

Screening Privilege:  
Global Injustice and Responsibility in 21st-Century  
Scandinavian Film and Media

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## Abstract

### *Screening Privilege: Global Injustice and Responsibility in 21st-Century Scandinavian Film and Media*

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This PhD thesis examines how contemporary Scandinavian audio-visual narratives represent the experience of being privileged in a world shaped by global injustice. The study brings together four examples drawn from a range of media and genres: the reality TV-inspired web series *Sweatshop – Deadly Fashion* (*Sweatshop – dødelig mote*, 2014), distributed by *Aftenposten-TV*, Erik Poppe's melodramatic film *1,000 Times Good Night* (*Tusen ganger god natt*, 2013), Roy Andersson's art film *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* (*En duva satt på en gren och funderade på tillvaron*, 2014), and SVT's science fiction TV series *Real Humans* (*Äkta människor*, 2012–2014). Drawing on film and media studies, cultural studies, sociology, philosophy, postcolonial studies, and privilege studies, the thesis analyzes the examples thematically and formally, and discusses how they connect privilege to present and past global injustice as well as to responsibility. The examples are also contextualized in relation to 21st-century globalization and contemporary Scandinavia in particular, especially to a perceived tension between existing notions of Scandinavia and Scandinavians as humanitarian, morally good, and egalitarian, on the one hand, and as privileged, resourceful, and implicated in global injustice, on the other.

The study finds that the examples foreground connections between privilege, global injustice, and responsibility especially through two narrative strategies: first, the staging of face-to-face encounters between characters associated with privilege and characters that symbolize underprivileged others, and second, a focus on the consequences of consumption. A second finding is that the characters that are framed as privileged and as feeling responsible for alleviating global injustice are largely female characters.

Overall, the study adds to film and media studies and the emerging field of privilege studies by synthesizing recent research on privilege. It also shows how privilege as a concept illuminate the ways that audio-visual narratives construct, reinforce, and challenge notions of privilege and, in the Scandinavian context, also associate privilege with cultural identities.

## Acknowledgments

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This study came about thanks to the kindness of a stranger – a stranger I am now fortunate enough to call my friend. When I first wrote to Ingeborg Kongslien in the summer of 2013, I did not know her personally, but had heard of her through a friend of mine who had loved a course that Ingeborg taught at the University of Oslo on contemporary Scandinavian literature. I wrote an email to Ingeborg from Hong Kong, asking her if she wanted to grab a coffee and chat about Norwegian literature next time I passed through Oslo. Thank you, Ingeborg, for being your curious self, for meeting with me that autumn afternoon, and last but not least, for having such a knack for connecting people! I sometimes think about what would have happened if you had never introduced me to Elisabeth, but thanks to you, I do not really need to wonder and can, instead, just be grateful for the gift this PhD fellowship has been.

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I would have liked to show this study to Esther M.K. Cheung – excitedly anticipating the discussion to come! Just like many of Esther's former students, I owe a great debt of gratitude to her for the way she inspired and acknowledged me when I was a young undergraduate at the University of Hong Kong. When Esther passed away in 2015, she left behind an indescribable void, but also tremendous inspiration. I miss her, her enthusiasm, and our conversations. I hope that she, as my first supervisor and beloved friend, would have liked this study. This study is dedicated to Esther.

## A Note on Translations and Style

This study uses materials, both written and audio-visual, whose original language is Swedish, Danish or Norwegian. All translations to English are mine unless otherwise stated. I use official English translations when they are available (e.g. subtitles from official DVDs).

To distinguish between my own translations to English and official English translations, I adopt the following format for *in-text quotations*:

“Official English trans.” (Author Year ##) [“Quote in Swedish/Danish/Norwegian”].

“My own English trans.” (Author Year ##) [Quote in Swedish/Danish/Norwegian].

I make exceptions when the translated text is only a single word, or a couple of words. In these cases, the English translations are immediately followed by the quotes in their original language (in square brackets). Here is an example: ‘The author refers to “Norway’s privileged position” [Norges privilegerte posisjon] in the world (Author Year ##).’

For *block quotations*, I use a similar format, but remove quotation marks around the translation. If the translations are the official English ones, the block quotations look like this:

This is a sample block quotation in the official English translation that spans more than three lines. (Author Year ##)

[“This is a sample block quotation in Swedish/Danish/Norwegian that spans more than three lines.”] (Author Year ##)

And when the translations to English are my own, they look this way:

This is a sample block quotation in my own English translation that spans more than three lines. (Author Year ##)

[This is a sample block quotation in Swedish/Danish/Norwegian that spans more than three lines.]

Lastly, when quoting lines from audio-visual materials (as opposed to written work), I omit the “(Author Year ##)” parenthesis.



## Chapter 1

### **Introduction:**

### **Screening Privilege in 21st-Century Scandinavia**

What does it mean to be privileged in a world shaped by global injustice? This question, and how it has been presented in contemporary Scandinavian film and media, is the central topic of this study. Since the 2000s, several films made in Scandinavia have explored global injustice – that is, structural injustice on a global scale – and focused in particular on the ambivalence that privileged people feel when confronted with the suffering of less privileged others. A striking example is *In a Better World (Hævnen, 2010)*, an award-winning drama film directed by Danish filmmaker Susanne Bier. Set partly in Denmark and an unspecified African country, *In a Better World* revolves to a large extent around Anton, a white, Swedish and mild-tempered doctor who works in an African refugee camp. A recurring theme in the film is the conflict between Anton's responsibilities as a doctor and aid worker abroad and as a father and husband whose family resides in Denmark. By exploring Anton's competing responsibilities, *In a Better World* asks what it means to be a morally good person in an era of globalization, and deals with the relationship between people in the Global North and in the Global South. *In a Better World* thus continues tendencies in Bier's two earlier films, *After the Wedding (Efter brylluppet, 2006)* and *Brothers (Brødre, 2004)*, whose protagonists also are white, Scandinavian males who do humanitarian work – and in the case of *Brothers*, military work – in a country in the Global South. A symbolic shot that appears in all three films and encapsulates their central themes – namely responsibility, globalization, and global inequality – is a shot of the male protagonist as he is being driven away from the camp, school, or military base where he works. Looking pensively out at the surrounding landscape, the protagonist represents on the one hand a privileged person who is noticeably more mobile than those he tries to help through his work. On the other hand, he is a figure whose privileged position is not only an advantage but also a source of moral uncertainty. That uncertainty pertains both to how he should relate to his own family in the Global North, to those he wishes to help in the Global South.

Within Scandinavia, Bier's films are only some of the more internationally known, commercially successful, and frequently researched films that grapple with the ethical

questions that globalization leaves in its wake. In this study, I shed light on some of the less internationally recognized, yet no less interesting, examples of contemporary Scandinavian audio-visual narratives that explore global injustice, privilege, and responsibility.<sup>1</sup> I want to dwell briefly on *In a Better World*, *After the Wedding*, and *Brothers*, however, because they are useful reference points in various ways. Besides sharing thematic similarities with my own examples, Bier's three films have drawn considerable scholarly attention and can thus give an acute sense of what is at stake when Scandinavian filmmakers thematize globalization. Several scholars have discussed the three films – which media scholar Ib Bondebjerg refers to as Bier's "global trilogy" (2014, 17) – in terms of how they represent globalization and the relationship between the Global North and the Global South (Bondebjerg and Redvall 2011; Shriver-Rice 2011, 2015; A. Marklund 2012; Volquardsen 2013; Smaill 2014; Kääpä 2014). Bondebjerg and media scholar Eva Novrup Redvall see *After the Wedding* as part of "a new trend in Scandinavian and European drama", whereby "global problems are mirrored and reflected in a national, classical family drama" that makes various problems associated with globalization more "concrete" (2011, 75). Similarly, Bondebjerg suggests that Bier's global trilogy develops "a formula for *cosmopolitan* narratives" and tries to illustrate "that structures or conflicts found in a global context can also be found in our own backyard" (2014, 17).

What Bondebjerg refers to, rather generally, as "our own backyard" is in the work of other scholars discussed as a specifically "Western", Nordic, or Scandinavian context (Volquardsen 2013; Kääpä 2014). These latter scholars, who write more or less explicitly in a postcolonial tradition, link the thematic focus on humanitarianism in Bier's trilogy to Scandinavian self-images and international politics (Volquardsen 2013), and to "Western" or "Euro-American" ways of imagining the relations between the Global North and the Global South (Smaill 2014, 25). As film and television scholar Belinda Smaill notes, Bier's films can be understood in light of what Fuyuki Kurasawa calls a "humanitarian scopic regime", namely "a set of visual patterns, and a mode of representing distant suffering that structure Western perceptions of the global South and its inhabitants, as well as the range and kind of the Euro-American world's moral concern" (Kurasawa 2009, 136, cited in Smaill 2014, 25).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> When I adopt the term "narrative" in this study, I use it in two ways: as a noun, i.e. "audio-visual *narratives*", and as an adjective, i.e. to describe "*narrative strategies*" in my four examples. By "audio-visual narratives", I mean films, TV series, web series and other narratives that combine moving images and sound. While these kinds of narratives are often described as "visual narratives", I prefer the term "audio-visual narratives" because it draws attention to the role of sound and thus avoids an over-emphasis on the visual.

<sup>2</sup> Volquardsen (2013) and Smaill (2014) critically interrogate humanitarian discourse and explicitly address the relationship between countries in the Global South and the Global North – specifically, the Nordic countries, in the case of Volquardsen, and Northern European countries, in Smaill's case [25–6]). Bondebjerg also mentions "charity" when he comments on *After the Wedding*, stating that the theme in the film "carves directly into our

Thus, while Bier's global trilogy can be seen as dramas that visualize the impact of globalization on people's everyday lives, the films also make it imperative to ask: *Whose* everyday lives do they depict, and why? *In a Better World*, for instance, is one of several recent Scandinavian films that are partly set and filmed abroad, but it ultimately foregrounds the existential "musings and ethical concerns" of its Scandinavian protagonists while giving little insight into the "subjectivity and vital concerns" of the film's non-Scandinavian characters (A. Marklund 2012, 82; see also Volquardsen 2013, 14–5). Generally speaking, Bier's global trilogy draws attention to what it means to be privileged in a world shaped by global injustice, and more or less explicitly deals with perceived connections between being privileged, being morally good, and being Scandinavian.

My own study examines the representation of privilege, global injustice, and responsibility in four audio-visual narratives drawn from contemporary Scandinavian cinema, TV, and online media.<sup>3</sup> Unlike Bier's films, these examples are influenced by a diversity of genres, take place in temporal settings that range from the historical past to imagined, alternative futures, and associate privilege with a variety of protagonists, spanning from Norwegian youth consumers to employed mothers. The four examples I analyze are all from the 2010s and include the web series *Sweatshop – Deadly Fashion* (*Sweatshop – dødelig mote*, 2014), the two feature films *1,000 Times Good Night* (*Tusen ganger god natt*, 2013) and *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* (*En duva satt på en gren och funderade på tillvaron*, 2014), and season one of the TV series *Real Humans* (*Äkta människor*, 2012–2014). I focus on these four examples partly because they share a thematic interest in privilege, global injustice, and responsibility, and because they explore the role of Scandinavia or Scandinavians in the world at large. In addition, the examples draw on different media and exemplify striking variations on the thematic and formal level. They are also more recent than Bier's films. Two of the examples, the melodramatic feature film *1,000 Times Good Night* and the art film *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*, are directed by well-established directors who are known both in Scandinavia and beyond, i.e. Norwegian

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role as charity giv[ing] nations vs. the bigger questions of what it would really take to overcome global differences" (2014, 18). However, he does not specify which nations he has in mind when he refers to "our role as charity giv[ing] nations". Nor does he question the idea of development aid as a form of charity (unlike Volquardsen [2013]).

<sup>3</sup> The term "Scandinavia" usually refers to Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, but sometimes also includes Iceland, the Faeroe Islands, and Finland. Meanwhile, the term "Nordic" (or "Norden") typically refers to Iceland, Denmark (with Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Norway, Sweden, and Finland (with Åland). When I use the term "Scandinavia" in this study, I mean to the cultural region of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark (as opposed to the larger geographical area that make up the Scandinavian Peninsula).

filmmaker Erik Poppe in the case of *1,000 Times Good Night* and Swedish filmmaker Roy Andersson in the case of *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*. Meanwhile, *Sweatshop – Deadly Fashion* is a reality TV-inspired web series distributed and partly produced by the major Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* (in collaboration with the Norwegian NGO *Framtiden i våre hender*, or *Future in Our Hands* in English), whereas *Real Humans* is a science fiction TV drama produced and aired by Swedish national public TV broadcaster Sveriges Television (SVT). My chosen examples address forms of injustice that span from war and conflict to hazardous working conditions in an era of global capitalism, and also shed light on different aspects of privilege.

### **Research Questions and Aim of this Study**

My analyses of these four audio-visual narratives are guided by two research questions. Firstly, how is the relationship between global injustice, privilege, and responsibility represented in the four examples? To answer this question, I look specifically at the influence of particular genres, narrative strategies, tropes or figures. I also examine the ways in which the examples connect privilege, responsibility, and global injustice, along with related themes such as guilt, violence, and history. My second research question is: In what ways do the selected examples relate to social and political issues in 21st-century Scandinavia? I explore this question by drawing attention to the Scandinavian context in which the examples were made, and discussing the ways in which the films and series touch on topical issues in contemporary Scandinavia, including egalitarianism, humanitarianism, and social inequality. As I elaborate on later in this chapter, these audio-visual narratives can be seen as grappling with a tension between existing notions of Scandinavia and Scandinavian people as, on the one hand, morally good, humanitarian, and egalitarian and as, on the other, privileged, resourceful, and implicated in global problems.

The aim of the study, then, is to analyze a sample of contemporary audio-visual narratives from Scandinavia in light of privilege, global injustice, and responsibility, and critically discuss the ways in which my chosen examples relate to contemporary Scandinavia and 21st-century globalization in general. The title of my study, *Screening Privilege*, refers to the act of representing privilege on a screen, be it through films, TV series, or other audio-visual media. It also hints at the fact that any act of representation not only includes, but also excludes certain issues. Every screening of privilege is, in other words, a process of screening something off, whereby omissions and elisions occur. Thus, screening privilege plays on the dual meaning of the verb “to screen”: as the act of *screening something* (i.e. putting

something on a screen) and as *screening something off* (i.e. hiding something behind a screen, thus shielding something from view).<sup>4</sup> In her book *Screening Sex*, film scholar Linda Williams (2008) similarly points out “the double meaning of the verb *to screen* as both revelation and concealment” (2). “To screen is to reveal on a screen,” she writes, “[b]ut a second, equally important meaning, as the dictionary reads, is ‘to shelter or protect with or as a screen.’ . . . Movies both reveal and conceal” (2). While Williams’ discussion concerns the screening of sex in movies, my study uses the idea of “screening” to critically discuss what is (and what is not) depicted and foregrounded in audio-visual narratives about privilege.<sup>5</sup> To examine how privilege is screened thus entails asking questions such as: What kinds of privileges, and what kinds of injustices, are being screened? Who is represented as the privileged and the underprivileged, and what is it about certain characters that associates them with privilege, or the lack thereof (is it their race, nationality, gender, age, class, work situation)?

### Key Findings

This study has two key findings regarding the screening of privilege in my chosen examples. The first finding concerns the ways in which the examples use specific narrative strategies to foreground the relationship between privilege, global injustice, and responsibility. There are two narrative strategies that stand out in particular, the first of which is a tendency to stage face-to-face encounters between characters that are associated with privilege on the one hand and characters who are framed as underprivileged, suffering others on the other. The second narrative strategy is a tendency to focus on goods that privileged individuals consume. In

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<sup>4</sup> The definition of the verb “screen” in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* includes this double meaning: To screen means “to present (something, such as a motion picture) for viewing on a screen” and “to give shelter or protection to with or as if with a screen” or “to separate with or as if with a screen” (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “screen (v.),” accessed November 13, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/screen>).

<sup>5</sup> Other film scholars have also pointed out the multiple meanings of the word “screen”. To give two examples: In the 1993 anthology *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, editors Steve Cohan and Ina Rae Hark explain the title of the book as an attempt at “rais[ing] a *multiple pun* that captures the considerable force of the male in Hollywood cinema: the apparatus *puts him on screen*, it hides him *behind a screen*, it uses him *as a screen* for its ideological agenda, and *it screens out* socially unacceptable and heterogeneous cultural constructions of masculinity” (1993, 3, my emphasis). Meanwhile, in her 2010 book *Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema*, Yosefa Loshitzky situates “the highly evocative metaphor of screening” within a broader, social context by connecting “screening” to “five different discourses” with which it is currently affiliated (Loshitzky 2010, 4). These include “(1) the discourse of cinema, or screen media, (2) the discourse of psychoanalysis (the screen dream), (3) medical discourse, . . . (4) the post-9/11 screening of potential terrorists by airport security that is based on ‘racial profiling’ and driven by ‘white paranoia,’ . . . and (5) the introduction of compulsory identity cards in the UK and elsewhere to enable screening using new biometric technologies ‘to establish identity and to check movement at borders.’ . . .” (Loshitzky 2010, 4).

several examples, these two strategies are combined, as seen when a privileged protagonist's sense of responsibility stems from both the consumption of certain goods and from directly witnessing the precarious situation of less fortunate others. The two strategies have slightly different functions, however. The staging of face-to-face encounters may seem like a pretty obvious, even simple, strategy, since encounters between individual characters can be an effective means of visualizing global injustice – an issue that may otherwise seem fairly abstract. Across the four examples, however, these face-to-face encounters take on different forms, partly because the audio-visual narratives explore different kinds of privilege and injustice, and because of variations at the formal level. Generally speaking, the examples appear to use the staging of face-to-face encounters between privileged and underprivileged characters to suggest that privilege cannot be isolated from injustice, and that those who are privileged should be confronted with the suffering of less advantaged others. The aftermath of these encounters also hints at how difficult it can be to respond to injustice. Notably, those who represent the privileged in my four examples generally tend to be white people from the Global North, whereas their less advantaged counterparts are typically non-white people living in poverty or experiencing violence in the Global South. Through these figures, the examples foreground global inequality in the contemporary world, but also contrast life in the Global North with that in the Global South and thus risk reproducing Eurocentric ideas (as I touch upon in Chapters 4–6). Meanwhile, the second narrative strategy highlights the ways in which the consumption of material objects indirectly connects the privileged to the underprivileged, and can be intricately related to questions of identity. Through focusing on consumption, the examples not only touch on the subject of global commodity chains and the globalization of work in general, but also draw attention to global injustice in the contemporary world. The goods or services people buy are shown to trigger questions of responsibility and guilt, especially on the part of privileged consumers.

My second key finding is that the four examples in this study generally tend to represent female characters as the privileged and as those responsible for alleviating global injustice. More specifically, women, including young women, are typically screened as feeling responsible for helping less advantaged others, but they are also shown as implicated in global injustice (by virtue of being privileged). There are exceptions to this tendency, and a concern with global injustice is associated not only with females but also with specific professions (i.e. journalists, aid workers) and age groups (i.e. youths). Yet, gender is still a recurring feature, as my analyses in Chapters 3–5 suggest. The narrative strategy may be partly explained by real and perceived gender roles in the Scandinavian societies. That is,

framing women as at once privileged and responsible figures may be an attempt at giving women, including young women, agency. Other possible reasons include the influence of discourses on global feminism and global sisterhood, or the role of maternalistic (as opposed to paternalistic) ways of thinking about the relationship between the Global North and the Global South.

In the rest of this chapter, I give an overview of the background for this study and situate my own discussion in relation to existing research on contemporary Scandinavia and on privilege in contemporary Scandinavian film and media. I also explain my methodology, establish what I mean by privilege, and spell out the contributions that this study makes. While I use the next chapter to define global injustice and responsibility, I introduce privilege near the end of this chapter because it is a key concept in my analyses and, as I see it, a central theme in the audio-visual narratives I examine.

### **Scandinavia in an Era of Globalization**

Scandinavia provides a particularly fruitful context for a discussion on global injustice, privilege, and responsibility. My study is part of a larger project, titled “Scandinavian Narratives of Guilt and Privilege in an Age of Globalization” – or “ScanGuilt” for short – and led by Elisabeth Oxfeldt, scholar of Nordic literature at the University of Oslo. Made up of an international team of scholars from various disciplines, the “ScanGuilt” project takes as its starting point a larger body of contemporary Scandinavian narratives – specifically, narratives from 1989 to the present – that deal with the experience of being privileged and confronted with global inequality.<sup>6</sup> The examples analyzed within the “ScanGuilt” project come from literature, poetry, education, film, media, political discourse, and other areas, but share a common theme, namely, the relationship between privileged Scandinavians and less privileged people in the world at large. While I explain my position within the “ScanGuilt” project later on, I mention the project at the outset because my study is, like the “ScanGuilt” project, interested in the manner in which the Scandinavian countries have historically been associated with moral goodness, humanitarianism, egalitarianism, and exceptionalism. I write “historically” not to suggest that this association has now disappeared, but in order to point out that notions of Scandinavia countries as exceptional and “good” have been contested in

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<sup>6</sup> What I, for simplicity, refer to as the “ScanGuilt” project is made up of two separate projects that were funded by different institutions. The first is a cross-disciplinary research group funded by the Faculty of the Humanities at University of Oslo and based at the same university. The second is an international research group funded by the Research Council of Norway. My own project is funded by the latter, but has also benefited from workshops and seminars organized through the former project.

recent years. Indeed, Scandinavia is currently imagined also as an unusually privileged and resourceful region that is involved in global flows of labor, ideas, and goods, and thus implicated in global injustice.

As mentioned, the four examples in this study can be seen as influenced by somewhat conflicting ideas of contemporary Scandinavia and Scandinavian people. To elaborate on this tension between different notions of Scandinavia, I want to quote cultural and postcolonial studies scholar Lars Jensen and anthropologist Kristin Loftsdóttir's instructive comment on the perceived relationship between the Nordic countries and the "environmental, financial and multicultural crises" in the contemporary era (2014, 4). The Nordic countries are seen as having an unusual relationship to these various crises, Jensen and Loftsdóttir write in the anthology *Crisis in the Nordic Nations and Beyond: At the Intersection of Environment, Finance and Multiculturalism*. As they state in the introduction to the book:

The Nordic countries are often considered a peaceful zone largely unaffected by the crises and their effects. These countries represent some of the most affluent and least socially polarized societies in the world. They are a globalized space that actively participates in the global flows of labour, of an economic and historical system that has produced social, cultural and environmental inequalities. (2014, 2)

In this particular excerpt, Jensen and Loftsdóttir do not explicitly spell out the contradiction between the Nordic countries' perceived role as "a peaceful zone largely unaffected" by global crises, on the one hand, and their being "a globalized space that actively participates in . . . global flows", on the other (2014, 2). Their statement that the Nordic countries are seen as unaffected but also as participating in "global flows" could be broken up by a conjunction that suggests contrast – a "nevertheless" or "however". I say this not to criticize Jensen and Loftsdóttir but rather, to point out that their research tends to draw attention to precisely the contradictions in Nordic self-images.

Jensen and Loftsdóttir are among various scholars who in recent years have raised critical questions about the idea of "Nordic exceptionalism", that is, the idea that the five Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – are set apart from the rest of Europe and "the West" (see Browning 2007; Keskinen, Tuori, Irni, and Mulinari 2009; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012; Naum and Nordin 2013). According to this idea, the Nordic countries have no colonial past, and are somehow more benevolent and less paternalistic



when engaged in international affairs (including humanitarian efforts) than other countries in the Global North. As political scientist Mai Palmberg (2009) writes: “The five Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – have a reputation for being the odd ones out in the post-colonial Western world” (35). The Nordic countries, she adds, are seen as having “no colonial past” and hence “no colonial hangover of cultural oppression, economic exploitation and political repression” (35). To many, “not only in the Nordic countries, but also in the global South”, the Nordic countries represent “the exceptions to the rule of Western prejudice, racism and paternalism towards the non-white world” – in short, “the good Westerners”, Palmberg argues (35). The idea of Nordic exceptionalism also pertains to domestic affairs and links to the welfare state model. As cultural historian Ebbe Volquardsen suggests, “‘Nordic exceptionalism’ is based on the assumption of a unique Scandinavian model of society” – a model that, “apart from the social democratic welfare state, . . . is characterized by societal openness, tolerance, and freedom from prejudice, a hetero-stereotype, which largely coincides with the countries’ own national and regional self-images” (2013, 38).<sup>7</sup> The notion of “Nordic exceptionalism” thus needs to be understood in relation to the welfare state and the ways in which that model is, and historically has been, perceived. If Scandinavian countries are currently lauded (and applaud themselves) for their social democratic values, high levels of social equality, emphasis on universal suffrage, constitutional democracy, freedom of speech, and more, that positive image builds on ideas that can be traced back to the 20th century. Namely, they continue ideas of “Sweden and the Swedish – or indeed the Nordic – Model” that, according to historians Jenny Andersson and Mary Hilson, functioned for much of the 20th century “as a *utopia* in the political discourse of Europe and beyond, identified as the most modern country in the world” (2009, 220; see also J. Andersson 2009; Musiał 2002).

The idea of the Nordic countries as exceptional exists despite the fact that Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden are, and have long been, enmeshed and entangled in global trade and politics.<sup>8</sup> As Jensen and Loftsdóttir state, “there is a strong tendency to view the Nordic countries as somehow existing apart from global flows, as being outside power and

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<sup>7</sup> Volquardsen does not define the concept of “hetero-stereotype” in his article, but the term generally refers to stereotypes that concern someone else’s group (in contrast to “auto-stereotypes”, which are stereotypes that concern one’s own group) (Phinney 1991, 198).

<sup>8</sup> As the editors of *Complying with Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region* argue, the present-day Nordic countries “have taken, and continue to take, part in (post)colonial processes” in manifold ways (Mulinari, Keskinen, Irni, and Tuori 2009, 1). “The Nordic countries see themselves as part of the Western world, drawing their value systems from the Enlightenment, and showing themselves to be willing to defend these values sometimes even more forcefully than the former colonial centres” (Mulinari, Keskinen, Irni, and Tuori 2009, 1).

politics, and as representing a form of Nordic exceptionalism . . . , even in Nordic countries with a past as global empires” (2014, 2).<sup>9</sup> A list of events and phenomena in the history of the Scandinavian countries give the lie to ideas of Scandinavia as exempt from the history of “Western prejudice, racism and paternalism towards the non-white world” (Palmberg 2009, 35). Examples include Denmark and Sweden’s role in the Transatlantic slave trade, the history of forced sterilizations in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, and racism and discrimination against indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities within the Nordic region.<sup>10</sup> Sweden’s post-war image as a neutral country during the Second World War has also been criticized by historians and officially acknowledged as faulty. As historian Conny Mithander notes, at the turn of the century, Sweden’s image shifted away from that of a “bystander nation” (Mithander 2013, 183). This shift is perhaps epitomized by Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson stating, in 2000 during his opening address at the international Holocaust-related conference The Stockholm International Forum: “Today, we know that Swedish authorities failed in the performance of their duty during the Second World War” (Persson 2000, cited in Mithander 2013, 183; see also Holmila and Gevert 2011, 523).

As far as current global problems are concerned, Norway’s oil industry makes the country particularly entangled in global issues. As anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen puts it:

There is an increasingly visible gap between Norway, the world champion in global solidarity and promoting sustainability abroad, . . . and Norway, the filthy, disgusting country addicted to oil, a country responsible, through its petroleum exports, for three per cent of the world’s CO<sub>2</sub> emissions although it has less than 0.1 per cent of the total population. (2016, 246)

Indeed, a considerable amount of Norway’s wealth derives from a petroleum industry whose environmental impact is decidedly global in scope.<sup>11</sup> Both in Norway and Scandinavia in

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<sup>9</sup> What I have omitted from this quote are references to Loftsdóttir and Jensen’s work in the past, i.e. their previous anthology from 2012, which also deals with Nordic exceptionalism (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012), and Jensen’s previous work on Nordic countries’ past as global empires, especially that of Denmark (L. Jensen 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Browning 2007; Stenport and Lunde 2008; Keskinen, Tuori, Irni, and Mulinari 2009; Weiss 2009; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012; Naum and Nordin 2013.

<sup>11</sup> The Norwegian petroleum industry exports significant amounts of oil and gas to other countries every year, and the burning of oil and gas produced in Norway results in considerable CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. According to a 2013 report published by *Statistisk sentralbyrå* (Statistics Norway), in 2012, the total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in Norway amounted to 44 million tons a year, while the total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions resulting from the burning of Norwegian-produced oil and gas *globally* was around 500 million tons a year, i.e. about 11 times higher (Fæhn, Hagem and

general, it is not unusual to come across descriptions of Norway as being particularly resourceful and fortunate – even “lucky” – when compared to other countries in the world. A striking example can be seen in an article by renowned Norwegian diplomat and politician Jan Egeland from 2012, titled “Fortsatt et privilegert land” [Still a privileged country].<sup>12</sup> In this article, Egeland writes in his role as Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, comments on Norway’s future challenges in relation to international affairs, and repeatedly refers to “Norway’s privileged position” [Norges privilegerte posisjon] in the world.<sup>13</sup> He connects this privileged position to, among other factors, Norway’s peaceful relationship to its neighboring nations and access to considerable natural resources, such as oil and gas, and the absence of natural disasters and epidemic diseases. As Egeland sees it, “[t]his collective, national luck” [denne kollektive, nasjonale flaksen] on the part of Norway may continue into the future, but only if Norway carefully considers problems that lie ahead and reflects on “what our privileged position can and should be used for” [hva vår privilegerte posisjon kan og bør brukes til] (2012, 353).

On some levels, the notion of Norway as a protected, resourceful, and privileged nation is not as applicable to Sweden and Denmark, if we focus on the access to oil and gas. On other levels, however, Sweden and Denmark are, like Norway, associated with privilege and implicated in global problems. In general, the Nordic countries have a “robust self-image”, based on their having “a long history, unique in the west, at the top of statistical indicators of demonstrated happiness, trust in institutional structures of society, environmental awareness, relative economic and social equality”, according to Jensen and Loftsdóttir (2014, 3; see also Oxfeldt, Nestingen, and Simonsen, forthcoming). Norway, Sweden, and Denmark are also connected to global issues through their considerable foreign aid budgets and, moreover, their military involvement. Denmark and Norway are both members of NATO, and Sweden has, despite being seen as a “neutral” country, also joined humanitarian interventions conducted by NATO since the 1990s (C. Marklund 2016, 17). Commenting specifically on the deployment of Danish soldiers to Afghanistan and Iraq, international relations scholar Sten Rynning points

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Rosendahl 2013, 7). The industry that makes Norway rich thus contributes, to say the least, to global environmental problems. For more on Norway and oil, see Sæther 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Internationally, Egeland is known for his former role as United Nations Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (from 2003 to 2006). He is also famous for his active involvement in peace processes, including the Oslo Accord of 1993, and his years of engagement in humanitarian work and international affairs. Notably, Egeland’s approaches to humanitarian projects have also been sharply criticized in, for instance, the two documentaries *De hvite hjelperne* (*The white helpers*) and *Sultbløffen* (*The famine scam*), broadcast on Norwegian TV in 2007 and 2008, respectively.

<sup>13</sup> Egeland repeatedly uses the phrases “Norway’s privileged position” [Norges privilegerte posisjon], “our privileged position” [vår privilegerte posisjon] and “the privileged Norway” [det privilegerte Norge] in his article (2012, 353, 359, 360, 361).

to what he sees as a recent change in Danish international relations and argues that Denmark has “forsaken traditional Nordic anti-militarism for a position alongside the US, UK, France and Russia” (2003, 24, cited in Browning 2007, 38). As importantly, Sweden and Norway are also involved in the international arms trade: In the period 2012–2016, Sweden and Norway were among the top 20 largest exporters of major weapons, according to a 2017 report by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (2017, 1–2).<sup>14</sup> Suffice it to say, aspects of Scandinavian politics and history radically throw into question the Scandinavian countries’ international (and national) “images” as peaceful and peace-building countries. Some of the audio-visual narratives I analyze in this study touch on the connections between Scandinavia on the one hand and war, colonialism, slavery, and humanitarianism on the other, but generally speaking only scratch the surface of the ways in which Scandinavia is also entangled in global problems.

The “ScanGuilt” project explores how contemporary narratives from the Scandinavian region grapple with the notion that Scandinavians are privileged. The project focuses especially on narratives that thematize a sense of guilt that arises being or feeling privileged may engender. To quote the description of the project:

We live at a moment in time when most Scandinavians are extremely privileged. Time and again we are acclaimed as the richest, happiest and most egalitarian nations in the world. At the same time, globalization brings us into close contact with non-privileged Others. Through media and migration we are confronted on a daily basis with an awareness of suffering Others – child laborers, victims of trafficking, war refugees, etc. The Other lives side-by-side with us; often they even contribute (more or less directly) to our affluence. Numerous contemporary narratives indicate that this sense of global inequality does not simply lead to Scandinavians’ counting themselves lucky for their unusual privileges; they also feel uncomfortable and suffer from what we call “Scandinavian guilt feelings”.<sup>15</sup>

The “ScanGuilt” project examines narratives within a Scandinavian context and asks what they might suggest about cultural identity in Scandinavia, but it is not a given that the narratives in question – nor their concern with guilt, privilege, and global inequality – are

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<sup>14</sup> The five biggest importers were the United States, Russia, China, France, and Germany (SIPRI 2017, 2). For recent statistics on military spending in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, see Norges Fredslag 2017. See also Foss 2017.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.hf.uio.no/english/research/theme/scandinavian-narratives-of-guilt-and-privilege/> (see also Oxfeldt 2016a).

unique to Scandinavia. Rather, the project asks and struggles over the question: What *is* the relationship between Scandinavia and these contemporary narratives about guilt and privilege? Moreover, while the “ScanGuilt” project foregrounds the concept of guilt, it does not presuppose that privileged Scandinavians are represented or understood only in terms of guilt. Scholars involved in the project also explore how being or feeling like a privileged Scandinavian relates to, among other issues, responsibility, solidarity, and pity (Andersen 2016; Frøjd 2016), class (Sandberg 2016), and race (K. Iversen 2016; Rees 2016a; Helland 2016).

Like the “ScanGuilt” project, my own study also examines contemporary narratives from Scandinavia in light of privilege, globalization, and guilt, but I focus specifically on audio-visual narratives from different media. In this sense, this study both breaks with and draws on existing research on privilege in contemporary Scandinavian visual culture (Dancus 2016; Nilsson 2014; Rees 2016b; Oxfeldt 2016b, 2016c).<sup>16</sup> While the latter consist mainly of individual articles focused on films, my own study is the first monograph on privilege as it is represented in contemporary Scandinavian film and media.<sup>17</sup> The existing scholarship has enriched my own discussions by demonstrating how privilege is a useful analytical concept for analyzing contemporary Scandinavian films, and by showing the variety of Scandinavian films that thematize privilege. Examples span from documentary films such as Lars von Trier and Jørgen Leth’s *The Five Obstructions (De fem benspænd, 2003; see Oxfeldt 2016c)* and Margreth Olin’s *Nowhere Home (De andre, 2012; see Oxfeldt 2016b)* to fiction films such as Lukas Moodysson’s *Mammoth (Mammut, 2009; see Nilsson 2014)*, Maria Sødahl’s *Limbo (2010; see Rees 2016b)* and Hans Petter Moland’s *Comrade Pedersen (Gymnaslærer Pedersen, 2006; see Dancus 2016)*, and exhibit striking variations as far as genres, narrative strategies, and topics are concerned. To illustrate, the three fiction films draw variously on melodrama (e.g. *Mammoth* and *Limbo*) and comedy (*Comrade Pedersen*). Moreover, while the protagonists in these films are often (but not always) white, privileged individuals from Scandinavia who are confronted with underprivileged, suffering others, the films also take place in different temporal and geographical settings. For examples, *Limbo* and *Comrade Pedersen* set their plots partly or wholly in the past, which allows the films to explore – and

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<sup>16</sup> With the exception of Nilsson, the scholars writing on privilege in contemporary Scandinavian cinema have been connected to the “ScanGuilt” project (i.e. Oxfeldt, Dancus, and Rees).

<sup>17</sup> For a non-filmic analysis, see Oxfeldt’s discussion of the NRK TV series *SKAM* (2015–2017) and how the series “negotiates between feelings of individual shame and a sense of global guilt” (2017, 13).

elide – various aspects of Norwegian history, according to Dancus (2016) and Rees (2016).<sup>18</sup> *Mammoth* and *The Five Obstructions* are both set in the contemporary era and stage situations in which white, European men are confronted with underprivileged others in Asia, whereas in *Nowhere Home*, Olin frames herself as a maternal figure who feels responsible for young male refugees seeking asylum in Norway.

Like Dancus (2016) and Rees (2016b), I consider the role that temporal setting plays and thus deliberately include examples that variously associate privilege and global injustice with the historical past, the present, and the future. The decision to analyze not only films, but also a TV series and web series is, as mentioned earlier, related to my wanting to show and explore the range of media through which privilege, global injustice, and responsibility are represented in contemporary Scandinavia.<sup>19</sup> The four examples also demonstrate the influence of different individuals and institutions – including the role of individual filmmakers and their public personas (in the case of *1,000 Times Good Night* and *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*), and the impact of the strategies and mandates on the part of key media institutions in Scandinavia such as SVT (in the case of *Real Humans*) and *Aftenposten* (in the case of *Sweatshop*). By applying the concept of privilege not only to art films, but also to more popular cultural examples such as *Real Humans* and *Sweatshop*, I also build on the work of cultural theorist Devika Sharma. Discussing what she calls “the predicament of privilege” [“privilegiets problem”] (2013, 90; 2015, 46–7), Sharma analyzes *Radi-Aid*, a recent Norwegian campaign video that parodies humanitarian discourse (Sharma 2015), and a satirical sketch that aired on Danish TV as part of the program *Danmarksindsamlingen 2012* (Sharma 2013). As she argues,

we can hardly understand the affective-moral dimensions of globalization without exploring the cultural forms and social functions of the ugly, unprestigious and amoral feelings pertaining to being globally privileged: sentiments such as boredom, indifference, compassion fatigue, cynicism, bad conscience and sheer reluctance to engage emotionally in the ethical claims made on us. (2013, 89)

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<sup>18</sup> In her article, Dancus compares *Comrade Pedersen* with *12.08 East of Bucharest (A fost sau n-a fost?, 2006)*, directed by Romanian filmmaker Corneliu Porumboiu, and discusses how the two films use humor to explore Norway’s and Romania’s different experiences with communism, respectively.

<sup>19</sup> The particular PhD position in the “ScanGuilt” project to which I applied, was expected to study films in one form or another. When I began my research, I initially planned to analyze four feature films, but gradually chose to expand my examples to also include a TV series and a web series.

Drawing on Sianne Ngai's (2005) concept of "ugly feelings", Sharma defines the "predicament of privilege" as "a specific affective disposition" that is shaped on the one hand by ugly feelings and on the other by "humanitarianism's moral feelings", as anthropologist Didier Fassin (2012) calls them (e.g. pity, compassion, empathy) (Sharma 2013, 89–90). Sharma thus draws attention to how being privileged is characterized by ambivalence, and involves attempts on the part of privileged people, as collectives and individuals, to navigate both moral and amoral feelings. While several of Sharma's objects of study are made in Scandinavia, she analyzes them in light of "western" or "European" self-understandings and communities, as seen when she writes that the predicament of privilege "has to do with our western self-understanding as globally privileged" [har at gøre med vores vestlige selvforståelse som globalt privilegerede] (Sharma 2013, 90).<sup>20</sup> Sharma raises questions about categories such as "we, the privileged" and "the West", but her discussion of such categories does not lead her to an exploration of the Scandinavian context, including notions of Scandinavia as particularly privileged and humanitarian nations.<sup>21</sup>

When I, unlike Sharma, situate my four examples within a Scandinavian context, this allows me to discuss the extent to which my chosen examples relate to topical, socio-political issues in the Scandinavian context and associate being privileged to being a citizen of a Scandinavian nation. This association is sometimes established implicitly thorough, for instance, evoking the idea of Scandinavia as a part of the Global North and framing these regions of the world as safe, calm, or protected spaces, in contrast to countries in the Global South, which are shown as violent, chaotic, and dangerous. Other times, the association between being Scandinavian and privileged is explicitly articulated through dialogues, and connected to specific nation states within Scandinavia. To illustrate, during a pivotal scene in the reality TV-inspired series *Sweatshop*, one of the participants in the series, Anniken,

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<sup>20</sup> Elsewhere, Sharma also refers to how "we in Europe, and in the West more generally, represent Africa and Africans" [vi i Europa, og i Vesten mere generelt, fremstiller Afrika og afrikanere] (2015, 36; see also Sharma 2015, 43).

<sup>21</sup> More specifically, Sharma states in a footnote that when she uses formulations such as "we, the privileged" and "the underprivileged" ['os, de privilegerede' over for 'de underprivilegerede'], she does not mean to deny that "the West/Europe/Western Europe/Euro-America/the Global North" [Vesten/Europa/Vesteuropa/Euro-Amerika/det globale Nord] also contains class differences, excluded and underprivileged groups, and dominant majorities (Sharma 2015, 44n9). Nor does she mean to suggest that the Global South and the African continent lacks "welfare and geopolitical power" altogether [ligesom jeg heller ikke forestiller mig et globalt Syd eller et afrikansk kontinent uden velfærd eller geopolitisk magt] (Sharma 2015, 44n9). As Sharma writes, when she nevertheless refers to the West as "privileged", she does so in order to highlight the positions that humanitarianism constructs for different populations in the world. More specifically, she states, humanitarianism addresses – or, rather, "interpellat[es]" – "some populations as *subjects* of humanitarian action and other populations as *objects* of humanitarian intervention" [humanitærens interpellation af nogle befolkninger som subjekt for humanitære fordringer og af andre befolkninger som objekt for humanitære interventioner] (Sharma 2015, 44n9, my emphasis).

interviews a female Cambodian sweatshop worker. After the worker has relayed her traumatic life story, shaped by poverty and death, Anniken – a young, white teenager from Norway – reacts with shock and, while struggling to hold back her tears, says to the young Cambodian woman in English: “I know that you know that your situation is bad. But I don’t think you know how bad this really is. Because... in Norway, this is not okay at all.” The manner in which Anniken’s comment explicitly contrasts “what is okay” in Norway with the poverty and suffering in Cambodia characterizes a more general tendency in the examples I discuss – namely, the tendency to screen a white protagonist from the Global North as privileged, as a witness to suffering in the Global South, and as a voice of conscience that condemns injustice.

While my examples fit within a Scandinavian context, it is important to point out that Scandinavia is itself imagined as being a part of the Global North, Europe, “the West”, and similar categories. Furthermore, Scandinavia is itself a category that includes three distinct nations, each of which has diverse populations that are going to understand Scandinavia in different ways. I focus on Scandinavia in this study, but repeatedly make a point of zooming out and considering how Scandinavia is seen as a part of the Global North, as well as zooming in and acknowledging differences between the Scandinavian nations. My examples are, admittedly, by and large representations of the majority population in Scandinavia and thus do not shed much light on the demographic and racial diversity within contemporary Scandinavia. Nor do they generally do much to critique hegemonic ideas of Scandinavian people as being white and privileged (although there are some exceptions, as seen in the case of Andersson’s film). While taking more or less for granted that Scandinavians are white and privileged, the examples nevertheless grapple with crucial questions, including whether being privileged comes with a particular level of responsibility for alleviating structural injustice. As importantly, my chosen examples provide ample opportunity to discuss how film and other media may, on the one hand, reinforce dominant notions of what it means to be privileged. On the other hand, they may also be read against the grain and consequently serve as starting points for critical discussions on the meaning of privilege.

Before explaining my methodology, I want to underscore that a crucial premise for this study is that people may respond in numerous ways when confronted with their own advantaged positions and the suffering of less advantaged others. As philosopher Peter Singer writes in *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*, “for many people, the circle of concern for others stops at the boundaries of their own nation – if it even extends that far” (2002, 152–3). A so-called “cosmopolitan” outlook (Beck 2006) may not make much sense for those who see themselves as first and foremost responsible for their close ones (e.g. family members), not



for strangers in faraway countries. While the privileged characters in the examples I analyze generally seem to feel responsible or guilty for global injustice, one can just as easily imagine someone responding with disinterest, indifference, denial, or even anger (see Helland 2016). In short, I argue (with Sharma) that being aware that one is privileged when others are not may be an experience shaped by *ambivalence*, and by feelings that may be considered “ugly” in Ngai’s (2005) use of the term (see also Oxfeldt, forthcoming). Unlike Sharma, however, whose work can be situated within the growing body of research on affect, I do not analyze my chosen examples in light of affect theory. Whether certain affects create affective communities and thus include certain subjects while excluding others; whether national identities in particular are constructed through certain affects (e.g. guilt, pity, compassion); or whether audio-visual narratives “circulate” and/or trigger affects in their viewers are not my key questions – even if some of these issues do crop up in my analyses.<sup>22</sup> My intent in this study is instead to show how scholarship on privilege, responsibility, and global injustice in film and media studies, sociology, philosophy, and Scandinavian studies can shed light on tendencies in 21st-century Scandinavian film and media.

