

Abstract

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“Am Deutschen Wesen wird die Welt nicht genesen”¹

An Interpretation of V. Schlöndorff's Historical Film “Diplomacy” (2014)

The conference subject

The theme of the symposium is an allusion to the Berlin Wall (1961-1989), a structure built to fortify the border of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The Berlin Wall and the division of Germany were the primary consequences of National Socialist rule (1933-1945) and the Second World War. Volker Schlöndorff's historical film "Diplomacy" (2014) is an example of how the arts and culture deal with the "emotional inheritance" (Freud cited in Moré 2013) of National Socialism to "remember, repeat and work through" the participation of the *Wehrmacht* in war crimes. The film centers on the night of August 25, 1944, in which occupied Paris was to be destroyed by the Germans before the Allies could recapture it. The Swedish diplomat Raoul Nordling has set himself the task of tearing down the "walls in the head" of the German Governor of Paris, General von Choltitz, to persuade him to reconsider, though von Choltitz' thoughts and action are shaped by his belief in Germany's special historical significance.

Psychoanalytic theory and background

Such "walls in the head" of the authoritarian German character (Fromm 1936), as attributed in Schlöndorff's film to von Choltitz, were exploited by National Socialism and developed into a fascistoid character. Here, external violence manifests itself as inner coercion. In 1941, Adorno put forth that a fascistoid terrorist state is based on a human type which no longer goes through ego formation, i.e. the unity, continuity and substantiality of the individual has been dissolved. He is referring explicitly to Freud's mass psychology and ego analysis (Freud 1921, Adorno 1951, cited by Dahmer 2019).

¹ A reference and reinterpretation of a political catchphrase from Emanuel Geibel's poem *Germany's Profession* of 1861.

Von Choltitz is no simple nazi follower, he is an important military leader. If he decides not to obey the scorched earth orders, he will have to re-evaluate his past and live with the guilt of serving in a criminal regime and committing atrocities at its behest. Such an about-turn is an essential developmental step for an individual who has surrendered their moral choices to ideology and authoritarian leadership. As a case study, von Choltitz has overcome the "critical typology" (Adorno 1951 cited by Dahmer 2019) of the authoritarian character.

Relevance today

The phenomenon of right-wing extremist populism today shows that the desire for identification with strength and power, and the longing to subject to strong leadership, can still be encountered in the grandchildren of the perpetrators and followers. The hope that this transmission would weaken in succeeding generations has not come to pass. On the contrary, the third generation shows a strengthening of tendencies to identify with the consciously denied, yet deeply internalized, National Socialist ideals and norms of the parents and grandparents (Moré 2013). The planned essay will attempt, by means of the film example, to provide ISPSO conference members and guests with illustrative insights into this way of dealing with inherited perpetrator introjects and putting this approach up for discussion.

Literature

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