat of rape seems to be gestured to several scenes earlier in the film, where Lore's mother is briefly shown stifling a cry as she stares at her body in the mirror while wearing only a bra. Despite her near-nudity, through her dejected stance and a conventional, distanced medium shot, the scene is not sexualised, but instead implies vulnerability in the depiction of her body. Again avoiding sentimentality and encouraging the viewer to adopt a certain critical distance, the film portrays her character with a measure of ambivalence. She yells at Lore – 'Why are you looking at me? Stop it!' – and cries as she tells her daughter mournfully that 'the Führer' is dead. Made aware of both her support for Hitler and involvement in the Nazi 'euthanasia' programs, as well as her tormented existence in a misogynist environment, the viewer is positioned to tenuously hold in balance her complicity and suffering, while being encouraged to avoid identifying clearly with or against her. In her final appearance in the film, Lore's mother is shown departing to give herself up to the Allies. An emotional Lore runs after her, causing her to stop and turn. She exchanges no words with her daughter; the expression on her drawn and exhausted face is divided between sternness and sadness – humanising her character, but acknowledging and judging her culpability.

From this point on, Lore takes on a parental role, guiding her younger sister, even younger twin brothers, and baby brother on their long journey to Hamburg. However, Lore is not a stable surrogate with whom the audience is positioned to identify. Her indoctrination into Nazi ideology is made clear early in the film when she voluntarily gives the Nazi salute to a less enthusiastic farmer and later secretly peels a picture of her father overseeing a mass shooting from an Allied notice board, burying it in the forest. Lore's deeply embedded antisemitism (again not present in the novel) also comes into conflict with her physical attraction to Tomas, a young man who claims to be Jewish, and joins the travelling siblings for much of the film. Lore is rendered a somewhat unlikeable and unsympathetic character through her treatment of

Tomas, who bears the tattoo of a camp prisoner and papers identifying him as a Jew (although whether or not he is actually Jewish or was in Auschwitz at all is left ambiguous). Her acute racial hatred is evident in one scene when she warns Tomas to stay away from her siblings: 'I know what you are. You are a Jew... I don't want you touching them, do you understand me?'

On the other hand, Lore's traumatic experiences ensure that there is an ever-present threat of sexual violence throughout the film, from her discovery of the bloodied body of a woman who has been raped and murdered in a barn, to her frequent vulnerability in a world where social moorings have been frayed. It could be argued that by alluding to sexual violence without showing or referring to it directly, Lore follows the historical tendency to elide rape while relying on it as a narrative driver (Higgins and Silver 2-3; Projansky 27-28), thus downplaying its significance. However, we argue that by repeatedly showing both the threat and aftermath of rape, the film is able to focus on the women's trauma while avoiding voyeurism, drawing attention to this gendered form of wartime victimisation. Abjection permeates the film, but it is of the German people rather than sexualised women, represented through repeated close-ups of the central (male and female) children's filthy hands and feet. As Lore's racial hatred demonstrates, even children are not 'innocent' and unstained by the regime. With the blood on the woman's thigh signifying the violence of the rape, its connection to the abject provides a more personalised link to the aftermath of the war rather than the degradation of female sexuality.

The ideological complicity of women, as well as Lore's vulnerability, is further highlighted when Lore and her younger siblings encounter an elderly woman living alone. The woman maintains a portrait of Hitler on her wall and is in denial regarding the Nazis' defeat; her obsession seems to have reduced her to a form of madness. At one point, the woman tells the children about her Führer: 'We broke his heart, he loved us so much', claiming that the photographs of atrocities posted by the Allies were pictures of actors paid by the Americans. Lore does not entirely avoid sexually stigmatising the woman: although she is one of the first people to appear genuinely sympathetic to the children's plight, the woman soon turns abusive, and her abuse centres on a kind of 'deviant' female sexuality. Most disturbingly, she gets Lore's twin brothers to dance to a Nazi song for her in their underwear, implying a paedophilic voyeurism, while Lore's sister watches uncomfortably. Having been reduced by the desperate situation to a form of madness, the elderly woman pleads with Lore to leave her baby brother with her so she that can acquire food more easily, further portraying her as an 'unnatural' mother figure who treats a child as a commodity. The siblings then hastily depart, leaving the viewer to contemplate her simultaneous unsympathetic nature and her apparent marginalisation by her own community.

Lore's grandmother, whom the children eventually find in the film's denouement, bears a striking physical resemblance to this crazed elderly woman. She stands as a figure of hope throughout the film, the children's ultimate destination and place of safety. However, revealing another rung on the spectrum of complicity, she is unapologetic for her daughter's behaviour. She tells her grandchildren, 'You must never feel ashamed... Your parents did nothing wrong', although her body language reveals her to be extremely anxious and uncertain about this. Although there are glimpses throughout the film that Lore is coming to question Nazi ideologies, particularly when she emotionally looks through family pictures of (presumably) dead Jews, there is no major moment of revelation and redemption as is customary in many Hollywood productions; Lore's position of complicity remains ambiguous. Through these and other examples, the complicity of women and their suffering at the hands of men permeate the film on a number of levels. By expanding on the narrative of the film's source text, including the additions of the more active complicity of Lore's mother, the crazed woman's continued devotion to Hitler and Lore's virulent antisemitism, all of the film's characters are made considerably less sympathetic than in the novel. Thus through the adaptation process, Shortland reveals that the filmic medium has the potential to facilitate a complex exploration of how women were implicated, and simultaneously victimised, in the Third Reich.

Conclusion

The work of feminist scholars has gone some way to ameliorating the initially dismal state of Holocaust research into the experiences of women; however, certain paths still remain only lightly travelled. Our glimpse into the representation of women's complicity in Holocaust film has revealed that the voyeuristic eroticisation of the female body within the camera's gaze has intersected strongly with what Weckel (560) describes as 'fantasies about particularly evil Nazi women – women so wicked that they turned the gender order upside down'. Patriarchal perspectives on women's participation in genocide, reliant on the simplistic concept(ion) of 'evil' and the perpetuation of longstanding gendered stereotypes, only detract from attempts to comprehend their behaviour. Heavily reliant on a voyeuristic gaze on the eroticised female body, the film's depiction of the complexities of Adolf Eichmann and the 'banality' of his evil is only accomplished through a deeply gendered representation of the past.

The moral responsibility of women complicit in the Holocaust must be acknowledged; nevertheless, the pervasive gendered myths that permeate many contemporary films detract from the deeper understandings that are so desperately needed. When women stand as objects rather than subjects – bearers, rather than makers, of meaning (Mulvey 7) – viewers are discouraged from endeavouring to understand their all-too-human choices and actions. The frequently gendered representation of the Holocaust demands more sustained attention to the issue of how women continue to be portrayed, particularly (though not solely) in fictional narratives. Yet in the face of what Adams (1) rightly terms 'the difficulty in incorporating or imagining Nazi perpetrators into a shared moral, ethical and ultimately human sphere', the work of some filmmakers reveals that films can and do play an important role in mediating perpetrator experiences without resorting to misogynist frameworks. Adopting an unconventional mode of characterisation and viewer positioning, Shortland's *Lore* reveals that

filmmakers can eschew voyeurism and refuse to simplistically sexualise women, taking a nuanced approach to representing the complexities of women's complicity in the Holocaust.

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