## **Methodology**

This study analyzes four audio-visual narratives through a combination of close analysis and socio-political and historical contextualization. In my close analyses, I examine the examples on the thematic and formal level, considering in particular how themes such as privilege, global injustice, and responsibility are represented, as well as the influence of specific genres, tropes, or narrative strategies. To explore the more perennial themes in the examples – including the topic of responsibility and guilt – I engage with the ideas of moral philosophers, political philosophers, and social psychologists with an interest in responsibility and guilt. Notably, when I discuss the issue of guilt, I do not speculate as to whether the four examples trigger or elicit guilt feelings in viewers. Following film scholar Catherine Wheatley’s (2009) distinction between “diegetic guilt” and “spectatorial guilt”, I focus primarily on “diegetic guilt”, namely the ways the films and series in this study thematize guilt on the diegetic level.<sup>23</sup> In situating my chosen examples within a broader context, I discuss how the examples

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<sup>22</sup> These questions have been explored by, among others, Sara Ahmed ([2004] 2014; 2010) and Lauren Berlant (2011). For discussions of whether cultural identities or communities in the Scandinavian region are linked to certain affects, see Dancus 2009; Fredriksen 2012, 2013; Myong and Bissenbakker 2016; Koivunen 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Wheatley refers to diegetic guilt and spectatorial guilt in her book-length study of Austrian director Michael Haneke’s films, and refer to “diegetic guilt” as the thematization of guilt in Haneke’s films (especially *Caché* [2005]). “Spectatorial guilt”, by contrast, refers to “the experience of the unpleasurable emotions of guilt or shame” on the part of the *spectators*, “as they realise that they are watching something (or want to watch

touch on socio-political issues associated with contemporary Scandinavia and 21st-century globalization in general, and draw on sociological studies in the process. I also use reviews and the general reception of the four examples to contextualize my examples, and show how they were interpreted by film reviewers and, in certain cases, the general public. I focus especially on the reception in Scandinavia, but generally include reviews also from other countries so as to convey how the four examples have been discussed across different contexts.<sup>24</sup>

While earlier studies on Scandinavian cinema tended to adopt a national framework, I analyze my four examples within a regional/Scandinavian framework.<sup>25</sup> I do this not only in order to discuss contemporary understandings of Scandinavia, but also because most of the examples are, at the level of funding and production, made with the help of both national and transnational financing and support. To illustrate, the pan-Scandinavian institutions Nordisk Film & TV Fond provided funding for three out of four examples in this study (*Real Humans*, *1,000 Times Good Night*, and *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*). In general, the audio-visual narratives I examine illustrate how Scandinavian film and TV are shaped by transnational networks of funding, distribution, and exhibition (see Elkington and Nestingen 2005a, 2; Redvall 2013, 53).<sup>26</sup> Moreover, adopting a regional, Scandinavian approach can also highlight differences and similarities between the Scandinavian countries. Indeed, while Scandinavia forms the broader framework for my analyses, each chapter touches on current debates, historical events, or socio-political issues that are specific to individual countries in the region.

When seen in light of film studies, my methodology is best described as a combination between a Cultural Studies approach and what film scholars David Bordwell (1996) and Noël

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something) that they ought not to be watching (or wanting to watch)” (2009, 154; for other analyses of Haneke’s films in light of guilt and/or ethics, see Celik 2010; Coulthard 2011; Hubner 2012; McGill 2013; Ballesteros 2015; Grønstad 2016). Similarly, in her article “Guilt, Empathy and the Ethical Potential of Children’s Literature”, scholar of children’s literature Maria Nikolajeva distinguishes between “the artistic representation of guilt as experienced by fictional characters and the cognitive engagement of the reader, that is, recognition of the character’s legal, ethical and affective guilt, as well as the reader’s own moral judgement” (2012, 2).

<sup>24</sup> When I consider the reception in countries outside of Scandinavia, I look first and foremost at the English-language press due to my own linguistic background.

<sup>25</sup> In adopting a regional, or transnational framework, I build on several anthologies on Scandinavian or Nordic cinema published in recent decades, including *Transnational Cinema in a Global North* (Nesting and Elkington 2005b), *Northern Constellations: New Readings in Nordic Cinema* (Thomson 2006), *Nordic Genre Film: Small Nation Film Cultures in the Global Marketplace* (Gustafsson and Kääpä 2015), and *A Companion to Nordic Cinema* (Hjort and Lindqvist 2016). For an overview of scholarship on Scandinavian cinema that adopts a national framework, see Elkington and Nestingen 2005a, 11–2.

<sup>26</sup> As Bondebjerg and Redvall (2011) argue, despite differences between Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, “the Scandinavian film and TV culture is one of the European regions with the strongest public service television tradition and with a cinema culture and cinema policy dominated by a culturally oriented ‘soft’ subsidy system” (19, my emphasis).

Carroll (1996a, 1996b) refer to as “middle-level research” and “piecemeal theorizing”, respectively. My decision to draw on Cultural Studies, and the implications of this choice, can be explained by briefly turning to an incisive chapter by Bordwell (1996), titled “Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory”. In this chapter, Bordwell (1996) covers recent developments in film studies and explains, among other things, the contributions that Cultural Studies has made to film studies.

As he suggests, Cultural Studies was part of a larger “culturalist” trend in film studies during 1970s, which represented an influential and promising alternative to earlier approaches in film studies, especially subject-position theory. “Culturalism probably came as something of a relief”, he writes, since it offered theories that were “generally less intricate and philosophically ambitious than its predecessor [subject-position theory]” (he also describes the former as more “user-friendly” and “highly teachable”) (11).<sup>27</sup> Moreover, culturalism and Cultural Studies were committed to social change and the possibility of reading against the grain: “The everyday activities of ordinary people” were seen as “complex negotiations with the forces they confront” (11). Finally, the willingness on the part of Cultural Studies to examine a variety of materials also made it an attractive approach (12). In this study, I draw on Cultural Studies because of the aspects that Bordwell mentions – namely, its commitment to being fairly accessible, to reading against the grain, and to studying a diversity of materials. By comparing examples from different media and across a range of genres, this study brings into view how certain themes (e.g. privilege, responsibility, global inequality) are explored through different narrative strategies and genres.

My methodology can also be understood as an example of “middle-level research” and “piecemeal theorizing”, two closely related approaches that Bordwell and Carroll proposed in the 1990s as correctives to what they saw as a problematic tendency in film studies at the time (Bordwell 1996; Carroll 1996a, 1996b). In particular, Bordwell and Carroll took issue with the use of Grand Theory, namely the tendency to frame discussions of cinema “within schemes which seek to describe or explain very broad features of society, history, language, and psyche” (Bordwell 1996, 3).<sup>28</sup> By contrast, Bordwell’s idea of “middle-level research”

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<sup>27</sup> Bordwell’s description of “culturalist theories, particularly those on offer from British thinkers,” is aptly illustrated by the work of Stuart Hall. One of Hall’s most notable attempts at making Cultural Studies accessible includes U203, “an interdisciplinary multimedia course broadcast by The Open University between 1982 and 1987”, when Hall was a Professor of Sociology at the university (Procter 2004, 32). As scholar of modern and contemporary literary studies James Procter notes, U203 was co-produced by Hall and a team of teachers, and had 6,000 students between 1982 and 1987 (2004, 32).

<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Carroll describes Grand Theory as “the attempt to ground a comprehensive perspective of film on certain foundational principles, whether those concern the ontology of the cinematic image or subject positioning” (1996a, xiv).

(1996) rejects any commitment to a Grand Theory (29) and is “problem- rather than doctrine-driven” (28).<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Carroll’s notion of “piecemeal theorizing” is based on the idea that “[f]ilm theorizing should be interdisciplinary” and “pursued without the expectation of discovering a unified theory, cinematic or otherwise” (1996b, 40). As Carroll suggests, film scholars should go to the disciplines where films take them:

Some questions about film may send the researcher toward economics, while others require a look into perceptual psychology. Other instances, sociology, political science, anthropology, communications theory, linguistics, artificial intelligence, biology, or narrative theory may provide the initial research tools which the film theorist requires. (1996b, 40)

As I understand Carroll and Bordwell, a film scholar should not force a film into a given discipline, or make a film fit a certain theory, but rather, go to theories and disciplines that fit the film and work from there. Like Carroll, who argues that “anxieties about the theoretical purity are impediments to theoretical discovery” (1996b, 40), I contend that drawing on different disciplines is valuable and important – in this case, because it allows me to situate the four examples within a broader social and political context.

Because of the potential pitfalls with adopting an interdisciplinary approach, I want to briefly return to Bordwell’s chapter and consider an important critique he raises against the use of a Cultural Studies approach to film studies. According to Bordwell (1996), culturalism was quickly assimilated into film studies not only because of its valuable contributions (11), but also because it continued earlier tendencies in film studies.<sup>30</sup> One of these continuations, what he calls “argument as bricolage”, is especially relevant to my study and the interdisciplinary approach I adopt (21). With “argument as bricolage”, Bordwell refers to the tendency to draw on an “eclectic” mix of theorists in general, but especially the tendency to selectively borrow from different theorists yet fail to mention that the theorists in question may have disagreed with one another – that they may even have developed ideas that they considered to be “incommensurable” (21). As Bordwell puts it: “The risk of selectively

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<sup>29</sup> To understand what constitutes middle-level research, it is helpful to consider some of the examples Bordwell provides. He mentions empirical studies of filmmakers, genres, and national cinemas – a “tradition [that] has been enriched by gay/lesbian, feminist, minority and postcolonial perspectives” (27) – as well as “revisionist film history” and studies on specific film industries and practices of film exhibition and censorship (27–9). To compare, my own project is a study not of national cinemas but of regional (Scandinavian) cinema and media and is similarly enriched by disciplines such as postcolonial and gender studies.

<sup>30</sup> Bordwell gives altogether eight examples of how Cultural Studies continues, rather than breaks with, earlier tendencies in film studies, and the “eclectic” use of theories is one such example (1996, 21–2).

borrowing pieces of theories is that the scholar may miss exactly those portions of one source that contradict the assumption of others” (1996, 22). What Bordwell points out here is an important methodological challenge, and closely related to what literary critic Frederick Crews refers to as *antidisciplinarity* (as opposed to *interdisciplinarity*) (1995, 52). As Crews points out, any given discipline has “its own tacit standards of inquiry and reporting”, including “intellectual habits” and “methodological rules” that those within that discipline observe, whether knowingly or not (1995, 52). A problem emerges, however, when people practice “*the duty-free importing of terms and concepts* from some source of broad wisdom about history or epistemology or the structure of the mind” (Crews 1995, 52, my emphasis). This is, in Crews’s words, not *interdisciplinarity* at all “but *antidisciplinarity*, a holiday from the methodological constraints that prevail in any given field” (1995, 52). While Crews refers specifically to poststructuralism in his discussion, his evocative metaphor of “duty-free *interdisciplinarity*” (see also Livingston 1995, 158) is helpful to consider also in a study such as mine, which actively draws on scholars working in different disciplines.

Like Crews and Bordwell, I am skeptical of the duty-free importing of concepts from theorists or disciplines that are principally at odds with one another, and therefore choose my concepts, theorists, and disciplines meticulously, avoiding to the best of my abilities the conflation of ideas that, in fact, contradict one another. Where there are disagreements – or rather, discussions and debates – I make a point of highlighting them, so that neither individual concepts nor thinkers are misrepresented, and so that the disagreements are given the attention they deserve. I also make a point of drawing on disciplines with which I am either familiar or in which I have colleagues who can provide advice.<sup>31</sup> In general, my interdisciplinary method can be situated at the intersection between the humanities and the social sciences – specifically, at the point where cultural studies, film and media studies, sociology, and philosophy meet.<sup>32</sup>

### **Theoretical Approaches to Privilege**

Given how central the concept of privilege is to this study, I want to establish what I mean by privilege, and discuss how existing research on privilege shapes my own study. In recent years, privilege as a concept has become increasingly influential within both public and

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<sup>31</sup> To give but one example, my use of sociological research on au pairs in Scandinavia is indebted to sociologist and gender studies scholar Elisabeth Stubberud, whose familiarity with the existing literature proved invaluable.

<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, a key figure in cultural sociology, states in an interview with sociologist Håkon Larsen (published in 2014) that scholars in sociology and those working in communication and media studies have much to learn from each other, but unfortunately still collaborate far too rarely (2014, 80–1).

academic discussions. The rising interest in privilege has been especially noticeable in the United States, where privilege has become a widely circulated concept, appearing in books, academic articles, news articles, blogs, social media, and more (McIntosh 2012, 194) and shaping debates on “white privilege” and “male privilege”. This suggests that privilege is indeed “a flexible and useful theoretical concept” that can “be used to analyze, illuminate, and challenge power relationships”, as the editors of the recent anthology *Geographies of Privilege* argue (Twine and Gardener 2013, 8). According to gender studies scholar and feminist Peggy McIntosh, an influential figure within the scholarship on privilege, knowledge of privilege (or “privilege systems”, as she calls them) is crucial to a person’s sense of agency and responsibility in the world:

The knowledge of privilege systems can allow a person to develop a sense of his or her own agency, and free her or him from the feeling that they bear the responsibility for all of their life circumstances in the world. Within the confines of a capitalistic and individualistic ethos, they have been taught to take upon themselves full credit and full blame for their life circumstance. The ethos denies that they function within systems of oppression and privilege. (2012, 203)<sup>33</sup>

As McIntosh suggests, being aware of privilege systems can enable people to appropriately assign responsibility and blame for the problems they encounter, and to challenge a “capitalistic and individualistic ethos” that fails to account for the fact that people exist “within systems of oppression and privilege” (2012, 203). At the same time, as more and more individuals and groups use the concept of privilege to make sense of the world, the concept also takes on different meanings.

In this study, I define privilege in a rather broad sense so as to illuminate how my chosen examples shed light on various aspects of privilege. My definition of privilege is based on four theoretical approaches to privilege: namely, privilege as something you are *part of*, something you *have*, something you *are*, and something you *negotiate*. I develop these four theoretical approaches to privilege based on recent research on privilege, including the anthologies *Geographies of Privilege* (Twine and Gardener 2013) and *Privilege: A Reader* (Kimmel and Ferber [2003] 2017b), and the work of individual scholars with an interest in privilege, such as McIntosh (1988, [1989] 1990, 2012), cultural sociologist Rachel Sherman

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<sup>33</sup> In their preface to *Privilege: A Reader*, sociologists Michael S. Kimmel and Abby L. Ferber similarly argue that understanding privilege is “one step in working to dismantle systems of inequality” ([2003] 2017, xii).

(2017), and education scholar Adam Howard (2008). Howard's 2008 book *Learning Privilege: Lessons of Power and Identity in Affluent Schooling* has been especially useful for my four-part definition of privilege, thanks to Howard's literature review of and contribution to existing research on privilege (2008, 15–33).

Existing scholarship on privilege is, in Howard's (2008) summary, generally focused on privilege as “the advantages that some individuals have over others, which have been granted to them not because of what they have done or not done, but because of the social category (or categories) to which they belong” (21).<sup>34</sup> He traces the study of privilege back to McIntosh and her pivotal articles from 1988 and 1989 on white and male privilege. As Howard notes, McIntosh's image of privilege as an “invisible knapsack” became a way to argue that, in order to understand privilege, we need to think differently about inequality, and focus not only on those who suffer the consequences of subordination or oppression, but also those who benefit, so to say, from inequality (22). “McIntosh challenges the privileged to ‘open their invisible knapsacks,’ which contain all of the benefits that come to them from their social, cultural, and economic positionality”, Howard adds (22). My understanding of privilege as not only something you are part of and have, but also as something you *are* and *negotiate* is based on Howard's critique of existing research of privilege. As he argues, many scholars (whom he describes as “the ‘first generation’ scholars”) have so far “constructed *commodified* notions of privilege” – that is, they have understood privilege “extrinsically, as something individuals *have* or *possess* (that is, as something that can fit into a ‘knapsack’ – invisible or otherwise) or something they *experience*” (23, my emphasis).<sup>35</sup> While he acknowledges that this “commodified” conception of privilege has its merits, Howard proposes an alternative conception of privilege, which considers “*privilege as identity* – as a particular sense of self-understanding” (2008, 23). This entails seeing privilege as “something more intrinsic, as something that reveals who [individuals] *are* or who they have *become* in a fundamental sense”, he writes (23, my emphasis).

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<sup>34</sup> Howard cites the following as examples: Goodman 2001, R. Jensen 2005, Johnson 2001, Kimmel and Ferber 2003 (see Kimmel and Ferber [2003] 2017), Rothenberg 2002, and Wise 2005 (Howard 2008, 21). In the glossary section of *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, privilege is defined as: “Right or advantage, often unwritten, conferred on some people but not others, usually without examination or good reason” (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 182).

<sup>35</sup> While Howard does not criticize McIntosh in particular, he does refer specifically to McIntosh's “knapsack” metaphor and thus implies that her metaphor exemplifies a commodified conception of privilege. McIntosh's legacy is also evident in the notion that privileges are typically invisible to those who have them. As Twine and Gardener suggest, McIntosh's work popularized a conception of privilege as “a very specific kind of power, one that is often rendered invisible, at least to those who benefit from it” (2013, 9).

My understanding of privilege as something you are and negotiate is directly related to Howard's notion of privilege as identity. Like Howard, I find it useful to think of privilege as "an identity (or aspect of an identity)" and "a lens through which an individual understands self and self in relation to others" (2008, 23). This conceptualization of privilege shifts the focus "from identifying *what* privilege is to exploring *how* privilege is produced and reproduced" (2008, 23) in everyday life through individuals' use of specific ideologies and ideological frames (Howard 2008, 30). Following Howard, I argue that to think of privilege as identity is not to deny or diminish the importance of advantages that some have over others. Rather, it is a way to highlight "the ways that individuals actively construct privilege" through particular "ways of knowing and doing" (2008, 31). As I see it, to think of oneself as privileged and as belonging to a privileged group can be a significant dimension of a person's sense of self, shaping how they see their own relation to others and construct their identities on a daily basis. However, in contrast to Howard, who uses ethnographic methods to study how privilege is produced and reproduced in everyday life (particularly in elite schools), I treat audio-visual narratives as my starting point, and examine how they produce and reproduce ideas about privilege. Such ideas include notions of what privilege is, who the privileged are, and what constitutes "right" and "wrong" ways of being privileged.

Privilege is a particularly useful concept for the study of film and media given the close relationship between privilege and power as well as ideology. While Howard does not analyze films in his study, he notes in his introduction that he uses films such as *Birth of a Nation* and *Gone with the Wind* in his own teaching practice, to discuss with students "how films have contributed to the perpetuation of a racist understanding of history" (2008, 6). If films from the past can help students "locate the political, economic, and social forces at work in constructing understandings of history" (Howard 2008, 6), then contemporary films can, as I see it, be used to discuss how political, economic, and social forces are at work in our understanding of the present. When contemporary films are partially set in or refer to the historical past, these films also construct understandings of history, and the relationship between systems of privilege and oppression in the historical past and those in the present. In arguing that the concept of privilege contributes to the study of film and media and vice versa, I also build on a point Rachel Sherman raises in her article "Conflicted Cultivation: Parenting, Privilege, and Moral Worth in Wealthy New York Families" (2017a). Like Howard, Sherman, a cultural sociologist, interviews people and does not analyze audio-visual narratives (or representations) like I do. Yet she specifically mentions popular culture in the concluding remarks of her article, pointing out that popular culture helps reinforce widespread



understandings of wealth, privilege, and inequality. According to Sherman (2017a), her respondents' distinctions between the "deserving rich" and the "undeserving rich" – along with their general idea of "legitimate entitlement" – are widespread, at least in the United States (29). "We can see these distinctions in popular culture," she adds, ". . . in which 'bad' rich people are selfish, rude, and lazy, while 'good' rich people are down-to-earth and nice to waiters and others who work for them" (29). To Sherman, such distinctions are significant, because they ultimately "legitimate inequality and forestall a distributional critique, by suggesting that some people (those who behave appropriately) are genuinely entitled, while others are not" (29).<sup>36</sup> While she only mentions popular culture in brief, I consider Sherman's remark on popular culture (2017a, 29) as an invitation to examine how popular culture constructs ideas about privilege.<sup>37</sup> An important starting point for my study is that ideologies and values specific to the Scandinavian countries may influence how the four audio-visual narratives in question represent privilege, privileged people, and the ways that privileged people inhabit their privileged positions. As Sherman notes, "how wealthy people think and feel about their . . . privilege" may vary from nation to nation (2017a, 30). My own study takes these variations into account by generally analyzing my examples within a Scandinavian framework, and modifying that framework so as to include national differences where relevant.

While emphasizing the Scandinavian context, I draw on scholars working on privilege in other contexts and argue that there is much to be gained from engaging with research on privilege in, for instance, the United States. Debates on privilege in the United States are borne out of the on-going ramifications of a distinct history of slavery and institutionalized racism, but research on privilege in the United States can nevertheless help deepen the understanding of privilege also in the Scandinavian countries, just as discussions on privilege in the Scandinavian context can shed light on the workings of privilege elsewhere.

## Contributions

In sum, this study contributes to Scandinavian studies, film and media studies, and the emerging scholarship on privilege. Firstly, it is a work of cultural analysis of contemporary

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<sup>36</sup> As Sherman puts it in her book *Uneasy Street: The Anxieties of Affluence* (2017b): "ideas about what it means to be a good person with wealth matter . . . because they draw on and thus illuminate broadly held notions of what it means to be *legitimately* privileged. . . . These ways of thinking about legitimacy and moral worth resonate, I contend, because they constitute 'common sense.' . . . The fact that some people have much more than others comes to be taken for granted as long as those who benefit inhabit their privilege appropriately." (26)

<sup>37</sup> In *Uneasy Street*, Sherman repeatedly comes back to media representations of wealthy people (see for instance 2017b, 9, 13, 25, 254).

Scandinavian culture and society. By bringing together a range of audio-visual narratives from 21st-century Scandinavian and discussing their shared thematic focus on global injustice, responsibility, and privilege, the study relates tendencies in Scandinavian cultural production to social and political issues in the region. In doing so, the study takes the pulse of a small area in the world at a moment in history when globalization and its impact are increasingly felt, but experienced in different ways by different populations. The questions explored in my four examples and analyses – questions that pertain to privilege and responsibility in a globalized world – are potent issues not only in the Scandinavian context, but also elsewhere.

The study also participates in a longer discussion within film and media studies regarding the relationship between ideology, discourse, and politics, on the one hand, and film and media, on the other. While film and media scholars in the past may not have referred to privilege *per se*, earlier research on film and media's relationship to power and ideology, and social categories such as class, gender, race, and sexuality, have laid the ground for my own analyses. This study contributes to film and media studies by showing that the concept of privilege can deepen our understanding of films and other audio-visual narratives, especially but not only those that tackle themes such as structural injustice.

Finally, my study also adds to the emerging scholarship on privilege, or what Peggy McIntosh refers to as “the growing academic field of Privilege Studies” (2012, 194). The scholarship on privilege has increased in recent years, thanks to the work of scholars in areas ranging from critical race theory, whiteness studies, gender studies, sociology, education studies, and geography. My own contribution to privilege studies is to synthesize recent research on privilege and apply it to representations of privilege in contemporary Scandinavian film and media, showing not only how the concept of privilege can shed light on contemporary Scandinavia and cultural productions within that region. In addition, the study demonstrates how contemporary Scandinavian film and media can inspire discussions on privilege and the ways that notions of privilege are produced, reproduced, and challenged through film and media.

### **Chapter Outlines**

The study is structured around my four examples, which I analyze in individual chapters and discuss in light of relevant concepts and theories drawn from film and media studies, postcolonial studies, and gender studies (Chapters 3–6). Since each of these analytical chapters engage with their own set of concepts, I introduce these concepts in the respective chapters. By contrast, the broader theoretical framework for the study as a whole is presented

in Chapter 2. Here, I define and establish my key concepts (besides privilege) – namely, global injustice, responsibility, and guilt. In doing so, I draw on scholars from disciplines such as political science, philosophy, psychology and social psychology who have an interest in globalization (e.g. Arjun Appadurai, Zygmunt Bauman, and Manfred B. Steger), responsibility (e.g. Iris Marion Young, and J.R. Lucas), and guilt (e.g. Herant Katchadourian, Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber, Martin L. Hoffman).

The order of the next four chapters follows two trajectories: Firstly, while Chapters 3–4 focus on examples that are set in the contemporary era and situate injustice and privilege in the present (*1,000 Times Good Night* and *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*), Chapters 5–6 focus on examples that are partly or entirely set in the historical past (*A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*) or the future (*Real Humans*). Secondly, my analyses also move from more factual to fictional examples: *Sweatshop* in Chapter 3 draws on factual TV genres, whereas Chapters 4–6 examine two fiction films (*1,000 Times Good Night*, and *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*) and a fictional TV series (*Real Humans*). In the conclusion, Chapter 7, I summarize my analyses, discuss my key findings, and reflect on the implications of this study for Scandinavian studies, film and media studies, and privilege studies. I also discuss the pay-offs and drawbacks with my own approach, and point out avenues for future research.

## Chapter 2

### **Theoretical Backdrop:**

### **Global Injustice, Responsibility, and Guilt**

My analyses in this study focus in particular on the themes of privilege, global injustice, and responsibility. I introduced the concept of privilege in the previous chapter and connected it to the context of contemporary Scandinavia. This chapter establishes what I mean by global injustice and responsibility (as well as the closely related concept of guilt), and sheds light on the ways in which global injustice, responsibility, guilt, and privilege are related. While the purpose of this chapter is to provide the theoretical backdrop for my study, i.e. to introduce theoretical concepts that recur throughout my analyses, the following pages also provide a backdrop in a second sense – namely, by shedding further light on what I have so far referred to as 21st-century globalization.<sup>38</sup> Thus, while the previous chapter established Scandinavia as a particularly fruitful context for thinking about global injustice, privilege, and responsibility, this chapter zooms out further and shows how 21st-century globalization seems to make the following question at once more pressing and more difficult to answer: Who is responsible for global injustice, and for alleviating that injustice?

A key point in this chapter is that globalization is not reducible to its economic, social, and political dimensions: Globalization also has a cultural dimension and can influence people's sense of self and relationship to others, especially distant others. To elaborate on this point, I open this chapter with a discussion on the relationship between globalization and identity. I then go on to explore global injustice, responsibility, and guilt. During the course of my discussion, I draw on globalization theorists in various disciplines (e.g. Zygmunt Bauman, Arjun Appadurai, and Manfred B. Steger), sociologists (e.g. Johan Galtung, Dag Østerberg), philosophers (e.g. Iris Marion Young, J.R. Lucas, Karl Jaspers, Friedrich Nietzsche, Giorgio Agamben), as well as psychologists and social psychologists (e.g. Herant Katchadourian, Nyla R. Branscombe and Bertjan Doosje).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> This chapter does not introduce theories that are specific to film and media representations, such as genre theory. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, since my four examples differ significantly in terms of medium and use of genre, I introduce relevant film- and media-specific theories during my analyses in the next four chapters rather than discussing them here.

<sup>39</sup> Guilt could obviously also be discussed in relation to theories on emotions, especially Sara Ahmed's writings on the cultural politics of emotions ([2004] 2014). In this study, I find it more fruitful to conceptualize guilt in

While my project is not a philosophical or psychological study on responsibility or guilt per se, I draw on theorists in philosophy and psychology in particular so as to show the multi-faceted meaning of responsibility and guilt. On the one hand, these two concepts are central to how people think and talk about wrong-doings and instances of injustice. On the other hand, their meanings are unstable and complicated, especially when applied to instances in which structural processes, rather than the actions of one individual, have caused harm in people's lives. Such instances, which political philosopher Iris Marion Young refers to as "structural injustice", can make it exceptionally difficult to distribute responsibility and guilt for the harm caused. Yet, these difficulties are a fundamental part of living in a globalized world.

### **Imagining the Self in an Age of Globalization**

The four examples I examine in this study are made against the backdrop of 21st-century globalization. Thematically, they deal with the impact of globalization on people's self-understanding in the contemporary world. While the meaning of the term "globalization" is contested, it is generally used to describe the increasing flow of goods, people, and ideas across national borders, as when sociologist George Ritzer suggests the following composite definition of globalization in *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization*: "Globalization is an accelerating set of processes involving flows that encompass ever-greater numbers of the world's spaces and that lead to increasing integration and interconnectivity among those spaces" (2007, 1). While the impact of globalization is, as the name suggests, felt around the world, globalization is also understood as an uneven process that is experienced differently by different populations. To illustrate, in *Globalization: The Human Consequences*, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman notes: "What appears as globalization for some means localization for others; signaling a new freedom for some, upon many others it descends as an uninvited and cruel fate" (1998, 2). According to Bauman, globalization is characterized by "business, finance, trace and information flow", but is also interconnected with a closely related process – that is, "a 'localizing', space-fixing process" (1998, 2). Taken together, he writes, these two processes "sharply differentiate the existential conditions of whole populations and of various segments of each one of the populations" (1998, 2).

Another key globalization theorist, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, makes a similar point about globalization in his book *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of*

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light of philosophy and sociology, but want to add that I see Ahmed's work on emotions as a useful contribution to the ways that emotions have been conceptualized in philosophy and sociology.

*Anger* (2006). On the one hand, he describes globalization as “the name of a new industrial revolution (driven by powerful information and communication technologies) which has barely begun” (35). On the other, he follows up this statement by illustrating how differently globalization can be understood and experienced:

In the United States and in the ten or so most wealthy countries of the world, globalization is certainly a positive buzzword for corporate elites and their political allies. But for migrants, people of color, and other marginals (the so-called South in the North), it is a source of worry about inclusion, jobs, and deeper marginalization. . . . In the remaining countries of the world, the underdeveloped and the truly destitute ones, there is a double anxiety: fear of inclusion, on draconian terms, and fear of exclusion, for this seems like exclusion from history itself. (35)

While Appadurai and Bauman are only two of numerous scholars who have theorized globalization and its varying consequences,<sup>40</sup> their view of globalization as a differentiated process is relevant to the four examples I examine, since the latter convey an idea of the contemporary world as divided – into the Global North and the Global South, into a privileged “us” and an underprivileged “them”.

My understanding of globalization focuses on the ways that it not only has uneven economic and political consequences, but also influences in different ways people’s sense of identity, community, and responsibility. As in the case of Appadurai and Bauman, many of the theorists who have contributed to the discussion on identity and identity formation in the contemporary era have been concerned with modernity (e.g. Taylor 1989; Giddens 1991; Appadurai 1996; Beck 1999), or modernities in the plural (Taylor 2004). My own study is informed by these works, even if I refer to globalization rather than modernity or related terms such as Bauman’s idea of “liquid modernity” (1999). Particularly useful for thinking about the impact of globalization on people’s self-understanding is the concept of “the global imaginary”, as defined by political scientist Manfred B. Steger (2008). Steger uses this term to discuss political ideologies in the contemporary era and examine how these ideologies connect to an overarching “social imaginary” (6).<sup>41</sup> The concept of the global imaginary

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<sup>40</sup> For an instructive overview of debates concerning globalization, see Steger 2017. For the debate concerning the impact of globalization on work and working conditions in particular, see Vallas 2012, 144–56.

<sup>41</sup> Steger’s idea of the global imaginary builds on what philosopher Charles Taylor calls “the social imaginary”, namely, “that common understanding which makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy” (Taylor 2007 172, cited in Steger 2008, 1). Taylor develops the concept of the social imaginary in

draws particular attention to the ways that globalization leads to an “intensifying ‘subjective’ recognition of a shrinking world” (12).<sup>42</sup> Globalization, according to Steger, is not reducible to flows of capital, people, and goods across national borders, but also results in “new identities” and “intensifying relations” (12). As he puts it:

Globalization involves both the macrostructures of community and the microstructures of personhood. It extends deep into the core of the self and its dispositions, facilitating the creation of *new identities* nurtured by the *intensifying relations* between the individual and the globe. (Steger 2008, 12)

To Steger, globalization is characterized by a destabilization of the national (12) and represents a rupture with the past, but this does not render the nation-state irrelevant. Referring to other globalization theorists, such as sociologist Saskia Sassen (2006, 402, cited in Steger 2008, 12), Steger sees a destabilization of the national as instead going “hand in hand with the spotty and uneven superimposition of the global” and argues firmly against “the familiar theme of the death of the nation-state” (2008, 14). Citing international studies scholar Ulf Hedetoft and film scholar Mette Hjort’s introduction to *The Postnational Self: Belonging and Identity*, Steger adds:

“Globality”—for want of a better term—spells significant changes in the cultural landscapes of belonging, not because it *supplants the nation-state* . . . but because it changes the contexts (politically, culturally, and geographically) for them, situates national identity and belonging differently, and superimposes itself on “nationality” as a novel frame of reference, values, and consciousness, primarily for the globalized elites, but increasingly for “ordinary citizens” as well. (Hedetoft and Hjort 2002, xv, cited in Steger 2008, 14, my emphasis)

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*Modern Social Imaginaries* (2004), and chapter 4 of *A Secular Age* (2007). Besides Taylor, Steger also draws on the work of Benedict Anderson, Pierre Bourdieu, and Appadurai, specifically in his use of the two concepts the national and global imaginary (Steger 2008, 251n17).

<sup>42</sup> Steger (2008) dates this shift in consciousness to the period following World War II, when “new ideas, theories, and practices produced in the public consciousness a . . . sense of rupture with the past” (10). New technologies “facilitated the speed and intensity with which these ideas and practices infiltrated the national imaginary” and enabled “images, people, and materials” to circulate more freely across national boundaries (10). This led, in Steger’s words, to a “new sense of ‘the global’ that erupted within and onto the national” and “began to undermine the normality and self-contained coziness of the modern nation-state – especially deeply engrained notions of community tied to a sovereign and clearly demarcated territory containing relatively homogenous populations” (10–1).

For the purposes of my discussion, the global imaginary is a helpful concept: It highlights the role of the imagination and the diversity of meanings and values with which globalization is endowed,<sup>43</sup> but simultaneously emphasizing the persisting influence of the national. In this study, I suggest that a regional (Scandinavian) context may also inform how globalization is imagined, experienced, and represented.

In sum, my working definition of globalization takes into account how the experience of globalization may be variously shaped by people's sense of identity and belonging, their access to resources and rights, and their ability to navigate the political, social, cultural, and geographical contexts in which they are embedded. This understanding of globalization has implications for my analyses: While I analyze the four examples as Scandinavian cultural productions that represent the consequences of globalization, I do not assume that they are representative of how globalization is understood by every resident in Scandinavia and/or everyone who identifies as Scandinavian. For that, the understanding and experience of globalization is too diverse.

### **Global Injustice and Responsibility**

When I refer to “global injustice” in this study, I mean structural injustice on a global scale, i.e. unjust social processes that are not contained within the borders of one nation. My understanding of structural injustice draws especially on *Responsibility for Justice* (2011), a posthumously published book by political philosopher and feminist Iris Marion Young. In *Responsibility for Justice*, Young (2011) provides an insightful discussion on structural injustice and how it challenges our ideas of guilt and responsibility. To Young, structural injustice is a distinct form of moral wrong that stands apart from “wrongs traceable to individual actions or policies” (44). Unlike forms of harm that come about “through individual interaction” or that are “attributable to the specific actions and policies of states or other powerful institutions” (45), structural injustice “occurs as a consequence of many individuals and institutions acting to pursue their particular goals and interests, for the most part within the limits of accepted rules and norms” (52). Although structural injustice tends to occur within the boundaries of the law, it can nevertheless cause harm and limit the capacities of other people. As Young (2011) points out, structural injustice exists

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<sup>43</sup> In *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*, Steger argues that we are seeing a competition between three types of globalism, whereby globalisms refer to “ideologies that endow the concept of globalization with particular values and meanings” (2017, 99). These three globalisms include what he calls market globalism, justice globalism, and jihadist globalism (98–128).



when social processes put large groups of persons under systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities, at the same time that these processes enable others to dominate or to have a wide range of opportunities for developing and exercising capacities available to them.  
(52)

Young's definition of structural injustice is helpful for my study for at least two reasons. Firstly, it highlights how individuals or institutions that contribute to structural injustice often act within "the limits of accepted rules and norms" (Young 2011, 52). Secondly, it acknowledges that structural injustice consists of structural processes that will enable some to exercise their capacities, while severely limiting the capacities of others.

Structural injustice in Young's use of the term is comparable to "structural violence", as defined by Norwegian sociologist and founder of peace and conflict studies Johan Galtung. This concept, coined in 1964, refers to instances when the subject of violence is "a structure at work, churning out harm, causing basic human needs deficits" (Galtung 2013, 35).<sup>44</sup> Galtung contrasts structural violence with "direct violence" – namely, instances when the subject of violence is an agent who intends to cause harm (2013, 35). In *Sosiologiens nøkkelbegreper*, sociologist Dag Østerberg explains structural violence by using Norway as an example: "Norwegian ways of being and interacting are, in an international context, not particularly violent" [Norsk væremåte og omgangsform er i internasjonal sammenheng, lite voldelig] (2016, 14). Yet, he adds,

that does not inhibit *the world economy* from being structured in such a way that *our wealth partly rests on other societies' severe poverty*, which brings about high levels of child mortality and early mortality rate in general. Through our highly peaceful consumption we take part in what is for many a lethal economy.  
(2016, 14, my emphasis)

[det forhindrer ikke at verdensøkonomien er slik strukturert at vår rikdom dels beror på andre samfunns dype fattigdom, som medfører høy barnedødelighet og tidlig død for øvrig. Gjennom vårt høyst fredelige forbruk er vi delaktig i en for mange andre dødbringende økonomi.]

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<sup>44</sup> Elaborating on structural violence, Galtung (2013) writes that exploitation is central to structural violence: "The archetypical violent structure has exploitation as a centre-piece, meaning that some, the topdogs, get much more (here measured in needs currency) out of the interaction in the structure than others, the underdogs" (37).

In referring to Norway's relationship to "the world economy", Østerberg demonstrates how structural violence as a concept can help articulate challenges associated with globalization. Galtung's concept of structural violence is, like Young's idea of structural injustice, especially useful for thinking about global injustice in the 21st century, since both draw attention to social structures on a global scale. Notably, both also underscore that acting "within the limits of accepted rules and norms" (Young 2011, 52) and consuming in seemingly "peaceful" ways (Østerberg 2016, 14) can lead to injustice and violence. Business as usual, for want of a better phrase, can have violent consequences.<sup>45</sup>

In contrast to Østerberg, who refers to "the world economy", Young (2011) uses the global apparel industry in particular as an extended example of "structural social processes that are global in scope and condition" (125). As she writes in *Responsibility for Justice*, "it seems helpful to focus on one system at a time, rather than on global capitalism in general, so that actors can be identified along with their actions and how they might be altered" (133). Sweatshop factories aptly illustrate how instances in which "structural injustice . . . involves relationships across the world" (127) can make it overwhelmingly difficult to assign responsibility or blame.<sup>46</sup> Working conditions in sweatshop factories often violate human rights (127), yet the very "structure of the global apparel industry diffuses responsibility" for those violations (129). Young explains the difficulty of applying responsibility by referring to usual practices of assigning responsibility and showing how structural injustice challenges these practices: "To judge a circumstance unjust," she writes, "implies that we understand it at least as humanly caused, and entails the claim that something should be done to rectify it" – yet, "when the injustice is *structural*, there is no clear culprit to blame and therefore no agent clearly liable for rectification" (95, my emphasis). Structural injustice thus throws into question "[p]ractices of assigning responsibility in law and everyday moral life", which "first

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<sup>45</sup> Philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2008) makes a similar point in *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, when he distinguishes between subjective, symbolic, and systemic violence. Systemic violence, Žižek writes, involves "the violence inherent in a system" (9), including the "often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of economic and political systems" (1). His definition of systemic violence thus closely resembles that of Galtung. Žižek also makes the important point that while some people's comfortable lives may appear to be unaffected by systemic violence, they may in fact rest on it (2008, 9). To compare, "symbolic violence", as Žižek defines it, is "embodied in language and its forms" (2008, 1). It thus overlaps with Galtung's idea of cultural violence – namely, "aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence—exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics)—that can be used to justify, legitimize direct or structural violence" (Galtung 2013, 38). Galtung does not refer specifically to film, TV, or popular culture, but the latter can be understood as aspects of cultural violence.

<sup>46</sup> "If I share responsibility with many others for every social injustice that results from structural processes to which I contribute by my actions, then this makes me responsible in relation to a great deal," Young writes, and adds: "That is a paralyzing thought. . . . If the scope of this responsibility is not restricted by location or nation, moreover, then its extent becomes even more overwhelming" (2011, 123). For Young, the solution to this challenge is what she calls a "social connection model of responsibility" (for more on this model, see Young 2011, 95–122).

try to locate ‘who dunnit’; for a person to be held responsible for a harm, we must be able to say that he or she caused it” (95). Put differently, while we usually try to draw a linear connection between an unjust deed and a doer, structural injustice makes this connection hard to establish (Young 2011, 96).

Nevertheless, structural injustice does not render the actions of individuals irrelevant or inconsequential. What I do as an individual may contribute to structural injustice, even if that contribution is not direct or easy to trace back to me. Young suggests that we think of individuals’ actions as contributing “indirectly, collectively, and cumulatively”, through “the production of structural constraints on the actions of many and privileged opportunities for some” (2011, 96). Indeed, a central argument in *Responsibility for Justice* is that responsibility for remedying or alleviating structural injustice is shared by “all those agents who contribute to the structural processes that produce injustice” (Young 2011, 142).<sup>47</sup> This does not mean that everyone is responsible in the same way or to the same extent. As Young notes, agents – by which she includes individuals as well as institutions – have varying kinds and degrees of responsibility, depending on their social position (2011, 144). To make it easier for agents to reflect on their own and others’ responsibility, Young proposes four “parameters of reasoning” that can be taken into account – that is, power, privilege, interest, and collective ability (2011, 124). Young’s definition of privilege is brief, but it is worth noting that she separates power from privilege, and suggests that “[p]ersons and institutions that are relatively privileged within structural processes have greater responsibilities than others to take actions to undermine injustice” (2011, 145). She also describes the privileged as those that are “beneficiaries” within unjust structural processes and can “change their habits or make extra efforts without suffering serious deprivation” (2011, 145).<sup>48</sup> While brief, Young’s description of privilege is still helpful because it echoes a more general idea that being privileged comes with responsibilities. In his book *Responsibility*, philosopher J.R. Lucas writes of responsibility in general: “Some responsibilities arise simply from having a position of special power or influence – we ascribe *greater* responsibility to the well-educated and the rich” (1995 54, my emphasis). While Lucas refers to “power and influence”, not

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<sup>47</sup> According to Young, “[a]n agent’s responsibility for justice is *not restricted to those close by or to those in the same nation-state* as oneself, if one participates in social structural processes that connect one to others far away and outside those jurisdictions. In the contemporary globalized economic system, retailers and consumers of products purchased in one country are often connected to workers in other countries who make those products. These connections bring *obligations of justice*” (2011, 142–3, my emphasis).

<sup>48</sup> Given Young’s short definition of privilege, I turn to scholars within the emerging field of privilege studies, as discussed in Chapter 1, in order to further specify what I mean by privilege in this study. Moreover, while Young applies privilege to both individuals and institutions, I use the term to describe individuals only (preferring to use the terms power, or interest, when describing institutions).

privilege, the examples he uses – the well-educated and the rich – can be understood as people who are privileged or benefit from privilege.

### **Global Injustice and Guilt**

Perhaps even more so than responsibility, guilt is a concept that is frequently brought up in discussions on privilege and on the role of the privileged in an unjust society or world. The concept of guilt is often used in debates on structural injustice, yet pairing guilt and structural injustice together also raises critical questions about agency and the distinction between individuals and collectives. A discussion of guilt is necessary not only because guilt and responsibility are closely related concepts, but also because the four examples I examine explore the emotional responses and moral dilemmas that their protagonists experience when confronted with global injustice. Some of the narratives foreground guilt feelings and deal with issues that are linked to guilt, such as forgiveness or apology. Thus, thinking of the examples in light of guilt can help illuminate some of the issues they address, and this calls for a clarification of what the term “guilt” means.

An exploration of guilt quickly reveals that it is a capacious concept: It contains moral, emotional, as well as legal dimensions; and it includes individual as well as collective notions of guilt. In English, the word “guilt” has a two-fold meaning, describing the state of *being guilty* and the state of *feeling guilty*.<sup>49</sup> The former is closely connected to legal culpability and notions of responsibility, whereas the latter is linked to emotions and what in everyday speech is referred to as a “bad conscience”. In his book *Guilt: The Bite of Conscience*, psychologist Herant Katchadourian (2010) sums up these two states in the following manner:

The first state is the state of *being* guilty of a transgression; it entails legal or moral *culpability* in an *objective*, factual sense. The second is the *subjective* emotion of *feeling* guilty that follows committing a moral offense. It is the painful internal tension due to the awareness of having done wrong, or having failed to carry out a moral obligation. (2010, 21)

To compare, in Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish, the English word “guilt” translates into two separate words: *skyldfølelse/skuldfølelse* and *skyld/skuld*. While *skyldfølelse/skuldfølelse*

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<sup>49</sup> This dual meaning of the word “guilt” is evident in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which provides two definitions of guilt: (1) “the fact of having committed a specified or implied offence or crime”, and (2) “a feeling of having committed wrong or failed in an obligation” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “guilt (n.),” accessed November 11, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/guilt>).

refers to “guilt feeling” (similar to “having a bad conscience”), *skyld/skuld* has to do not only with guilt and blame, but also with the state of being in debt.<sup>50</sup> Debt is also an element in the two words that describe guilt in the German language – *Schuld* and *Schulden* – which are, I should note, etymologically linked to *skyld/skuld* in the Scandinavian languages. Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche ([1887] 2000), in the second essay of *The Genealogy of Morals* (titled “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like”), points out that the German words for guilt and debt, *Schuld* and *Schulden*, are etymologically related (498). For Nietzsche, this provides a clue to his question: “. . . how did . . . the consciousness of guilt, the ‘bad conscience,’ come into the world?” (498). As he sees it, the etymological connection between guilt and debt in the German language suggests that the “the major moral concept *Schuld* [guilt] has its origins in the very material concept *Schulden* [debts]” (498–9), and that the “moral conceptual world of ‘guilt,’ ‘conscience,’ ‘duty,’ ‘sacredness of duty,’ has its origin” in “the sphere of legal obligations” (501).<sup>51</sup> While Nietzsche uses the relation between *Schuld* and *Schulden* to develop a theory on past human societies and the historical role of violence as a means of balancing debts or guilt, I point out the distinction between *skyldfølelse/skulfølelse* and *skyld/skuld* in the Scandinavian languages not in order to make a large claim about the workings of Scandinavian societies, but in order to show associations linked to the concept of guilt.

At this point, it is useful to clarify two points. Firstly, while exploring the relationship between guilt and Scandinavian cultural productions, I do not make claims about Scandinavian societies as a whole. The conclusions I draw are based on what I see in my four examples and pertain to how responsibility, guilt, and globalization are tackled on a *representational* level. While I connect these representations to a broader social context, I do not intend to make sweeping statements about how Scandinavians in general think or feel, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. This study also distances itself from an influential thesis in

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<sup>50</sup> One of the filmmakers analyzed in this study, Swedish director Roy Andersson, has been described as playing with this two-fold meaning of “skuld” in his films. As Ursula Lindqvist writes of Andersson’s film from 2000, *Songs from the Second Floor*, one of the scenes in the film depicts two characters whose relationship is shaped by both personal guilt (*skuld*) and financial debt (*skuld*) (Lindqvist 2016a, 138).

<sup>51</sup> It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss what else Nietzsche makes of this relationship between guilt and debts, but it is worth mentioning that he uses it to construct a narrative about the role of violence in the past. As he ([1887] 2000) writes, “To inspire trust in his promise to repay, . . . the debtor made a contract with the creditor and pledged that if he should fail to repay he would substitute something else that he ‘possessed,’ something he had control over; for example, his body, his wife, his freedom, or even his life” (500). Meanwhile, “the creditor could inflict every kind of indignity and torture upon the body of the debtor; for example, cut from it as much as seemed commensurate with the size of the debt” (500). Interestingly, Nietzsche’s observation recently gained interest, when British Labour politician Stuart Holland wrote an article in which he connected Germany’s response to the Euro zone crisis to the German word *Schuld*, notably citing Nietzsche (Holland 2013; see also Erasmus 2015).

discussions on guilt and culture – namely, the idea that some cultures are “guilt cultures” whereas others are “shame cultures”. This idea was popularized through anthropologist and folklorist Ruth Benedict’s 1946 book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, in which Benedict characterizes American culture as a guilt culture and Japanese culture as a shame culture (for a more recent discussion on the role of shame in the United States, see Leys 2007). Secondly, in the literature on guilt, a distinction is often made between guilt and shame, whereby guilt is perceived to arise because of something you have done, whereas shame arises because of something you are. To illustrate, political philosopher Martha Nussbaum writes in *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice*: “Guilt is a negative emotion directed at oneself on the basis of a wrongful *act or acts* that one thinks one has caused, or at least wished to cause. . . . It is distinguishable from shame, a negative reaction to oneself that has a *characteristic, or trait*, as a focus” (2016, 128, my emphasis). While the four examples I analyze in this study could also be discussed in terms of shame, I find it fruitful to focus on the concept of guilt because of its two-fold meaning – being and feeling guilty – aptly conveys the tension at work in the four examples.

The distinction being guilty and feeling guilty is on the one hand imperative in a number of situations, but on the other it is also challenged by the way human life is lived. In a courtroom, for instance, being guilty and feeling guilty are not the same and can have tremendously different consequences (feeling guilty may not merit legal action or punishment, but being guilty can). Yet, the neat distinction between being and feeling guilty often blurs, as seen in instances when a person is deemed guilty of a crime without being guilty (i.e. is wrongfully convicted) or without feeling guilty. Moreover, as Katchadourian notes, it is perfectly possible for a human “to be guilty but not feel guilty, or feel guilty without having done anything wrong” (2010, 21). As mentioned, guilt can furthermore describe individual as well as collective guilt. While conceptions of guilt vary from community to community, and from one period to another, a general tendency since the end of World War II in Europe (and, to some extent, in North America and Australia) is a notable interest in guilt as collective, i.e. that a group of people, such as a national community, can be and/or feel guilty by virtue of their collective identity. Present-day notions of collective guilt are greatly influenced by philosophical debates on guilt and responsibility that emerged after World War II. It is therefore worth briefly visiting these post-war discussions on guilt, because they have shaped the social context in which my audio-visual examples were made.

Among the most influential works in the debates on collective responsibility and guilt after World War II was philosopher Karl Jaspers’s book *The Question of German Guilt*, first

published in 1947. In his book, Jaspers ([1947] 2000) makes a crucial distinction between four types of guilt – criminal, political, moral, and metaphysical guilt – and suggests that each have their own set of implications. His attempt at distinguishing between different types of guilt laid the ground for a more complex discussion about guilt, one that did not equate guilt with legal culpability, but expanded the term to also include more subjective and collective experiences of guilt. Philosopher Hannah Arendt further developed and critiqued Jaspers’s concepts in several of her writings.<sup>52</sup> To compare, philosopher Martin Buber engaged less directly with Jaspers, but explored similar issues. For instance, his writings on “existential guilt” in the context of psychotherapy ([1957] 1999) can be compared to Jaspers’ idea of “metaphysical guilt”.<sup>53</sup> The terms “collective guilt” and “existential guilt” have also been discussed outside of philosophy, especially in the field of social psychology. Here, definitions of collective and existential guilt can differ from those of Jaspers, Arendt, and Buber. For instance, social psychologists Nyla R. Branscombe and Bertjan Doosje (2004) define collective guilt as guilt stemming from the distress that members of a group experience when they accept “that their ingroup is responsible for immoral actions that harmed another group” (3). People who feel collective guilt, the authors add, do not necessarily bear “any legal responsibility for their group’s actions” (3) and can feel guilty without being “in any way involved in the harm doing” (4). As Branscombe and Doosje seem to suggest, just because a community (or “ingroup”) is perceived as responsible for harm doing, individuals within that community do not bear “legal responsibility”, even if they have a sense of “collective guilt”. Branscombe and Doosje’s understanding of collective guilt thus differentiates between legal responsibility and feelings of guilt.<sup>54</sup>

Within philosophy, collective guilt as a concept has been criticized for the ways in which it expands and thus alters the meaning of guilt, stretching it from the individual to the

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<sup>52</sup> Arendt argues for a distinction between guilt and responsibility in two short essays, “Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility” (Arendt [1945] 1994) and “Collective Responsibility” (Arendt [1968] 1987), as well as in her influential book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, first published in 1963. In chapter 3 of *Responsibility for Justice*, “Guilt versus Responsibility: A Reading and Partial Critique of Hannah Arendt”, Young provides a useful overview of these three works and critiques Arendt’s distinction between guilt and responsibility (2011, 75–93). For a comparison between Arendt and Jaspers’s conceptions of collective responsibility and collective guilt, see Schaap 2001.

<sup>53</sup> In his essay “Guilt and Guilt Feelings” from 1957, Buber writes that “[e]xistential guilt occurs when someone injures and order of the human world whose foundations he knows and recognizes as those of his own existence and of all common human existence” ([1957] 1999, 116). To compare, Jaspers describes metaphysical guilt in the following manner: “There exists a solidarity among men as human beings that makes each co-responsible for every wrong and every injustice in the world, especially for crimes committed in his presence or with his knowledge. If I fail to do whatever I can to prevent them, I too am guilty. If I was present at the murder of others without risking my life to prevent it, I feel guilty in a way not adequately conceivable either legally, politically or morally. That I live after such a thing has happened weighs upon me as indelible guilt” ([1947] 2000, 26).

<sup>54</sup> For a recent survey of existing research on collective guilt in social psychology, see Ferguson and Branscombe 2014.

collective. Contemporary philosophers who are skeptical of collective guilt argue, among other things, that the concept waters down the meaning of guilt as the state of being guilty or culpable (Young 2011, 75–93). Philosopher Giorgio Agamben suggests that collective guilt may ultimately side-step rather than confront the ethical problem at hand (1999, 94–5). In *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, Agamben refers specifically to survivor’s guilt and writes that “guilt of this kind . . . inheres in the survivor’s condition as such and not in what he or she as an individual did or failed to do” (1999, 94). For Agamben, survivor’s guilt “recalls the common tendency to assume a generic *collective guilt* whenever an ethical problem cannot be mastered” (1999, 94–5, my emphasis).

From another perspective, collective guilt that includes feeling guilty for actions one did not even commit also risks putting inaction (i.e. things one has *not* done) on the same footing as action (i.e. things one *has* done). This can make collective guilt a problematic example of what Lucas calls “a doctrine of unlimited negative responsibility” (J. Lucas 1995, 38). As Lucas writes in *Responsibility*, a doctrine of unlimited negative responsibility suggests that “[w]e are as much responsible for the consequences of what we do as for the consequences of what we do not do: . . . if at any time I fail to alleviate sufferings in the remotest part of the Third World, I am as responsible as if I had deliberately chosen to bring them about” (J. Lucas 1995, 37–8). This is a consequentialist doctrine, Lucas writes, which “misconstrues the nature of agency”, “loads everyone with unbearable burdens and induces unassuageable feelings of guilt”, and ultimately induces a counter-productive, “all-pervasive feeling of guilt” (J. Lucas 1995, 38). Lucas does not refer specifically to collective guilt here, but he raises a crucial question that does apply to collective guilt: What are the consequences of treating inaction and action as if they were equal, or nearly equal?

While collective guilt may be problematic from a theoretical and practical point of view, it seems clear that understandings of guilt as collective also resonate with people. One example is the concept of “white guilt”, a term that has gained popularity since the early 2000s particularly, but not only, in North America.<sup>55</sup> White guilt is intimately related to the idea of white privilege, and is only one of several guilt concepts that stem from the experience

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<sup>55</sup> As of December 2017, Google’s search engine Google Trends, which shows how often a particular search-term is entered in Google’s search engine, the period 2004–2017 saw a gradual increase in the number of online searches for “white guilt” as a topic, with a noticeable peak in popularity in the year 2006. (This peak is perhaps related to the publication of Shelby Steele’s (2006) controversial book *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era*, since Steele shows up among the list of related topics and queries in the Google Trends search results.) The ten countries in which the search interest was the highest are, in order of popularity: the United States (with significantly higher search interest than the other countries), Canada, South Africa, Australia, Finland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Morocco, and Germany.



of privilege. For instance, in his discussion of collective guilt and other forms of “guilt without transgression” (2010, 89),<sup>56</sup> Katchadourian touches on what he calls “the guilt of positive inequity”.<sup>57</sup> In a section titled “Positive Inequity and The Burden of Wealth”, he explains the phrase “guilt of positive inequity” thus:

Inequity is inequality that is neither justified nor fair. It is ‘positive’ since it arises from the sense of having the good things in abundance that we want in life—health, wealth, and other material and social advantages—in short, leading a privileged life. . . . Since the value of what we have is relative to what others have, the guilt of positive inequity is expressed not in absolute but relative terms. It is not an issue of having too much or too little, but having more or less relative to others we compare ourselves with. (2010, 104, my emphasis)

As Katchadourian (2010) adds, “suffering from positive inequity is not exactly a moral issue of epidemic proportions” (104). Nevertheless, there are those who may experience wealth as “a moral liability” (106).<sup>58</sup> For these individuals, he writes, feelings of guilt may be informed by beliefs about justice and fairness (104) and attitudes to wealth and prosperity (106–7).

Guilt of positive inequity is useful for my discussion because it addresses how the state of feeling guilty can arise also from an awareness of being more affluent and advantaged than others. As a concept, it strongly resembles what social psychologists call existential guilt. A social-psychological approach to existential guilt often refers to instances when people feel guilty because they have unearned advantages over others. This definition of existential guilt can be traced to psychologist Martin L. Hoffman (1976, 1982), who in the 1970s and 1980s analyzed empathy, guilt, and pro-social behavior, among other issues. Hoffman’s concept of existential guilt – which, I should note, differs from Buber’s use of the same term – has been influential (see Montada, Schmitt and Dalbert 1986; Leach, Snider, and Iyer 2002). Similarly, collective guilt has been used to discuss racial relations in Australia (Pedersen, Beven, Walker, and Griffiths 2004), New Zealand (Sibley, Robertson, and Kirkwood 2005), and South Africa

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<sup>56</sup> Katchadourian situates his examples of guilt without transgression within a modern, post-war context. Referring to survivor, collective, and existential guilt, he writes that they “are very much part of our modern consciousness”, even if our awareness of such experiences are “quite recent, going back to the aftermath of World War II” (89).

<sup>57</sup> By guilt without transgression, Katchadourian (2010) means instances in which people feel guilty without having done anything wrong (89). While he lists three examples, including survivor guilt, collective guilt, and existential guilt (89), “the guilt of positive inequity” is brought up between the sections on collective guilt (96–103) and existential guilt (108–11).

<sup>58</sup> Besides wealth, I would add other material benefits, such as social support offered in welfare state systems.

(Klandermans, Werner, and van Doorn 2008).<sup>59</sup> As social psychologists suggest, collective guilt raises an important question: What are the antecedents and consequences of guilt (Ferguson and Branscombe 2014)? Put in more simplistic terms, why does guilt emerge, and what does it lead to?

Several contemporary political philosophers, including Young, Nussbaum, Sandra Lee Bartky, and Sonia Kruks, have explored similar questions about guilt and its function, in certain cases as it pertains to collective guilt in particular.<sup>60</sup> For the purposes of this study, Bartky's discussion of what she calls "guilt by virtue of privilege" is especially relevant. She introduces "guilt by virtue of privilege" in her essay "In Defense of Guilt" (Bartky [1999] 2002), in which she makes two general claims about guilt. Firstly, she argues that "guilt can be one among many acceptable motivations for political action" (134), and secondly, that "the standard characterization of guilt in moral psychology" is too "psychologistic" (142). To Bartky, certain kinds of guilt cannot be reduced to an emotion and need to be understood in a political context. The examples she gives are guilt by complicity (134–5), guilt by virtue of privilege (135–44), and guilt in the form of a debt (144–6). Without referring specifically to Buber's idea of existential guilt, she seems to suggest, like Buber, that people's relationship to a larger social world can put them in a state of "guilt" – lead them to *being* guilty, in other words – because of injustices that pervade that larger social world and harm other human beings.

Bartky underscores that guilt by virtue of privilege does not necessarily entail the state of *feeling* guilty.<sup>61</sup> As she defines it, guilt by virtue of privilege is not an emotion, but "an existential-moral condition" ([1999] 2002), 142). To use Bartky's own words:

I am guilty by virtue of simply being who and what I am: a white woman, born into an aspiring middle-class family in a racist and class-ridden society. The existentialists were fond of saying that guilt was endemic to the human condition: I confess to never having fully understood this until now. *The recognition of unearned privilege does not necessarily or inevitably engender guilt feelings in*

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<sup>59</sup> For examples, see Branscombe and Doosje 2004, which covers collective guilt processes in Australia, Canada, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, and the United States.

<sup>60</sup> While working in different fields of philosophy, Young, Nussbaum, Bartky, and Kruks share an interest in the issue of responsibility. For that reason, it is perhaps not too surprising that all four philosophers have also engaged with existentialist philosophy at some point, including the writings of French philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre (Nussbaum [1986] 2013, 31; Young 2011, 53–4, 155–6; Bartky 2002, 140–2, 148) and Simone de Beauvoir (Kruks 2012). In "In Defence of Guilt", Bartky quotes passages from Sartre's 1948 play *Dirty Hands* (1955) to discuss "the recognition—or the non-recognition—of responsibility" (2002, 140).

<sup>61</sup> She occasionally refers to "guilt by virtue of privilege" as "guilt by reason of privilege" (2002, 141), and the terms seem to mean the same thing.

*the heart of the one privileged.* The response might well be anger, or dismay. . . . My role in the maintenance of an unjust social order is a fact, whether I recognize it or not. *Guilt, then, need not be felt* as emotions are typically felt: it is an *existential-moral condition* that can be, but need not be accompanied by “feeling guilty.” ([1999] 2002, 142, my emphasis)

In establishing guilt by virtue of privilege as “an existential-moral condition”, Bartky thus seems to suggest that guilt by virtue of privilege shapes the existential conditions of certain people, including herself. At the same time, what she means by “an existential-moral condition” is somewhat unclear. While she touches on the “existential” dimension – it has something to do with your existence in this world, i.e. your existential condition – Bartky does not specify what goes into the “moral” dimension she refer to (what does she mean by “moral”? Is “moral” understood as synonymous with “ethical”?). In addition, if people are guilty “by virtue of simply being” who they are ([1999] 2002, 142) – by virtue of their skin color, their gender, and the class into which they are were born – then surely, guilt seems to be defined here according to “a doctrine of unlimited negative responsibility”, to return to Lucas’s (1995) term. Consequently, Bartky’s notion of guilt by virtue of privilege would run into the same problem that Lucas warns against: that “the nature of agency” becomes “misconstrue[d]”, “load[ing] everyone with unbearable burdens and induc[ing] unassuageable feelings of guilt” and ultimately resulting in a counter-productive feeling of guilt (J. Lucas 1995, 38).

Bartky’s discussion of guilt has also been criticized on other grounds. Kruks and Young both argue that Bartky too readily assumes that guilt can be politically motivating. According to Kruks, Bartky makes a helpful distinction between guilt as an emotion and guilt as “an existential-moral condition”, yet her idea that guilt is politically motivating is problematic. As Kruks writes: “. . . conversely, I want to suggest, those practices that heighten emotions of guilt may not always be the best way to go about addressing the ‘existential-moral’ condition of guilt in which we find ourselves” (2012, 101). She adds: “Guilt as an emotion may well be an important moment of an initial ‘conversion’ process, in which we become aware of our privilege, but it may become quite crippling as a basis for effective long-term political action” (2012, 101). Similarly, in a review of Bartky’s book, Young questions the idea that feelings of guilt are a source of political motivation (2005, 225). Young’s critique of guilt is central to her argument in *Responsibility for Justice* (2011), in which she

proposes that political responsibility is a more productive concept than guilt when discussing obligations of justice on the part of collectives (as opposed to individuals).

Nevertheless, Bartky's discussion of guilt by virtue of privilege is also helpful because it highlights the fact that privileged individuals may or may not be aware of their own condition, and if they do become aware of it, they may or may not feel guilty – anger, dismay, denial, or defensiveness may very well be their response (Bartky 2002, 141–2).<sup>62</sup> Bartky echoes scholars in privilege studies who argue that an essential part of being privileged is the ability to ignore, or to simply not be aware of, social injustice and oppression. Being able to “opt out” of thinking about racism is a “luxury” on the part of the privileged (Kimmel and Ferber 2017, xi), one that victims of oppression do not have. Moreover, that people may respond in various ways if or when their own privileged positions are brought to their attention is an important point. Bartky mentions anger, dismay, denial or defensiveness as possible reactions – to this, I would add ambivalence. After all, the responses on the part of people who become aware of their privileges may very well be anger, dismay, denial, *and* defensiveness, all at the same time.

## **Conclusion**

To end this conceptual discussion of responsibility and guilt, I want to point out that complicity is a concept several scholars have found useful for thinking about the Scandinavian (or Nordic) countries and their relations to the history of colonialism. The anthology *Complying with Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region*, for instance, uses the concept of “colonial complicity” to discuss how the Nordic region can be understood within a postcolonial framework (Mulinari, Keskinen, Irni, and Tuori 2009, 2). Ulla Vuorela (2009) develops the concept of colonial complicity to “theorise a situation in which a country (in this case, Finland) has neither been historically situated as one of the colonial centres in Europe” nor “an ‘innocent victim’ or mere outsider of the colonial projects” (19). Drawing on postcolonial theory (in particular “postcolonial feminisms, represented by Chandra Talpade Mohanthy, Gayatri Spivak and many others”), Vuorela suggest that complicity is useful for thinking about “the ambiguous positions of the Nordic countries vis-à-vis the colonial” (19–20). More specifically, while the Nordic countries have the assumed status of “outsiders in the colonial project”, their positions may upon closer examination be better characterized as shaped by “involvement in colonial practices, as well as participation

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<sup>62</sup> See also *Responsibility for Justice*, where Young devotes a whole chapter (titled “Avoiding Responsibility”) to typical strategies that agents use “to avoid responsibility in relation to social injustice” (2011, 154).

in and acceptance of colonialism as a discourse and form of universal truth” (20).<sup>63</sup> Complicity, in her view, appears to provide “a middle ground between feelings of ‘guilt’ and ‘innocence’ that keep haunting us” (19), and a way to speak about populations that were neither at the heart of the colonial conquests nor colonial subjects, but nevertheless connected to the “kind of knowledge” and “‘universally’ accepted regimes of truth” that made colonial projects possible in the first place (21).

Vuorela’s argument is persuasive because it acknowledges the peripheral positions of the Scandinavian countries in the history of colonialism and, more generally, asks how postcolonial theory can be applied to Nordic countries.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, it challenges a long-standing tendency to assume that Nordic countries are *exempt* from colonial projects simply because they were not the most powerful colonial empires (see also Weiss 2009). However, the four examples I analyze in this study first and foremost thematize forms of injustices shaped by 21st-century globalization, and only occasionally deal explicitly with colonialism and the colonial past (as seen in Chapters 4–5). For that reason, I do not treat colonial complicity as an overarching concept for the study as a whole, but consider it fruitful to keep the idea of complicity in mind, along with related concepts such as implication and indirect contribution.

In the following four chapters, I show how privilege, global injustice, responsibility, and the related concept of guilt can shed light on my four chosen examples (and vice versa), starting with the web series *Sweatshop*. Out of my four examples, *Sweatshop* explores, perhaps more evidently than any of the other examples, the connections between being privileged, being implicated in global injustice, and feeling responsible or guilty for global injustice.

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<sup>63</sup> As I understand it, Vuorela’s description of colonialism as “a form of universal truth” does not assume that colonialism was, in fact, a universally (or globally) accepted truth. Rather, it points out that, in the Nordic countries, one adopted the socially constructed idea of colonialism as a universal truth – an idea that had a hold especially, but not only, in the larger, colonial centers (e.g. Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands).

<sup>64</sup> Oxfeldt raises a similar question in her book *Nordic Orientalism: Paris and the Cosmopolitan Imagination 1800-1900*, which examines the appropriation of Oriental imagery within Danish and Norwegian nineteenth-century nation-building (2005).

***Sweatshop – Deadly Fashion:***

**Shaming and Blaming Multinational Corporations and Norwegian Youth Consumers**

In the early 21st century, the buying of consumer goods, such as clothes, foods, and electronics, is one of the most emblematic examples of the ways that privileged individuals can indirectly contribute to global injustice. Consider the production of a plain white t-shirt. Before the t-shirt is bought and worn for the first time, it has most likely passed through the hands of numerous workers in different countries, and was probably sewn by underpaid workers toiling under dangerous, if not life-threatening conditions. As Young suggests, the global apparel industry is “a useful example for thinking about what it means to take responsibility for transnational injustice” (2011, 125). For Young, this has partly to do with how well the industry exemplifies that structural social processes are currently “*global* in scope and condition the lives of many people within diverse nation-state jurisdictions” (2011, 124, my emphasis). As importantly, the global textile industry is also a useful example due to the anti-sweatshop movement of the 1990s, which “involved a great many people and achieved some success in creating a public discussion of the injustice of working conditions, as well as some changes in situations and practices” (2011, 125).<sup>65</sup>

*Sweatshop – Deadly Fashion* (*Sweatshop – dødelig mote*, 2014),<sup>66</sup> a five-part web series released on the website of the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten*, engages with both of these aspects of the global garment industry: It represents textile factories as part of a larger global economic system, and echoes critical questions raised by the anti-sweatshop movement. Indeed, the series (henceforth referred to as *Sweatshop*) touches on the role of political activists in instigating social and political change, since it depicts activists in Cambodia who fight for a fair wage, and foregrounds the transformation of consumers in the Global North into budding political activists. Combining elements from reality TV and documentary journalism, *Sweatshop* revolves around a social experiment: Three young people from

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<sup>65</sup> While much has been written about the anti-sweatshop movement, see Steger 2008, 196–212 for a useful summary.

<sup>66</sup> Notably, the series has two subtitles: *Deadly Fashion* and *Dead Cheap* (the opening credits of the official English version of the series reads *Sweatshop: Dead Cheap Fashion*). I use the subtitle *Deadly Fashion* because *Aftenposten* uses it on its website, which suggests this is the more official subtitle.

Norway are recruited to travel to Cambodia to learn about the working and living conditions of sweatshop workers.<sup>67</sup> As *Sweatshop* presents them, the participants transform from fairly naïve, even spoiled youth consumers to informed and conscientious advocates of ethical consumption thanks their journey to Cambodia and the experiences they have there.<sup>68</sup> *Sweatshop* uses clothes and the textile factory as metonyms for the problems of global capitalism, and frames the participants not only as a part of the problem of global injustice, but also a part of the solution to global injustice. That is, while the world is shaped by the uneven distribution of rights and resources and privileged people may often be unaware of or ignore that inequality, *Sweatshop* suggests that individual youths can learn to think critically about global injustice.

Of the four examples in this study, *Sweatshop* can be understood as the most striking example of a “ScanGuilt”-themed narrative. Its protagonists are from Scandinavia, the series makes explicit and implicit references to the contrast between living and working conditions in Cambodia and Norway, and it touches on the issue of guilt and responsibility.<sup>69</sup> *Sweatshop*’s particular focus on three youths from Norway and their understanding of global injustice also aligns the series with several other contemporary narratives that deal with Norwegian youths and their relationship to privilege, guilt, and global inequality (see Bakken and Oxfeldt 2017). Yet, *Sweatshop* also fits into more transnational trends, specifically a recent trend within the reality TV genre, whereby participants from countries in the Global North are recruited to go on a journey to countries in the Global South. These Global South/North-themed reality TV series build on a general premise in many reality TV series – namely, the recruitment of real people (as opposed to actors) to participate in social experiments that are shown to change participants for the better. Through these social experiments, participants are typically shown to participate in a form of “self-transformational television”, as sociologist Beverley Skeggs puts it (2009, 628). While *Sweatshop* is not a TV series per se, it draws on similar tendencies, staging as it does a transformative journey from the Global North to the Global South.

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<sup>67</sup> The *Sweatshop* series refers to a contemporary understanding of the word “sweatshop”. Since the start of the 1990s, “sweatshop” has been especially associated with “off-shore ‘sweatshops’ . . . , i.e. production sites characterized by poor labor conditions (sweatshops), in emerging countries, working for companies in developed countries” (de Lagerie 2013, e14). For more on the term “sweatshop” and its history, see de Lagerie 2013.

<sup>68</sup> In this chapter, I adopt the term “youth consumers” in order to highlight the extent to which youth is as a specific group of consumers. In the 21st century, youth is understood not only as a state of transition (between childhood and adulthood), but also closely associated with “the youth market”, an important target group for advertisers and the media (Frith 2005, 381).

<sup>69</sup> For more on the term “ScanGuilt”, see Chapter 1.

In this chapter, I focus on the first season of *Sweatshop* and explore how it draws on the reality TV genre, notions of global injustice related to consumerism, and gendered discourses about young women.<sup>70</sup> While *Aftenposten* has labelled *Sweatshop* a “documentary series” (not a reality show) on its website, I suggest that *Sweatshop* in light of reality TV is helpful because it makes evident how the series is in fact a generic hybrid. The series suggests that the three participants, Frida, Ludvig and Anniken, initially know little about sweatshop labor; however, due to their encounters and experiences in Cambodia, they come to recognize their own privileged positions, and learn to understand and support workers and activists in Cambodia. This transformation is conveyed through the use of narrative conventions in documentary journalism and reality TV, as seen when participants undergo staged challenges (such as working in a sweatshop factory for half a day) and are repeatedly interviewed about their experiences.

*Sweatshop*'s emphasis on personal transformation appears to be an effective means for suggesting both that change on an individual level is possible, and that collective action is needed for political change to take place. Indeed, *Sweatshop* does not reduce the problem of global injustice to a matter of individual morality – that is, to a question of how to transform “bad” consumers into “good” consumers. Rather, it explicitly suggests that organizations such as multinational corporations need to take their part of the responsibility for the dangerous working conditions in today's sweatshop factories. Upon closer examination, however, the emphasis on personal transformation also raises critical questions. Narratives about personal change – especially those that revolve around change for the better – rest on the assumption that people who undergo a change are flawed, that there is something about them that needs to be changed in the first place. Skeggs makes this point in her research on reality TV as “self-transformational television”, and underscores that it is important to ask: What kinds of people do reality TV series tend to recruit, and why are the standards of particular individuals or groups shown as “in need of improvement”? In what ways are reality TV series informed by existing class and gender relations (2009, 628)? Using Skeggs's questions as a starting point, this chapter discusses the implications of *Sweatshop*'s focus on the transformation of three youths from Norway.

My central argument is that the series explicitly blames and shames multinational corporations, but that it also implicitly blames and shames youth consumers, especially young women consumers. More specifically, *Sweatshop* evokes gendered ideas about young women

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<sup>70</sup> As I explain later in this chapter, there are altogether several seasons for *Sweatshop*.



as on the one hand ideal agents for humanitarianism (Harris 2006) and on the other as irresponsible and vain consumers (Brusdal and Storm-Mathisen 2009). While also pointing fingers at other agents, the series depicts young women consumers as disproportionately responsible for both contributing to and alleviating global injustice.

### ***Sweatshop – Deadly Fashion***

*Sweatshop* is a relatively short web series produced by *Aftenposten* and the Norwegian NGO *Framtiden i våre hender* (*The Future in Our Hands* in English), with the aid of the production company Lopta AS. The series consists of five episodes that each lasts between 10 to 14 minutes, and most of the scenes are filmed in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, revolving around the three participants' responses to life there. The first episode depicts the participants in their everyday environments in Norway and positions them as fairly unaware of sweatshop labor. The start of the series thus establishes who the participants are before the trip to Cambodia, laying the foundation for the personal transformation that the series develops. *Sweatshop* stages a narrative of personal transformation in at least three ways: by revolving around a journey to a faraway country, by staging challenges that the participants must undergo, and by featuring numerous interviews in which the participants either interview workers and activists in Cambodia or are themselves interviewed about their impressions and feelings.



*Figs. 1–2: The opening sequence, with Anniken to the left. Source: Screen dump from Aftenposten-TV.*

*Sweatshop* screens privilege and its relationship to global injustice by representing the three participants as privileged consumers from Norway (and, arguably, the Global North in general), and foregrounding how they react when confronted with people less advantaged than themselves. To illustrate, the first episode, entitled “– How many will die here every year?”, opens with a sequence that introduces Anniken, one of the three participants, and establishes

the sweatshop factory as a setting and a metonym for global capitalism.<sup>71</sup> The sequence opens with a short, rapidly edited montage of clips in black and white that provide brief glimpses into a sweatshop factory, where mostly Asian people are sewing on machines (Fig. 1). The clips include close-ups of hands working away and generally provide little insight into the identities or experiences of the workers. By contrast, the next part of the sequence is a medium shot of Anniken, a young, white woman (Fig. 2). Unlike the preceding black and white montage, the clip of Anniken appears in color and shows her talking to the camera in an interview setting. Addressing the interviewer, who is off-screen and presumably behind the camera, Anniken has tears in her eyes and looks upset, occasionally pausing, sniffing, and shrugging her shoulders while saying:

You sit in your bed in Norway and hear about all those that suffer. You watch the news, and you hear about all sorts of things. Then I have said to myself that there are so many that are born just to do one task in life, and that's it.

[“Når jeg har sittet hjemme i senga mi i Norge, og hørt om alle som har det vondt, og du ser det på nyhetene og hører om ting, så har jeg tenkt at... det finnes mye mennesker som... blir født, også har de en oppgave i livet, også dør de. And that's it”.]<sup>72</sup>

As Anniken tries to make sense of the vast economic inequality in the world, she comes across not only as distraught but also as somewhat jaded and cynical both through her body language and words. As importantly, her comments are framed as an indirect comment on the preceding montage of the textile factory workers; this establishes a narrative principle that the series repeatedly adopts – problems in sweatshop factories and in the lives of sweatshop

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<sup>71</sup> The episode title is a statement Anniken makes later in the same episode, shortly after she and the other participants arrive in Cambodia. Most of the episode titles are statements made by the participants, which foreground the youths and their impressions. For instance, the fifth episode is titled “– What kind of life is this?” and “– Hva slags liv er dette?” in the English and Norwegian versions, respectively. In other cases, the titles for the English and Norwegian versions differ, as seen in the case of episode four, whose English title is “–The large [clothing] chains are starving their workers!”. By contrast, the Norwegian title is “– De har det dårlig fordi vi har det bra” [– They are miserable because we have it well].

<sup>72</sup> In this chapter, I use the official English subtitles for *Sweatshop*, since these are the subtitles that English-speaking viewers around the world are likely to have read. I should note, however, that the official English translations often cut sentences short (due to lack of space), contain a number of grammatical errors, and often fail to accurately communicate important nuances in the monologues/dialogues. In the interview with Anniken mentioned above, the official translation alters the pronoun Anniken uses (she refers to “I”, not “you”), and omits, among other things, Anniken’s mention of death. A more accurate translation of the lines would be: “When I’ve sat at home in my bed in Norway, and heard about all the people who suffer, and you see it on the news and hear about stuff, I’ve thought that... There are a lot of people who... They are born, and then they have one task in life, and then they die. And that’s it.”

workers are framed in relation to the emotional reactions and self-reflexive comments by the three participants.

I have so far emphasized *Aftenposten*'s role in the distribution and promotion of *Sweatshop*, but it is important to underscore that *Sweatshop* was largely a collaborative project between *Framtiden i våre hender* and *Aftenposten*. The end credits of the series states that the show was “[B]ased on an idea from *Framtiden i våre hender*” [“Etter en idé fra *Framtiden i våre hender*”].<sup>73</sup> As communications consultant at the NGO Anne Kari Garberg states in an interview, it came up with the idea for the series, and then pitched it to different media outlets, including *Aftenposten* (Anne Kari Garberg, private interview, May 5, 2017). Given the NGO's commitment to environmental issues and advocating ethical consumption, the emphasis on sweatshop factories and political activism in the series is not surprising.<sup>74</sup> The making of the series was made possible by the help of fixers in Cambodia who were known to it, as well as the NGO's knowledge of the textile industry in the country and financial support that had been granted by Norad, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.<sup>75</sup> In addition, two of the participants, Frida and Ludvig, were recruited to the series through an open call for participants issued by *Framtiden i våre hender* (meanwhile, Anniken was headhunted for the series).<sup>76</sup> In sum, *Sweatshop* was influenced by *Framtiden i våre hender* at the level of both production and content.

In the Norwegian media, *Sweatshop* was generally treated as a thought-provoking reminder that individuals and institutions in the Global North have a responsibility for unjust labor practices in the Global South. The series won several awards for its depiction of sweatshop labor, and raised debates in the Norwegian public about fair wages and ethical consumption.<sup>77</sup> In May 2014, for example, the Norwegian politician and leader of *Kristelig*

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<sup>73</sup> When I first started writing about *Sweatshop* in spring 2015, the end credits of the series listed *Framtiden i våre hender* as as “professional consultants” [fagkonsulenter]. The series has since been revised, and now places more emphasis on *Framtiden i våre hender*'s role, in addition to listing as its professional consultants Carin Leffler and Anne Kari Garberg (both of whom work for *Framtiden i våre hender*). While I do not know the exact reason for this change, I suspect it has to do with the complaint that H&M filed against *Aftenposten*, and a consequent desire on *Aftenposten*'s part to somewhat distance itself from the series' criticism of H&M (which I discuss more later in this chapter).

<sup>74</sup> The website of *Framtiden i våre hender* includes a section devoted to the issue of “ethical clothes” [etiske klær] and a fair wage for textile factory workers (Framtiden i våre hender, n.d.).

<sup>75</sup> Norad is a directorate under the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that distributes Norwegian development aid funds to Norwegian NGOs, and this funding includes *informasjonsstøtte*, or funding aimed at supporting communication campaigns (Norad 2017). *Sweatshop* was financed through *informasjonstøtte* that *Framtiden i våre hender* had received from Norad (Anne Kari Garberg, personal interview).

<sup>76</sup> As I explain later, Anniken had previously appeared on a reality TV series *Teenage Boss*, produced by NRK (Gjuvsland 2012).

<sup>77</sup> *Sweatshop* won three awards, the most prestigious of which was the Norwegian TV award *Gullruten* in the category Best Reality. *Sweatshop* was also awarded the *Mediarosen* prize from the Christian organization *Familie & Medier* (“Family & Media”), and received the honour's prize at an annual Norwegian award

*Folkeparti* (Christian Democratic Party), Knut Arild Hareide, referred to *Sweatshop* in an official letter to Solveig Horne, Minister of Children and Equality. In his letter, Hareide uses *Sweatshop* as proof that Norwegian people are increasingly concerned with “fair conditions for workers in production countries” [rettferdige vilkår for arbeidere i produksjonsland] (2014). He also states that the series has engaged people, especially youths, adding that many are now calling “for Norway to take our part of the responsibility” [Serien har skapt stort engasjement, spesielt blant unge, og mange tar nå til orde for at Norge må ta vår del av ansvaret] (Hareide 2014). That *Sweatshop* drew considerable attention in the Norwegian media has much to do with *Aftenposten*’s position as one of the major newspapers in Norway. It was released on *Aftenposten*’s website and followed up by “spin-off journalism”, whereby opinion pieces (many of which were written by youths) and articles that dealt with sweatshop factories and referred to the series appeared in print and online versions of the newspaper.<sup>78</sup>

Partly due to its being a web series, *Sweatshop* spread internationally, through online newspapers and various social media channels. As film and screen studies scholar Whitney Monaghan defines web series, they are “typically short form and shareable” series that are “delivered online”, and have “a lot in common with traditional TV forms”, but “[they] cannot simply be defined as television produced and distributed for audiences on the Internet” (2017, 84). Interest in *Sweatshop* spiked especially after an article about it appeared on the Facebook page of American actor Ashton Kutcher (Aldrige 2015). The web series format also made it easy for *Aftenposten* to release two subtitled versions in English and Spanish, thus further broadening its viewership. The international attention that *Sweatshop* drew no doubt influenced the decision to make a second season (entitled *Sweatshop – A Living Wage*).<sup>79</sup> Since the release of *Sweatshop*, *Aftenposten* has further released two other web series, *Stuck* and *Motherhood*, which draw on documentary journalism and revolve around women from Norway who travel to countries in the Global South to find out about gendered violence. In both series, the women are not only from Norway but are also white, just like Anniken and

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ceremony called *Ikke for enhver pris* (Not at any price/prize). *Ikke for enhver pris* aims “to promote ethical aspects of procurement in the public sector” (KLP 2014).

<sup>78</sup> According to Jonas Brenna, the producer of *Aftenposten-TV*, releasing *Sweatshop* alongside what he calls “spin-off journalism” was part of a larger strategy, which involved producing “follow-up stories” on different platforms, both in print and online (Stapnes 2015). I should mention that a number of articles mentioning *Sweatshop* also appeared in several newspapers that are, like *Aftenposten*, owned by Schibsted Media Group, Norway’s biggest media house and one of the largest in Scandinavia. For more on Schibsted and its position in Scandinavian and European media, see Syvertsen, Enli, Mjøs, and Moe 2014, 100–6, 188.

<sup>79</sup> *Sweatshop – A Living Wage* differs from the first season in that it is a Swedish-Norwegian co-production (made by *Aftenposten* and Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet*). Moreover, the second season revolves around four participants, all of whom are young women and framed as fashion bloggers. In contrast, the first season includes two female and one male participant, only one of whom is presented as a fashion blogger (Anniken).

Frida. To date, *Sweatshop* is the only web series by *Aftenposten* that has been used to develop teaching materials, making it all the more important to study the series more closely. Lesson plans with a focus on *Sweatshop*, intended for use in Norwegian secondary schools, can be downloaded from the website *Global Skole*, owned by Norad, which offers teaching resources in Norwegian on topics such as global poverty, human rights, and “North-South relations”.<sup>80</sup> The lesson plan for *Sweatshop* was, like other teaching materials on *Global Skole*, developed by an NGO, in this case, *Framtiden i våre hender*.<sup>81</sup>

Not all the attention *Sweatshop* has received has been positive. For one, the Swedish multinational clothing company H&M, whose name is mentioned in a derogatory way in the series, reported *Aftenposten* to the Norwegian Press Complaints Commission (*Pressens faglige utvalg*).<sup>82</sup> H&M’s complaint was ultimately rejected, and overall *Sweatshop* has drawn relatively little criticism. A noteworthy exception is an article by Maria Lavik (2016) of the Norwegian newspaper *Klassekampen*, in which she compares *Stuck* and *Sweatshop*, arguing that both resemble what sociologist Matthey Hughey (2014) has called a “white savior film”. Since whiteness is not the focus of this chapter (for more on the white savior trope, see Chapter 4), I respond in brief to Lavik’s review at the end of this chapter. For now, I want to add that there has been no scholarly discussion of *Sweatshop*, thus leaving unexamined the issues I explore in this chapter, starting with *Sweatshop*’s debt to reality TV, especially to so-called life experiment programs and their emphasis on personal transformation.

### **Experimenting with Privilege: *Sweatshop* as Life Experiment Program**

*Sweatshop* fits into a larger body of factual TV series and documentaries that have dealt with sweatshop labor, but particularly resembles a series of reality TV series by the British television channel, BBC Three, entitled *Blood, Sweat and T-Shirts* (2008), *Blood, Sweat and Takeaways* (2009), and *Blood, Sweat and Luxuries* (2010). Each of the *Blood, Sweat and...* series is premised on recruiting a group of youths from the UK to travel to countries in Asia and Africa. There, the participants learn about global inequality by witnessing and often

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<sup>80</sup> The stated aim of *Global Skole* (which translates to “Global School”) is to promote the “global education” of Norwegian students (Global Skole n.d.). The organization is supported by Global.no, which in turn is partly owned by Norad. The *Sweatshop* lessons plans can be downloaded from:

<http://globalskole.no/videregaende/samfunnsfag/sweatshop/>

<sup>81</sup> The online version of *Kosmos SF Naturfag*, a popular Norwegian high school textbook in the subject of *naturfag* (natural sciences), also includes a link to *Sweatshop*:

[https://kosmossf.cappelendamm.no/elevreal/tekst.html?tid=1971825&sec\\_tid=1668416](https://kosmossf.cappelendamm.no/elevreal/tekst.html?tid=1971825&sec_tid=1668416)

<sup>82</sup> For more on H&M’s complaint, see the official announcement made by *Pressens faglige utvalg*: <http://presse.no/pfu-nyhet/pfu-uttalelse-klagen-fra-hm-mot-aftenposten/>

participating in the making of various consumer goods, which range from luxury products (*Blood, Sweat and Luxuries*) to seemingly “everyday” objects such as cotton t-shirts (*Blood, Sweat and T-Shirts*) and food (*Blood, Sweat and Takeaways*). *Sweatshop* uses a similar format, and is not the only Scandinavian series to do so. In 2011 and 2013, the Danish public broadcaster DR made two series following the *Blood, Sweat and...* format, titled *Blod, sved og T-shirts* (DR2, 2011) and *Blod, sved og ris* (DR1, 2013). *Sweatshop* resembles these reality TV series by BBC and DR not only thematically but also formally. Indeed, *Sweatshop* contrasts with other factual TV programs that tackle sweatshop labor.<sup>83</sup>

Notably, *Sweatshop* is influenced by both documentary journalism and reality TV, but has generally been promoted in terms of the former. The influence of documentary journalism can be seen, in the various interviews that the three participants conduct with workers and activists in Cambodia. In these scenes, the viewer is temporarily given insight into the experiences of people in Cambodia, in contrast to the rest of the series, which mainly concentrates on the experiences of the three participants from Norway.<sup>84</sup> These interviews partly explain why *Aftenposten* can justifiably label *Sweatshop* a documentary on its website. Also Norwegian documentary filmmaker Erling Borgen describes *Sweatshop* as a documentary, as seen in an article in which Borgen refers to *Sweatshop* as “very well made” “documentary series” [dokumentarserie] (Borgen 2014).

Yet, the reception of *Sweatshop* also suggests that there are reasons to see *Sweatshop* as a “reality TV show”. In reviews of and articles about *Sweatshop*, the series is described as “a reality TV show” or “reality show” in newspapers such as *The Huffington Post* in the UK (Goldberg 2015) and *The Sydney Morning Herald* in Australia (Ward 2015), and fashion

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<sup>83</sup> The 2012 season of the Swedish investigative journalism program *Kalla Fakta* includes two episodes that raised questions about the textile industry, one of which deals with H&M in particular (see the second episode, titled *Drömmen om levnadslön* [The dream of a living wage], and the eighth episode, titled *H&M och Stefan Persson* [H&M and Stefan Persson]). In the UK, the investigative journalism program *Dispatches* (Channel 4) has also devoted several episodes to sweatshops, albeit with a focus on factories in Bangladesh and London. Another example from outside the Scandinavian context, is the award-winning episode “Made in Bangladesh” from 2013, which was produced by the Doha-based news channel Al Jazeera. Since the 2000s, sweatshop labor has been the subject of several documentary films, including a Danish film titled *Design With Dignity* (Helle Løvstø Severinsen, 2016) and produced by Clean Clothes Campaign Denmark, which is the Danish branch of Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), a “leading European antisweatshop organization” (Micheletti and Stolle 2007, 163) that was founded in 1989. Examples from outside the Scandinavian context include *The True Cost* (Andrew Morgan, 2015), *The New Rulers of the World* (Alan Lowery and John Pilger, 2001), *Dressing America: Tales from the Garment Center* (Steven Fischler and Joel Sucher, 2009), *The Machinists* (Hannan Majid and Richard York, 2010), *Cotton Road* (Laura Kissel, 2014).

<sup>84</sup> These interviews with people in Cambodia would presumably require considerable preparation, logistically and ethically speaking, and in terms of preparing the youths for their roles as interviewees. Yet, the interviews are notably embedded rather seamlessly into the series, and thus, the viewer is not encouraged to question the interviews or how they came about. Instead, the series primarily directs the viewer’s critical gaze towards the issues of sweatshop factories, clothing consumption and, more generally, global injustice in the current era.

magazines such as the UK-based *Cosmopolitan* (Sarsfield 2015). Notably, the article in *Cosmopolitan* describes the series as both a reality show and a documentary: While its headline reads “Norwegian *reality show* sends fashion bloggers to work in a Cambodian sweatshop”, the article itself calls the series “quite a powerful *documentary* exploring how privileged Westerners perceive the fashion world” (Sarsfield 2015, my emphasis).

Rather than seeing the two labels “reality (TV) show” and “documentary” as contradictions, I suggest that the co-existence of the two labels tell us something about reality TV as a genre. As various scholars writing about reality TV suggest, reality TV as is a fundamentally hybrid genre (Jerslev 2014, 14; see also Bondebjerg 2002, 183–5), one that “cross[es] into fiction and non-fiction territories, taking genre experimentation to the limit”, as media scholar Annette Hill puts it (2007, 1). To play on Hill’s personified image of reality as a genre that “runs wild” (2007, 1), we may think of *Sweatshop* as a particular instance in which reality TV has journeyed into the terrain of journalism, into the web-TV platform of *Aftenposten*, and consequently invited three youths from Norway to undertake their own journey to Cambodia. While reality TV can and has been defined in numerous ways, I adopt Hill’s definition of reality TV as “a catch-all category for a variety of different one-off programmes, series and formats that follow real people and celebrities and their everyday or out of the ordinary experiences” (2007, 5).<sup>85</sup> Notably, as a genre, reality TV is often described as “trash-TV”, according to media scholars Anne Jerslev (2014, 7) and Ib Bondebjerg (2002, 165, 188). More specifically, it is often associated with “low production values, high emotions, cheap antics and questionable ethics” (Kavka 2012, 5, cited in Jerslev 2014, 7). The negative associations that reality TV bring up helps explain why *Aftenposten* presents *Sweatshop* as a documentary, not a reality show.

At the same time, *Sweatshop* also lacks several narrative elements that are often associated with reality TV, particularly the competitive element that underpins so-called reality gameshows (e.g. *Big Brother*, *Survivor*, and in a Scandinavian context, *Expedition Robinson*) and reality talentshows (e.g. *Idol*), two of the most dominant types of reality TV, according to Hill (2007, 197). While the three participants in *Sweatshop* cannot be voted out as a consequence of failing staged challenges, *Sweatshop* nevertheless resembles reality TV series, especially a sub-genre of reality TV that Hill refers to as “life experiment programmes” (2005, 36; 2007, 5, 50–1). While this chapter is not about reality TV per se, it is helpful to say

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<sup>85</sup> To Hill, this definition applies both to reality TV and what she calls Hill “popular factual”. The latter refers to a category that contains but is not limited to reality TV, since it includes “factual entertainment, reality entertainment and reality TV” (2007, 48).

a few more words about life experiment programs, since it helps establish what narrative conventions *Sweatshop* draws upon. “Part social experiment, part makeover, and part gameshow, life experiment programmes usually involve ordinary people experimenting with their lives in various different ways”, Hill writes (2005, 36). Typically, life experiment programs follow participants “over a pre-determined period of time” as they engage in social experiments, such as “living with someone else’s family; masquerading in an alternative, unfamiliar profession; living without an ‘essential’ utility/service/object; [and] living by the domestic rules imposed by strangers” (Hill 2007, 50). To illustrate, *Wife Swap*, one of the most famous examples of the life experiment program, is premised on two women from different families switching households for two weeks.<sup>86</sup> How each participant copes with the social experiment they undergo is a central element in these programs. As Hill writes, the series tend to revolve around “[t]he tensions, triumphs and failures of the participants’ experiences”, which are, moreover, “filmed in an observational manner” (2007, 50).<sup>87</sup> To put to the test people’s ways of life (and ways of managing their reactions to new environments), life experiment programs often stage smaller challenges within the larger social experiment, emphasize personal transformation and learning, often using interviews with participants to convey the idea that the participants have undergone a personal change.<sup>88</sup>

In *Sweatshop*, a contrast between a familiar home and a new, unfamiliar environment is established through the scenes set in Norway (in the first episode) and the subsequent episodes in Cambodia. A dichotomous relationship between an “us” and a “them” is also evoked, as seen in an inter-title that appears shortly after the opening sequence I described earlier. The inter-title displays a definition of the word “sweatshop”, presented in white text on black background, and is set to the sound of sewing machines running. It reads:

**Sweatshop** (swetʃɒp):

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<sup>86</sup> Since the first version of *Wife Swap* aired on Channel 4 in the UK in the period 2003–2009, the format for the series has since been adapted to other countries. The format was used in the Norwegian series *Konebytte* (TV3, 2004–2005), and the two Swedish series *Par på prov* (TV3, 2004–2005) and *Mamma byter bo* (TV4, 2011). For a comparative study the *Wife Swap* format in the UK and Norway, see Enli and McNair 2010.

<sup>87</sup> To compare, media scholars Laurie Ouellette and James Hay note that *Wife Swap*, unlike reality TV shows that “involve vetting who’s in and who’s out”, instead deals with “the ability of subjects to *tolerate* the discomforts of living difference and sharing the same space with alternative lifestyles, and ... the capacity of subjects to adjust their familiar management solutions to the requirements of the alternative lifestyle” (2008, 194). Ouellette and Hay’s analysis of *Wife Swap* fits into a larger argument they make about reality TV being “a resource for *constituting* households, neighborhoods, and other spheres of everyday government” (2008, 171).

<sup>88</sup> As Hill notes, the end of a given experiment in life experiment programs can generate a “life-affirmative” message, as seen when “the participants want to change their lives for the better”; in other cases, the take-away message is a “negative” one, whereby “the participants are judgmental of other people and their different life experiences” (2005, 37). In the case of *Sweatshop*, the youths are represented as having changed for the better.



Garment factory with low salaries and bad working conditions. Found in low cost countries and sew cheap clothes to our fashion stores.

[“**Sweatshop** (swetʃɔp):

Tekstilfabrikk med lav lønn og dårlige arbeidsforhold. Finnes i lavkostland og syr billige klær til våre kleskjeder.”]

Given the inclusion of a phonetic notation (“swetʃɔp”), the intertitle is designed to resemble a dictionary definition. However, it breaks in significant ways with the kind of language one might expect from a contemporary dictionary, since it refers to fashion stores (“kleskjeder in Norwegian) as “*our* fashion stores” [“våre kledskjeder”] (my emphasis).<sup>89</sup> This use of the pronoun “our” is subtle, but it establishes a subjective point of view from which sweatshops are perceived and defined. Sweatshops are, the intertitle implies, related to an imagined community – an “us” – because “our fashion stores” depend on these kinds of factories. Who constitutes this “us”, and on what grounds certain fashion stores can be described as “our” fashion stores, is not established in the inter-title. However, the description of the first episode does, incidentally, evoke the idea that life in Norway is comfortable, and may thus position Norwegians as part of the community whose clothing stores rely on sweatshops.<sup>90</sup> However subtly, the inter-title constructs a dichotomous relationship between an “us” and a “them” and raises the question of who (or what) is responsible for the conditions in sweatshop factories. Because the inter-title with the sweatshop definition appears early on and is followed by the segments in which the three participants are introduced, it frames the series as a whole and is likely to influence how the viewer perceives the three participants. More specifically, it encourages the viewer to see the three youth consumers from Norway as belonging to the “us” whose clothing stores depend on sweatshop labor.<sup>91</sup>

Who belongs to the categories “us” and “them” shifts throughout the series, variously pertaining to affluent consumers and underpaid workers, high-income and low-income countries/the Global North and the Global South, and multi-national corporations and

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<sup>89</sup> To compare, in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, the word “sweatshop” is defined as “a shop or factory in which employees work for long hours at low wages and under unhealthy conditions” (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “sweatshop (n.),” accessed November 13, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sweatshop>).

<sup>90</sup> The episode description reads: “Frida, Ludvig and Anniken arrive [to] their new reality in Cambodia. It is hot, humid, dusty and miles away ‘Norwegian comfort’” [“Frida, Ludvig og Anniken ankommer sin nye hverdag i Kambodsja. Det er varmt, klamt, støvete og milevis unna ‘norsk komfort’”].

<sup>91</sup> It is also worth noting that the series’ definition of “sweatshop” conflates, however paradoxically, sweatshop factories with the workers laboring in these factories. Note how the last sentence in the definition makes the “garment factory”, not garment factory workers, the subject that “sew[s] cheap clothes to our fashion stores”.

individuals. Notably, the first three dichotomies more or less overlap, but the fourth and final dichotomy – between multi-national corporations and individuals – blurs the line between the Global North and Global South by showing consumers and underpaid workers as fighting for the same cause. When *Sweatshop* introduces Frida, Ludvig and Anniken in the first episode, the viewer is encouraged to see them primarily as privileged youth consumers from Norway who lead comfortable lives. The inter-title with the sweatshop definition is followed by individual segments that introduce Frida, Ludvig, and Anniken, one by one. Each segment includes individual interviews with the participants and clips depicting spaces such as their bedrooms, closets, and the places they go shopping. That some of these shots are handheld and filmed by the participants themselves creates a sense of intimacy, whereby the viewer is presumably getting candid access into the lives of the three participants. In the more formal interviews, all three participants talk about themselves, their personalities, their relationship to shopping, and what they expect to learn in Cambodia. In short, the introductions are structured in similar ways, and thus work to establish the participants as a group, specifically, as privileged Norwegian youth consumers. Especially to viewers in Norway, the participants may evoke associations to “the oil generation” [oljegerasjonen] and “the oil kids” [oljebarna]. These two phrases are used, often in derogatory ways, to describe the generation born in Norway after the nation’s oil boom in the 1970s and the wealth that this oil boom created. The term “oljebarna” crops up in the spin-off journalism surrounding *Sweatshop*, in an opinion piece by 16-year-old Marie Charlotte Quist Paulsen, who both identifies as one of “oljebarna” and criticizes the group for being “spoiled” [bortskjemt] (2015).<sup>92</sup>

At the same time, the three participants may also be understood as (youth) consumers in the Global North in general. All three are white and appear to be middle-class to upper-middle class. Moreover, while *Sweatshop* contains a few references to Norway, as I will show, the series also frames the participants and their relationship to sweatshop labor in terms of a power imbalance between the Global North and the Global South in general. Thematically, the series thus brings to mind Young’s discussion of sweatshop labor, and that of philosopher Gillian Brock, who touches on sweatshops in her article on global justice in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. In this article, Brock uses sweatshops as an example of an ethical problem in the contemporary world, and writes:

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<sup>92</sup> In both its print and online version, the opinion piece is accompanied by a photograph depicting three young women (from behind) as they walk down a street with big shopping bags in their hands and their arms around each other’s shoulders. However, the online version has an additional visual element, namely, the first episode of *Sweatshop*. The clip is embedded into the text, near the end and right before the subtitle “Oljebarna”.

So-called sweatshops (in which workers typically labor under harsh and hazardous conditions) are ... a frequently raised example of how western consumers are *implicated* in far away suffering, given the high level of *dependence* in high-income countries on labor from low-income ones. (Brock 2017, my emphasis)

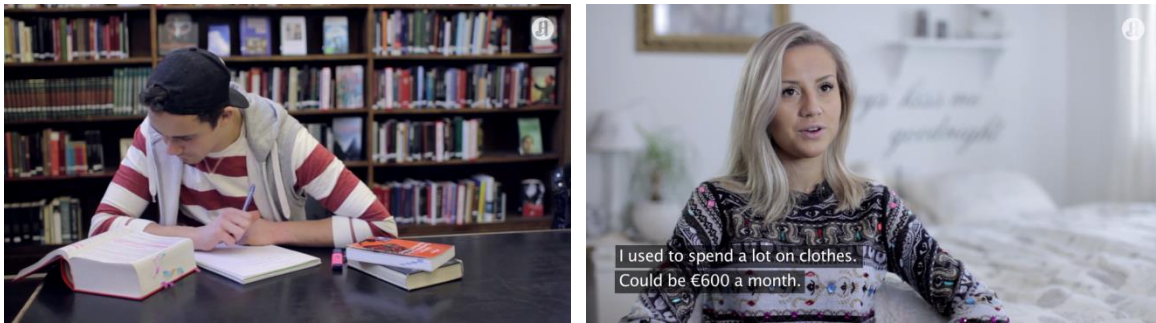
Brock goes on to ask: “When we purchase products manufactured in sweatshops are we *guilty* of contributing to exploitation and if so, what ought we to do to mitigate these unfairnesses?” (2017, my emphasis) Brock points out the perceived contrast between on the one hand “western consumers” and “high-income countries” (which she seems to relate a “we”, i.e. the “we” that “purchase[s] products manufactured in sweatshops”), and on the other hand workers that “typically labor under harsh and hazardous conditions” in sweatshops and “low-income [countries]”. In *Sweatshop*, the relationship between these two categories is visualized and problematized through face-to-face encounters between the youth consumers from the Global North and sweatshop workers in Cambodia.<sup>93</sup>

While the three participants represent a group, it is also worth underscoring that they are also cast and depicted in such a way that they symbolize different segments of the Norwegian youth population. During their introduction segments, each of the participants answers questions in slightly different ways. Moreover, Ludvig, the eldest of the three participants, is like the others represented as an avid shopper, but he is notably introduced as a student and shown sitting in the library, reading (Fig. 3). Meanwhile, Frida is the only one who buys second-hand clothes and also appears somewhat informed about the problems with sweatshop labor. Compared to the others, Anniken is associated more with glamour and conspicuous consumption, partly because she is introduced as a popular fashion blogger in Norway and her introduction to a large extent revolves around that role and what being a fashion blogger entails (Fig. 4). Anniken is, I should note, also depicted as somewhat goofy, as seen at the start of her segment in a couple of “behind the scenes”-like clips, which depict her as she applies hair spray and seems unable to stop giggling. Compared to the other introductions, Anniken’s segment most evidently evokes associations to an affluent and privileged youth from Norway. While the three participants are all shown to undergo a personal transformation, *Sweatshop* frames Anniken as the participant who changes the most

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<sup>93</sup> In her article, Brock gives an overview of various philosophical approaches to the issue of global justice. Besides global economic injustice (the heading under which she discusses sweatshops), Brock gives a number of other examples, exploring issues related to military intervention, war and just conduct, global gender justice, immigration, global environmental issues and global health issues.

during the course of series.



Figs. 3–4: From the left, Ludvig's and Anniken's introduction segments, respectively. Source: Screen dump from *Aftenposten-TV*.

### Staging a Narrative of Personal Transformation

*Sweatshop* stages a narrative of personal transformation not only by constructing a larger social experiment (i.e. a journey to Cambodia), but also by staging smaller challenges that the participants must undergo as part of the larger social experiment. These staged challenges function as tests through which the participants are shown to learn. The lessons they draw from these tests vary, but the participants are generally depicted as getting a better understanding of poverty and what it is like to be a sweatshop worker thanks to the challenges. To give some examples, in the third episode, the participants must work in a sweatshop factory for half a day and subsequently try to buy ingredients for a large dinner, using the meagre salary they earned in the factory (altogether \$US 9). The youths struggle with both tasks, especially working in the sweatshop factory. However, unlike reality TV series that have a markedly competitive element to them (e.g. reality gameshows), *Sweatshop* does not suggest that failing the staged challenges has any major consequences for the three participants. Rather, the point seems to be that the participants *should* fail, for in their inability to work in a sweatshop factory, the youths also demonstrate how intolerable the working conditions in the factory are.

More generally, whenever the participants prove unable to adapt to life in Cambodia, it only further underscores how privileged they are. The staged challenges have a didactic function, teaching the participants (and, perhaps, the viewer) about global injustice and serving as a reminder that working and living conditions in Norway are significantly better than those in Cambodia. Besides having this didactic dimension, the staged challenges also add a ludic and comical element to the series. For instance, when the youths go to a supermarket in search for groceries in the third episode, *Sweatshop* draws on elements from

more gameshow-like reality TV series: It uses sounds and visual effects (such as the noise from a cash register and clip-art or photographs of the food items the participants buy), as a way to visualize whether the participants meet the challenge, and to add an element of playfulness or suspense. Whether the scenes in the supermarket and their gameshow-like elements are seen as emulating or parodying reality gameshows depends on the viewer. What seems fairly certain is that the makers of *Sweatshop* have been influenced by another supermarket scene, seen in *Teenage Boss* (NRK, 2011–2012 and 2017), the reality TV series in which Anniken first made her debut on TV. *Teenage Boss* also features a segment in which Anniken goes to the supermarket and struggles to balance a budget while sound effects add a gameshow-like feel to the scene.<sup>94</sup> However, the money Anniken spends in *Teenage Boss* comes from her own parents' wallets, whereas in *Sweatshop*, the money consists of the three participants' hard-earned salary from the textile factory.

The supermarket scene in *Sweatshop* is in some ways a classic, comical “fish out of water” moment, comical because the three participants have entered an unfamiliar environment that they do not know how to navigate. That the participants are spending their own money presumably makes it fairly harmless for *Sweatshop* to create some comedy out of their inability to spend their money wisely. Conversely, the supermarket scene also has a serious, underlying subject matter. After all, the money the participants are spending is not only their own salary – it also symbolizes the meager salary that sweatshop workers in Cambodia earn. Thus, every item the participants cannot afford is also a symbolic reminder of the items that are out of bounds for sweatshop workers. From one perspective, the scene is comical; from another, it is grave because its underlying topic is poverty and global injustice. At issue in this supermarket challenge, and in the other staged challenges in *Sweatshop*, is thus a tension between the ludic and didactic dimensions in *Sweatshop* as a whole.

Indeed, a tension between wanting to entertain and wanting to impart lessons of some sort is evident in the very premise of the series: recruiting three participants from Norway, framing them as privileged, and having them live and work like sweatshop workers in Cambodia. To have the participants experiment with being a factory worker can, on the one hand, be understood as an exercise in empathy, a way to walk in someone else's shoes. It may even bring to mind the process which, during the 1960s and 1970s, was referred to among

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<sup>94</sup> *Teenage Boss* was a life experiment program developed by the Norwegian national public broadcaster NRK, and premised on a social experiment in which two parents hand over the family budget to their teenage daughter or son for a designated period of time.

Maoists in Norway as “self-proletarianization” [selvproletarisering].<sup>95</sup> On the other hand, having privileged individuals experiment with being a sweatshop worker, with being less advantaged than they are, may also imply that it is okay to momentarily “play at” being an underpaid factory worker – as if poverty and dire working conditions is something you can try on to re-fashion yourself, like a piece of clothing. I say this is not to suggest that social experiments are inherently and always unethical. What I mean is that some of the staged challenges in the particular case of *Sweatshop* rest on asymmetrical power relations that are important to acknowledge and, in fact, radically different from those in other life experiment programs. To illustrate, while *Wife Swap* involves a two-way exchange of lifestyles, whereby two wives trade places for a few weeks, *Sweatshop* is premised on a one-way exchange in which three relatively privileged citizens from Norway go to Cambodia to live and work like sweatshop workers – but at no point is anyone in Cambodia offered the chance to fly to Norway and try out the lifestyles of the Norwegian youths. I am not seriously suggesting that the latter would be a good idea. Rather, I mention it to point out how *Sweatshop*, inadvertently or not, represents poverty as an arena for social experimentation on the part of privileged people, and that the staged challenges in particular may risk obscuring the power imbalance that makes that experimentation possible in the first place.

The staged challenges are closely connected to another key feature of *Sweatshop*'s narrative structure, namely, the repeated use of interviews. These include one-on-one individual interviews, group interviews where all three participants are present, and lastly, interviews that the participants conduct with sweatshop workers and activists in Cambodia. Unlike the former two types of interviews, the third and final type place the three participants in the role as journalists, and thus make them go from interviewers to interviewees. The first of these interviews appears in the second episode, when the youths are introduced to Sokty, a 25-year-old garment factory worker. After Sokty has shown the participants around her small home, Frida asks Sokty how many hours she works, what she gets paid, and various other questions. During this interview, we repeatedly cut to reaction shots of the participants, but they are not the only focal point. Rather, they function as an inquisitive and attentive group of listeners who share the narrative space with Sokty, the interviewee. Likewise, the fifth episode includes several interviews with Siang Yot, a political activist. Here, too, Anniken, Frida, and Ludvig are depicted as attentive listeners who learn from and are eventually

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<sup>95</sup> In *Store norske leksikon*, selvproletarisering is defined as: “turning oneself into a proletariat by leaving an academic, bourgeois environment and entering manual labor” [det å gjøre seg til proletar ved å forlate et akademisk, borgerlig miljø og gå ut i manuelt arbeid] (*Store norske leksikon*, s.v. “selvproletarisering (n.),” accessed November 28, 2017, <http://ordbok.uib.no/selvproletarisering>).

inspired by the older and experienced activist from Cambodia. In general, the interviews that the youths conduct with locals in Cambodia stage symbolic face-to-face encounters between the participants and less advantaged others in the Global South.

To compare, interviews in which the participants talk either individually or as a group typically revolve around what the participants have learned from the various challenges and their journey to Cambodia in general. These interviews are thus key to how *Sweatshop* constructs a narrative of a personal transformation. To illustrate, in the second episode (which is titled “Our bathroom is larger than her entire house” in English), the participants not only interview Sokty, but also have dinner in Sokty’s home and learn that they will spend the night there.<sup>96</sup> Sitting outside Sokty’s house in the daylight, Frida and the rest of the group talk about their expectations. Frida asks: “We were just told that we shall sleep in that tiny room. What do you think of that?” [“Nå blir det en natt på det lille rommet. Vi fikk jo akkurat vite at vi skulle sove der da. Hva tenker dere om det?”] In response, Anniken says that she thinks that it will do them good, that although she would rather sleep in a hotel bed, they will learn from the experience [“Jeg tror vi har kjempegodt av det. ... jeg har ikke så veldig lyst, jeg vil heller ligge i en hotellseng liksom, men vi har kjempegodt av det”]. Anniken’s comment illustrates the general emphasis on learning in the series and how this theme is conveyed through the use of interviews. Moreover, it also indicates a general tendency on the part of the youths to describe their exposure to poorer, rougher living conditions in “positive” terms – as experiences that are “good for them”, beneficial to their own personal development.<sup>97</sup>

Unlike the interviews with Cambodians, which draw on conventions in documentary journalism, interviews where the three participants talk about their expectations or what they have learned formally resemble reality TV series. As in the reality TV genre, *Sweatshop* tends to place the interviewer off-screen, thus allowing the series to film the participants in an observational manner and simulate a sense of authenticity. Jerslev (2014), who describes reality-TV as emotions TV [følelser-TV], refers to one-on-one, individual interviews in reality TV series as “simulated monologues”. As she points out, such simulated monologues create a specific mode of address by editing out the interviewer who poses the questions to which participants are responding (53). By removing the interviewer, simulated monologues seem to convey directly to the viewer the thoughts, feelings and reflections on the part of the

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<sup>96</sup> Earlier parts of the episode convey that the three participants consider Sokty’s home as tiny and unclean.

<sup>97</sup> In Chapter 6, I return to this idea that exposure to poverty can be “beneficial” to the personal development of privileged individuals. Drawing on Sherman’s sociological study on parenting techniques in wealthy New York families, I analyze *Real Humans* and the ways in which one of the privileged protagonists in the series, Inger, manages her own privileged position and that of her children.

participants. Or rather, they give the viewer an *impression* of authenticity and immediacy, creating a sense of “closeness and of direct communication” [nærhed og direkte kommunikation] that Jerslev describes as a “discourse of intimacy” [en intimitetens diskurs] (Jerslev 2014, 53). To compare, in their article “Talking Alone: Reality TV, Emotions and Authenticity”, media and communications scholars Minna Aslama and Mervi Pantti suggests that the monologue “is at the core of reality television”, with “staged confession[s]”, as they call it, being perhaps the most obvious example (2006, 175).<sup>98</sup>

In *Sweatshop*, the individual interviews, or simulated monologues, with Anniken, Frida and Ludvig are remarkably consistent in that they often contain remarks on what each participant has *learned* from a given experience. This makes it fair to assume, or at least speculate, that an off-screen interviewer may have asked the participants questions such as “what did you learn from your experiences today?” While the viewer does not know whether the three participants have been explicitly asked to discuss what they expect to learn from their experiences in Cambodia, *Sweatshop* is clearly edited in such a way that comments on learning recur throughout the show, thus establishing learning as a theme. Notably, through the individual and group interviews, *Sweatshop* also suggests that the participants have different views on the trip to Cambodia, what they have learned from it, and what they think about life in Norway. Ludvig, for instance, repeatedly mentions that people in Norway (including himself) do not properly understand poverty – not until they see it in real life. In the second episode, after the participants have had dinner with Sokty and interviewed her during the meal, Ludvig, Frida, and Anniken are standing outside Sokty’s house when Ludvig says (addressing the others):

It is stupid that we have to go all the way down here to understand it. In Norway, we live in a bubble. You think you know, you think it is bad. But you just don’t know how bad it is before you see it.

[“Men jeg synes det er så utrolig teit at man liksom må dra ned hit for å skjønne det liksom . . . man lever liksom i den bobla i Norge og tror at, altså . . . man tror man vet, man tror de har det fælt, men man vet ikke hva fælt betyr før man ser det, altså.”]

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<sup>98</sup> My understanding of reality TV as influenced by confessions is inspired by education scholar Andreas Fejes and social work scholar Magnus Dahlstedt’s discussion of reality TV in their 2013 book *The Confessing Society: Foucault, Confession and Practices of Lifelong Learning*.



When Ludvig says that people in Norway seem unable to properly “understand it”, he does not specify what he means by “it”, but the viewer can infer from the context of the dialogue that he means either the severity of global poverty, or poverty in the Global South or Cambodia in particular. While he says that people in Norway “live in a bubble”, he also seems to imply that coming to Cambodia has allowed him to momentarily escape that bubble. At the same time, his remark is also fairly self-aware, and thus comparable to Anniken’s comment that the group can benefit from spending the night in Sokty’s home, which I mentioned earlier. However, Ludvig’s comment comes noticeably closer to a social critique, since it addresses that there is something “stupid” – or, to give a more accurate translation, something so incredibly stupid [“så utrolig teit”] – about having to travel “all the way down here to understand it”. Ludvig does not refer specifically to his own journey and that of the other two participants, but again the context of the dialogue and the overall premise of the series invites the viewer to see Ludvig’s comment as a subtle critique of his own journey to Cambodia. His comment can even be understood as a criticism of the *Sweatshop* series itself. As Ludvig paradoxically suggests: Why should he have to travel to Cambodia in order to understand the vast economic inequalities in the world? He should know. And yet, he does not in fact understand, not until he travels to Cambodia and sees it with his own eyes.<sup>99</sup>

It is worth pointing out that Ludvig also embodies a critical voice elsewhere in the series, and generally represents someone who explicitly points out the asymmetrical power relations between consumers like himself and workers in Cambodia. The following excerpt from an individual interview with Ludvig is a striking example. It appears in the fifth and final episode (titled “- What kind of life is this?”), and illustrates the series’ general emphasis on learning, the function of one-on-one interviews, and the kind of social critique that Ludvig provides (Fig. 5). It is also important because it contains the first of several explicit, critical references to H&M in the series. To better convey the fact that Ludvig comes across as indignant or morally outraged in this scene, I have italicized words that Ludvig stresses when he speaks:

The main thing I have learned is that the world is *unbelievably* unfair. This is also what we say in Norway. And “unfair” is really the correct word. It is not fair that

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<sup>99</sup> In the fourth episode, Ludvig makes a similar statement when he says that what you can buy for \$US 9 in a country is not something you see on TV or hear about. This statement is followed up by clip in which Ludvig says: “Their lives suck because we are so well off. Everybody say[s] that the world is unfair. Now I know what unfair actually means.” [“De har det jævlig fordi vi har det bra. Og alle sier at verden er urettferdig. Men nå ser jeg hva urettferdig faktisk betyr.”]

anybody sit in 12 hours sewing and sewing. Until they collapse of dehydration and hunger. I don't have word for it. It is just so extremely unfair. And truth is that we are rich because they are poor. We are rich because it costs us €10 to buy a t-shirt [i]n H&M. But somebody else has to *starve* for you to be able to buy it.

[“Det viktigste jeg har lært... Det er nok at verden er *utrolig* urettferdig og... det sier vi hjemme i Norge også, men “urettferdig” er faktisk det ordet som passer mest. Det er ikke rettfærdig at noen sitter i tolv timer og syr og syr og syr til de besvimer av dehydrering og sult. Jeg eier ikke ord for det engang. Det er, det er så utrolig urettferdig. Og det er faktisk sånn at... vi er rike fordi de er fattige. Vi er rike fordi at det koster oss 100 kr å kjøpe en jævla t-skjorte på H&M mens noen andre... *sulter* for at du skal ha den.”]

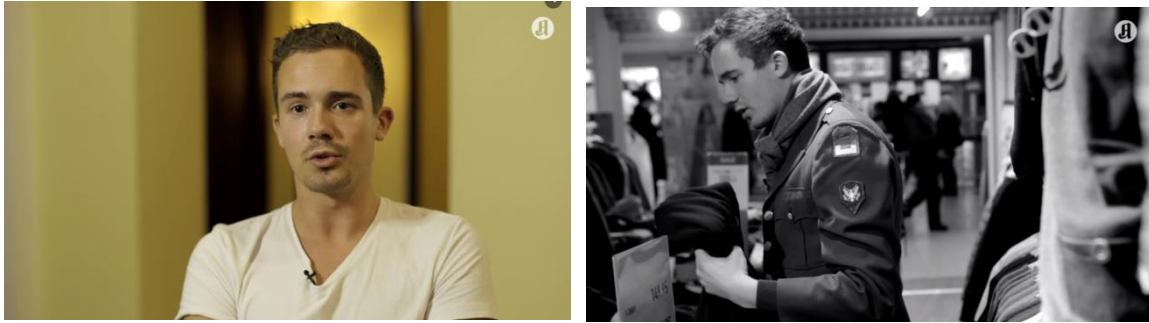
Even if Ludvig does not explicitly state “I feel guilty”, his statement can bring to mind what Katchadourian calls “the guilt of positive inequity” (discussed in Chapter 2). Furthermore, because his comment concerns sweatshop labor in the Global South, it also relates to structural injustice in a globalized age, as conceptualized by Young in her discussion on sweatshop labor.

In *Sweatshop*, these otherwise abstract concepts and phenomena are embodied by Ludvig's sense of moral outrage. Indeed, his comment is not reducible to the excerpt printed above, but needs to be understood in relation to the use of music and visuals in the scene. For one, Ludvig's interview is set to a song by the Norwegian band Highasakite, “*Lover, Where Do You Live?*” – a melancholic song that is dominated by a repeated piano chord in minor key and a female vocal that, when used in *Sweatshop* at least, appears to be singing about separation and loss. The song adds an additional emotional charge to an already dramatic and affecting scene. Moreover, visually, Ludvig's words are at first accompanied by black and white clips that depict workers in a sweatshop factory, thus bringing to mind the rapidly edited montage in the series' opening sequence. This time, however, clips from the factory are set to Ludvig's voice-over and, moreover, include a shot of Ludvig himself working on a sewing machine in the factory.<sup>100</sup> This is, in other words, not the same image of a sweatshop factory that we saw in the opening sequence, wherein all the workers were Asian and remained anonymous. While the factory is presumably the same, the factory is now depicted as one in which the participants themselves have worked and that they have consequently

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<sup>100</sup> As in the opening sequence, this montage of clips from the sweatshop factory in this episode includes a clip of Anniken sitting by a sewing machine, looking tired.

experienced. As the series seems to suggest, the dichotomy between “us” and “them”, between privileged youth consumers in Norway and sweatshop workers in Cambodia, has been blurred, leading to important realizations on the part of the youth consumers (embodied here by Ludvig).



*Figs. 5–6: Ludvig’s monologue (left), and his “past self” in black and white (right). Source: Screen dump from Aftenposten-TV.*

Finally, when Ludvig says the words “we are rich because they are poor”, we cut to a series of black and white clips that appear to be flash-backs. The clips should be familiar to the viewer: They are taken from his introduction segment in the first episode, and show Ludvig browsing in a clothing store in Norway. This time, however, the clips are in black and white, and may thus seem to represent Ludvig’s “past self” (Fig. 6). Alternatively, they also serve as reminders of Ludvig’s consumption habits in Norway, or perhaps the habits of anyone who is, like Ludvig, a privileged consumer in the Global North. Ludvig’s references to a rich “we” – an imagined community whose wealth relies on the poverty of others – are, when accompanied by these black and white shopping scenes, an example of how *Sweatshop* launches a social critique even, or especially, because it charts the personal transformation of its three participants. Through Ludvig and the other participants’ self-scrutinizing comments, *Sweatshop* draws attention to global injustice, and to the relationship between privileged people and their less advantaged counterparts in other parts of the world.

### **Blaming and Shaming Multinational Corporations**

As importantly, *Sweatshop* also criticizes multinational clothing companies in particular, using the personal transformation of the three participants as a means for building up to and literally voicing this critique. As mentioned, Ludvig’s explicit reference to H&M in the above monologue is the first of several instances in which H&M is mentioned in the series. An even more blatant critique comes shortly afterwards, when we cut to a simulated monologue in

which Frida is noticeably enraged. Ludvig and Frida's monologues are, I should note, preceded by a pivotal moment in the series, where three participants visit a resource center for sweatshop workers and each conduct an interview with a female sweatshop worker. In short, Frida's anger and moral outrage is framed as a response to her hearing the traumatic life experiences of a sweatshop worker. Consequently, the traumas of sweatshop workers also frame Frida's critique of H&M, which goes as follow:

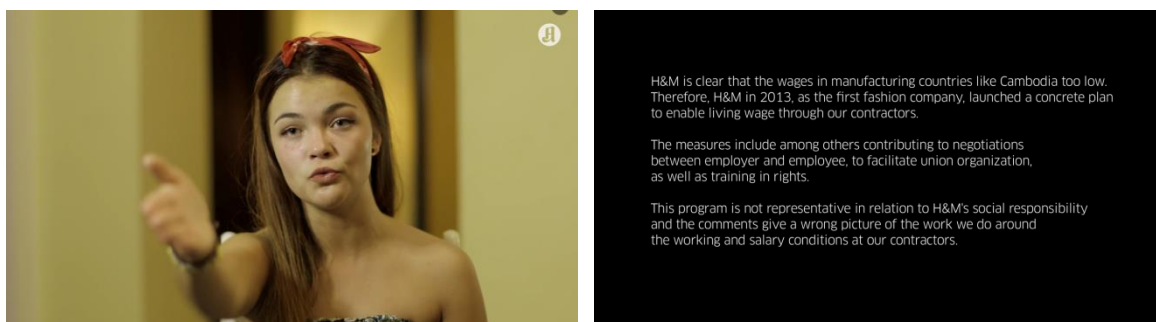
I can't understand why the big chains, like H&M, don't act? H&M is [a] big company with massive amounts of power. Do something! Take responsibility for your employees. Don't just sit on your ass and take everything for granted. These people work for you. I am just put out by all this. I never imagined these things were real.

[“Jeg skjønner ikke... hvorfor tar ikke de store organisasjonene som H&M for eksempel, hvis du tar H&M, som en organisasjon med sinnssykt mye makt. Gjør noe, ta ansvar for din ansatt. Ikke bare sitt på rumpa og ta alt som en selvfølge. Det er faktisk folk som jobber for dere. Jeg blir helt satt ut. For det kunne ikke falle meg inn at noe sånt kunne skje.”]

When Frida says “Do something!”, she raises her hand and points it directly at the camera – a gesture that seems to address H&M in particular, especially given her earlier mention of H&M by name (Fig. 7). Her remark “These people work for you” also seems to address a “you” that is H&M and not, for instance, consumers who buy clothes from H&M. As such, Frida's monologue draws more attention to the role of H&M, and clearly foreshadows two inter-titles later in the episode, which engage even more directly with H&M.

Appearing almost at the end of the final episode, the first of these inter-titles shows an official statement issued by H&M in response to *Sweatshop* and its content, and reads: “H&M did not want to be interviewed for this series, but have made the following statement about the content:”. Next, another inter-title gradually displays three paragraphs in which H&M explains its commitment to corporate social responsibility and ultimately distances itself from the content in *Sweatshop*, as it states: “This program [*Sweatshop*] is not representative in relation to H&M's social responsibility and the comments give a wrong picture of the work we do around the working and salary conditions at our contractors.” [“Dette programmet er ikke representativt i forhold til H&Ms sosiale ansvar, og kommentarene gir et feil bilde av arbeidet vi gjør som arbeids- og lønnsforhold blant våre leverandører.”] (Fig. 8). Notably, the

use of sound in these inter-titles represents H&M’s response both as an interruption of sorts or a source of controversy, and as a text that should be taken seriously. To illustrate, before the first inter-title appears, we hear a brief, high-pitched beep, i.e. the beeping sound that is used when words are censored or a technical error occurs on TV. Meanwhile, the longer statement by H&M in the second inter-title is accompanied by a male voice-over, who reads the statement in a voice that sounds calm, trustworthy, and evokes associations to a newscaster.



*Figs. 7–8: Ida accusing H&M (left) and the intertitle with H&M’s response (right). Source: Screen dump from Aftenposten-TV.*

The decision to include H&M’s own official statement near the end of *Sweatshop* needs to be understood in light of a journalistic code of ethics, which in the case of the Norwegian press entails a commitment to allowing different points of view be expressed.<sup>101</sup> Narratively speaking, the inter-titles with H&M’s statements also function as a retort to Ludvig’s and Frida’s mention of H&M, thus creating a dialogue within the series between youth consumers and multinational corporations. This dialogue, as I mentioned, is somewhat ambiguous, however, given the manner in which H&M’s statement is presented. Indeed, overall, *Sweatshop* seems to build on a tactic used by activists in the anti-sweatshop movement, namely, the blaming, shaming and naming of companies whose goods are made in sweatshops. As sociologists Tim Bartley and Curtis Child argues in their article “Shaming the Corporation: The Social Production of Targets and the Anti-Sweatshop Movement”, “‘naming and shaming’ corporations has become a signature piece in many social movement repertoires”, as illustrated by the “branding” of certain clothing companies (e.g. the US-based company The Gap) with a “sweatshop stigma” (2014, 653–4; see also Appelbaum 2016, 45).

<sup>101</sup> In Norway, the ethical guidelines for the press are stated in the Code of Ethics of the Norwegian Press (referred to in Norwegian as “Vær varsom-plakaten”), and paragraph 1.2 in the Code of Ethics refers specifically to presenting multiple points of view: “The press has important functions in that it carries information, debates and critical comments on current affairs. The press is particularly responsible for allowing different views to be expressed.” [“Pressen ivaretar viktige oppgaver som informasjon, debatt og samfunnskritikk. Pressen har et spesielt ansvar for at ulike syn kommer til uttrykk.”] (Pressens faglige utvalg, n.d.)

In *Sweatshop*, a critique of H&M is evoked both through the above scenes and in a more subtle way through the ending of the series. *Sweatshop* ends with a montage with two, black and white, medium shot photographs of Sokty sitting in her home and looking directly into the camera. Superimposed on each of the photographs are two sentences, the first of which is a dedication to Sokty, thanking her for giving insight into garment workers' everyday lives, while the second sentence reads: "She still earns \$3 a day" ["Hun tjener fortsatt \$3 dagen"]. The latter sentence makes no references to H&M, but it nevertheless functions as a sobering reminder that, while H&M claims to improve the conditions of sweatshop workers, Sokty and other workers are still underpaid. The word "still" draws particular attention to the lack of change, or the continuation of existing structural problems, at least as far as Sokty's life "on the ground" is concerned. Indeed, the absence of change in Sokty's life sharply contrasts the considerable transformation that the three participants from Norway are shown to undergo, and the claim on H&M's part that the company actively helps sweatshop workers.

### **Blaming and Shaming Youth Consumers and Young Women**

Besides explicitly blaming and shaming multinational corporations, *Sweatshop* also implicitly blames and shames youth consumers, especially young women consumers. While Anniken, Frida, and Ludvig all represent the potential for change, the series emphasizes Anniken's personal transformation in particular, framing her as the participant who changes the most. This becomes especially evident in the fifth and final episode, when a simulated monologue with Anniken in the diegetic present is intercut and contrasted with clips from earlier episodes. The latter clips are presented as flash-backs both aurally and visually (i.e. they appear in black and white, and are preceded by a "swoosh" sound). In these flash-backs Anniken makes somewhat flippant or insensitive comments about poverty and sweatshop workers' lives. The simulated monologue in the diegetic present is the interview in the opening sequence of the series, in which Anniken looks upset and talks about how she used to think about poverty in other parts of the world.

This interview is a key scene in the series, appearing as it does at the start of the series and in this final episode. However, when used at the end of the series, the interview is longer and intercut with clips that seem to depict Anniken's "past self". In contrast to the black and white flashbacks, the simulated monologue shows a self-critical Anniken who seems to recognize the intrinsic value and suffering of less advantaged others. Another example can be seen at the very end of the final episode. Here, Anniken even comes across as a nascent

political activist. The three participants are sitting in the back of a van and discussing the future, when Anniken says that their task right now is to go back to Norway and influence everyone else [“Jobben vår nå er å dra til Norge og påvirke alle andre.”].<sup>102</sup> Also, Frida chips in and agrees that that is “our job now” [“vår jobb”].

As I suggested in the introduction to this chapter, it is important to ask which specific individuals or groups are recruited to participate in reality TV series. As Skeggs points out, “[t]he over-recruitment of different types of working-class participants to . . . [reality TV] shows and the positioning of many in need of transformation” makes it important to explore the manner in which “certain people and cultures are positioned, evaluated and interpreted as inadequate, deficient and requiring improvement” (2009, 626). While Skeggs’s examples are drawn from reality TV series in the UK, I mention her discussion because it is useful for critically discussing the casting and framing of the three participants in *Sweatshop* and for considering, in particular, the role of gender. According to Skeggs, “self-transformation television has to entertain in order to produce viewers”, and “[i]t does this by dramatically visualising ‘problems’ in need of improvement and providing advice on how this can be achieved” (2009, 639). In her examples, Skeggs finds that “it is predominantly working-class women (of different types) that we see recruited to self-transformational television” and that “the type of transformation is often structured through class relations” (2009, 628). My aim is not to compare Skeggs’s examples with my own, but to use Skeggs’s observations to ask how gender and class relations informs *Sweatshops*’s story about personal transformation.

*Sweatshop* is also about class relations, in the sense that it deals with global inequality. While all three participants are presented as having roughly the same class background (i.e. middle to upper-middle class) and, as a group, symbolize the privileged, they are obviously contrasted with the workers and activists in Cambodia, as I have already shown. What seems at first less obvious, but is no less important, is the role that gender and gendered ideas play in the series. Young women play a particularly noteworthy position in *Sweatshop*, and this has not so much to do with the fact that two of the three participants are young women (although this matters too), but with the manner in which *Sweatshop* foregrounds Anniken’s transformation. By hinting at her vanity and ignorance in earlier parts of the series, *Sweatshop* suggests that Anniken ultimately transforms into a more self-critical, conscientious, and politically conscious subject by the end of the series. Additionally, certain moments in the

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<sup>102</sup> In this case, the official English subtitles misrepresent Anniken’s statement, making it sound as if she is referring to a task in the singular (“my task”), while the original spoken words in Norwegian refer to a task shared by all three of the youths in the plural (“our task”). The official English subtitles read: “My task now is to go to Norway and make others see. To help by influence others”.

series also juxtapose Anniken and Ludvig in such a way that the latter comes to embody the stereotypical idea of the older, more “rational” male figure. This is especially evident in a simulated monologue in the third episode, where Anniken makes what are probably some of the most questionable statements about sweatshop labor that we hear in the series. This simulated monologue is also worth examining more closely because it is used in the fifth episode, as part of the montage of black and white flashbacks that depict Anniken’s past self. Indeed, when clips from this particular monologue are included in black and white in the final episode, it serves to underscore how Anniken has changed for the better.

The monologue in question appears halfway through the third episode, and shows Anniken sitting outdoors in the daylight after having worked in a sweatshop factory for most of the day. She seems noticeably exhausted, and in this sense resembles the other participants, who are similarly tired when they are interviewed. At the same time, Anniken seems especially unfocused and thus vulnerable as an interviewee. Rather than pointing out this vulnerability on Anniken’s part, *Sweatshop* instead makes the most out of the fact that Anniken makes several flippant comments in this interview. As she talks about her observations – on her own experience of working in a factory, but also on sweatshop labor in general – she says that sweatshop workers have an okay job [“en helt grei jobb”], and that they are fine with their current working conditions because they, unlike her, are used to working under these conditions and have never experienced anything better. The scene also depicts details in Anniken’s body language, including moments when she rubs her eyes and generally looks tired and distracted. The general impression the viewer gets of Anniken is, as mentioned before, not that of a vulnerable participant in a staged social experiment, but rather, that of an entitled, ignorant, and arrogant youth consumer from Norway – someone who really does not understand the suffering of others.

As importantly, Anniken’s interview is quickly followed by an interview with Ludvig, in which he essentially contradicts what she has said and represents someone with a more informed and empathetic understanding of poverty and the suffering of others. For instance, Ludvig says that he feels very sorry for those who have to work under these conditions and that the worst part probably is that the factory they have visited is most likely relatively decent, given the fact that they have actually been given access to it. [“ . . . jeg synes veldig synd på de menneskene som må ha det sånn. Det verste er vel at det her er jo en av de vi faktisk slipper inn i, så da lurer jeg på hvordan det er i de vi ikke kommer inn i.”] In contrast to Anniken, Ludvig is depicted as a person who recognizes his own privileged position and does not take it for granted.



Anniken is, in other words, singled out as the participant who is especially in need of improvement, even if *Sweatshop* represents not only young women (e.g. Frida and Anniken) but also young men (e.g. Ludvig) as privileged consumers who need to learn about global injustice. According to Skeggs, participants in “‘reality’ television” tend to

come to the viewer pre-packaged . . . , entering the event already value-loaded, their moral subject-positions highly circumscribed, cast to fulfil specific criteria, in need of, or wanting, or willing to participate in self-transformation. (2009, 639)

In the case of Anniken, she is already in her introduction segment more or less typecast as a young, blonde, and feminized fashion blogger, and her interest in fashion is, by virtue of the series’ overall theme (i.e. the problems with today’s global garment industry), implied to be a problem, one that will be corrected during the course of the series. If participants in reality TV are, as Skeggs suggests, value-loaded from the outset, then Anniken can be described as loaded with negative and gendered ideas about consumption of clothes as wasteful and unproductive.

*Sweatshop* can thus be understood in light of sociologists Ragnhild Brusdal and Ardis Storm-Mathisen’s discussion in their 2009 article “Fy skam deg! Betraktninger rundt kritikken av unge kvinners forbruk” [Shame on you! Observations on the critique of young women’s consumption]. In Norway, media representations of young women and their consumer habits often evoke the idea that there is something “wasteful, uncontrolled, and shameful” [sløsende, kontrolløst og skammelig] about young women’s consumption, Brusdal and Storm-Mathisen note (2009, 54). Norwegian debates are shaped by a narrative about girls and women whose consumption is shameful and a cause for concern, for instance because they are concerned with buying designer jeans or other expensive clothes (Brusdal and Storm-Mathisen 2009, 54). As the authors point out, the classic shopaholic is typically associated with “a woman who buys too many clothes, not a man with expensive cars, sports equipment, and other technical gadgets, or a retiree with many real estate properties” [en kvinne med høyt klesforbruk, ikke en mann med dyre biler, sportsutstyr og andre tekniske innretninger, eller en pensjonist med mange boliger] (70–1). It is both unfair and unfortunate, the authors argue, that young women’s consumer habits are constructed as especially shameful – unfair because young women’s consumption is neither especially high nor especially materialistic or immoral when compared to that of other groups, and unfortunate because it associates and encourages shame in one specific group (2009, 70). More specifically, shaming young women for their

consumption can let off the hook those groups that are not explicitly mentioned and targeted. As Brusdal and Storm-Mathisen write:

This makes shame a tool of power that produces *just and guilty identities*. When the spotlight is aimed at young women, others can – with a clear conscience – continue as before in the surrounding shadows. As a result, one unjustifiably exempts other consumer groups of responsibility. (2009, 70, my emphasis)

[Skam blir da nettopp et maktmiddel som produserer rettvise og skyldige identiteter. Når lyskasterne rettes mot unge kvinner, kan andre – med god samvittighet – fortsette i skyggefeltene omkring. Slik fritar en urettmessig andre grupper forbrukere for ansvar.]

Applying Brusdal and Storm-Mathisen's findings to *Sweatshop* brings into view how the series shames and blames young women in particular for their consumer habits, and implies that they are responsible for changing themselves.

It is worth pointing out that there is an empowering aspect to this emphasis on young women and personal change. As *Sweatshop* seems to suggest, by changing themselves, young women can, in turn, potentially help instigate a change in the way people think about consumption and global injustice, perhaps even trigger a political change. Indeed, the series very much exemplifies what sociologist Anita Harris describes as a contemporary tendency, whereby young women are depicted as “taking responsibility for social rights, acting as ‘ambassadors’ and leaders, as the new global citizens, and as those best able to blend consumer choice into citizenship duties” (2006, 71; see also Koffman, Orgad, and Gill 2015). However, as Harris writes in her book *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century* (which focuses on the Australian context), this depiction of young women as “global citizens” is complex and problematic. For one, while many advertisers market their products to young women by adopting “the language of political power” and give the impression that young women are “running things” (Harris 2006, 90), it is often “big business [that] is the principal beneficiary” (Côté and Allahar 1996, 134, cited in Harris 2006, 88).<sup>103</sup> As we have seen so far, *Sweatshop* highlights the fact that multinational corporations are more powerful than youth consumers, including young women such as Anniken and Frida.

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<sup>103</sup> Harris considers it problematic also for another reason: Giving the impression that “power, visibility, and the occupation of public space are achieved through shopping” hides the fact that shopping depends on having “disposable income and the cultural capital that enables one to engage successfully in consumer practices” (Harris 2006, 91).



Figs. 10–11: Frida and Anniken with Sokty and her friend. Source: Screen dump from *Aftenposten-TV*.

At the same time, the series – and especially the final episode – foregrounds Anniken and Frida in particular, framing them as ideal humanitarian agents and advocates for political change. To illustrate, in a montage near the end of the final episode, Frida and Anniken pose to have their photos taken with Sokty and another woman who appears to be Sokty’s friend (Figs. 10–11). The scene is indicative of a general shift in the final episode, whereby Anniken and Frida come to play a larger part than Ludvig. This presumably has to do with ideas of female solidarity and global sisterhood, ideas that Anniken and Frida (but not Ludvig) can embody. The photo shoot montage and its focus on female solidarity is, incidentally, immediately followed up by H&M’s official statement. Thus, the latter not only “interrupts” the flow of the narrative and introduces H&M’s “voice”, which I mentioned earlier – its use of an authoritative, adult male voice-over also contrasts with and thus draws attention to the focus on young women and female solidarity in the preceding photo shoot montage.

While addressing young women can appear to be empowering, it may also absolve other groups of responsibility. This applies to *Sweatshop* in particular, but also to discourses on “girl power” in humanitarian campaigns in general. Building on the work of Harris, media scholar Ofra Koffman, sociologist Shani Orgad, and cultural studies scholar Rosalind Gill analyze the manner in which “girl power” discourse is mobilized in contemporary global humanitarian and development campaigns. As they note, there is a strong tendency to address “girls (not boys, nor adults) in the US (and elsewhere in the Global North) exhorting them to identify as sisters, saviours, and ‘BFFs’ of their Southern counterparts” (Koffman, Orgad, and Gill 2015, 161).<sup>104</sup> Appeals to young women as ideal humanitarian agents thus share similarities with the disproportionate shaming of young women for their consumer habits (as

<sup>104</sup> “BFF”, an abbreviated form of “best friends forever”, is a phrase describing a person’s best friend and was popularized in the 1990s (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “BFF (n.)”, accessed November 18, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/bff>).

discussed by Brusdal and Storm-Mathisen). In both cases, the emphasis on young women lets other social groups off the hook – including boys and men and adults in general. In the case of *Sweatshop*, Ludvig’s presence keeps the series from shifting all the symbolic responsibility (and blame) to young women, or suggesting that only young women buy a lot of clothes. Nevertheless, as I have suggested earlier, Ludvig is often a voice of reason that serves to amplify what is “off” in Anniken’s statements.<sup>105</sup> Ludvig and Anniken are thus represented not as equals, not until Anniken has transformed and left behind her “past self”.

Taken together, these scholarly discussions on gendered ideas about young women as shameful consumers and humanitarian ambassadors help shed light on those groups that *Sweatshop* does *not* screen as privileged and responsible. As Brusdal and Storm-Mathisen reminds us, if shame and shaming is it to function in such a way that it regulates consumption and does this in a manner that benefits everyone, then shame should be aimed at “new groups”, such as adult men, who as a social group generally consumes “large cars, electronics, and air flights” [store biler, elektronikk og flyreiser] (2009, 71). Suffice it to say, cars, electronics and air flights are no less linked to global injustice than textiles. For one, buying and using cars and electronics and travelling by airplane have environmental consequences that are global in impact, due to both the energy consumed and the carbon dioxide emitted. Moreover, while sweatshops and their unfair labor conditions are often associated with the manufacturing of clothes, workers in sweatshop factories also make electronics.

To end, it is worth mentioning that young women and youth consumers in general have, as a social group, far less spending power than adult men do. If we take into account Young’s discussion of responsibility – including the idea that types and degrees of responsibility vary depending on an agent’s social standing and privilege (as discussed in Chapter 2) – then surely, having more spending power would also appear to come with more responsibility. *Sweatshop*, however, does not blame and shame more powerful social groups, such as adults, including adult men, but focuses instead on youth consumers and young women in particular. The reasons can be many, and may include a desire on the part of both *Framtiden i våre hender* and *Aftenposten* to inform youths, and an attempt on *Aftenposten*’s part to draw a younger audience. Besides these and other reasons, I would, however, assume that it also has to do with youth consumers and young women being precisely less powerful,

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<sup>105</sup> This makes the second season of *Sweatshop* especially interesting, since it focuses solely on young women, as I mentioned earlier, and frames all four participants as fashion bloggers. Given the casting of semi-famous fashion bloggers from Sweden and Norway, the first and second season can also be discussed in light of celebrity, specifically the relationship between celebrity and stardom, women ambassadors, and humanitarianism. Relevant research in this area includes Wilson 2012, 2014, Christiansen and Frello 2015, and Richey 2016.

and therefore an easier target – easier, at least, than adult men who buy cars, electronics and air flights. After all, the latter may not be one of *Framtiden i våre hender*'s main target groups – but it is one of *Aftenposten*'s.

## Conclusion

*Sweatshop* provides a compelling starting point for this study for at least two reasons. For one, the series screens privilege – and the relationship between privilege and global injustice – by depicting three privileged individuals who are confronted with the injustices that underpin global capitalism. It screens privilege and in doing so suggests that global commodity chains implicate privileged people, as consumers, in global injustice. Secondly, *Sweatshop* draws attention to the unjust working conditions in textile factories in Cambodia (and, by implication, the Global South in general), and thus screens and momentarily restores to visibility injustices that occur in today's sweatshop factories. "Accounts of the appalling conditions of labour and the despotic conditions under which labourers work in the sweatshops of the world," geographer David Harvey writes in *A Brief History to Neoliberalism* (2005, 169), yet the dire working conditions in sweatshop factories are generally not visible to the public.<sup>106</sup> *Sweatshop* connects the unjust working conditions in sweatshop factories to the seemingly quotidian (and non-violent) activity of buying clothes, and also points out the responsibility that multinational corporations have for improving sweatshop workers' conditions.

When asked in a 2015 interview by *Aftenposten* why he thought *Sweatshop* became popular also outside of Norway, producer of *Aftenposten-TV* Jonas Brenna said:

I think it's about being confronted with one's own prejudices. It is part of human nature to distance oneself from what is horrible. The moment one puts representatives of western, privileged people in Cambodia's textile industry, one is forced to reflect. With *Sweatshop* we wanted to put a spotlight on the consequences of our well-to-do lives. (Aldridge 2015)

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<sup>106</sup> The news coverage of the Rama Plaza disaster in 2008 is an exception to the rule. As Young (2011) notes in *Responsibility for Justice*, sweatshop factories tend to violate "the most basic health and safety standards", and workers – many of whom are women – are typically underpaid, overworked and "treated in dominative and abusive ways by bosses" (127). Moreover, she adds, if workers try to organize unions, they are often "threatened, fired, blacklisted, beaten and even killed" (127). For more on sweatshops and activism against sweatshop labor, see Seidman 2007, and investigative journalist Naomi Klein's (2000) bestselling book *No Logo*, which also criticizes, among other things, the textile industry.

[Jeg tror det handler mye [om] å møte seg selv i døren. Det ligger i menneskets natur å distansere seg fra det forferdelige. I det øyeblikket man plasserer representanter for vestlige, privilegerte mennesker inn [i] Kambodsjas tekstilindustri, blir man nødt til å ta det innover seg. Med *Sweatshop* ønsket vi å sette søkelyset på konsekvensene av våre bemidlede liv.]

As this chapter has shown, when *Sweatshop* sheds light on “the consequences of our well-to-do lives”, the “us” to which the series refers oscillates between being consumers in “the West” or the Global North, consumers in Norway, and last but not least, youth consumers and young women in particular. The series’ tendency to associate these groups with privilege can be understood as part of broader tendencies, some of which arise out of the fact that the world’s wealth is unevenly distributed, while others have more to do with gendered ideas and trends in contemporary humanitarian discourse.

To end, I want to briefly mention Lavik’s (2016) article on *Stuck* and *Sweatshop*, since it raises an important point – namely, the issue of race and whiteness. While much more can and should be said on this issue, I will keep my response here brief, since I discuss white savior tropes more extensively in Chapter 4. Lavik’s article touches on the representation of otherness and the Global South in Norwegian media, and brings to mind a critical point that media scholar Elisabeth Eide raises about Norwegian media. As Eide states in a 2014 interview, “the media in Norway suffers from what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak refers to as wanting to save brown women from brown men”, including “the tradition of writing of especially women from other parts of the world as suppressed and in need of our help” (Bergstrøm 2014; see Spivak [1999] 2007, 303).<sup>107</sup> As I see it, *Stuck* and *Sweatshop* nevertheless differ in that the white savior trope is less present in *Sweatshop* than it is in *Stuck*. To give an example, *Sweatshop* breaks with the typical white savior narrative when it features interviews in which workers and activists in Cambodia get to speak on their own behalf about the problems they face. Also, the three participants from Norway come across not so much as “white saviors” as witnesses to the suffering of others and as individuals who are themselves not powerful enough to really “save” anyone. What they *can* do – as the series suggests – is to accuse those who are able to change the labor conditions of sweatshop workers, i.e. multinational corporations. Yet, while Frida, Ludvig, and Anniken are certainly presented in rather laudatory ways by the end of the series, they are still not imbued with enough agency

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<sup>107</sup> Eide’s work includes extensive research into the news coverage of non-Western countries in the Norwegian media. See for instance Eide and Simonsen 2008.

and power (nor do they consistently overshadow local Cambodians enough) to really constitute white saviors.

My example in the next chapter, Erik Poppe's melodramatic feature film *1,000 Times Good Night*, shares several similarities with *Sweatshop* on both the thematic and formal level. Thematically, both examples deal with problems in the Global South, associate humanitarian efforts with individuals from Norway, and frame youth as a beacon of hope. Both also stage face-to-face encounters between privileged people from the Global North and victims of injustice in the Global South, and in doing so screen the former as responsible, but also conflicted witnesses to the suffering of less fortunate others. Interestingly, both examples have also been criticized by reviewers for perpetuating a "white savior" trope. As I argue in the next chapter, *1,000 Times Good Night* comes closer to embodying a white savior narrative than *Sweatshop* does. Partly for this reason, I adopt a more markedly postcolonial approach. I also draw attention to two elements that I did not address in detail in this chapter – namely, the function of the journey narrative, and the influence of melodrama. From a postcolonial perspective, *Sweatshop*'s focus on three white protagonists' journey from Norway to Cambodia can be understood as a variation of a long-standing trope in which a subject from "the West" journeys to "the East" to gather knowledge about (and in certain cases help) distant strangers.<sup>108</sup>

While *Sweatshop* revolves around a journey to Cambodia – a country that is likely to evoke associations to contemporary tourism among certain viewers in Norway – *1,000 Times Good Night* opens in Afghanistan, where the film's protagonist, the conflict photographer Rebecca, is creating a photo series about a suicide bomber.<sup>109</sup> Due to its focus on Rebecca and her job, *1,000 Times Good Night* foregrounds direct violence, war, and conflict, and thus differs somewhat from *Sweatshop* and its thematic focus on structural violence and global capitalism. As I show, multinational corporations are criticized also in *1,000 Times Good Night*, as are consumers in the Global North. This time, however, the voice of reason and conscience is a fictional conflict photographer, mother, and wife whose conflicting

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<sup>108</sup> *Sweatshop* also contains melodramatic elements, as exemplified by the staging of conflicts in the series. In this chapter, I nevertheless chose to focus on the influence of reality TV and life experiment programs in order to show, and question, *Sweatshop*'s narrative structure and emphasis on personal transformation.

<sup>109</sup> In contrast to *Sweatshop*, the BBC Three series *Blood, Sweat and T-Shirts* is set in India and may evoke associations to the history of British colonialism and the fact that India, as geographer David Harvey notes, was transformed into "a market for British textile products" during the early 19th century (after first having been "a field for 'direct exploitation'") (2001, 253). As importantly, the British series also features a female participant who is introduced as an Indian adoptee. Through this participant, the TV program explores ideas of the UK in a postcolonial era. Similarly, the Danish series *Blod, sved og T-shirts* has a female Indian adoptee, and touches specifically on her experiences with being adopted and how it is especially challenging for her to go to India, given her adoptive background.

responsibilities raise questions about what it means to be a responsible human in an age of globalization.



## Chapter 4

### *1,000 Times Good Night:*

#### **Troubling Conflict Photography and Global Motherhood**

In *1,000 Times Good Night* (2013), a melodramatic feature film by Norwegian director Erik Poppe, privilege and global injustice are screened through the film's protagonist, Rebecca (Juliette Binoche), a white, French conflict photographer. While Rebecca's job brings her face to face with people who suffer in the world's conflict zones, her obligations as a wife and a mother of two young girls presents Rebecca with a dilemma: How does she reconcile her dangerous, but important work abroad on the one hand and life with her family on the other? Rebecca's daughters and her husband, Marcus (Nikolaj Coster-Waldau), live in Ireland while Rebecca herself spends most of her time covering conflicts in politically turbulent countries. However, after she is seriously injured during a mission in Afghanistan, she travels back to Ireland and tries to adapt to everyday life with her family again. As she quickly learns, her job is distressing to Marcus and the children. This forces her to consider whether to quit her job – that is, to stop taking the photos that she firmly believes the world needs to see. *1,000 Times Good Night* explores how Rebecca grapples with these moral challenges and in doing so, touches on the classic conflict between work and family. As importantly, the film asks what it means to be a responsible person in a globalized age and what to do when different responsibilities come into conflict with one another. How might Rebecca balance her “thick relations” and “thin relations”, as philosopher Avishai Margalit ([2002] 2004) calls it, i.e. her relations “to the near and dear” and “to the stranger and the remote” (7)?<sup>110</sup> After all, Rebecca's “near and dear” live fairly safe and comfortable lives in the Global North, while countless strangers in other parts of the world are suffering from poverty and war. Whichever choice she makes, Rebecca neglects one of her relations and thus an important aspect of her identity and sense of self.

This chapter analyzes *1,000 Times Good Night* in light of privilege, global injustice, and responsibility, and discusses the pay-offs and drawbacks with the film's tendency to focus

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<sup>110</sup> Margalit ([2002] 2004) uses the terms “thick relations” and “thin relations” in his book *The Ethics of Memory*. He describes thick relations as being “grounded in attributes such as parent, friend, lover, fellow-countryman” and “in a shared past” or “shared memory” (7). By contrast, thin relations refer to relations that are “backed by the attribute of being human” or of some aspects of being human, such as gender or illness (7).

on the problems of its privileged, white protagonist, Rebecca.<sup>111</sup> As I argue, Rebecca's struggle to reconcile her commitments to family and work, to the close and the remote allows the film to thematize global injustice and the relationship between the Global North and the Global South in the contemporary era. By virtue of her job as a conflict photographer, Rebecca represents a symbolic meeting point between privilege and global injustice, partly because her job entails witnessing injustice and partly because Rebecca can, if she needs to, return to a safe and comfortable life in the Global North. Having the freedom to "opt out of struggles against oppression" is a central part of being privileged (Wildman and Davis 2008, 113; see also Kimmel and Ferber 2017, xi), and Rebecca embodies this freedom through the fact that she at one point chooses, however reluctantly, to quit her job.<sup>112</sup> Rebecca is also an evocative character for exploring the themes of privilege, global injustice, and responsibility because she represents a person who uses her own privileged position to help less advantaged others. As I show, Rebecca is not the only character from the Global North who is depicted as wanting to solve global issues, but she is the central one. Moreover, Rebecca is the character who most evidently has, through her camera, the power to narrate – a power she shares with the filmmaker himself, and uses to draw attention to suffering in the Global South that is, she argues, too often neglected, at least by people in the Global North.

Notably, the film's focus on Rebecca, her family, and their problems has also been criticized by reviewers. In his review of the film, Mats Kolmisoppi of the Swedish newspaper *Helsingborgs Dagblad* writes that *1,000 Times Good Night* "hammers home its message about how important it is to not to turn one's attention away from the world's conflicts," but "is itself guilty of doing precisely that" [Trots att filmen hamrar in sitt budskap om hur viktigt det är att inte vända bort blicken från världens konflikthärddar, gör den sig skyldig till just det] (2014). To compare, Melissa Silverstein of the US-based film website *IndieWire* notes that "one of the biggest problems with the film is the white-savior issue and the fact that none of the people [Rebecca] is photographing speak" (2014). Taken together, Kolmisoppi, Silverstein, and other reviewers address what I consider to be the Eurocentric tendencies in the film – tendencies reviewers have described not necessarily in terms of "Eurocentrism", but closely related concepts such as "western-centrism" [västvärldcentrism] (Könick 2014)

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<sup>111</sup> This chapter is a significantly revised version of my article "'De trenger henne mer enn jeg gjør': Nord-Sørforhold i Erik Poppes *Tusen ganger god natt* (2013)" (Yang 2016).

<sup>112</sup> The film does not explicitly draw attention to Rebecca's freedom of choice and mobility as a sign of her being privileged, but her mobility and freedom to travel across borders becomes an evident aspect of Rebecca's privileged position if we consider the film with privilege in mind.

and a “white savior issue” (Silverstein 2014).<sup>113</sup> The drawbacks with *1,000 Times Good Night*’s focus on Rebecca and her moral challenges bring to mind the criticism that was launched against Susanne Bier’s *In a Better World* – a film that is also set partly in the Global South, but provides only brief glimpses into the experiences of locals in those contexts and primarily focuses on the “musings and ethical concerns” of its Scandinavian protagonists (A. Marklund 2012, 82).<sup>114</sup> Indeed, reviewers of *1,000 Times Good Night* have compared the film to precisely Bier’s films, implicitly or explicitly berating Poppe for emulating Bier: “Copying Denmark’s Susanne Bier, whose Oscar-winning *In a Better World* proved her a slightly self-satisfied dramatist of bourgeois guilt, Norwegian director Erik Poppe could be too easily accused of war tourism here,” Tim Robey of the UK newspaper *The Independent* writes in his review, adding that “[Poppe’s] film visits these far-flung conflicts, plucks an image or two, and moves on, sympathetic chiefly to Rebecca and her family” (2014). My focus in this chapter is on *1,000 Times Good Night*, but the parallels the film has to *In a Better World* are worth keeping in mind, since they hint at the appeal but also the pitfalls associated with drama films that address global injustice while foregrounding privileged white protagonists from the Global North and their families.<sup>115</sup>

In this chapter, I engage with and explore critical interpretations of *1,000 Times Good Night* and ask whether the film has, as Silverstein puts it, a “white savior issue” and if so, in what ways. As I argue, the film can indeed be seen as paradoxically centered on privileged people in the Global North, but existing criticisms of the film also need to be further developed and contextualized. In using critiques of the film as my starting point, I deliberately break with a prominent interpretation of the film, which has shaped both the promotion and reception of the film – that is, an auto-biographical interpretation that sees *1,000 Times Good Night* as partly based on Poppe’s own experiences. While acknowledging that this

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<sup>113</sup> Following Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, I understand Eurocentrism as the “procrustean forcing of cultural heterogeneity into a single paradigmatic perspective in which Europe is seen as the unique source of meaning, as the world’s center of gravity, as ontological “reality” to the rest of the world’s shadow” (2014 [1994] 1–2). In *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, Shohat and Stam also comment specifically on the potential implications of focusing on the moral dilemmas of privileged groups: As they warn, “even liberal discourse” can end up “devaloriz[ing] the lives of people of color” when it “focus[es] on the moral dilemmas of the dominant group rather than on structures of oppression” (2014, 24).

<sup>114</sup> Similarly, in the UK edition of the travel and entertainment magazine *Time Out*, Guy Lodge states in his review of *1,000 Times Good Night*: “This film from Norwegian photojournalist-turned-director Erik Poppe is supposedly personal, drawing heavily on experiences in his former job. So it’s odd that this tasteful, mildly diverting human interest tale feels so much like the work of another filmmaker – the Danish director Susanne Bier (*In a Better World*), whose Nordic brand of wholemeal domestic melodrama permeates this story of a globe-trotting, risk-taking photographer (Juliette Binoche) torn between her dangerous professional impulses and her responsibilities to her justly worried, Dublin-based family.”

<sup>115</sup> Bondebjerg and Redvall’s description of a new trend in Scandinavian and European drama, whereby “global problems are mirrored and reflected in a national, classical family drama” (2011, 75) (mentioned in Chapter 1), fits not only Bier’s films, but also *1,000 Times Good Night*.

interpretation has its appeal, I argue that *1,000 Times Good Night* is a noteworthy film for reasons that have less to do with its relationship to Poppe's life, and more to do with the ways that privilege, global injustice, and responsibility are screened in contemporary Scandinavian visual culture. Given the dearth of scholarly research on *1,000 Times Good Night*, little has been done to discuss, for instance, how Eurocentric tendencies in the film are closely related to the representation of Rebecca as a conflict photographer. In this chapter, I furthermore connect *1,000 Times Good Night* to a longer tendency, at least in Hollywood films, to produce and reproduce myths about journalists and conflict photographers as either heroic, self-sacrificing figures or as scoop hunters that cannot be trusted. Rebecca is a character who breaks with these long-standing tendencies, partly by virtue of her being a female conflict photographer and because she is also a fairly complex character. *1,000 Times Good Night* pushes boundaries in cinematic representations of journalists, and in doing so, also highlights challenges faced by women journalists (and employed mothers in general) who struggle to reconcile work and family life.

If this emphasis on films about journalists leads to a fairly laudatory interpretation of *1,000 Times Good Night*, the rest of my discussion takes a more critical view and asks whether Rebecca can also be understood as a bridge character and as a white savior. As I argue, like the three participants in *Sweatshop*, Rebecca can be described as a bridge character, in the sense that she is a white person from the Global North whose point of view significantly shapes how the viewer is invited to see suffering and problems in the Global South.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, Rebecca is indeed associated with what sociologist Matthew W. Hughey, in his book *The White Savior Film*, calls the trope of "saviorism". She is, however, not the only character that brings to mind white savior tropes. Equally significant is the character of Stig (Mads Ousdal), a white, Norwegian male who is introduced in the film as a project coordinator for the Norwegian Refugee Council (*Flyktninghjelpen*). Stig's presence in the film and his symbolic function as a representative of Norway and of humanitarian work also makes *1,000 Times Good Night* surprisingly similar to *Sweatshop*, in the sense that both examples feature what documentary filmmaker Karoline Frogner refers to in an interview as "the good Norwegian" [den gode nordmann] (Kleve 2009). As for Rebecca, her role is especially noteworthy because it illustrates the manner in which saviorism and motherhood

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<sup>116</sup> The focus on journalism in *1,000 Times Good Night* also connects the film to *Sweatshop*. While the latter does not feature journalists per se, the three participants in the series do repeatedly take up the position as journalists, as seen in the various interviews they conduct with sweatshop workers and activists in Cambodia. These interviews are shown as important rites of passage for the participants, as I discussed in the previous chapter, but in addition, they leave a positive impression of journalism as a profession.

sometimes go hand in hand. In several scenes in *1,000 Times Good Night*, Rebecca's role as a mother is essential to how she talks about, if not on behalf of, disadvantaged others in the Global South. The same role is also essential to how others, especially her eldest daughter Stephanie/Steph (Lauryn Canny), talks about Rebecca's role in the Global South, as exemplified by scenes that frame Rebecca more or less as what gender studies scholar Raka Shome (2011) calls a "global mother". Nevertheless, my conclusion is that *1,000 Times Good Night* reinforces but ultimately also challenges tendencies in white savior films in general. While certain scenes draw on saviorism tropes and, moreover, whitewash the role that the Global North has played (and continues to play) in the Global South, *1,000 Times Good Night* as a whole raises considerable doubt as to whether Rebecca – and, by implication, the Global North – is anyone's savior at all. As I show, at the end of the film, Rebecca hardly seems able to save anyone, perhaps not even herself.

### ***1,000 Times Good Night***

Drawing its title from a famous line in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *1,000 Times Good Night* deals not so much with romantic love as with familial love and compassion for fellow human beings. A central question in the film is whether Rebecca, as a successful and dedicated conflict photographer, is right to prioritize her job over her family. By variously representing Rebecca as an admirable and even self-sacrificing conflict photographer, and as a flawed and potentially irresponsible mother, *1,000 Times Good Night* explores the challenges faced by employed mothers and what it means to be at once privileged and responsible in a globalized age. Already in the opening of the film, Rebecca's bravery is foregrounded through a suspenseful sequence set in Afghanistan, where Rebecca is on a photographic mission. As the viewer gradually learns, the person Rebecca sets out to photograph – a young, presumably Afghani woman – is preparing to become a suicide bomber. Rebecca photographs the preparations – a ritual with fairly religious overtones, as I discuss later in this chapter – and she manages to join the bomber all the way to an open market, where the bomb is detonated. Civilians nearby, including several children, are injured in the explosion. Rebecca herself, whose presence may have affected where and when the bomb went off, is hurled through the air (depicted in slow motion) and her camera, now bloodied, is shown to roll across the ground (also in slow motion). These symbolic shots are followed by an equally symbolic close-up, in which the camera moves towards Rebecca, who is lying on the ground, covered in dust, while the white gold wedding ring on her left hand is unusually bright and visible in the foreground, in contrast to the black and dark grey colors that dominate the shot overall.

This post-explosion scene not only establishes that Rebecca is married and thus has commitments beyond her job, but also foregrounds her fearless devotion to her job. For although she is injured and disoriented, Rebecca soon gets on her feet again and tries to photograph victims of the explosion, until she eventually passes out.



*Fig. 9: Official promotional photograph of Rebecca (left) as she returns to Ireland, with Steph and Marcus in the background. Photo/copyright: John Christian Rosenlund/Paradox.*

The rest of the film is generally set in a far more peaceful and provincial setting: Rebecca's and her family's house in Ireland. Unlike the opening sequence, which resembles a scene from a war film, the majority of *1,000 Times Good Night* is a family melodrama that revolves around Rebecca's attempts at bonding with her family again (Fig. 9). After her accident, Rebecca wakes up in a bright, white hospital in Dubai, where her husband Marcus is by her side. While the film does not explicitly point out that Rebecca must be privileged and well-connected in order to be flown to a hospital in Dubai, this plot event foreshadows an overarching theme in the film: That Rebecca does, in fact, have the opportunity to live a fairly comfortable life, but struggles to do so because of what she knows and has seen in the world's conflict zones. When Rebecca and Marcus travel back to Ireland, they are reunited with their two daughters and friends of the family. That Rebecca struggles to settle back into everyday life in Ireland (and, by implication, the Global North) is conveyed through her conflicts with her family, and through the fact that she does not know where to find things or how to do

things in her home. A large, idyllic shore-side villa in the Irish countryside, Rebecca's home is also a symbolic space in which she tries to mend her relationship with her eldest daughter Steph. Steph looks at her mother's job with both admiration and fear, in contrast to four-year-old Lisa (Adrianna Cramer Curtis), who is too young to properly grasp what her mother does for a living. Key events in the rest of the film include Rebecca's decision to temporarily quit her job (to her husband's relief), her travelling with Steph and an aid worker named Stig to a supposedly peaceful refugee camp in Kenya (which is attacked by local militia), and her eventually returning to both her job as a conflict photographer and to Afghanistan, where she aims to finish her photos series about the suicide bomber. Ending where it started, in Afghanistan, *1,000 Times Good Night* is a film that repeatedly hints at its protagonist's heroism, but also questions whether Rebecca (and, by implication, people in the Global North) can in fact help alleviate global injustice in the Global South. This is especially evident in the film's final scenes, which I analyze later in this chapter. Overall, the film ends on an ambiguous note: Rebecca and Marcus's marriage seems unstable, Rebecca's relationship to Steph appears fragile but stronger than before, and it remains unclear whether Rebecca still believes in her job as conflict photographer.

Rebecca's identity as a woman, mother, and wife is central to *1,000 Times Good Night*, whereas the promotion and reception of the film has emphasized that Erik Poppe's own experiences as a foreign reporter was the starting point for the film.<sup>117</sup> As Poppe tells the Norwegian journalism newspaper *Journalisten*, he made the protagonist female in order to sharpen the conflict between work and family: If the character had been a man, Poppe states, "the theme would not have been as obvious. It's so common that men go abroad that we don't question it" [Hvis det hadde vært en mann, ville ikke tema kommet tydelig nok fram. Det er så vanlig at menn reiser ut, at det stiller vi ikke spørsmål ved] (Geard 2013). Besides interviews with Poppe, reviews of the film also frame *1,000 Times Good Night* as partly autobiographical, as seen in Geoffrey Macnab's review of the film in the UK newspaper *The Independent*, which describes the film as "[t]he former news photographer Erik Poppe's autobiographical drama" (2014).<sup>118</sup> This autobiographical interpretation of the film is important to point out because it seems to have given a general aura of authenticity to the film. To illustrate, when *1,000 Times Good Night* was awarded the Norwegian Film Critic's Prize

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<sup>117</sup> To illustrate, on the back of the UK version of the official DVD (released by Arrow Films), *1,000 Times Good Night* is described as "inspired by the director's own experiences as a war photographer in the 1980s".

<sup>118</sup> Interpretations of *1,000 Times Good Night* as being based on Poppe's experiences are evident in reviews in the Norwegian (Ringheim 2013; Elnan 2013; Geard 2013) and English-language press (DeFore 2013; Kermodé 2014; Kiang 2013; Maddox 2014).

in 2014, the jury's justification applauded Poppe for having, "with bravery and considerable knowledge, addressed his own experiences and gripping dilemmas" [med mot og stor kunnskap, har tatt tak i egne erfaringer og dyptgripende dilemmaer] (NFI 2014).<sup>119</sup> Thus, the autobiographical interpretation of the film seems to have given credence to the film and been used to explain its narrative focus on Rebecca – a white, French, and female conflict photographer torn between family and work.

Shaping the auto-biographical interpretation is also Poppe's status as a well-established film director in Norway. Generally speaking, *1,000 Times Good Night* continues thematic as well as formal tendencies in Poppe's previous films, including *Schpaaa* (1998), *Hawaii, Oslo* (2004), and *deUSYNLIGE* (2008), often referred to as the "Oslo trilogy". For one, central themes in *1,000 Times Good Night*, such as parent-children relationships, responsibility, guilt, and reconciliation, are also explored in the Oslo trilogy. As Elisabeth Oxfeldt notes, the Oslo trilogy explores "human kindness – charity – in various settings" and seems "inflected by an increasingly overt Christian symbolism" (2010, 64). These thematic consistencies can be partly explained by the fact that Norwegian novelist and scriptwriter Harald Rosenløw Eeg, who wrote the scripts for both *Hawaii, Oslo* and *1,000 Times Good Night*. Unlike the Oslo trilogy, however, *1,000 Times Good Night* deals explicitly with globalization and global injustice, bearing the mark of a "global imaginary" (to use Steger's [2008] term, discussed in Chapter 2). While Rebecca's family live far away from war and conflict, their lives are influenced by global issues, not only due to Rebecca's traumatic experiences, but also because of the global circulation of media images of war and conflict (to which Rebecca herself contributes) and environmental problems (an issue the film touches on through Marcus, who works as a marine biologist and researches pollution). *1,000 Times Good Night* also casts a different light on responsibility and guilt than, for instance, *deUSYNLIGE*, which revolves around a specific criminal act and the guilt and forgiveness that follows from this act. *1,000 Times Good Night* deals specifically with responsibility in a globalized age, in addition to exploring guilt on the part of journalists who work in conflict zones. As I show later in this chapter, certain scenes in the film more or less suggest that Rebecca feels implicated in the violence she witnesses, and that she potentially suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>120</sup> *1,000 Times Good Night* breaks with Poppe's earlier films also with regards to the

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<sup>119</sup> Note how the jury's official explanation blurs the boundary between the fictional character Rebecca and Poppe the director (even though the film is a work of fiction).

<sup>120</sup> As suggested by recent research on guilt, ethical dilemmas, and PTSD among news journalists, a factor that can increase the risk of developing PTSD are ethical dilemmas – that is, "situations during an ongoing



film production itself, since it is the first of his films to be set entirely outside of Norway, his first English-speaking film, and a noticeably more European project as far as funding and production is concerned.<sup>121</sup>

I mentioned earlier that *1,000 Times Good Night* is a melodramatic film, and this is a point that needs to be elaborated upon, since definitions of melodrama can vary greatly. My understanding of melodrama in this chapter draws especially on debates on melodrama within film studies and to some extent theater studies (e.g. Brooks 1976; Elsaesser [1972] 2002; Gledhill [1972] 2002; Williams 1998; O’Shaughnessy 2007; Nestingen 2008). The influence of melodrama on *1,000 Times Good night* can be seen in the film’s thematic concerns, especially its focus on interpersonal relationships and the family, and its tendency to stage heightened conflicts (so as to engage the viewer emotionally), and to convey meaning through the use of music and characters’ gestures and body language. Moreover, the film’s use of the home and the workplace as symbolic spaces is also characteristic of melodrama. As Nestingen writes, in melodrama, “the home . . . is presented as a space of innocence and virtue” while “[t]he workplace is a space for diligence, solidarity, and cooperation with others”, and melodramas often establish their “moral coordinates by separating a character from the home or workplace, or by throwing either the home and family or workplace and workers into crisis” (2008, 104–5). In *1,000 Times Good Night*, Rebecca’s family’s house in Ireland is associated with calmness, affluence, and idealized notions of the family and the provincial. Yet, the home becomes a space of conflict because Rebecca brings “the world” home. Rebecca’s job is shown to put her in harm’s way and result in traumatic experiences, also for her family, while at the same time being a means through which Rebecca can stand in solidarity with underprivileged others. In exploring how Rebecca ideally would, but apparently cannot, return to a state of innocence, *1,000 Times Good Night* resembles numerous melodramatic films, and the characterization of Rebecca as more or less a victim of circumstances beyond her control also makes her a quintessentially melodramatic protagonist.<sup>122</sup>

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assignment where a journalist experiences inner conflicts between behaving like a good human being and working like a professional journalist” (Backholm and Idås 2016, 193).

<sup>121</sup> *1,000 Times Good Night* is a European co-production in various senses. For one, the film was financed by Norwegian, Swedish, Irish, Nordic, and European institutions, English is the main spoken language, the key actors are from France, Ireland, Norway, and Denmark, and most of the film is shot in Ireland (Finn Gjerdrum, personal communication via e-mail, October 19, 2015). According to the producer of the film, Finn Gjerdrum, *1,000 Times Good Night* was originally intended to be a Norwegian project, but ended up being filmed in Ireland because there were useful tax incentives for film and television productions in Ireland (Finn Gjerdrum, personal communication via e-mail, October 19, 2015).

<sup>122</sup> As Williams writes: “In cinema the mode of melodrama defines a broad category of moving pictures that move us to pathos for protagonists beset by *forces more powerful than they* and who are perceived as victims” (1998, 42). *1,000 Times Good Night* is not the only film by Poppe that draws on melodrama. Both Eeg’s

While *1,000 Times Good Night* was rather well received in Norway (Vestmo 2013; Økland 2013), where it won several prizes, the film has generally received mixed reviews, as I insinuated earlier.<sup>123</sup> The criticism seems to gather around two issues in particular, the first of which concerns the heroic, martyr-like representation of Rebecca. For instance, Peter Bradshaw’s review of the film in the British newspaper *The Guardian* describes Rebecca as “tiresomely radiating a martyred integrity” (2014). Similarly, Ulrik Eriksen of the Norwegian newspaper *Morgenbladet* criticizes the film for representing Rebecca as if she carries “world peace” [verdensfreden] on her shoulders (2013). He also argues that the film does not sufficiently address what is, in his view, the reason that Rebecca can “live in a luxurious villa by the beach”, namely, the commercial logic that governs the media and creates a demand for “the most spectacular and dramatic photos” (2013). The sources of Rebecca’s own material comforts are in some ways the poverty and misery of other human beings, and this is a causal relationship *1,000 Times Good Night* fails to point out, according to Eriksen.

The second point of criticism is closely related to the first, and concerns the film’s focus on Rebecca and other characters in the Global North. As discussed at the start of this chapter, several reviewers suggest that the film’s focus on the experiences of privileged people in the Global North conflict with one of the film’s overall themes: global injustice. Echoing Kolmiskoppi, whom I also cited earlier, Mats Mamet Könick (2014) of the Malmö-based culture magazine *Konstpresson* argues that *1,000 Times Good Night* is a film that deals with, among other issues, “western guilt, and the inability of westerners and western media to care about events happening in other parts of the world”, but that occasionally is “guilty of the very western-centrism that it is trying to criticize” [*Tusen gånger god natt* berör teman som . . . västerländsk skuld, västmänniskor och västmediers oförmåga att bry sig om saker som händer i andra delar av världen. . . . I vissa stunder . . . gör [filmen] sig skyldig till samma västvärldcentrism som den försöker kritisera]. Meanwhile, Tim Robey of the UK newspaper *The Telegraph* states that it is “a pity” that the film “lacks any interest in the specifics of [Rebecca’s] reportage” (2014). The scenes set in Kabul and Kenya, he writes, are “point-

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manuscripts and Poppe’s films have been discussed by several scholars and critics in light of melodrama (e.g. Eriksen 2007 and Nestingen 2008, 106). Without referring to melodrama per se, film scholar Anne Gjelsvik suggests that Poppe’s films are shaped by pathos (Aalen 2015) – a comment I take to deal indirectly with melodrama, since pathos is a key aspect of melodrama (see Elsaesser [2002] 1987, 66–7).

<sup>123</sup> In Norway, the film received the award for Best Film at the Amanda Awards, the prize for Best Cinematography (awarded to John Christian Rosenlund) and Best Score (awarded to Armand Amar) at the Amanda Awards, and the Film Critic’s Prize (*Filmkritikerprisen*) for Best Norwegian Feature Film (in 2014). Notably, Poppe had previously won the Film Critic’s Prize, for both *Hawaii, Oslo* (in 2005) and *deUSYNLIGE* (in 2009). *1,000 Times Good Night* also received the prestigious Special Grand Prize of the Jury at the Montréal World Film Festival.

proving backdrops to a single character arc, not desperate situations in their own right” (2014). As I show in the following, *1,000 Times Good Night* does indeed represent Rebecca as a hero, but it also raises questions about her character – making her seem flawed, complicated, and occasionally self-critical. The film establishes Rebecca as a complex character by drawing on positive as well as negative myths about journalists and conflict photographers and, moreover, by pitting Rebecca’s professional role against her role as a mother, implying that the two roles might be incompatible.

### **Witnessing Injustice: The Figure of the Conflict Photographer**

*1,000 Times Good Night*, then, frames Rebecca as a self-sacrificing and dedicated conflict photographer on the one hand, and as a person whose passion for her job may seem questionable, not least because it gets in the way of her responsibilities for her family. The film combines critical as well as more laudatory and romanticized notions of conflict photography and journalism, drawing on popular cultural images of journalists in films. Images of journalists in cinema have often tended to be dichotomous, representing journalists as either heroes or villains, according to the authors of *Heroes and Scoundrels: The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture* (Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015) and *Journalists in Film: Heroes and Villains* (McNair 2010). In Hollywood films, journalists have long been represented as “a kind of cultural nobility, like the incorruptible cop and the self-sacrificing soldier – an ideal which may be challenged . . . to the benefit of a good story”, media scholar Brian McNair notes (2010, 27). In particular, the figure of the foreign correspondent can provide the starting point for a dramatic story, as McNair suggests:

Foreign correspondence . . . takes the film-maker to exotic locations, and allows him to witness and publicise human suffering in ways which s/he may hope will impact on public opinion and policy. . . . there is danger and suspense, a thrilling quality to these stories, [and] the opportunity for redemptive and uplifting tales of journalistic heroism in the face of violence and threat. (2010, 47; see also Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015, 117)<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> What constitutes what McNair calls “exotic locations” will evidently depend on the viewer. In the case of contemporary Scandinavian films, setting the plot in locations that viewers may consider “exotic” and “faraway” can enable a film to appeal more easily to viewers outside of the Scandinavian region, Marklund notes (A. Marklund 2012, 92). This is especially the case if the shooting locations bring to mind conflicts or crises that are familiar to viewers (A. Marklund 2012, 92). In *1,000 Times Good Night*, the scenes that are set in Afghanistan and revolve around female suicide bombers exemplify scenes that may open up the film to international viewers.

To see how and why *1,000 Times Good Night* pits positive and negative notions of conflict photography against one another, it is useful to turn to one of the various dialogues in the film where Rebecca talks to either family members or friends of the family about her job. The following example is a conversation between Rebecca and Theresa (Maria Doyle Kennedy), a close friend of Rebecca and her family. The dialogue takes place early in the film, shortly after Rebecca has returned from Afghanistan to her home in Ireland. Theresa has come to Rebecca's house to chat and check up on her friend.<sup>125</sup> The two friends talk and banter in the kitchen, and soon get onto the topic of conflict photography. In a somewhat sarcastic and playful tone, Theresa implies that Rebecca is addicted to her job when she says: "Well, that's who you are. You hang around in war zones. You seem to need it". Rebecca replies, in a serious, almost self-righteous manner that is a defining feature of her character: "I don't need it. The world needs it. Needs to see the suffering, the pain, what's going on—", Theresa seems to have heard Rebecca's reasoning before, since she interrupts Rebecca before she has finished her sentence. "Just... stop right there!" says Theresa, and adds: "You do it for the excitement and the danger, and that's why you're great".

This brief dialogue between Theresa and Rebecca is emblematic of the ways in which *1,000 Times Good Night* engages with the aforementioned long-standing and often conflicting ideas about conflict photographers. Are conflict photographers, as Theresa suggests, adrenaline junkies with a personal need for adventure and danger? Or are they noble, self-sacrificing individuals who use their images to show "the world", as Rebecca puts it, the violence that exists but so often gets ignored? The scene illustrates what scholars of journalism Matthew C. Ehrlich and Joe Saltzman consider a tendency in Hollywood films to represent the war and foreign correspondent as "the prototypical journalist hero" (2015, 14). War correspondents are, the authors add, often depicted as "struggling with the difficulties of covering non-Western peoples and conflicts" (sometimes also "engaging in ethically questionable behaviour"), but ultimately tend to be shown as "leading glamorous, dangerous, and exciting lives" (2015, 14). Rebecca brings to mind these myths about war correspondents, and exemplifies how photojournalists often embody the idea of the "journalist-as-witness". Photojournalists tend to represent courageous individuals who take images of "indescribable horror and barely escape death to bring back those images to the public" (Ehrlich and

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<sup>125</sup> Before Theresa arrives, Rebecca is seen sitting in her kitchen and watching a news report on TV about peace negotiations in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Rebecca turns off the TV when Theresa arrives, which conveys Rebecca's attempt to shut out her concerns with global conflicts and adjust to everyday life. The TV report also hints at a crucial aspect of the contemporary age, namely, the on-going circulation of media images about events and conflicts in other parts of the world – images that may, as Thomas Elsaesser (2014) writes, result in conflicting feelings of guilt.

Saltzman 2015, 13).<sup>126</sup> Their photographs, in turn, become “the silent, permanent testimony of what has occurred” (McNair 2010, 82). While the scholars cited above, including McNair and Ehrlich and Saltzman, generally examine films about journalists from the UK and the US, *1,000 Times Good Night* illustrates how contemporary Scandinavian films about journalists resemble their UK and US counterparts.<sup>127</sup>

Whether Rebecca is in fact “great”, as Theresa puts it, is explored in particular through Rebecca’s relationship to Steph, her eldest daughter. By representing Rebecca as a mother who struggles to understand and even protect her own children, the film complicates Rebecca’s stated concern with global injustice. If Rebecca’s job has a detrimental impact on her children and family, does this not make her an irresponsible mother and consequently, an irresponsible person? Yet, if Rebecca quits her job, is she not neglecting her responsibility towards less advantaged others? The viewer is repeatedly invited to see Rebecca critically due to her being a mother who does not properly know what is going on in the lives of her daughters. The film thus plays to some extent on an idealized notion of the “good” mother as someone who knows what her children are thinking and feeling, as seen for instance at the end of the dialogue between Rebecca and Theresa. After discussing Rebecca’s job, the two friends move on to talk about Steph, and notably, it is Rebecca who asks Theresa (not the other way around) how her teenage daughter is doing. The conversation between Rebecca and Theresa is fairly amicable when compared to the various dialogues between Marcus and Rebecca, which similarly help to establish Rebecca as a flawed parent. Shortly after Rebecca has returned to Ireland, Marcus tells Rebecca that neither he nor their daughters can put up with her dangerous job any longer. Here, too, we get the sense that Rebecca is unaware of her own children’s emotions, while another parental figure (in this case, Marcus) is. Similarly, in a later dialogue between the two, Marcus tells Rebecca that she is not emotionally present, even when she is at home. Sitting in the car with Rebecca while the kids are playing outside, Marcus says to Rebecca: “You come home, you... you sleep, you rest, you get rid of the smell, and... you’re happy. We’re happy”. And yet, he adds, “you’re getting ready to go back, you’re just waiting for that next shot.” Marcus’s use of the word “shot” refers to a

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<sup>126</sup> See Badsey (2002) and Bridger (1997) for more on photojournalists and war correspondents in American film.

<sup>127</sup> The film thus confirms an argument made by scholar of Norwegian film Gunnar Iversen. In an article on Norwegian films about journalists, he suggests that they draw on American films, so much so that they often seem less reflective of the reality of the Norwegian media than of tendencies in American films (G. Iversen 2010).

photographic image, but at the same time evokes associations to drug addiction – thus playing on myths of conflict photographers and war correspondents as addicts.<sup>128</sup>

A forgiving interpretation of the film can see this nuanced portrayal of Rebecca as an attempt at challenging existing representations of journalists and conflict photographers in particular. From this perspective, *1,000 Times Good Night* appears to exemplify what literary scholar Barbara Korte describes as “a contemporary tendency, at least in more demanding forms of representation, to represent war correspondents as *complex figures* in today’s media world” (Korte 2009, 161, my emphasis). As Korte notes in *Represented Reporters: Images of War Correspondents in Memoirs and Fiction*, these contemporary representations frame war correspondents

not only as heroes, scoop-hunters or committed advocates of human rights, but as mediators of war deeply involved in their practice not only as professionals but also as individuals confronted with bodily harm, psychological trauma and ethical dilemma. (2009, 161)

The above description aptly sums up Rebecca in *1,000 Times Good Night*, even if she is not a war correspondent but a conflict photographer. Moreover, that Rebecca is a woman and mother breaks established conventions in films about journalists. While some of the most famous (and most often researched) Hollywood films about conflict photographers revolve around male journalists (e.g. Peter Weir’s 1982 film *The Year of Living Dangerously* and Roger Spottiswoode’s 1983 film *Under Fire*), *1,000 Times Good Night* deals with the challenges faced by women journalists.<sup>129</sup> The film resists hackneyed, but persistent stereotypes of women journalists in film and popular culture, such as the stereotypical images of women journalists as lacking “personal and professional ethics” and as constantly needing male companionship (Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015, 108). Moreover, by exploring Rebecca’s role as a mother and her struggle to balance family and work, *1,000 Times Good Night*

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<sup>128</sup> The use of the word “shot” also brings to mind gunshots, and harks back to cultural critic Susan Sontag’s influential book *On Photography* ([1971] 2008), in which she points out how cameras share similarities with guns (14).

<sup>129</sup> There are also important similarities between *1,000 Times Good Night* and *The Year of Living Dangerously* and *Under Fire*, since the protagonists in all three films are white photojournalists working in the Global South. As development studies and urban research scholars David Lewis, Dennis Rodgers, and Michael Woolcock (2013) note in their chapter on films about development, *The Year of Living Dangerously* and *Under Fire* depict “a Western photojournalist . . . thrown into an unstable or threatening situation in the developing world” and represent “anxieties about the changing relationship between the West and the ‘Third World’” (13–4). Also, the films address “the complacency of Western citizens to poverty and oppression” (Lewis, Rodgers, and Woolcock 2013, 19). Similarly, *1,000 Times Good Night* frames Rebecca as a critical voice of conscience who condemns the lack of attention “the world” directs at injustices in the Global South.

touches on what journalism and media studies scholars Deborah Chambers and Linda Steiner calls the “classic double-bind” with which women journalists are confronted, whereby they “are devalued either as ‘proper professionals’ or as negligent towards their families – or both” (2010, 56).<sup>130</sup> *1,000 Times Good Night*’s depiction of the “double-bind” with which women journalists are faced is an apt reminder that, while Rebecca may be privileged in terms of class and nationality, her gender also brings with it expectations that, whether imposed by others or herself, limit her ability to do her job.<sup>131</sup>

The film’s portrayal of Rebecca’s competing responsibilities as a mother and conflict photographer deals with the dilemmas of employed mothers in general (a theme explored also in *Real Humans*, as I show in Chapter 6). According to Ingunn Økland (2015) of *Aftenposten*, *1,000 Times Good Night* and Norwegian director Joachim Trier’s *Louder than Bombs* (2015) are two positive examples of contemporary Norwegian films that explore the challenges faced by employed mothers.<sup>132</sup> Without embarking on a lengthy comparison of these two films, it is worth pointing out that they share striking similarities as well as several noteworthy differences. Both films are English-speaking films directed by a Norwegian filmmaker and both feature a French female conflict photographer who struggles to balance work and family.<sup>133</sup> However, while Rebecca may bring to mind a “white savior” figure (as I discuss more below), the conflict photographer in *Louder than Bombs*, Isabelle Reed (played by Isabelle Huppert), is less likely to evoke these associations to white savior tropes. This has largely to do with Isabelle’s identity being far more unstable and ambiguous than that of Rebecca. *Louder than Bombs* plays out shortly after the death of Isabelle, and traces how her husband and two sons remember Isabelle, or rather, reconstruct their memory of her. This process of remembrance and mourning slowly uncovers different sides of Isabelle’s past, and

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<sup>130</sup> Many women journalists face disproportionate prejudice when trying to combine a hectic, demanding career in journalism with having a family, according to journalism scholar Suzanne Franks (2013, 40–3).

<sup>131</sup> Conversely, the film also exemplifies a problematic tendency in films with women journalists as protagonists. As McNair notes, in films that revolve around women journalists, journalists are depicted as selfish and overly ambitious if they choose to prioritize work over family. By contrast, male journalists in film are often shown as heroic and self-sacrificing when they make the same decision to put work before family (McNair 2010, 105–6).

<sup>132</sup> A 2013 article on *1,000 Times Good Night*, published on the website of *NRK*, includes comments from Sidsel Wold, who is famous in Norway for her years of foreign corresponding (Elnan 2013). While Wold speaks about her own experiences with being both a foreign correspondent and a mother and does not comment directly on *1,000 Times Good Night*, the fact that her comments appear in an article on *1,000 Times Good Night* does add credence to the film, giving the impression that its representation of Rebecca is realistic, accurate, and authentic.

<sup>133</sup> Two other relevant examples from Scandinavian films are *Skytten* (*The Shooter*, 2013) by Danish director Annette K. Olesen and *Upperdog* (2009) by Norwegian director Sara Johnsen. The thriller drama *Skytten* revolves around a female journalist whose job ends up conflicting with her responsibilities as a soon-to-be adoptive mother. Thus, motherhood and journalism are shown to conflict. *Upperdog*, a multiple protagonist drama film set in Oslo, includes a female journalist working in a war zone. However, the journalist is only a minor character, is not a conflict photographer by profession, and is fairly one-dimensional character who embodies the image of journalists as scoop-hunters.

consequently challenges romanticized ideas of Isabelle as a heroic conflict photographer. The difficulty of knowing other people, a central theme in the film, is evoked through the narrative structure, which is divided into four parts (each of which conveys the perspective of one of the four family members). Unlike *1,000 Times Good Night*, which privileges Rebecca's point of view, *Louder than Bombs* shifts between different perspectives and thus makes Isabelle's identity a mystery – suggesting that even (or especially) Isabelle's own family will struggle to properly know, let alone judge, her role in the world.

### **Bridge Characters and/as White Saviors in *1,000 Times Good Night***

If understood more critically, however, *1,000 Times Good Night* can also be discussed as one of many narratives, cinematic and otherwise, that uses a so-called “bridge character” to represent issues in the Global South in way that is relatable to viewers in the Global North. I want to dwell for a moment on the function of bridge characters, since the concept applies not only to Rebecca and other characters in *1,000 Times Good Night*, but also to the three participants in *Sweatshop* (discussed in Chapter 3), and many of other narratives that thematize global injustice while revolving around white protagonist and their responses to global injustice. Several scholars writing on films and white savior tropes connect the term “bridge character” to Nicholas Kristof, a *New York Times* op-ed columnist and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist known for his work on human rights abuses and global affairs (see Ballesteros 2015, 149, and Hughey 2014, 3). Bridge characters come up in a filmed Q&A session with Kristof from 2010, in which he responds to a reader, who argues that Kristof's “columns about Africa almost always feature black Africans as victims, and white foreigners as their saviors.” In response, Kristof acknowledges that the reader's point is an important one and agrees that “very often I do go to developing countries where local people are doing extraordinary work, and instead I tend to focus on some foreigner, often some American, who's doing something there” (Kristof 2010). He explains, in his defence, that he does this because of the challenge he as a writer faces – namely, “get[ting] people to care about distant crises” in the first place. As he states:

. . . frankly, the moment a reader sees that I'm writing about Central Africa, for an awful lot of them, that's the moment to turn the page. One way of getting people to read at least a few [graphs] in is to have some kind of a foreign



protagonist, some American who they can identify with as a *bridge character*.  
(Kristof 2010, my emphasis)<sup>134</sup>

Since Kristof's response concerns news reporting in particular, it is debatable how applicable his comment is to a fiction film like *1,000 Times Good Night*. After all, are not fiction films narratives in which "distant suffering", to use Luc Boltanski's (1999) term, is easier for audiences to bear, precisely because it is not actual, distant suffering, but fictional suffering and one step removed from reality? From this perspective, even *Sweatshop* – a series produced by and circulated through a newspaper and labeled as a "documentary series" – may bear too much semblance to reality TV to be comparable to the reportages Kristof has in mind.

Against these arguments, I consider *1,000 Times Good Night* no less caught up with the issue of bridge characters and the related concept of white saviors. Indeed, both *1,000 Times Good Night* and *Sweatshop* can be discussed in light of a longer critical debate – spurred by scholars in cultural studies and postcolonial studies – regarding race, whiteness, and Eurocentrism in popular culture and cinema (e.g. hooks 1992, 1996; Shohat and Stam [1994] 2014; Hall [1997] 2003; Dyer 1997). A recent contribution to this discussion, sociologist Matthew W. Hughey's book *The White Savior Film*, refers specifically to Kristof's comment on bridge characters and uses it to illustrate the pervasiveness of the trope of "saviorism", as Hughey calls it (2014, 2).<sup>135</sup> By saviorism, Hughey refers to a trope that "racializes and separates people into those who are redeemers (whites) and those who are redeemed or in need of redemption (nonwhites)" (2014, 2). More specifically, saviorism enables "an interpretation of nonwhite characters and culture as essentially broken, marginalized, and pathological, while whites can emerge as messianic characters that easily fix the nonwhite pariah with their superior moral and mental abilities" (2014, 2). Writing on the United States and what he refers to as "white savior films", Hughey argues that saviorism pervades the popular imagination in general, casual conversations on blogs, social media, the

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<sup>134</sup> Notably, Kristof (2010) raises an important point in the latter half of his response. As he goes on to explain, the concern he has about his own type of reporting is that it risks "overplay[ing] the negatives in the developing world... Africa in particular. I worry that by focusing on Sudan, Congo and Zimbabwe, I'm helping create a perception that all of Africa is a mess — a perception that reduces foreign tourism and growth prospects. This is a genuine conundrum, one that to me is more problematic than an American newspaper writing about Americans in Africa and Asia" (2010).

<sup>135</sup> Similarly, film scholar Isolina Ballesteros also cites Kristof's comment on bridge characters, adapting it to her discussion of "white European immigration filmmakers who elicit a spectatorial identification with white 'bridge characters' who are aware of and sympathetic to immigrants' predicaments" (2015, 149).

news, and television (2014, 3), and the object of his own study, fiction films from Hollywood.<sup>136</sup>

Since *1,000 Times Good Night* has been discussed in light of white savior tropes, it is useful to take a closer look at Hughey's definition of white savior films. According to Hughey, white savior films typically "show whites going the extra mile across the color line", whether in terms of "helping people of color who cannot or will not help themselves, teaching nonwhites right from wrong, or framing the white savior as *the only character able to recognize these moral distinctions*" (2014, 8, my emphasis).<sup>137</sup> Hughey discusses white savior films as "redemption stories and morality tales" in general, stories that "carry resonance because they provide scripts that instruct audiences on the means of receiving redemption, either in a secular or theological sense, during times of social upheaval and change" (2014, 18). While white savior figures can take a number of forms, they are in Hughey's view often represented as "disheveled or temporarily broken people who struggle with the sins of their past", but whose contact with people of color eventually allow them to "rise to the occasion, overcoming their insecurities and dedicating their lives to saving their newfound nonwhite friends" (2014, 42). While these are only some of the features that Hughey associates with white savior films and the white savior figure, they provide a glimpse of the tendencies that I argue *1,000 Times Good Night* both reinforces and challenges.<sup>138</sup>

Thinking of *1,000 Times Good Night* in terms of white savior tropes and the question of who gets to speak on their own (or other people's) behalf helps highlight some of the more problematic sides of the film. Generally speaking, the film tends to position Rebecca and other characters in the Global North as subjects who speak on behalf of people in the Global South. The people Rebecca encounters in the Global South are not all passive victims, as seen in the fact that some are agents of violence (i.e. the woman suicide bomber), but they are generally fairly flat characters that the viewer learns little about. As far as the woman bomber is concerned, it is also unclear whether she is driven by her own motivations or forced and equipped by others. As seen in the following example, certain scenes do try to draw attention

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<sup>136</sup> As he notes, the term "white savior" has a long history that goes back to the idea of the "the white man's burden", among other concepts (2014, 8–10).

<sup>137</sup> As discussed at the end of Chapter 3, *Sweatshop* has been criticized for reproducing in the Norwegian context the tendencies Hughey describes, but this criticism is, while an important contribution to a critical discussion of *Sweatshop*, not entirely accurate in my view (for more, see Chapter 3).

<sup>138</sup> Although Hughey does not situate his study within postcolonial studies, his discussions on the relationship between race and representation build on the work of scholars such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Edward W. Said. Spivak and Said made major contributions to the field now known as postcolonial studies by drawing attention to the pervasiveness of Orientalism (Said [1978] 2003, 1993), and the question of who gets to speak on whose behalf (Spivak [1999] 2007).

to conflicts in the Global South and give a voice to those who suffer because of these conflicts, but it is first and foremost Rebecca's perspective and that of other characters in the Global North that is foregrounded. During an important dialogue halfway through the film, Rebecca talks to Steph about the Democratic Republic of Congo. The scene is important because it represents a moment in which Steph and Rebecca's relationship takes a turn for the better, and because it positions Rebecca as a source of knowledge with regards to violence in the Global South. The conversation is prompted by the fact that Steph has seen one of Rebecca's press photos in school, a photo she found deeply disturbing. This leads Rebecca to have a longer conversation with her daughter about the context for the photograph.

The dialogue between mother and daughter frames Rebecca not only as a mother who tries to help her child, but also as a white European figure who understands, can explain, and morally condemn violence in the Global South. The scene deals specifically with the Second Congo War in the late 1990s and early 2000s and frames and explains that war both to Steph (within the diegetic universe) and the viewer watching the film. Several images that Rebecca has supposedly taken while covering the war are depicted during this scene. This includes the image that Steph has seen in school: a high-contrast, almost black and white portrait of a black girl or young woman whose lips and ears have been cut off. This graphic photo appears at the start of the scene and initially fills the entire screen, thus symbolically positioning the viewer in a similar position as Steph, as a person who, in Susan Sontag's (2003) words, regards the pain of others. The camera then slowly zooms out while Rebecca explains (in voice-over) the story of the female in the photograph, stating that her name is Mary and that her face was mutilated by members of the rebel group The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in order to scare others. After narrating Mary's story, Rebecca goes on to explain the background for the war at large, and visually, the rest of the scene mainly cuts between medium close-ups of Rebecca and Steph. Exceptions include several clips that depict Rebecca's computer screen, where other, mostly black and white press photographs from the war are displayed.

What is especially noteworthy about this scene is the manner in which it deals with both the war in Congo and Rebecca's relationship to Steph, and the ways in which the mother-daughter relationship significantly influences how the war in Congo is represented. Given the considerable amount of time Rebecca spends explaining and describing the war, the violence in Congo is clearly a central topic in the scene. At the same time, the mother-daughter relationship also structures the scene in a fundamental way. For one, the starting point for the conversation is, as mentioned, Rebecca's desire to help her daughter understand

Mary's portrait and traumatic story. In other words, Steph and Rebecca's relationship helps justify why Rebecca explains the war in Congo to Steph – a character who, I should note, knows considerably less about the war than Rebecca. This difference in knowledge matters because it translates into a difference in power. More specifically, Steph's lack of knowledge means that she asks Rebecca fairly general – and important – questions (e.g. “Why are they doing this?”), but that she cannot really challenge Rebecca's explanations. Making Steph Rebecca's interlocutor therefore has implications for the film's representation of the war in Congo and helps justify that Rebecca takes up the role as an authority or source of knowledge. The result is that Rebecca can assume an authoritative and pedagogical role in the scene. By contrast, if Rebecca had the same conversation with Marcus, one can at least suspect that the dialogue would play out rather differently, with Rebecca presumably taking a less pedagogical role.

While the scene does not relegate the war in Congo to the background, it does make the war an occasion for establishing Steph and Rebecca's characters and their relationship. It also seems to position Rebecca as a white savior in the sense that she is “the only character able to recognize . . . moral distinctions” (Hughey 2014, 8). The scene brings to mind a tendency that Margaret R. Higonnet (with Ethel R. Higonnet) finds in several famous Hollywood films that depict African history, whereby problems in African history are depicted from the perspective of white protagonists, and framed in such a way that the latter are those who recognize human right violations (2012, 42).<sup>139</sup> Since the scene generally cuts between close-ups of mother and daughter, it also foregrounds their relationship and the impact the dialogue has on each of them. The various medium close-ups and close-ups of Rebecca draw the viewer's attention to Rebecca and her moral outrage. As importantly, the scene also suggests that the conversation helps Steph better understand her mother's job, and likewise helps Rebecca connect to her daughter. Lastly, through the use of *mise-en-scène* and lighting, the scene also positions Rebecca and her daughter as privileged people in the Global North whose lives contrast with the suffering and violence people in the Global South experience. Unlike the high-contrast, black and white photos of the violence in the Congo, the shots of Rebecca and Steph depict the two characters in a calm, quiet, and gently lit environment. The study they are sitting in is softly lit by the daylight outside, and the *mise-en-*

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<sup>139</sup> The authors – who, incidentally, are listed as “Margaret R. Higonnet (with Ethel R. Higonnet)” – use *Blood Diamond* (Edward Zwick, 2006) and *The Last King of Scotland* (Kevin Macdonald, 2006), among other films, as their examples (2012). Operating with a different term than Hughey's concept of the white savior film, Higonnet and Higonnet refers to these films as “human rights films”, a term they use to describe a larger body of fiction films with a “human rights agenda” (2012, 35) – a term that could apply also to *1,000 Times Good Night*.

*scène* includes expensive furniture and framed family portraits (the latter can be glimpsed in the background).

### The “Good Norwegian” and the “Global Mother”

Interestingly, the trope of saviorism, as represented in *1,000 Times Good Night*, can also be understood as a product of the film production itself and in light of self-images that imagine Norway as a benevolent, humanitarian nation. This brings us to the scenes set in Kenya, which appear around halfway through the film, and to Stig, the Norwegian aid worker who invites Rebecca and Steph to join him on a trip to a Kenyan refugee camp (Fig. 11). Stig asks Rebecca whether she can come and help take photos of the camp, but the trip also becomes an occasion for Steph to gather information for a school project (or her “Africa project”, as Rebecca calls it) (Fig. 10). Before the trip, Stig assures them that the camp is peaceful, and it initially seems to be a safe space, as Steph and Rebecca walk around the camp, calmly taking pictures of women and children.



*Fig. 10: Official promotional photograph of Rebecca (left) and Steph (right) on the plane to Kenya.*

*Photo/copyright: John Christian Rosenlund/Paradox.*

Suddenly, a group of rebel soldiers attack the camp, and Rebecca begins to photograph the attack, despite having quit her job and reassured her husband that she will take care of Steph during the trip to Kenya. In this scene, Rebecca jeopardizes an already volatile relationship

between her and Steph, and is framed as both disturbingly irresponsible and self-sacrificing and heroic. While Steph cries and pleads her mother not to leave, her words prove futile as Rebecca runs towards the line of fire. Notably, just as Rebecca abandons her parental role in favor of her job, Stig steps up as a protective, paternal figure for Steph. As it turns out, Rebecca's photos ultimately help Stig, his NGO, and last but not least the refugees in the camp, since her coverage of the shooting makes the United Nations offer the camp protection. As we watch the van from the United Nations drive towards the camp, Stig turns to Rebecca and says: "Your pictures have power". While Stig's comment borders on the saccharine, the journey to Kenya reinforces the idea that Rebecca's photos are indispensably important, echoing her own argument that "the world needs it".

Stig is only a minor character in the film, but his role is nevertheless noteworthy, partly because he makes possible Rebecca and Steph's journey to Kenya (a crucial event in the film) and because he is presented as a benevolent aid worker from the Global North. Much in the same way that travelling to Cambodia is shown to change the participants in *Sweatshop*, Steph's journey to Kenya is framed as a crucial moment in her development. Notably, both examples depict a journey on the part of white European youth that goes from the Global North to the Global South, where structural violence – and, in Steph's case, direct violence – shocks and disturbs the protagonists. Ultimately, however, the violence they witness and the transformative journey they embark on is shown to make the youths more aware of their own privileges, as well as more concerned about the suffering of less advantaged others. I return to the trip to Kenya later in this chapter, but for now want to turn to another reason that Stig is an important character – namely, because he symbolically represents both Norway and humanitarianism in the film. Stig is the only character in the film associated with Norway, and is introduced as an aid worker employed by the Norwegian Refugee Council (Flyktningshjelpen), a real Norwegian NGO. He is introduced halfway through the film, as a project coordinator. A white, middle-aged male, Stig is characterized in the film as a sympathetic, knowledgeable figure who, as mentioned, represents a surrogate parent for Steph. As an aid worker, Stig may also partly explain why some reviewers associate *1,000 Times Good Night* with Bier's films *In a Better World* and *After the Wedding*, which also feature white, middle-aged Scandinavian men who do humanitarian work in the Global South.<sup>140</sup> Unlike Bier's films, however, *1,000 Times Good Night* gives a fairly uncomplicated and one-sided impression of Stig, representing him as an almost unequivocally good person.

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<sup>140</sup> As Belinda Smaill points out, the male protagonists in Bier's two films must "grapple with hefty humanitarian problems on the global stage" as well as "the tangled expectations of class, gender, and the everyday" (2014, 24).

This laudatory image of Stig has partly to do with being a minor character that gets fairly little screen time when compared to the two aid workers in Bier's films, both of whom are protagonists in their respective films. In addition, however, other factors are also likely to be at play, including the fact that the Norwegian Refugee Council, the real NGO that the fictional Stig works for, was involved in the making of *1,000 Times Good Night*. The Norwegian Refugee Council, which is described as one of the five major NGOs in Norway (Lie 2006), collaborated with the filmmakers by giving professional advice, commenting on the film script, and helping to arrange for the filming in Afghanistan and Kenya, according to the website of Flyktningshjelpen (Flyktningshjelpen 2013a).<sup>141</sup> Moreover, Ousdal sought advice from the organization while preparing for his role (Andersen 2014) and during the filming in Kenya participated in promotional videos for the organization. Moreover, after the film's official premiere, a separate "pre-Christmas screening" of the film was organized, and proceeds went to the Norwegian Refugee Council (Flyktningshjelpen 2013b). In the film itself, the NGO is represented through Stig's character and the fact that its logo can be seen in several scenes, e.g. on Stig's t-shirt (Fig. 11), cars, and other objects in the *mise-en-scène*.



*Fig. 11: Official promotional photograph of Stig (left), whose t-shirt carries the logo of the Norwegian Refugee Council, and Rebecca (right) in Kenya. Photo/copyright: John Christian Rosenlund/Paradox.*

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<sup>141</sup> Flyktningshjelpen, along with Kirkens Nødhjelp, Norsk Folkehjelp, Røde Kors, and Redd Barna, are described as the five major NGOs in Norway, or "de fem store" in Norwegian, according to social anthropologist at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) Jon Harald Sande Lie (2006).

In addition, the positive representation of Stig can be discussed in light of a broader tendency to associate Scandinavian countries with humanitarianism (see Chapter 1). This association need not be a positive and laudatory one (as seen in Ebbe Volquardsen's [2013] discussion of how Bier's films negotiate ideas of Nordic exceptionalism), but in the case of *1,000 Times Good Night*, humanitarianism is largely depicted as a positive contribution to world affairs. As far as Stig's character is concerned, *1,000 Times Good Night* does not challenge self-conceptions of Norway as a peace-building, humanitarian nation. The film can thus be said to help legitimize the Norwegian state system of foreign aid, or what Terje Tvedt (2010) calls a "regime of goodness" (*godhetsregime*). While Tvedt does not refer to cinematic representations, his argument has been connected to films. As Scandinavian studies scholar Ellen Rees argues in her article on Norwegian director Maria Sødahl's *Limbo* (2010), the visual rhetoric in the film can be related to Tvedt's idea that the "regime of goodness employs various *rhetorical strategies* in order to conceal the fact that it is ultimately driven by self-interest" (2016b, 51–2, my emphasis). To compare, Norwegian documentary filmmaker Karoline Frogner argues that there seems to be a tendency in the Norwegian film industry to prioritize stories that feature "good Norwegians" (Kleve 2009). As Frogner states in an interview with the Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet*: "We are a young nation state," Frogner says, "and have a need for an identity. I think 'the good Norwegian' is a brand we very much want to export." [Vi er en ung nasjonalstat, og har behov for identitet. Jeg tror «den gode nordmann» er en merkevare vi gjerne vil sende ut.] (Kleve 2009). While *1,000 Times Good Night* may not have been prioritized and funded because it features "good Norwegians", the film still includes the figure of "the good Norwegian", as seen in the case of Stig.

Certain scenes in *1,000 Times Good Night* also illustrate how images of saviors and mothers become conflated with one another. In a pivotal scene near the end of the film, Rebecca's role as a mother is used to frame and justify her job as a conflict photographer, explaining why she can and should work to help people – and, I should note, children – in the Global South. The scene is set in Steph's school, as Steph gives a school presentation about her trip to the refugee camp in Kenya. Standing on a small stage in front of her teacher, classmates and their parents, Steph begins her presentation without knowing whether her mother has been able to make it to her presentation. The viewer, meanwhile, sees Rebecca watching the stage from a dimly lit doorway, symbolically set apart from the other parents. "I recently visited a camp in Kenya with my mother," says Steph. "She is a photographer. She goes to places where there are problems. Places the rest of the world doesn't... really care about." Steph goes on to describe her trip to Kenya, the conditions in the refugee camp she



visited, and the fact that many of the children in the camp were orphaned children. She also mentions how she herself felt ambivalent about photographing people in the camp, while photographs of African women and children (supposedly taken by Steph during her trip) are projected onto the wall behind her.<sup>142</sup>

Steph then mentions the importance of Rebecca's work: ". . . no matter how many pictures you take, it's not enough. Someone has to keep taking more. That someone happens to be my mum." Rebecca's importance is emphasized again when Steph describes the moment when the rebel soldiers attacked the camp and her mother's heroic response: "Mom got me to safety. Then she risked her own life to take this photo." As Steph says this, the photo projected onto the wall is a dramatic photo of several rebels with masked faces and machine guns in their hands. In the same instance, Steph also realizes that her mother is in the room – an emotional moment that is underscored by the use of close-ups and music (i.e. the reintroduction of a symbolic piano theme from earlier scenes in the film, which is associated with Rebecca and Steph's relationship). Looking at her mother, Steph says as the final words in her presentation: "I think about the kids who go through this every day. They need her more than I do".

On the one hand, the scene with Steph's school presentation is, like the dialogue about the war in Congo, a scene about Steph and Rebecca's relationship. This is conveyed through the cinematography, which switches between medium close-ups and close-ups of Rebecca who looks at Steph with a combination of concern and pride. The scene resembles a classic moment in many a coming-of-age story, namely, the moment in which the young main character lets go of her parent(s) and childhood. On the other hand, if Steph symbolically lets go of her mother in this scene, the separation is also framed as though Steph must let go so her mother can be there for *other* children – children in the Global South. By virtue of her job, Rebecca needs to be in the Global South, helping children there. While this use of children may seem fair enough – many refugees are, indeed, orphaned children – it is also worth considering how the image of the child serves to "invoke an audience's sympathy on a plane that appears *apolitical* or *suprapolitical*—'purely' *moral*" (Moeller 2002, 48). The key word here is "appears". As Susan D. Moeller's (2002) and Wendy S. Hesford's (2011) work on

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<sup>142</sup> Notably, Steph's comment about her own ambivalence is the closest the film gets to a critique of photography itself, specifically, of the power that photographers have over their subjects. Steph's tone quickly shifts from ambivalence to certainty, however. As Steph says: "At the start I thought it was odd to go up to people and take pictures of them, especially when they were sad, but then... Then I understood. They wanted it." That a close-up of several smiling African children is projected on the wall behind her as Steph says "they wanted it" makes the scene, however inadvertently, a paradoxically fitting representation of a white subject who speaks on behalf of non-white others.

international media and transnational human right discourse suggests, the circulation of images that depict “the endangered foreign child” also have “the ethical and political stakes” (Hesford 2011, 151). In the case of *1,000 Times Good Night*, the emphasis on orphaned children in Kenya (and their need for Rebecca) risks reproducing the trope of saviorism, which imagines people in the Global South as needing to be saved by those in the Global North.

As importantly, the scene with Steph’s school presentation mixes together saviorism with ideas about motherhood, bringing to mind what postcolonial and media studies scholar Raka Shome (2011) refers to as a discourse of “global motherhood”. Describing “a growing transnational phenomenon” in the media and cultural landscape of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Shome uses the discourse of global motherhood to describe a tendency in popular culture to depict “white Western women [as] saving, rescuing, or adopting international children from underprivileged parts of the world, and rearticulating them through *familial* frameworks that recenter white Western (and especially North Atlantic) heterosexual kinship logics” (2011, 389). While Shome’s examples include images of Princess Diana in the 1990s and more contemporary images of celebrity adoption (e.g. Angelina Jolie, and Madonna) and of U.N. ambassadors (e.g. Nicole Kidman and, again, Angelina Jolie), these images of global motherhood, or “transnational maternity” (2011, 389), pertain to popular culture in general. It is important to point out that *1,000 Times Good Night* does not go so far as to show that Rebecca can indeed “save” children in the Global South. That is, when Steph says that vulnerable children in other parts of the world need Rebecca more than she herself, the film leaves it open to interpretation whether Steph is idealizing her mother, or simply trying to tell her mother how much she loves her. At the same time, as the references to saviorism accumulate in the film, ranging from Rebecca’s brave acts to Stig’s noble commitment to aid work, *1,000 Times Good Night* also exemplifies how Eurocentric discourses manifest not only in the form of *paternalism*, but also *maternalism*.<sup>143</sup>

## **Representing the Global South: An Absence of History and Politics**

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<sup>143</sup> As historians and gender studies scholars point out, in the colonial period, women’s involvement in missionary work abroad sometimes resembled a form of “colonial feminism” rather than an emancipatory project for the people they claimed to help (see Grimshaw 1989; Chaudhuri and Strobel 1992; L. Ahmed 1992; Thorne 1999; Jacobs 2009; Lundström 2014). For a brief overview of literature on white middle-class women’s role in the colonial project, see Heron 2007, 30–3. See also Paidar 1995 and Bahramitash 2005 for discussions on “feminist Orientalism”, and Sara de Jong’s 2017 book *Complicit Sisters: Gender and Women’s Issues Across North-South Divides* on contemporary relations between female NGO workers in the Global North who help women in or from the Global South.

Despite drawing attention to global injustice, *1,000 Times Good Night* also illustrates one of the features of Eurocentric discourse, namely, the tendency to whitewash the history of the Global North.<sup>144</sup> More specifically, scenes in the film that refer to conflicts or problems in countries in the Global South, including Kenya, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, typically elide the fact that the Global North and the Global South have a long, tumultuous and interconnected history. The film has remarkably little to say about the influence that past and present governments in the Global North have had on the social and political situation in countries in the Global South. For instance, the film opens and ends in Afghanistan, where women or girls are shown to become suicide bombers, but it gives little insight into why female bombers exist. While the film can be lauded for drawing attention to the recruitment of female bombers in Afghanistan – a severe and pressing issue from a human rights’ perspective – it is the gravity of this subject matter that makes it all the more perplexing that the film has little to say about the possible political, economic, social, and historical factors that lead to such female bombers existing in the first place. While the makers of *1,000 Times* presumably had their reasons for not exploring the issue of women bombers further, not drawing attention to the political context in contemporary Afghanistan risks whitewashing the political history of the Global North. Strikingly absent is, for instance, any mention of the fact that the European countries involved in the making of *1,000 Times Good Night* were also militarily involved in Afghanistan in the decade leading up to the release of *1,000 Times Good Night* in 2013. Ireland and Norway – the two countries whose state-funded film institutions helped finance *1,000 Times Good Night* – are both members of NATO, and both sent troops to Afghanistan as part of the NATO-led security mission referred to as the ISAF, or the International Security Assistance Force.<sup>145</sup> These omissions are not a small matter, especially if one sees the political instability and poverty in contemporary Afghanistan as a product of involvement on the part of various governments in the Global North, past or present.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> In Ella Shohat and Robert Stam’s definition, a key feature of Eurocentrism is the tendency to “[elide] the democratic traditions of non-Western people, while obscuring both the manipulative limits of Western formal democracy and the West’s not infrequent role in subverting democracies (often in collaboration with local kleptocrats) in the Global South” (2016, 66).

<sup>145</sup> The same applies to France, the country with which Rebecca is associated in the film.

<sup>146</sup> Political dissident and linguist Noam Chomsky has on numerous occasions criticized the United States for its foreign policy and role in Afghanistan. To give an example, during a talk he gave at MIT in 2001, he states: “Afghanistan’s always been a very poor place and there are many reasons for its current straits but two primary ones are called Russia and the United States. Russia and the United States, in the 1980s, practically destroyed the place — not to help the Afghans. As soon as the place was destroyed, they pulled out and the forces that the United States had organized to harass the Russians then took over — they’re now called the Northern Alliance

Moreover, the sequence with the first (woman) bomber suggests an ambivalent fascination with the combination woman, terrorism, Islam, and the Middle East. To illustrate, when the bomber takes part in a cleaning ritual, we hear and see other local women chanting or praying. Since the women's lines are not subtitled, viewers who do not understand these lines are encouraged to see the ritual through the lens of exoticism, or as an image of the spiritual, transcendental and even the ineffable. The sequence thus seems to exemplify what anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod calls "cultural framing", namely, cases in which an event, including a prolonged conflict or a violent attack, is explained not in reference to politics and history, but rather to culture and religion (Abu-Lughod 2013, 31). The concept of cultural framing is especially relevant for *1,000 Times Good Night* and its representation of women in Afghanistan, since Abu-Lughod refers to cultural framing in a discussion of the heightened interest in Muslim women in US media after the September 11 attacks. As Abu-Lughod asks:

. . . why was knowing about the culture of the region – and particularly its religious beliefs and treatment of women – more urgent than exploring the history of the development of repressive regimes in the region and the United States' role in this history? Such cultural framing, it seemed to me, prevented the serious exploration of the roots and nature of human suffering in that part of the world. Instead of political and historical explanations, experts were being asked to give religious and cultural ones. (31, my emphasis)

From another perspective, *1,000 Times Good Night* and its representations of women bombers can also be seen as part of tendencies gender studies scholar V. G. Julie Rajan points out in her book *Women Suicide Bombers: Narratives of Violence*. As Rajan writes, Western media in general tends to represent women bombers in ways that omit important information about the bombers – information that Rajan argues is "critical to understanding who they were, what they did, and why they did what they did" (2011, 3). While Rajan's examples pertain to the media, it is worth noting that fiction films such as *1,000 Times Good Night* make similar omissions.<sup>147</sup>

To compare, the dialogue in which Rebecca talks to Steph about the Democratic Republic of Congo is far more nuanced, even providing a lengthy explanation of the

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— and that led in the early '90s to what Human Rights Watch calls the worst period in Afghan history as these various criminal forces, that the U.S. had organized with its allies, just tore the place apart" (Chomsky 2001).

<sup>147</sup> For recent fiction films that go further in exploring the contested issue of women bombers's motivations and backgrounds, see *The Attack* (Ziad Doueiri, 2012) and *Day Night Day Night* (Julia Loktev, 2006).

background for the war. Nevertheless, this scene also gives a problematically ahistorical impression of the conflict it addresses. The dialogue deals with the Second Congo War, as mentioned earlier, and Steph listens to her mother explain the extent of the violence. Deeply disturbed and confused, Steph eventually asks: “I don’t get it. Why are they doing this?” Rebecca’s response is worth quoting in its entirety, in order to show how she explains the origins of the war and the specific agents to whom she attributes responsibility. In response to the question “why are they doing this?”, Rebecca says:

For money! Multinational corporations and the mining companies have these incredible deals with many of the governments of Africa. They’re *raping* those nations for their natural resources and wealth, and none of that money gets passed back into the country to enhance the infrastructure. You know, a lot, a lot of hospitals have been burnt down, medical supplies are being stolen by the military, and the lack of access to medication... Five million people *died*. It’s... since when... 1998? It’s the highest number of dead people in any war since the Second World War.

While giving this explanation, Rebecca sighs and pauses, conveying her moral outrage. In one sense, her explanation is rather specific, since it touches on corruption and the collusion between African governments, multinational corporations, and mining companies. Yet, Rebecca’s reference to categories such as “multinational corporations” can also be described as vague. For who owns these multinational companies? And in which countries are they based, with whom do they trade, and what do they sell exactly? If the film is trying to allude to the buying of so-called “conflict minerals”, then mentioning “the mining companies” and “multinational corporations” hardly comes close to pointing out the fact that consumer electronics – ranging from mobile phones, cameras and computers (which Rebecca herself and, I presume, members of the audience use) – are manufactured through the use of minerals that may include precisely conflict minerals, mined in the Democratic Republic of Congo, among other countries.<sup>148</sup>

Rebecca’s summary of the war in Congo can also be described as ahistorical since she says nothing about the history of European imperialism. Rebecca refers to political powers but she only mentions “the governments of Africa”, as if governments in the Global North

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<sup>148</sup> For more on conflict minerals, see Eichstaedt 2011.

have had no role to play in the political situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo.<sup>149</sup> In what ways might this omission affect the viewer's understanding of violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, of violence in postcolonial contexts in general, and of the relationship between the Global North and the Global South? Whether inadvertently or not, *1,000 Times Good Night* sanitizes history when it elides, for instance, the colonization of the Democratic Republic of Congo in the 19th century by Belgian King Leopold II. As Edward W. Said (1993) reminds us through his concept of "contrapuntal reading", much can be gained from examining a narrative in terms of the places, people, and events it does not explicitly mention. In the case of *1,000 Times Good Night*, there is a tendency to avoid touching on the history of colonialism and imperialism. However, if we read against the grain, as I have done in this chapter, the violence and conflicts depicted in the film function as traces or reminders of the very history it tries to not explicitly address.

This is not to suggest that the film leaves the Global North entirely off the hook. As Rebecca tells Steph during their conversation about the war in Congo: "I was in Congo at the time when the world was more interested in news about Paris Hilton wearing no knickers than what was going on in the world. So... It just made me... furious." Notably, Rebecca mentions "the world" twice here, but each time "the world" appears to refer to different things. When she says "I was in Congo at the time when *the world* was more interested in news about Paris Hilton wearing no knickers than what was going on in *the world*" (my emphasis), the first mention of "the world" seems to refer to those who are more interested in Paris Hilton than the war in Congo, while "what was going in the world" appears to be the war in Congo.<sup>150</sup> In the first instance, "the world" that ignores the war presumably refers to people who are privileged enough to be able to focus on entertainment and celebrity news. It is never

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<sup>149</sup> It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the extent to which Rebecca's speech typifies dominant narratives on the war in Congo, but such an analysis would be worth pursuing. Some theoretical starting points for such a discussion could be political scientist Séverine Autesserre's (2012) article "Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on the Congo and their Unintended Consequences", and global studies scholars Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern's 2010 book *The Complexity of Violence: A Critical Analysis of Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)*. As Baaz and Stern note, "most media reports [of sexual violence in the DRC] have recycled and reinforced familiar colonial images and fantasies in their representations of the violence" (2010, 12). Violence in the DRC has also primarily been framed in terms of sexual violence: "The most prevalent storyline of violence in the reporting on the warscape of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been rape" (Baaz and Stern 2010, 7). The dialogue between Rebecca and Steph in *1,000 Times Good Night* not only addresses rape; Rebecca even uses rape as a metaphor when she describes the relationship between "multinational corporations", "the mining companies" and "many of the governments of Africa". As she says, "they're raping those nations for their natural resources and wealth" – with a distinct emphasis on the word "raping".

<sup>150</sup> References to "the world", as we have seen, also appear in the dialogue between Rebecca and Theresa, where Rebecca tells Theresa that she works in conflict zones not because she herself needs it, but because "[t]he world needs it. Needs to see the suffering, the pain, what's going on—" Here, "the world" can also be understood as a reference to people who do not live in conflict zones.

explicitly stated that these people are people in the Global North, but the scene evokes associations to ideas of “Western consumers”, the United States, and media spectacles through its reference to Paris Hilton – a celebrity who, in cultural studies scholar Douglas Kellner’s words, is “an obvious example” of “attributed celebrity”, that is, a person whose fame is “achieved through media representations or spectacle, in scandals or tabloid features” (2009, 716).<sup>151</sup> Without explicitly spelling out a contrast between the Global North and the Global South, the contrast is inscribed in the dialogue through the references to Paris Hilton on the one hand and the war in Congo on the other.

If Rebecca is interpreted as a representative of the Global North, several scenes in *1,000 Times Good Night* also raise questions about the involvement of the Global North in violence in the Global South. While *1,000 Times Good Night* does not address whether Rebecca’s affluent lifestyle is related to her job as a conflict photographer (as Eriksen [2013] argues in his review), the film does suggest that Rebecca feels implicated in the violence she witnesses. In a brief, but significant scene in the film, Rebecca expresses what seems to be a sense of guilt for her potentially having influenced where and when the bomb went off while she was in Afghanistan. The scene is a dialogue between Rebecca and Marcus that takes place in the evening, after Rebecca’s editor in New York has told her via a video call that the photos she took in Afghanistan will not be published.

The subsequent scene opens with a medium long shot of Rebecca standing alone in her bathroom, looking into a lit mirror, frustrated and upset. Placed in the middle of the frame, Rebecca bends down to wash her face. Marcus walks in and sits down on a chair slightly away from Rebecca, and says: “What exactly happened in Kabul?” Marcus is initially in focus, but gradually becomes a blurry figure as the focus returns to Rebecca, who is slightly taken aback by Marcus’s question. “I don’t understand, Rebecca. Why would you put yourself in harm’s way?” Marcus asks. As he says this, we see in a close up Rebecca’s face, or rather, her face as it is reflected in the mirror. In the background, Marcus is visible, but again, in the shape of a blurry figure. Rebecca begins to explain, and does not turn around as she does this, only looking at Marcus through the mirror. She struggles to find her words, and does not seem to properly know what actually happened: “The worst thing is that... I took two more shots from outside the car. I don’t know why.”<sup>152</sup> Later, she says: “She detonated the bomb, that’s

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<sup>151</sup> Kellner describes Paris Hilton as an example of “faux celebrities”: those “who are largely famous for being famous and being in the media, supported by a tabloid media that is becoming more prevalent in the era of the Internet, new media and social networking sites that circulate gossip” (2009, 716).

<sup>152</sup> At this point, non-diegetic instrumental music (mostly a minimalistic mixture of string instruments and piano in minor key) is introduced into the scene, heightening the emotional tension in the scene.

all I remember... It's all my fault." At this point, we cut to Marcus's face in a close-up. "You think because of you she set the bomb off?" he asks, with a look of concern on his face. The camera lingers on Marcus as we hear Rebecca reply (in voice-over): "Yes, in that particular place, in that particular time." She adds: "That those particular people died, yes, yes." In yet another close-up of Rebecca, we see her looking down at first, but eventually, she raises her gaze and looks at Marcus through the mirror. Like the rest of the conversation, however, this final moment in the scene shows Rebecca with her back turned against Marcus. The husband's and wife's eyes are locked, but Rebecca's past remains a source of confusion and conflict. While most reviewers ignore this scene, Stephen Holden of *The New York Times* aptly notes that Rebecca blames herself for the bomb in the opening sequence, and that the film "brings up the subject of how a photojournalist's presence can shape events" – although "[Rebecca's] guilty conscience is no palliative for lives lost" (2014).

Last but not least, the ending of the film also invites the viewer to be critical of Rebecca and the extent to which she can document, let alone alleviate, suffering in the Global South. The ending can thus, by implication, also raise questions about the involvement on the part of the Global North in general. Ending where it started, *1,000 Times Good Night* closes with a sequence set in Afghanistan, where Rebecca has returned in order to complete her story about the suicide bomber. This time, however, the bomber she is going to photograph is – to Rebecca's shock and disgust – a young girl, perhaps eight or nine years old. Like the first woman bomber, the girl is dressed and prepared before she is driven off in a car, and while Rebecca tries to take photos of the ritual, she is too distraught to take a single picture. At one point, she leans against a wall, clearly nauseous. Visually, this ritual is also depicted differently than that with the woman bomber. While the latter is bathed in sunlight and depicted through both medium shots and close-ups, the young girl is seen sitting in the shade and filmed more from a distance, primarily through medium shots. Altogether, the ritual with the young girl comes across as less spectacular.

Rebecca's sense of confusion is powerfully conveyed in the film's very final shot: Rebecca and a local woman are seen standing outside the building where the ritual has just taken place, watching the young girl being driven off in a van. Filmed in a long shot with no camera movement, the clip is set to a minimalistic score dominated by string instruments playing in a melancholy minor key. The camera lingers on the two women, who appear helpless before the injustice they are witnessing, albeit for different reasons. Unlike the local woman, Rebecca represents an outsider who, up until this point, has seemed able to be both a witness and a mediator. Now, she is unable to do her job and live up to her own adamant



belief in showing “the world” the suffering and pain that exists. This is symbolically conveyed through Rebecca’s letting go of her camera with one of her hands. The camera ends up dangling next to her body. Shortly after, the local woman turns around, away from the van, and falls to her knees, weeping silently. Next, Rebecca falls to her knees as well, thus visually mirroring the other woman. Rebecca remains sitting, staring pensively ahead, before she closes her eyes, and the film cuts to black. This final shot not only marks a decisive moment in Rebecca’s personal story, but also casts doubt on whether people in the Global North can, in fact, help those who suffer injustices in the Global South. While *1,000 Times Good Night* contains various scenes that seem to reinforce white savior tropes and Eurocentric tendencies, the film as a whole, and especially the ending, also raises profound questions about Rebecca – ultimately associating her not with redemption and hope, but with doubt, confusion, and moral uncertainty.

### **Conclusion**

Made against the backdrop of 21st-century globalization, *1,000 Times Good Night* is a melodramatic film that uses Rebecca and her conflicted relationship to her family to dramatize the moral conflicts that globalization leaves in its wake – specifically the tension between one’s “thick” and “thin” relations. As I have discussed, Rebecca’s role as a mother functions both as a source of tension and as a means for framing her as a heroic figure, at least in the eyes of her daughter. Indeed, while the film revolves around Rebecca, Steph’s role is also crucial, partly because Rebecca is defined partly through her interactions with Steph. Moreover, Steph gradually becomes more and more like a younger version of her mother. At the end of their conversation about the Second Congo War, the focus shifts away from gruesomeness of the war towards the hope that Steph can, like her mother, function as a mediator. As Steph asks her mother: “Can I use these pictures for my project?” Surprised, Rebecca smiles as if both deeply moved and somewhat surprised. Much like in *Sweatshop*, then, we see how a young female figure gradually becomes a source of hope, someone who embodies the potential for a better future and uses her privileges to try to help less advantaged others. Whether Steph or Rebecca are, in fact, capable of helping other people in the Global South is, as I have shown, left fairly open to interpretation, thanks to the film’s ambiguous ending. What the ending does not undermine, however, is the idea that privileged people need to consider the relationship between the Global North and the Global South, and arguably also the question of what to do when you are privileged and aware of global injustice.

The tension between thick and thin relations is, of course, neither a novel phenomenon nor strictly related to globalization. Yet, there is arguably something distinct about 21st-century globalization that makes the contrast between privileges in the Global North and suffering in the Global South especially obvious. One factor, which *1,000 Times Good Night* repeatedly touches on, is the ease with which images of distant suffering can circulate and remind privileged people, however momentarily, of the inequality in the world. While the awareness of such images may not necessarily lead to political action, nor to any sense of responsibility on the part of privileged people – a point Rebecca explicitly raises – it seems hard to deny that in the 21st century, one has easier access to images and news about problems in other parts of the world. Another factor, which *1,000 Times Good Night* also depicts, is the mobility of privileged people from the Global North, people who like Rebecca and Steph can easily travel abroad and consequently become more aware of global inequalities, if not direct witnesses to the suffering of underprivileged others.<sup>153</sup>

The example I explore in the next chapter, Roy Andersson's 2014 film *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*, similarly includes a figure that, like Rebecca, becomes a witness to violence. However, *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* is a far more ambiguous film in that it deliberately depicts acts of violence in an anachronistic manner, and sometimes even blurs the boundary between dream and reality. Also, while *1,000 Times Good Night* and *Sweatshop* generally focuses on injustice in the contemporary era, *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* screens privileges and acts of violence in the present as connected to those in the historical past. More specifically, the film repeatedly alludes to the histories of imperialism and colonialism in Sweden and Europe, and touches on the history of slavery in particular. As such, it provides a striking contrast to *1,000 Times Good Night*, which generally elides the history of colonialism, and represents a striking attempt to draw attention to Sweden's past as a global empire. Last but not least, unlike the previous two examples, which seem to foreground women and girls as privileged but also responsible, humanitarian figures, the central characters in *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* are men and appear to lack, rather than have, agency.

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<sup>153</sup> Migration, moreover, can make distant suffering not so distant after all. *1,000 Times Good Night* does not explore the existence of social inequalities within the Global North, however.

## ***A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence:* Historicizing Privilege and Injustice**

*A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* (*En duva satt på en gren och funderade på tillvaron*, 2014), directed by Swedish filmmaker Roy Andersson, is a compelling and contrastive example to *Sweatshop* and *1,000 Times Good Night*.<sup>154</sup> While *Sweatshop* and *1,000 Times Good Night* revolve around injustices in the contemporary era and focus on protagonists from the Global North who travel to and encounter underprivileged others in the Global South, *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* seems comparatively more concerned with history. Specifically, Andersson's film (which I refer to as *Pigeon*) evokes associations to the histories of imperialism and colonialism in Sweden and Europe through several anachronistic tableaux in the film. Notably, these anachronistic tableaux contrast with the rest of the film, which is set in a non-descript Swedish city and depicts fairly mundane moments and dialogues between ordinary people.<sup>155</sup> These everyday moments, which are filmed in sketch-like tableaux, typically take place in streets, stores, workplaces, and apartments that bring to mind modern-day Sweden, but seem to challenge ideas of contemporary Sweden as a nation that repeatedly ranks among the "happiest countries in the world".<sup>156</sup> Many of these scenes also touch on existential themes such as alienation, the desire to be acknowledged by others, and a search for meaning in life. For instance, one scenario that recurs throughout the film (albeit in different variations) has a character telling someone over the phone "I'm happy to hear you're doing fine" ["Vad roligt att höra att ni har det bra"]. Every time, however, the character has to repeat the line, presumably because the person at the other end has been too preoccupied with something else (or someone else?) to hear what has just been said. Taken together, the film's repetition of the deceptively simple line "I'm happy to hear you're doing fine" hints at how attempts at being happy on other people's

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<sup>154</sup> This chapter is a thoroughly revised version of my forthcoming article "Filming Guilt about the Past through Anachronistic Aesthetics: Roy Andersson's *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*".

<sup>155</sup> The sets in the film are all built from scratch, either in Andersson's studio, Studio 24, or in larger, rented studios, and have a noticeably *constructed* feel. While the sets suggest that the film is temporally speaking set in the modern era, they also evoke associations to a mixture between postwar Sweden and a stripped down version of present-day Sweden – creating a temporal ambiguity that I return to later in this chapter.

<sup>156</sup> I am referring to the annual *World Happiness Report* issued by the UN. For more on Scandinavia, the *World Happiness Reports*, and discourses on happiness, see Oxfeldt, Simonsen, and Nestingen (forthcoming).

behalf often fall on deaf ears – not necessarily because people ignore each other, but rather, because they try to care about others yet ultimately care just a little more about themselves.

To compare, the anachronistic tableaux in the film draw attention to the historical past by combining elements from the diegetic present (e.g. key characters in the film) with elements that seem to belong to earlier stages of history (e.g. historical figures and dialogues that refer to historical events). These anachronistic tableaux are significant because they allude to colonialism, imperialism and other systems of injustice in the past and, moreover, suggest that privilege and injustice in the past may be an integral part of the present. As I show in this chapter, the anachronistic tableaux evocatively imply that systems of violence, injustice, and privilege in the present-day era may represent a continuation of the historical past. As importantly, the legacy of violence, injustice, and privilege appears to bring about a state of unhappiness rather than the state of happiness one would normally associate with privilege. In this chapter, I examine how *Pigeon* screens privilege and injustice and analyze in particular how and why the anachronistic tableaux are central to the film's social critiques. Drawing on memory studies scholar Michael Rothberg's (2009) discussion of "anachronistic aesthetics", I suggest that a deliberate use of anachronism in Andersson's film can have a creative and subversive potential, challenging common understandings of history, privilege, and happiness. In *Pigeon*'s case, the use of anachronisms allows the film to raise questions about notions of Sweden as a peaceful, politically neutral nation, and draw attention to *Stormaktstiden*, or "the Great Power Era", and Sweden's history as a global empire – a topic that is rarely broached in the Scandinavian context, let alone Scandinavian cinema (Habel 2008; Lindqvist 2010, 219).<sup>157</sup>

As seen in a pivotal sequence near the end of the film, *Pigeon* also blends elements from colonialism in the past with global capitalism in the present. It thus invites the viewer to consider the relationship between these systems of domination. Given these references to colonialism, capitalism, and history, it is helpful to consider *Pigeon* in light of what film scholar Thomas Elsaesser (2014) calls "guilt management". While Elsaesser uses the concept to analyze how post-war German films have grappled with the trauma of the Nazi rule and the

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<sup>157</sup> Like historian Kristian Gerner, I use the term "the Great Power Era" to designate "[t]he period from the Livonian War in the mid-sixteenth century to the end of the Great Northern War in 1721" (2009, 687). Other English translations of the term *Stormaktstiden* also exist, such as "Sweden's century as a great power" (Larson 1996). Sometimes, the time period also differs somewhat, as when Larson defines "Sweden's century as a great power" as lasting from 1523 to 1718 (Larson 1996). Also, while definitions of the term "imperialism" vary, I use the term "Swedish imperialism" in this study to describe the period in which the Swedish Empire existed (often described as 1611–1721) and Charles XII reigned (1697–1718). I thus build on historical research on this particular time period, particularly the work of historians Per Widén (2015) and Gerner (2002), who use the terms "svensk imperialisme" and "the Swedish empire", respectively.

Holocaust, he suggests that guilt management is applicable also to other contexts and phenomena, including the legacies of colonialism and the influence of capitalism.

Like my previous two analyses, this chapter also considers the role of genre, and shows how *Pigeon* is usefully understood as an art film partly because of its formal and thematic features. As importantly, the reception of *Pigeon* is informed by expectations towards art cinema in general, especially the assumption on the part of viewers that art films should be interpreted in light of art film directors' own stated intentions. As film scholar David Bordwell suggests, such "viewing conventions" is a central aspect of art cinema ([1979] 2002, 97). These viewing conventions and their emphasis on the voice of the art film director help explain why the anachronistic tableaux in *Pigeon* have been interpreted by reviewers in strikingly consistent ways, despite their being noticeably ambiguous scenes that feature various, sometimes rather obscure historical references. In short, this chapter takes into account Andersson's own stated intentions and considers how the director's statements as well as the film's promotional materials (especially its two press kits) seems to have informed how reviewers interpret *Pigeon*. In the process, I discuss the function of the anachronistic aesthetics in the film, arguing that the film's general play with history and time invites the viewer to consider multiple instances of injustice and forms of privilege at once. Moreover, *Pigeon* ultimately raises questions about the neat parceling of time into the past, present, and future, and affirms the importance of reflecting on the historical past as an integral part of the present.

### ***A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence***

*Pigeon* is Andersson's fifth feature film to date and premiered at the 71st Venice International Film Festival in 2014, where Andersson won the prestigious Golden Lion Award for Best Film.<sup>158</sup> Marketed as part of Andersson's "Living" trilogy, which started with *Songs from the Second Floor* (*Sånger från andra våningen*, 2000) and *You, the Living* (*Du levande*, 2007), *Pigeon* is explicitly presented as a film about "being human". To illustrate, an inter-title that appears shortly after the opening credits of the film reads: "the final part in a trilogy about being human" ["sista delen i en trilogi om att vara människa"]. *Pigeon* continues both thematic and stylistic tendencies in Andersson's films in general, including the tendency in his films to "[displace] realism with abstraction and the dramatic unfolding of a plot with

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<sup>158</sup> The film later went on to win several other Swedish, European, and international film awards in 2015 at the 28th European Film Awards (the prize for Best Comedy), the Guldbagge Awards in Sweden (the prize for Best Set Design), and the International Cinephile Society Awards (a prize named Best Picture Not Released in 2014).

repetitive ruminations—audiovisual leitmotifs—on existential ideas” (Lindqvist 2016b, 548–9). Stylistically speaking, *Pigeon* has, like the “Living” trilogy as a whole, an episodic narrative structure and is filmed through a consistent use of wide angle, deep focus shots and little to no camera movement. Thematically, the film also exemplifies Andersson’s propensity to criticize contemporary Swedish society and generally represent Sweden as a fairly drab and lonely place. As film scholar Daniel Brodén writes: “Few, if any, filmmakers have scrutinized the development [of the welfare state in Sweden] with the same depth, consistency, and zeal as Andersson” (2014, 99).<sup>159</sup> This description applies as much as to Andersson’s earlier films as *Pigeon*.



Fig. 12: Jonathan (left) and Sam (middle) demonstrating their plastic vampire teeth. © Studio 24 Foto: Studio 24.

While *Pigeon* does not have any fully fledged protagonists, two characters do recur throughout the film, namely Jonathan (Holger Andersson) and Sam (Nils Westblom). Two awkward, middle-aged, Swedish men who are business partners as well as friends, Jonathan and Sam resemble archetypes rather than psychologically complex protagonists, and provide both a sense of narrative consistency through their repeated appearances and represent a source of tragicomedy in the film. Jonathan and Sam’s job as salesmen who barter in novelty

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<sup>159</sup> According to Brodén, Ingmar Bergman might be a more internationally known director, but Andersson is “a strong contender for the title of not only the most original auteur of Swedish cinema but also the famed critic of the state of the welfare state” (2014, 99).

items, such as plastic vampire teeth, laugh bags, and rubber masks, can also be understood both symbolically (as a critique of alienation in contemporary societies) and meta-fictively (as a comment on filmmakers' attempt at entertaining people). Jonathan and Sam seem relatively alienated from their work, as seen in the various scenes in which they pitch their products to others, but look and sound absurdly unengaged (Fig. 12). Each time, Sam, the more confident of the two, takes the lead and speaks the words of a salesman, but seems unable to alter his monotone, deadpan voice. His pitch is thus void of the enthusiasm one would expect from a persuasive salesman. Meanwhile, Jonathan tries to chip in, saying that “we want to help people have fun” [“vi vill hjälpa folk ha det roligt”], but every time, his nasal voice is a quivering, faltering knot of doubt.<sup>160</sup>

In their inability to properly inhabit the role of a salesman, Jonathan and Sam indirectly touch on the pressure in contemporary societies to perform “emotional labor”, a term sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild uses to describe the ways in which workers are expected to induce particular feelings in others (e.g. their customers) by using their body language, tone of voice, and more.<sup>161</sup> By failing to perform emotional labor, Jonathan and Sam inadvertently expose the contemporary expectation that a “good worker” should, in fact, be able to feign and trigger in others particular emotions. Their unsuccessful sales pitches also establish Jonathan and Sam as unheroic, slightly pathetic underdogs in society.

Jonathan is central to the ways in which *Pigeon* touches on feelings of ambivalence, regret, and guilt and links those feelings to the historical past. In several of the film's anachronistic tableaux, Jonathan represents a symbolic witness to violence and injustice. Unlike Rebecca in *1,000 Times Good Night* and the three participants in *Sweatshop*, however, Jonathan is confronted with violent events that are temporally ambiguous, and does not necessarily react (at least not initially). To give an example, two anachronistic scenes that have drawn considerable attention from reviewers are two long scenes that are set in a modern-day bar and depict the arrival of an army and a king who looks remarkably similar to

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<sup>160</sup> Viewers familiar with Swedish dialects may notice that Jonathan's dialect resembles those spoken in Mälardalen and other parts of central Sweden. Dialects spoken in this region are generally perceived as “whiny”-sounding [*gnällig*], and the geographical area where they are spoken is thus nicknamed “*Gnällbälte*” [“the whining belt”] (see Engstrand 2012, 84). That Jonathan speaks this particular dialect implies that Jonathan is not from the city, and thus hints at a rural/urban divide in Sweden. His “whiny” dialect may also have a slightly comical effect, further underscoring his somewhat pitiful personality.

<sup>161</sup> Hochschild develops the concept of “emotional labor” in her influential book *The Managed Heart* ([1983] 2003), and distinguishes it from “physical work” (e.g. lifting heavy items) and “mental work” (e.g. preparing and managing), while also noting that the three types of work are not mutually exclusive (6–7) (see also Vallas 2012, 48–9). Emotional labor resembles but differs somewhat from Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's concept of “affective labor” (see Hardt 1999; Hardt and Negri 2000). For a discussion of the differences between Hochschild's and Negri and Hardt's concepts, see Altomonte 2015.

Charles XII. In the first of these scenes, Jonathan and Sam are present, but do not seem shocked by the sudden appearance of these anachronistic figures, suggesting that this is a magical-realist moment in the film.<sup>162</sup> Another example, which I call “the organ sequence”, consists of two scenes that are not only anachronistic, but also appear dream-like.<sup>163</sup> The ambiguous organ sequence opens on a savannah, where a group of white, British soldiers dressed in colonial uniforms torture and murder several enchained black men, women, and children. Peter Bradshaw of the UK newspaper *The Guardian* describes the sequence as “a truly horrible moment” in the film, and one that is made more awful still “because the bemusement and laughter that have been our obvious responses to earlier scenes are no longer appropriate” (Bradshaw 2015). Other reviews similarly note that the sequence stands out from the film in general, as exemplified by Matthew Connolly’s review of *Pigeon* in the US-based film journal *Film Comment*. As Connolly states: “Andersson wisely intersperses scenes less tethered to the absurdist rhythms of everyday monotony, *unexpectedly introducing historical anachronism, unsettling cruelty, and even musical revelry*” (2015, my emphasis).

As the above summary suggests, *Pigeon* is both thematically and stylistically indebted to art cinema. While the term “art film” can be defined in various ways, I (as indicated above) build on Bordwell’s definition of art cinema in his pivotal 1979 essay “The Art Cinema as a Mode of Practice”. To Bordwell ([1979] 2002), art cinema can be thought of as “a distinct mode of film practice, possessing a definite historical existence, a set of formal conventions, and implicit viewing procedures” (94). Among other features, art films typically lack “goal-oriented characters”, demonstrate a “loosening of causal relations” (i.e. art films are not driven by a cause-effect logic), foreground ambiguity, and revolve around themes such as the human condition (often presenting “judgments on ‘modern life’”) (95–8). Moreover, when art film viewers are confronted with ambiguities, including problems of “causation, temporality or spatiality” (98), they often interpret these ambiguities as the artistic expressions of the art-film director or *auteur* (97). In a similar vein, viewers also expect “stylistic signatures in the narration”, such as “technical touches and obsessive motifs” that are associated with the

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<sup>162</sup> By magical-realist, I refer to the genre of magical realism and its tendency to feature seemingly improbable elements while having those elements go unquestioned, i.e. appear as if they were probable after all. As Maggie Ann Bowers notes in *Magi(al) Realism*: “magical realism relies upon *the representation of real, imagined or magical elements as if they were real*. The key to understanding how magical realism works is to understand the way in which the narrative is constructed in order to provide a realistic context for the magical events of the fiction. Magical realism therefore relies upon realism but only so that it can stretch what is acceptable as real to its limits” (2004, 22, my emphasis).

<sup>163</sup> I call it “the organ sequence” because the same sequence is referred to as “The Organ”, and “Orgeln” in Swedish, in the film’s promotional material. On Roy Andersson’s official profile on the video sharing website Vimeo, several behind-the-scenes clips that are labelled “Orgeln/The Organ” document that the making of the sequence (see for instance <https://vimeo.com/133563197>).



director's existing films (97). If we apply Bordwell's criteria to *Pigeon*, the film seems to be an art film both as far as formal and thematic tendencies are concerned, and in terms of the promotion and reception of the film, which foreground Andersson's role as an *auteur*.<sup>164</sup>

That the reception of *Pigeon* is influenced by auteur-centered viewing conventions is particularly evident in several reviews of the film that describe *Pigeon* as a film about guilt, especially guilt for events in the historical past (see for instance Debruge 2014; Abrams 2015; Kiang 2015; O'Connor 2015). Reviewers have, with good reason, brought up the theme of guilt when discussing the film's anachronistic tableaux, particularly the organ sequence. To illustrate, Jessica Kiang (2015) of the US-based film website *IndieWire* describes the organ sequence as "probably the most unsettling and memorable scene" in *Pigeon*, and connects it to the subject of "guilt for atrocities past":

The sequence . . . , along with the King Charles XII segments, perhaps adds another layer to Andersson's dissection of the human condition: how we may as a species retain legacies of guilt for atrocities past. And how perhaps the thing that is making us miserable today happened long ago, and is beyond the reach of comfort—a kind of original sin, a stain in the blood. (Kiang 2015)

While Kiang refers specifically to the two tableaux with Charles XII and the organ sequence, *Pigeon* as a whole has been understood as evoking associations to the issue of guilt and responsibility. Olaf Möller of the US-based film magazine *Film Comment* writes of the film that it "grapple[s] with painful truths everybody knows but prefers not to face. . . . it is, for all its carefully manicured surface calm, a despair-riddled and angry vision of an uncaring world, in which all the misery and terror around us is due to humanity's carelessness, indifference, and hubris—things for which we are *responsible both individually and collectively*" (2014).

While the film itself touches on themes such as injustice, history, guilt, and responsibility, it is worth noting that the reception of the film is also shaped by Andersson's established reputation, and the manner in which *Pigeon* in particular has been described in interviews with the director and other promotional materials. Over the years, Andersson established himself as an art film director who is deeply concerned with guilt – especially

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<sup>164</sup> That *Pigeon* explicitly positions itself as part of a trilogy (cf. the inter-title at the start of the film) caters to the expectations of art cinema audiences, since art films are, as Bordwell notes, often expected to be part of a director's *oeuvre* and to include "references to previous films by the director or to works by others" ([1979] 2002, 97). *Pigeon* also includes references to other famous art films. At the start of the first scene with Charles XII, for instance, the song "Shimmy Doll", a 1950s rockabilly tune by Ashley Beaumont, is playing in the background. "Shimmy Doll" is also featured in Luis Buñuel's 1961 surrealist film *Viridiana*, and Andersson's use of the song can thus be understood as an homage to Buñuel's film (Romney 2015).

notions of collective guilt and what German author Bernard Schlink calls “guilt about the past” (2010). In numerous interviews, Andersson mentions guilt about the past, specifically his sense of guilt for the Holocaust and other mass atrocities.<sup>165</sup> These interviews often echo passages from Andersson’s 1995 book, *Our Time’s Fear of Seriousness [Vår tids rädsla för allvar]* ([1995] 2009), in which writes of his sense of guilt for the Holocaust.<sup>166</sup> Besides dealing with the question of how to represent the Holocaust in cinema, the book includes references to philosopher Martin Buber and his concept of “existential guilt”, which Andersson describes as an important source of influence (see R. Andersson 2010, 276–7).<sup>167</sup> Unsurprisingly, various scholars writing on Andersson’s filmic and non-filmic projects have thus mentioned existential guilt and post-war guilt in their analyses, as seen especially in studies on *Songs from the Second Floor* and *World of Glory*, a commissioned short film directed by Andersson in 1991.<sup>168</sup> Like *Pigeon*, these earlier films themselves do bring to mind guilt, responsibility, and injustices in human history, but another significant factor shaping the scholarly reception of his films is Andersson’s own stated intentions and frequent references to guilt.

In the case of *Pigeon*, the film’s promotional material, specifically its press kits, features several references to Andersson’s expressed sense of guilt. The two press kits distributed by Coproduction Office (which is based in France and responsible for the film’s international sales) and Magnolia Pictures (which has distributions rights for *Pigeon* in the United States) both contain an interview with Andersson, in which the director mentions the organ sequence and connects it to guilt:

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<sup>165</sup> By “mass atrocities”, I mean phenomena that include “the Holocaust and other genocides, . . . crimes against humanity such as slavery and apartheid,” and “large-scale, deliberate, and systematic violations of human rights” – a definition I borrow from the editors of *The Religious in Responses to Mass Atrocity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Brudholm and Cushman 2009, 6).

<sup>166</sup> As Andersson writes: “I was born when the annihilation of the Jews reached its most intense stage. During the first two years of my life millions of people were gassed in the most bestial way, in a neighboring country where people could read and with traditions that reminded us of our own. This has always haunted me, and still does. . . . I am ashamed of these crimes, on behalf of humanity. I feel some kind of guilt even though I was not there” (R. Andersson 2010, 276). This passage is taken from the essay “The Complex Image”, an English translation of excerpts from Andersson’s book ([1995] 2007), which was published in 2010 and translated by Anders Marklund.

<sup>167</sup> As Brodén notes, what is even more interesting than Andersson’s tendency to refer to Buber’s philosophy is the fact that the latter becomes a way for Andersson to add credence to his own work (Brodén 2016, 74).

<sup>168</sup> For scholarship on Andersson’s films and projects that explicitly mentions guilt, see Brunow 2010; Yang 2013; Lindqvist 2010, 2016a; Brodén 2016. To compare, in his analysis of *Songs from the Second Floor*, film scholar Pietari Kääpä does not explicitly mention guilt, although he does point to Sweden’s neutrality during World War II and refers to the past as “haunting” the present: “The spectre of a murdered Russian boy from the Second World War haunts the protagonists, suggestively gesturing to Sweden’s neutrality in the war” (2014, 114).

In [*Pigeon*] there is also a rigorously arranged scene where a terrible crime is put into a fictitious historical context. It is almost a provocation in its combination of cruelty and beauty. I am referring to the extermination scene near the end of the film. British colonialists are forcing slaves into a copper cylinder, and slow, beautiful music evolves from the victims' last cries.

As an artist it is important, even necessary, to shake up preconceptions, to stir, *to add to the feeling of guilt in the world. We are still supposed to feel ashamed.* (Asp 2015) <sup>169</sup>

Similarly, Andersson's interviews with reporters and film critics prior to the release of *Pigeon* also touch on the director's stated sense of existential, historic, or collective guilt, often while also referring to Buber's writings and/or the organ sequence (see Oscarsson 2013; Steingrimsen 2013; Gamble 2015; Kohn 2015; MacFarlane 2015; E. Lucas 2015).<sup>170</sup> To illustrate, in an interview with the Berlin-based magazine *EXBERLINER*, Andersson states the following about the organ sequence:

The torture scene with the cylinder? It's memory and it's fantasy. But it's not only fantasy. For me, it's a kind of historic guilt, collective guilt. I was not there to torture the Indians with the conquistadors, but I feel guilt for the white man. I'm ashamed of being a member of mankind. (E. Lucas 2015)

As the above excerpts suggest, Andersson links guilt to the history of "mankind" in general and the history of "the white man" in particular. The concept of guilt to which he alludes pertains not only to individual action, but also to the actions of specific communities, bringing to mind the concept of collective guilt (which I discussed in Chapter 2). Moreover, that Andersson brings up guilt feelings when discussing the organ sequence helps frame the sequence as a reflection on guilt for events in the past – or as an attempt, as Andersson puts it, "to shake up preconceptions, to stir, to add to the feeling of guilt in the world" (Asp 2015).

## **Guilt Management through Anachronistic Aesthetics**

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<sup>169</sup> Press kits (or press notes) have traditionally been given to journalists by film studios during press screenings; now, they tend to be available electronically, often together with film clips, and are an important indication of how a film has been marketed (Caldwell 2008).

<sup>170</sup> Notably, when Andersson refers to existential guilt, historic guilt, and collective guilt, he seems to use these various guilt terms interchangeably (see Steingrimsen 2013; E. Lucas 2015; Oscarsson 2013).

*Pigeon* can be usefully understood not only in light of Andersson's own statements, but also as an instance of what Elsaesser, in his book *German Cinema – Terror and Trauma: Cultural Memory Since 1945*, refers to as “guilt management”. As suggested above, Elsaesser (2014) develops the concept of “guilt management” to analyze post-war German cinema – specifically films from the 1970s to the present – and the ways in which they have been informed by, and involved in, German attempts at “mastering the past”, i.e. coming to terms with the Nazi rule and the Holocaust (19). Through his analyses of individual films, Elsaesser shows how directors in Germany have addressed, avoided, or (as is often the case) unintentionally evoked the issue of guilt. To manage and distribute guilt in post-war Germany is an on-going, paradoxical process, according to Elsaesser, and one that is evident not only in political discourse and praxis, but also in films. His key argument is that this process manifests both in the form of deliberate and overt attempts at acknowledging guilt, and in the form of more unplanned avoidances, silences, and slippages in meaning – or what he calls “parapraxis”. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the various forms that parapraxis can take, it is useful to note Elsaesser builds on the idea of *Fehlleistung* (referred to as the “Freudian slip” in English) and associates parapraxis with “failure”, while underscoring that failure can occur by accident (as when politicians fail to perform as they were expected), but also be used strategically (as when filmmakers “perform” failure). As I understand his argument, Elsaesser suggests in particular that a failure to properly “manage” and distribute guilt for the atrocities in Germany's historical past can, however inadvertently, shed light on how the very process of “coming to terms with the past” is a paradoxical one – one that repeats itself, and is never really finished.<sup>171</sup>

Guilt management as a concept can be used to understand the aftermath of colonialism too, as Elsaesser writes at the end of the book:

That . . . guilt management can also be observed elsewhere, as I suggest, with a look to Hollywood, is a feature that deserves more attention than I can give it here. Guilt management through melodrama and parapraxis . . . is *not confined to Germany*, if one thinks of the many *legacies of colonialism*, whose political consequences are arguably more pressing today than those of the Holocaust. Perhaps even more importantly, guilt management is *not confined to events that*

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<sup>171</sup> Elsaesser also notes that many of the films under consideration strategically use parapraxis (or “parapractic elements”) as well as melodrama. As I understand Elsaesser's argument, guilt management does not necessarily entail the use of melodramatic and parapractic elements, but the latter appear to be especially present in – and perhaps, especially useful for – the films he examines in his book. For more on the arguments I summarized above, see the introduction of Elsaesser's book (2014, 1–30).

*are situated in the past*, which in any event, is often the ‘screen memory’ for the urgent concerns of the present. (2014, 299, my emphasis)<sup>172</sup>

In addition, Elsaesser mentions the influence of capitalism and asks whether capitalism may have changed the manner in which we imagine victim and perpetrator roles in the 21st century (2014, 23). In the introduction to his book, he states:

The politics of the ‘68 generation had the overthrow of capitalism as its political goal, but as such aspirations faded or were seen to have failed, the 1980s saw (in almost every Western country) the Holocaust become the central reference point, as the universalized symbol of man-made historical catastrophe in the twentieth century, with Germany as the perpetrator nation, and the rest of Europe suffering the traumas of persecution and occupation. A connection offers itself: as capitalism has become the ‘untranscendable horizon’ of our thinking and our experience, *might it be that in recent years, the victim-perpetrator divide has also undergone a gradual recalibration?* I mention this merely as a suggestion, since it is not what the present study is primarily about. (2014, 23, my emphasis)

In what ways may capitalism have recalibrated the “victim-perpetrator divide” in the contemporary world? While Elsaesser leaves this question open, I argue that *Pigeon* may be seen precisely as an attempt at “managing guilt” in an era of global capitalism, and that the film deliberately uses anachronisms to evoke the issue of guilt. The fact that *Pigeon* alludes not only to capitalism, but also to colonialism, makes all the more fruitful to think of the film as managing guilt – more specifically, as managing guilt for multiple instances of injustice in different historical periods.

If *Pigeon* is a film that “manages” guilt, the deliberate use of anachronisms and tendency to blur the boundary between past and present can be seen as the narrative means through which this guilt management happens. Understood thus, *Pigeon* further develops narrative strategies that Andersson has used also in earlier stages of his career to evoke the theme of guilt. For instance, *World of Glory* creates a noticeably stylized and allegorical representation of violence in history, and clearly contrasts with more realistic representations of history in film (e.g. films that try, among other things, to create a semblance of

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<sup>172</sup> Elsaesser points to the European debt crisis as one of the “urgent concerns of the present”, arguing that the crisis calls for a “fundamental rethinking about the relation between money and debt, between debt and guilt, between guilt and accountability, between accountability and the community” (2014, 299–300).

verisimilitude and adhere to historical facts).<sup>173</sup> According to film scholar Dagmar Brunow, *World of Glory*'s opening sequence combines the history of the Holocaust and post-war Swedish society by depicting a “mode of killing [that] alludes to the Holocaust” and simultaneously featuring, in the *mise-en-scène*, costumes and props that seem to belong to post-war Sweden, such as high-rise buildings (Brunow 2010, 85). As Browns argues, *World of Glory* “condenses different layers of time into one single image” and in doing so, raises questions about our relationship to the past, especially the Holocaust (Brunow 2010, 84-5).<sup>174</sup> To compare, *Songs from the Second Floor* also experiments with the use of anachronisms and consequently asks: What is the relationship between humans in the present and victims of past historical atrocities? As scholar of Scandinavian studies Ursula Lindqvist writes:

In *Sånger från andra våningen* [*Songs from the Second Floor*], Andersson seeks to collapse ‘real time’ and history to illustrate that historical events continue to dwell in the present—particularly those we seek most strenuously to avoid (which fosters, and often compounds, feelings of guilt). (2010, 218)

As Lindqvist, *Songs from the Second Floor* evokes the theme of guilt by, among other things, including ghostly and “anachronistic” figures that appear to return from the past and “haunt” characters in the present (2010, 218; see also Lindqvist 2016a, 132–42; Yang 2013, 155–98; Brodén 2014, 120–1, 125).<sup>175</sup> Like Lindqvist, I consider the appearance of anachronistic “ghosts from the past” in Andersson’s films as means for raising questions about history and guilt. Moreover, in both *Songs from the Second Floor* and *World of Glory*, we see how characters in the diegetic present who are confronted with history and the question of guilt fail to understand, and even actively try to ignore, that history and guilt. Notably, these characters are in both cases white, Swedish, middle-aged men who are dressed in suits and classed as middle-class or upper-middle class. While they do not represent the most privileged in society, they nevertheless come across as leading fairly comfortable lives – at least materially speaking (emotionally, they seem far from contented). Both films may thus seem to suggest that relatively privileged people in the present – when confronted with violence in the

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<sup>173</sup> For a discussion of *World of Glory* and its relationship to the broader debate on how (or whether) to represent the Holocaust, see Yang 2013, 158–80.

<sup>174</sup> Several reviewers point out the parallels between the organ sequence in *Pigeon* and the opening scene in *World of Glory* (Pallas 2014; J. Anderson 2014). Also, in an interview with Andersson, Megan Ratner of *Film Quarterly* makes the same comparison, and calls the organ sequence “Andersson’s boldest references to the intrusion of past atrocities on the present” (2015).

<sup>175</sup> The film also touches on guilt by including dialogues that touch on guilt and debt (Lindqvist 2016a, 135–42) and scenes that implicate the Swedish military in the Holocaust (Lindqvist 2016a, 141).

historical past, and the question of guilt about the past – struggle to grapple with these issues, and/or actively try to distance themselves from them.

Before turning to specific examples of anachronisms in *Pigeon*, it is worth pointing out that *Pigeon*'s references to Sweden's imperial past also set the film apart from Andersson's earlier films. Writing in 2010, Lindqvist points out that while Andersson has described his guilt feelings as “an awareness of the interconnectedness of all human suffering”, it is interesting that Andersson “does not discuss, nor feature in his films, Sweden's own colonial history” (2010, 219). As Lindqvist sees it, the fact that this chapter in Swedish history is absent from Andersson's films ironically exemplifies a more general tendency, namely that Sweden's “involvement in the human trafficking of enslaved Africans in the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries” “has failed to make it into most Swedish history textbooks, not to mention the collective memory of Swedes” (2010, 220). That *Pigeon* touches on Swedish imperialism is, as I discuss later in this chapter, a note-worthy attempt at addressing subjects that are otherwise generally silenced in the Swedish context.

In addition, I should also clarify what I mean when I call certain tableaux in the film as anachronistic. After all, *Pigeon* as a whole is quite temporally ambiguous, but the majority of the tableaux are not blatantly anachronistic. More precisely, as in Andersson's earlier films, the *mise-en-scène* in *Pigeon* includes sets designed in architectural styles that connote multiple moments in Swedish history. Brodén's description of Andersson's early films is instructive in this regard: Andersson's films' “stylized aesthetic milieus” are “characterized by a *temporal vagueness*, reminiscent of both 1950s *Folkhemmet* and 1980s Sweden”, which “creat[es] an impression of a past modernity with only the shell of the welfare state remaining” (2014, 118, my emphasis).<sup>176</sup> *Pigeon* is marked by a similar “temporal vagueness”, and can thus be understood as an example of what Nestingen calls “temporal mixing”, a term he coins to describe the films of Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki. Kaurismäki's films tend to “include diverse temporal registers and objects belonging to different historical moments”, Nestingen writes, and adds that this makes the films seem both “timeless in some ways” and “tie[d] to the present” (2013, 92). Temporal mixing aptly describes most of the scenes in *Pigeon*, which tend to use *mise-en-scène*, as well as music, to allude to various earlier periods in Swedish history. By contrast, the anachronistic scenes in the film introduce elements associated with the historical past, such as actual historical figures, in what appears to be the diegetic present,

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<sup>176</sup> While Brodén is referring to Andersson's films prior to the release of *Songs from the Second Floor*, I mention his description because Andersson's later films construct similar spatial environments and also come across as temporally vague.

or in certain cases, dream-like scenes where we see characters that we know to exist in the diegetic present.

These anachronistic scenes can have a subversive and creative potential, if the viewer understand the historical references in the scenes as references to Swedish and European history. As Rothberg argues, what he calls “anachronistic aesthetics” can challenge existing ways of understanding history (2009, 137). In his book *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Rothberg (2009) argues that collective memory is often imagined as “competitive”, and proposes as a more worthwhile alternative that we think of memory as “multidirectional” instead, that is, “as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing” (3).<sup>177</sup> In one of his chapters, Rothberg analyzes the role of “anachronistic aesthetics” in the works of the two writers André Schwarz-Bart and Caryl Phillips (136). As Rothberg suggests, Schwarz-Bart and Phillips’s writings juxtapose the histories of slavery and the Holocaust by deliberately using anachronisms. In doing so, their writings challenge “restrictive conceptions that keep the histories and aftermaths of the Holocaust and European colonialism separate from each other” (136) and, more generally, demonstrate “the power of anachronism” to bring together “that which is supposed to be apart” (137). Deliberately using anachronisms can, in Rothberg’s view, “serve as powerfully *subversive* and *demystifying* means of exposing the ideological assumptions of historicist categorization” (137, my emphasis). While Rothberg writes of literature, I consider his argument about anachronisms useful also for understanding *Pigeon* and its anachronistic aesthetics. As I see it, the use of anachronisms in the film as central how *Pigeon* draws attention to privilege and injustice in the historical past, and suggests that these aspects of the past may, in certain cases, raise questions of responsibility or guilt in the present.

### **Guilty Swedes? The Return of Swedish Imperialism**

The two tableaux with Charles XII aptly illustrate how the use of anachronisms in *Pigeon* can have a subversive and demystifying potential. As historian Sverker Oredsson writes, Charles XII is one of the most mythologized historical figures in Swedish history and a king who has,

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<sup>177</sup> As Rothberg puts it, “many people assume that the public sphere in which collective memories are articulated is a scarce resource and that the interaction of different collective memories within that sphere takes the form of a zero-sum struggle for preeminence” (2009, 3). Against a conceptual framework that sees collective memory as “competitive memory”, Rothberg convincingly suggest that we instead “consider memory as *multidirectional*” (3). More specifically, thinking of memory as “multidirectional” means to acknowledge “the spiraling interactions that characterize the politics of memory” (11). This allows us to address the ways in which, for instance, memories of the Holocaust and colonialism have influenced (or “cross-referenced”) one another (18).



at different stages in Swedish history, been associated with nationalistic, heroic and Romantic ideas (1998a, 69). When the king first appears halfway through *Pigeon*, he enters a bar on the outskirts of the city together with his army, and together they represent a disruptive force in the otherwise quite mundane, almost dull, environment in the bar, which appears to take place in the contemporary era.<sup>178</sup> Indeed, as seen at the start of the first tableau in which the king appears, the bar is initially peopled by patrons who are casually passing the time – drinking beer, making out, playing on slot machines, or looking longingly at someone in the distance. Jonathan and Sam then arrive at the bar, asking for directions to a store, and soon end up telling people in the bar about the items they sell. Just when Jonathan puts on a rubber mask to demonstrate their products, however, the army of Charles XII arrives, followed by the king himself (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13: *The first tableau with Charles XII.* © Studio 24 Foto: Studio 24.

Taken together, the army and Charles XII himself come appear out of place and anachronistic partly because they wear 17th century military uniforms and ride in on horseback. As importantly, they also seem incongruously fixated on hierarchy and rank, at least when

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<sup>178</sup> The temporal setting is linked to the modern-day era through, among other factors, the fact that the patrons are dressed in contemporary clothes, such as cardigans, hoodies, and jeans, and elements in the *mise-en-scène*, such as the slot machines mentioned below.

compared to otherwise laid-back atmosphere in the bar.<sup>179</sup> When the army enters the bar to prepare for the king's arrival, officers ban all the female guests from the bar and wave their swords around, shouting "no women allowed!" ["inga kvinnor i lokalen!"]. The officers also select a man seemingly at whim, chase him out of the bar, and whip him (we hear the whipping, but do not see it, since it takes place off-screen). As a group, the army and their king generally appear arrogant, violent and misogynistic, and thus seem out of place not only in terms of their appearances, but also with regards to their behavior.

Both the *mise-en-scène* and the dialogue in this tableau suggest that the depicted king is Charles XII. To give but a few examples, the king and his army are dressed in blue and yellow uniforms that resemble those worn by the Caroleans, i.e. the soldiers of Swedish kings Charles XI (1655–1697) and Charles XII (1682–1718).<sup>180</sup> Moreover, Charles XII's name comes up in a song near the end of the tableau, when the king orders a group of soldiers to play a marching song and they sing a song whose chorus goes "Charles XII had 100,000 men" ["Karl den tolvte hade hundratusen man"].<sup>181</sup> However, as important as these references in the film itself is the fact that the film's two press kits explicitly mentions Charles XII and identifies him as a Swedish king, thus guiding reviewers – and, by implication, viewers in general – in how to interpret the tableau (Coproduction Office 2015; Magnolia Pictures 2015). Both press kits also contain a quote from Andersson, in which he states that in Sweden, Charles XII is "generally considered a true macho male and therefore a strong symbol for many right wing organizations" (Coproduction Office 2015; Magnolia Pictures 2015). Variations on this statement crops up also in interviews with Andersson, as seen when Andersson tells the Norwegian film magazine *Rushprint* that the references to Charles XII in *Pigeon* were borne out of a desire to de-pedestalize the king and challenge the image of

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<sup>179</sup> Indeed, before the army appears, the bar is in a sense fairly egalitarian: Everyone, men as well as women, just seem to be going about their own business. That the army does not fit into the bar is also conveyed visually, through subtle movements and the characters' relationship to the built environment. When the officers and soldiers ride in on horseback, they are shown to be too tall for the doorway and thus bow their head, ever so slightly, whenever they enter or exit the bar.

<sup>180</sup> The same uniforms can be seen in famous paintings of Charles XII, such as Gustaf Cederström's *Bringing Home the Body of Charles XII (Karl XII:s likfärd)* from 1884. The painting can be viewed at the National Museum (*Nationalmuseum*) in Stockholm. There are two versions of the painting, one painted in 1878 and one in 1884; it is the latter that is on display at the National Museum. Notably, Cederström's painting continues to be reproduced to this day. For instance, in 2005, it appeared on the cover of a popular-historical book titled *Karl XII:s död: Gåtans lösning* (From 2005).

<sup>181</sup> This is one of several songs in the film that are set to the melody of the famous American patriotic song "The Battle Hymn of the Republic". This melody has been adapted to songs in a number of different contexts (Stauffer and Soskis 2013), and in Sweden the melody of a Swedish drinking song, titled "Halta Lotta's krog" [Limping Lotta's tavern], which also appears in *Pigeon* during a musical scene that is set in a bar in Sweden in 1943. However, while the scene in Limping Lotta's tavern conveys how human desire and playfulness may exist also during war times, the scene with Charles XII plays more explicitly on the patriotic and nationalistic aspects of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic".

Charles XII “as a macho ideal”, an image he argues that he himself and other Swedes have grown up with [Vi svensker er oppvokst med Karl den tolvte som machoideal . . . Jeg hadde lyst til å rive ham ned fra pidestallen.] (Bhar 2014).<sup>182</sup> Similarly, Andersson tells the Norwegian newspaper *Dagsavisen*: “For us in Sweden, Charles XII has been one big lie, an embellishment of history to make it appear more successful than it actually is” [Karl XII har for oss i Sverige vært en eneste stor livsløgn, en frisering av historien for å gjøre den mer vellykket enn den egentlig er] (Steinkjer 2014).<sup>183</sup>

For viewers who have, like Andersson, grown up with an embellished image of Charles XII, *Pigeon*’s use of Charles XII as an anachronistic figure can serve to demythologize the king, and the imperial era with which he is associated. While Andersson points out the idolization of Charles XII among right wing groups in Sweden, the symbolic use of Charles XII has a longer history that can be traced back to, among other periods, the end of the 19th century, when Charles XII was treated as a nationalistic symbol (Oredsson 1998b, 293). Later, in the 1930s and early 1940s, the king was exalted as a hero by Swedish and German Nazis (1998b, 298), which helps explain why he has since been idolized by neo-Nazis in Sweden. More specifically, during the 1980s and early 1990s, “skinheads and other racists” in Sweden organized protest marches on the birthday of Charles XII, i.e. November 30th, leading to violent clashes between neo-Nazi and anti-racist groups in cities like Stockholm and Lund, especially in 1991 (Oredsson 1998a, 72). For viewers who associate Charles XII with right wing ideology in particular, *Pigeon*’s depiction of Charles XII returning from the past and entering a modern-day bar may serve as a reminder of violent, racist and xenophobic tendencies in contemporary Sweden. More generally, introducing Charles XII and elements from the Swedish imperial past into the diegetic present draws attention to Sweden’s imperial past, and invites the viewer to consider the relationship between contemporary Sweden and imperialism and violence. Are these features incongruous with contemporary Sweden? If so, are they relics of a long-gone past, or do they perhaps form a historical foundation on which contemporary Sweden has been built?

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<sup>182</sup> Andersson adds that there have been speculations about whether Charles XII was gay, a topic he thinks one has been reluctant to discuss in Swedish history. The topic should be brought up, he says, especially since Charles XII has “served as a symbol for right-wing extremists” [“har vært et symbol for de høyreekstreme”] (Bhar 2014). The first tableau with Charles XII touches on this topic when it depicts Charles XII as infatuated with a young male bartender. The king orders an officer to ask the young bartender if he wants to join the king on his political campaign, and is also seen looking longingly at the bartender while carefully sliding his hand across the bar to touch the young man’s hand. Besides hinting at the king’s sexual orientation, these moments can also be said to humanize Charles XII by showing his vulnerability and his need for love.

<sup>183</sup> For similar references in interviews with Andersson in the Swedish and the Anglophone press, see Oscarsson 2014 and Roddy 2014, respectively.

If the first tableau with Charles XII raises questions about Sweden in the past and the present, the second tableau with the king further challenges notions of Sweden's imperial past as a source of pride and contemporary Sweden's image as a peaceful, peace-building, and egalitarian nation. As many reviews of *Pigeon* point out – again, suggesting the influence of the film's press kits – the second tableau with Charles XII contains references to the Battle of Poltava, and depicts Charles XII and the Caroleans returning to the same bar (in search for something as trivial as a bathroom). The tableau is set post-battle: The king is injured, his army is severely diminished, and the dialogue contains several references to “Poltava” and a certain “Russian” – references that allude to the Battle of Poltava, a decisive battle which was fought in 1709 between the armies of Charles XII and Peter the Great of Russia at Poltava in present-day Ukraine. Since this battle is remembered as a crucial turning point – and moment of defeat – in Sweden's imperial history, its inclusion in *Pigeon* not only draws attention to the Swedish imperial past, but also associates that past with decline, failure and loss, rather than glory, power and pride.<sup>184</sup> This post-battle scene has a noticeable air of seriousness to it when compared to the first tableau with Charles XII, and depicts several female patrons in the bar as though they have lost their men at war (Kiang 2014). At one point, a male bartender notably turns to a sad, female patron by the bar and says: “You were widowed at Poltava. A widow's veil was your gift” [“Änka blev du i Poltava. Ett änkadock fick du”]. The bartender's line is, as Andersson states in an interview, adapted from a poem by the dramatist Bertolt Brecht (Ratner 2015), titled “Und was bekam des Soldaten Weib?” (“And What Did the Soldier's Wife Receive?”). Brecht wrote the poem around 1942 and later collaborated with composer Kurt Weill in turning it into an anti-war and anti-Nazi song (Wyatt 1993, 65–7).<sup>185</sup> This subtle intertextual reference to Brecht's poem underscores an overarching theme in the tableau, namely the sadness, misery, and suffering that war leaves in its wake.

While Andersson generally brings up the concept of guilt when discussing the organ sequence, the tableaux with Charles XII can also be understood as a form of “guilt management”, specifically, for Sweden's imperial past. Indeed, the references to Swedish imperialism in the film need to be understood in relation to the general *lack* of critical discussions on Sweden's imperial past. According to historian Kristian Gerner, “the Great

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<sup>184</sup> While the Battle of Poltava is understood differently in Sweden, Russia, and Ukraine (see Gerner 2009), there is a broad consensus “that the battle became a turning point in the Great Northern War and laid the foundations for the Russian Empire”, according to scholar of military history Gunnar Åselius's review of recent scholarship on the battle (2011, 31).

<sup>185</sup> The original poem describes the various gifts a soldier's wife receives from her husband as he is dispatched to different countries during the war. The line *Pigeon* adapts is taken from the final stanza/verse, in which the wife receives from Russia a “widow's veil” (to use in her husband's funeral).

Power Era was not held in high esteem in social-democratic Sweden after the Second World War. In the teaching of history, a sense of *collective guilt* for Sweden having been an imperialist power in the Baltic Sea region doomed the entire era almost to oblivion” (2009, 687).<sup>186</sup> Gerner’s thought-provoking suggestion that Sweden has a sense of “collective guilt” for the Great Power Era is especially evocative if we think of *Pigeon*, as I have done here, as an attempt at guilt management. While Gerner focuses on the Great Power Era, visual culture and media history scholar Ylva Habel makes a related point when she points out the overall reluctance to address Sweden’s historical relationship to imperialism and colonialism. As one of various scholars who have criticized notions of Nordic countries as exceptional (see my discussion of scholarship on Nordic exceptionalism in Chapter 1), Habel takes issue with self-images in Sweden that portray the country as politically neutral and innocent:

If we can speak of national mentalities, then Sweden’s equivalent consists of an ambivalent mix between conceptions of international exemplarity, political neutrality and innocence. Important historical components of our self-image are, as is often said, welfare and long-lasting peace. Another aspect that is seen as a feather in the cap for our international reputation is the relatively marginal role that Sweden as a nation played with regards to imperialism. Colonial enterprises have certainly not been absent, but in retrospect, it seems as though the collective memory of for instance Karlsborg Fortress in Ghana, or the Caribbean island of Saint Bartholomé repeatedly sink into oblivion. If our participation in the history of imperialism is acknowledged at all, it often tends to be toned down. (2008, 261)

[Om vi kan tala om nationella mentaliteter, så utgör Sveriges motsvarighet en ambivalent mix av föreställningar om internationell förebildlighet, politisk neutralitet och oskuld. Viktiga historiska beståndsdelar i vår självbild är, som ofta sägs, välfärd och långvarig fred. En annan aspekt som ses som en fjäder i hatten för vårt världsrykte är den relativt marginella roll Sverige som nation spelat i imperialismen. Koloniala företag har visserligen inte saknats, men i efterhand verkar det kollektiva minnet av exempelvis Karlsborgs fästning i Ghana, eller den karibiska ön Saint Bartholomé att återkommande falla i glömska Om vår

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<sup>186</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to Gerner’s take on Swedish foreign policy, I want to include the rather thought-provoking claim that Gerner adds: “It is worth noting, however, that Swedes who have a clouded view of the past have preserved some notion of Sweden as a Great Power. At the same time that the original Great Power Era was condemned as ‘historical Swedish imperialism,’ identification with ‘great powerness’ probably inspired Swedish political leaders to pose as representatives of a moral Great Power in the twentieth century; for example, with regard to the Vietnam War of the 1960s and 1970s” (2009, 687–8).

delaktighet i imperialismens världshistoria alls erkänns, så underbetonas den gärna.]

As Habel writes, the notion of “Swedish exceptionalism” [den svenska exceptionalismen] prevents a deeper understanding of the *privileges* that come with “being white in the world” [de privilegier det innebär att vara vit i världen], and of the ways in which Sweden has historically “played an active role in the history of colonialism” and is currently a part of “neocolonial movements” [Sverige har spelat en aktiv roll i den koloniala historien . . . Vi står inte heller utanför neokoloniala strömningar] (2008, 261–2, my emphasis; see also Habel 2012).<sup>187</sup> Taken together, Gerner’s and Habel’s comments suggest that acknowledging Sweden’s imperial past are central to understanding the working of privilege in the present, including the role of whiteness and the legacy of colonialism and imperialism. *Pigeon*’s representation of Charles XII can be understood as an attempt to at once draw attention to Sweden’s imperial past and to demythologize it.

As importantly, the tableaux with Charles XII also foreshadow the organ sequence not only in its foregrounding of injustice and imperialism, but also in its depiction of passive bystanders who do little or nothing when faced with the suffering of others. When describing the tableaux with Charles XII, most reviewers understandably focus on the king himself but as a result say little about the role of the patrons in the bar. Harking back to Andersson’s earlier films, which repeatedly feature the figure of the bystander, the patrons depicted in the first Charles XII tableau initially respond to the army’s arrival with disbelief, then fear, but eventually, they more or less adapt to the fact that the king and his army has taken over the bar. As Jason Anderson of *CinemaScope* notes in his review of *Pigeon*, the film continually represents characters as “sleepwalkers [who] struggle to produce any kind of reaction” and appear “impassive to the point of seeming frozen, their facial features locked in expressions of helpless stupefaction” (2014). The same passive response also characterizes the patrons who witness the appearance of Charles XII and his army (save the initial moments in which certain patrons are, as mentioned earlier, forced to run for their lives). In fact, during this first tableau with Charles XII, it is easy to forget about Jonathan and Sam altogether, since they do not respond to the king and his presence in any noticeable way. If the army represents a disruptive,

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<sup>187</sup> Habel goes on to analyze documentary films and TV programs “about Sweden’s participation in the colonial adventure”, specifically, *Vita myror*, a TV documentary from 1969 directed by Bo Bjelfvenstam. As she argues, “documentary films and TV programs about Sweden’s participation in the colonial adventure are important primary sources” (262). While Habel’s example differs significantly from *Pigeon*, her argument regarding Sweden’s relationship to colonialism and imperialism is relevant also to *Pigeon*, since it helps contextualize the film and its attempt at depicting the Great Power Era.

violent force, the people in the bar who stand in the background and watch as the soldiers and the king impose their demands may symbolize passive or complicit bystanders. Understood thus, the otherwise fairly peaceful people in the bar may subtly bring to mind the theme of responsibility, and invite the viewer to reflect on the question: What is the role of bystanders who witness injustice, but do little or nothing to stop it – one of innocence, complicity, or perhaps even guilt? The bystanders, while not directly engaging in violence, can also be understood in light of Østerberg's and Young's descriptions of structural violence and structural injustice, respectively. As the authors argue, acting in seemingly "peaceful" ways (Østerberg 2016, 14) and following accepted norms and rules (Young 2011, 52) can in certain cases lead, however indirectly, to the suffering of others.

### **The Organ Sequence: Humanity, History, and Guilt**

Also the organ sequence evokes the themes of responsibility, guilt, and complicity as well as violence and injustice in the historical past, but unlike the Charles XII tableaux, the former draws even more attention to the role of privileged people in witnessing injustice. Moreover, the sequence is also anachronistic, blurring the boundary between the past and the present, but it notably also blurs the boundary between dream and reality. The sequence revolves around a disturbing act of violence that contains various references to, among other things, British or European imperialism, the enslavement of African people, and industrial disasters in contemporary Swedish industrial history. As with the historical references in the two Charles XII tableaux, the references in this sequence are framed in strikingly consistent ways across interviews with Andersson, the press kits, and reviews of the film. This consistency is important to point out, because it sharply contrasts with the actual ambiguity of the sequence itself. In other words, taken together, the promotional materials and reviews of the film may present a fairly coherent interpretation of the sequence, but the sequence itself is deeply ambiguous and riddled with references that can be interpreted as various types of social critique. At the same time, the sequence is followed by a dialogue between Jonathan and Sam that seems closely connected to the violence depicted in the organ sequence, and appears to suggest that Jonathan feels a sense of collective guilt for the same violence. The fact that the organ sequence is mired in ambiguity makes Jonathan's guilt feelings complex, to say the least.

The organ sequence appears near the end of the film and is, as mentioned earlier, noticeably grave and disturbing when compared to the film as a whole. This shift in mood can be felt already in the two clips that precede the organ sequence – namely, an inter-title that



reads “homo sapiens”, followed by a short tableau that seems to depict an everyday moment in the diegetic present, albeit a moment of violence and torture. To deal with the inter-title first, the words “homo sapiens” echo the inter-title that opens the film (i.e. “the third film in a trilogy about being human”) and reestablishes the central theme in the film: the human. Moreover, the inter-title frames the following tableaux and their depiction of violence. The next tableau is set in the diegetic present and depicts a science lab in which a monkey appears to be strapped to an electrocution device (Fig. 14). While the monkey appears in the foreground and center of the frame, a woman dressed in a lab-coat is seen standing by a window and talking on the phone in the background and to the right of the frame. The woman seems to be responsible for monitoring the monkey, but she is more interested in continuing her phone conversation. (Besides telling the person at the other end about the weather, she says like many other characters in the film “I’m happy to hear that you are doing fine”). The woman’s disregard for the monkey persists even when the latter is electrocuted and shrieks in pain as a result. When interpreted in light of the inter-title that precedes it, this tableau in the lab seems to be a critical reminder of humanity’s tendency to reduce other species to mere objects, things that can be manipulated and experimented upon in the name of science and instrumental rationality.



*Fig. 14: The lab scene. © Studio 24 Foto: Studio 24.*



Indeed, the close relationship between humanity, violence and the use of science and technology, becomes especially evident in the organ sequence. It opens with a black screen and the sound of a dog barking aggressively. We then cut to a shot of a savannah, a static, wide-angle and deep focus shot in which a massive cylinder made of brass takes up much of the frame (Fig. 15). Welded onto the sides of the cylinder are trumpet horns in different sizes, but at first it remains unclear what these horns are for. Positioned around the cylinder are several white men dressed in military uniforms, as well as two German Shepherds. The scene develops slowly and gradually reveals that the cylinder is not only a vehicle for torture and violence, but also a visual and aural spectacle. The soldiers are shown to force a group of black slaves into the cylinder. Some of the slaves scream in revolt, and we hear a baby cry, but the dialogue consists mainly of an officer shouting at the slaves in a British English accent. We also see and hear the soldiers whip the slaves (which may bring to mind the whipping in the first Charles XII tableau). Once the slaves have been ushered into the cylinder, the door to the cylinder closes, and a soldier is ordered to light a fire beneath it. As the flames begin to grow, we hear the slaves' muffled screaming but also notice that the cylinder slowly starts to creak and spin. As a result, the trumpet horns begin to emit an eerie hum, a kind of music. The scene, which opened without any use of music, is now dominated by a disturbing blend between brass music on the one hand (music supposedly produced by the rotating cylinder) and choral music on the other (non-diegetic music). As it turns out, the brass cylinder, an instrument of torture, doubles as a *musical* instrument, as an organ. While the soldiers are depicted as perpetrators in this tableau, it is important to note that several of them turn to look directly into the camera several times. This extra-diegetic gaze not only brings to mind similar moments in Andersson's earlier films (such as the opening scene of *World of Glory*), but also harks back to the first tableau with Charles and its subtle thematic focus on bystanders.<sup>188</sup>

The soldiers in this scene evoke associations to the British Empire in various ways. Besides speaking in British English, they wear pith helmets and khaki uniforms that resemble those worn by the British army during the Boer War in South Africa in the 19th century.<sup>189</sup> As importantly, the manner in which race is inscribed in the scene also contributes to this association. That is, the image of white soldiers punishing and torturing black slaves is likely to bring to mind British and European colonialism (see Anderson 2014; Debruge 2014; Kiang 2014; Yamoto 2015).<sup>190</sup> That there are two German Shepherds in this scene can both reinforce

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<sup>188</sup> For more on the use of the extra-diegetic gaze in Andersson's earlier films, see Yang 2013, 32–3, 101–11.

<sup>189</sup> Thanks to cultural historian Jane Tynan for confirming the style of the uniforms.

<sup>190</sup> The film's two press kits both explicitly mention either European or British colonialism, thus guiding

and add nuance to this interpretation. The German Shepherd is a dog breed that has, historically, served as a powerful metaphor for colonial regimes, but also for Nazi Germany (Skabelund 2008). In addition to these historical references, the tableau also contains more contemporary references, although these are rather subtle.



Fig. 15: The “organ”. © Studio 24 Foto: Studio 24.

To illustrate, as the cylinder spins, it becomes apparent that a word, “Boliden”, is welded onto the side of the cylinder (we see the word twice as the cylinder turns). Boliden is the name of a small area in Sweden but also, and more importantly, the name of a large Swedish mining and smelting company, which was founded in Boliden in the early 20th century. New Boliden, previously known as Boliden AB, is not a company that everyone watching *Pigeon* is likely to know. Nevertheless, quite a few reviewers interpret the reference to Boliden as an obvious

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reviewers and others in how to interpret the sequence. Both press kits include an interview with Andersson, in which he refers to the soldiers in the sequence as “British colonialists”. There are also minor differences between the descriptions in the press kits. The press kit distributed by Magnolia Pictures calls the organ sequence “a diabolical metaphor for the horrors inflicted by *European* colonialism” (Magnolia Pictures 2015, my emphasis), whereas Coproduction Office’s press kit describes the same sequence thus: “A gigantic and grotesque antique copper organ surrounded by *British* colonial soldiers extracts magnificent music from the wretched moans of African prisoners roasting slowly inside...” (Coproduction Office 2015, my emphasis). The latter also includes interviews with the producer and line producer of the film (Pernilla Sandström and Johan Carlsson, respectively), in which they refer to the soldiers as “the *British* colonial soldiers” (in the case of Carlsson) and “*British* colonials” (in the case of Sandström).

social critique on Andersson's part. More specifically, they interpret the film as criticizing the Swedish mining and smelting company for having caused and mishandled a toxic waste disaster in northern Chile during the mid-1980s (Dagliden 2014; Leigh 2015; Sigander 2014; Steinkjer 2014; Åmodt 2014).

Andersson spells out his dislike of Boliden in various interviews, and this is likely an important reason that so many reviewers, including those outside of Sweden, seem to be familiar with Boliden.<sup>191</sup> Speaking to Norwegian newspaper *Dagsavisen*, Andersson goes into detail about the toxic waste disaster in northern Chile, and says: "The scene with the slaves is also about colonialism in our present era. We no longer put slaves in chains, but Swedish corporations have systematized social dumping and underpayment and become multi-millionaires. It's a disgrace" [Scenen med slavene handler jo også om kolonialismen i vår egen tid. Vi lenker ikke lenger slaver sammen, men svenske foretak har systematisert sosial dumping og underbetaling og blitt mangemilliardærer. Det er en skam] (Steinkjer 2014). Helena Lindblad's (2014) review in Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* echoes Andersson's own statements about Boliden (she mentions a "tableau where Boliden represents companies that exploit the third world" [tablå där Boliden får stå för företag som exploaterat tredje världen]), but also reviews outside of Sweden reinforce this particular interpretation of the Boliden reference. To illustrate, a review of *Pigeon* in the San Francisco newspaper *SF Gate* mentions Boliden and describes the company as "a Swedish mining company famous for environmental disasters" (Rubenstein, 2015). Thus, even if *Pigeon* itself is rather ambiguous, paratexts such as reviews and interviews with Andersson seem, when taken together, capable of circulating a scathing critique of the exploitative practices associated with multinational corporations such as Boliden.<sup>192</sup>

The next tableau in the sequence shifts attention away from the site of violence and the figure of the perpetrator towards what seems to be a group of privileged spectators or

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<sup>191</sup> A group of 707 villagers affected by the poisonous wastes filed a lawsuit against Boliden in 2013, making headlines in the Swedish and international press (Sveriges Radio 2013). The waste disaster was also discussed in the Swedish media prior to the law suit, for instance, in relation to the release of Lars Edman and William Johansson's documentary film *Toxic Playground (Blybarnen, 2009)*, which deals with the same waste disaster.

<sup>192</sup> Andersson comments on the idea behind the cylinder in an interview with *EXBERLINER*: "I really wanted to show the potential of cinematographic language. How far back can we go with that? The idea with the cylindrical torture machine is based on the cruelty of the Assyrians around 500 BCE. That human beings are able to create such things: it was time to show that" (E. Lucas 2015). In another interview, Andersson similarly links the cylinder to the historical past, but also adds that the scene is about colonialism and the torture of animals: "It's about colonialism, that scene, with the English people there, and even the scene before, when they are very cruel to animals and make experiments on monkeys, without respect, without empathy at all" (Kohn 2015). Indeed, the cylinder evokes associations to the notion of colonialism as a destructive machine – an idea that can be gleaned in philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's writings, in which he criticizes the French occupation of Algeria and refers to colonialism as an "apparatus" and "heavy machine" ([1964] 2006, 58), and an "infernal cycle" ([1964] 2006, 51).

bystanders. The tableau is another long, deep focus and wide-angle shot with no camera movement, and initially depicts only a white marble building, designed in art deco style, with a broad staircase and wide glass doors.<sup>193</sup> Reflected in the glass doors, however, are the soldiers, the rotating cylinder, and the flames from the previous tableau, suggesting that we have simply turned 180 degrees. Soon, two men in white clothes can be glimpsed through the glass doors. As they pull a pair of curtains to the side, a group of humans can be seen standing behind the glass, looking out.

With the curtains gone, the reflection in the glass becomes clearer, and consequently, the rotating cylinder, flames, and soldiers is now *superimposed* on the group of bystanders. If interpreted symbolically, this superimposition may suggest that, while the soldiers seem more directly involved in the violence than the ambiguous bystanders, the two groups and their roles *overlap* and merge at this instance – that is, in the instance when the curtains are pulled back and the humans inside the building also become *witnesses* to violence. Next, the two men, who appear to be waiters dressed in white tuxedos, open the glass doors, after which the bystanders slowly walk out and end up standing and watching the cylinder, thus staring directly into the camera. Notably, the group consists of about twelve, old, white men and women wearing black tuxedos or evening gowns and jewelry. Their old age is highlighted through the fact that they not only look old, almost vacant-eyed, but also move slowly and, in certain cases, even need assistance to walk. At the same time, the group is dressed as if going to a party and hold champagne glasses in their hands, evoking associations to privilege, decadence, and wealth. Last but not least, the waiters, who walk around calmly topping up the glasses with more champagne, are a secondary but crucial element in the tableau. One of them, it turns out, looks like Jonathan, dressed in a white tuxedo.

The organ sequence is both highly ambiguous and symbolic, and invites many other possible interpretations, many of which do not necessarily require specific knowledge of Sweden and Swedish history. The film does invite the viewer to see the sequence as a critique of Sweden. Since it appears near the end of the film, after the scenes with Charles XII have already been introduced, the organ sequence may be seen by some viewers as a continuation of the Charles XII scenes – as yet another a critique of Sweden and Swedish history. While none of the characters are explicitly positioned as Swedish, the fact that Jonathan shows up as a servant to the old, rich and white bystanders encourages the viewer to see the old people as

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<sup>193</sup> Together with the two German Shepherds, and the rotating cylinder as an instrument of torture, the white marble building may also bring to mind Nazi Germany. Art deco was a style that was popular across Europe during the 1920s and 1930s and resembles architectural styles that connote Fascism and Nazism, such as neoclassicism and functionalism (thanks to Erik Mørstad for clarifying the architectural style of the building).

Swedish as well. Indeed, while the old people have no lines and their costumes bear no mark of any particular nation (in contrast to the colonial uniforms of the soldiers), they may still evoke associations to the Swedish aristocracy, given the fact that they are white, rich, and old. From this perspective, the old group may serve as a striking visualization of what Ulla Vuorela (2009) calls “colonial complicity” (discussed in Chapter 2), a concept that has precisely to do with the particular, peripheral position of countries such as Sweden when compared to the centres of colonial power, including Great Britain. The sequence can also serve as a metaphor for historical hindsight – for how we, the living, who look back on the past, may sometimes “see” the structural injustice that shaped moments in the past more clearly than the people living at the time. Yet, neither the old, white bystanders nor Jonathan are present during the moments when the slaves are tortured. As such, they might be witnesses to the visual and aural spectacle of the rotating cylinder, without actually being aware of what violence went into the making of that spectacle. Interpreted thus, the tableau is less about complicity and more about naivety, about *not* knowing.

Ultimately, however, the organ sequence seems to allude not to one specific nation, but rather, to systems of injustice and violence in human history, and to whiteness in particular (i.e. the old people may very well symbolize white privilege). Especially evocative is the spinning cylinder, which combines elements from the colonial past as well as the capitalist present. Since the cylinder is an apparatus that contains and hides the exploitation of human lives, it can serve as a thought-provoking metaphor for global capitalism, especially the hazardous conditions under which many workers in the world today labor. If *Sweatshop* in Chapter 3 was an attempt to make sweatshop labor visible to viewers, the rotating cylinder in *Pigeon* shows, hyperbolically and metaphorically, the process by which workers are exploited and that exploitation is hidden from view – at least from the view of the old, privileged, white bystanders for whom the cylinder is spinning.

The cylinder can also have a meta-fictive dimension, that is, if we consider the aural and visual spectacle it produces and the fact that the cylinder’s function is ultimately not only to exploit human lives, but to create entertainment for a privileged audience. The cylinder is, in other words, a means to an end: to produce a spectacle. From this perspective, the cylinder may be a meta-fictive critique of filmmaking itself and of the position that, we, the viewers assume as passive, privileged spectators. In one sense, filmmakers such as Andersson also stage spectacles of human suffering in order to create something beautiful for privileged people to watch. The difference is obviously that the violence Andersson stages is fictional and constructed, but the cylinder may nevertheless be understood as a self-critical comment

on representing violence in human history, and on the ethics of consuming those representations. This meta-fictive interpretation is enhanced by one of the final dialogues in the film, where Jonathan repeatedly asks the question: “Is it right using people only for your own pleasure?” [“Är det rätt att använda människor bara för sitt eget nöjes skull?”]

Indeed, the question of what is right and wrong is clearly a theme in the organ sequence, since it depicts, rather blatantly, an instance in which humans treat other each other as means rather than ends in themselves. This brings to mind philosopher Immanuel Kant’s definition of morality, or what he calls “the categorical imperative”. As philosopher and international relations scholar Kimberly Hutchings sums up Kant’s categorical imperative, “[t]o never treat others solely as means but always also as ends-in-themselves” is central to Kant’s understanding of morality. To Kant, treating others as ends in themselves is essential to being human. Likewise, in Kant’s view, “[t]o treat a human being solely as a means, for instance by enslaving him or her, is to violate what makes humanity special and reduces not the enslaved but rather the enslaver to the condition of an animal . . .”, Hutchings writes (2010, 41). Striking parallels emerge between Hutchings’s references to slaves and animals on the one hand and *Pigeon*’s organ sequence on the other. After all, the sequence depicts precisely the enslavement of human beings. Kant’s understanding of morality as summarized by Hutchings also sheds a different light on the two tableaux that precede the organ sequence, namely, the inter-title “homo sapiens” and the lab scene in which a human treats a monkey as a means to an end. From this perspective, the various tableaux are thematically linked by a sharp critique of humanity: It is not only that the torture of the monkey resembles the torture of the slaves. As importantly, humans have, historically, also divided “homo sapiens” itself into human and animal (or less-than-human), treating the latter as mere means to an end and, in the process, dehumanized themselves. Taken together, the “homo sapiens” inter-title, the lab scene, and the organ sequence may in other words raise questions about the very idea of “homo sapiens” itself – questions humanity has brought upon itself through its systematic use of violence through history.

### **Being Human, Feeling Time**

The anachronistic aesthetics in the organ sequence makes it difficult to apply common categories for distributing responsibility, such as victim, perpetrator, bystander, and beneficiary.<sup>194</sup> After all, the violence and injustice depicted is not associated with one

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<sup>194</sup> I borrow these categories from film scholar Raya Morag (2012, 97), who uses these categories when analyzing cinematic representations of perpetrator trauma in cinema, especially Israeli cinema.

particular historical period or events, but multiple periods and phenomena, ranging from colonialism to global capitalism. As importantly, however, the two tableaux that follow the organ sequence throw into question whether the violence in the sequence has even taken place – that is, whether it has occurred within the diegetic universe. Revolving around a conversation between Jonathan and Sam, the tableaux suggest that the organ sequence may have been a dream/nightmare or thought on Jonathan’s part. In the first tableau, which follows immediately from the cylinder sequence, Jonathan is seen sitting on his bed, looking distraught and staring blankly ahead. Meanwhile, the choral and brass music from the organ sequence is still playing, and rather loudly at that, as non-diegetic music. Jonathan is no longer wearing a white tuxedo – he is wearing a grey pajama – but the sound bridge strongly suggests that Jonathan’s pensive look may have something to do with the violence in the organ sequence. Soon, Sam, who lives in the room next door, appears and asks Jonathan what is wrong. The ensuing conversation between the two men is, like their other dialogues in the film, slow, repetitive, and replete with pauses. This time, however, the pacing of the conversation also seems to convey Jonathan’s doubt, and what appears to be his sense of guilt or responsibility:

SAM: “What is it this time? What’s wrong with you?” [“Vad är det nu då? Vad är det med dig?”]

JONATHAN: “I thought of something horrible.” [“Jag tänkte på nåt hemskt.”]

SAM: “Okay?” [“Jaha?”]

JONATHAN: “Something horrible.” [“Nåt fruktansvärt.”]

SAM: “Okay?” [“Jaha?”]

JONATHAN: “And I was involved.” [“Och jag var med.”]

SAM: “Involved in what?” [“Med om vad då?”]

JONATHAN: “That horrible thing.” [“Med det hemska.”]

SAM: “Explain yourself. Have you been dreaming? Was it a dream?” [“Nu får du förklara dig. Har du drömt? Var det en dröm?”]

JONATHAN: “I’m not sure. But it felt like it had happened. That’s what scares me. Horrible! And no one has asked for forgiveness. Not even me. No one has asked for forgiveness.” [“Det är det jag inte vet. Men det kändes som om det hade hänt. Det är det som är så skrämmande. Fruktansvärt! Ingen har bett om förlåtelse. Inte jag heller.”]

SAM: “So what happened?” [“Vad var det som hände då?”]

JONATHAN: “It’s so horrible I don’t dare tell.” [“Det är så hemskt att det vågar jag inte berätta.”]

SAM: Then don’t, you stubborn fool. I can’t make sense of you. We’re supposed to do business tomorrow, we’ve decided. You want to help people have fun, right? [“Slipp då, tjurskalle. Jag förstår mig inte på dig. Vi ska göra business imorgon har vi bestämt. Du vill jo hjälpa människor ha roligt, eller hur?”]

JONATHAN: “Yes, I know.” [“Ja, jag vet.”]

SAM: “Crybaby.” [“Lipsill.”]

Since Jonathan never confirms whether the “horrible thing” he has been thinking about was a dream, it remains ambiguous whether anyone has committed violence and thus, whether anyone is actually guilty in the legal sense of the word.<sup>195</sup> Yet, Jonathan seems to *feel* guilty, even if he does not convey whether he or anyone else can be described as *being* guilty.

While Jonathan repeatedly calls for an apology, the film permanently delays its arrival, leaving unresolved the conflict that Jonathan has in mind. The viewer is thus left to wonder: Who should apologize, and what for? If someone has failed to ask for forgiveness – as Jonathan suggests twice in this dialogue – for what should they apologize, and towards whom? The second time Jonathan says the line “no one has asked for forgiveness”, he turns to look directly at Sam, if not to accuse Sam, then at least to put across the seriousness of his statement. It is, however, crucial to note that Jonathan is an enigmatic voice of conscience. While Rebecca in *1,000 Times Good Night* and the three participants in *Sweatshop* seem fairly firm in their convictions when they distribute blame, Jonathan talks of guilt and responsibility and calls for an apology, but seems unable to properly explain himself, thus rendering his own message opaque, at least to the other characters in the film. To the viewer, the ambiguity of Jonathan’s statements can on the one hand seem problematically confusing. On the other, the same ambiguity can also be seen as an invitation to further reflection, and as a way to touch on the relationship between history, guilt, and reconciliation without necessarily connecting those issues to one historical atrocity or event in particular, or to either the past or the present. Put differently, the ambiguity can be said to open up the ethical questions in the film.

This openness is especially important for how viewers understand the question Jonathan raises in the next tableau in the film: “Is it right using people only for your own pleasure?” [“Är det rätt att använda människor bara för sitt eget nöjes skull?”] In this tableau, which is also the penultimate tableau in the film, Jonathan is once more both a voice of

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<sup>195</sup> Several reviewers refer to this as a “dream sequence” (Abrams 2015; Debruge 2014; Kiang 2015), but the film leaves it open to interpretation whether Jonathan has been dreaming or not.



conscience and a person others do not seem to understand. Set in the corridor of Sam and Jonathan's hostel-like housing, the tableau is a wide-angle shot of a mostly monochrome and empty space, save for the guard who is sitting in a booth at the end of the corridor. To the left of the frame, we see Jonathan stepping out of his bedroom, standing in the empty hallway and asking: "Is it right using people only for your own pleasure?" He repeats the question three times. After a while, both Sam and the guard approach Jonathan, but neither seems to understand Jonathan's question. "What the hell are you doing?" ["Vad fan håller du på med?"] Sam says to Jonathan when he peeks out through his bedroom door. When the guard comes over, Sam addresses the guard and says, somewhat sarcastically, that Jonathan is "a little philosophical" ["lite filosofisk"]. Moreover, the guard eventually says to Jonathan, in a calm but almost parental voice: "But should we be discussing these things in the middle of the night? There are people here who are getting up early for work tomorrow" ["Men är det lämpligt att prata om såna saker så här dags på dygnet? Det är flera som ska upp och jobba imorgon"]. The guard's comment is one of the recurring lines in the film that seems mundane enough, but can also be understood symbolically. The remark can illustrate the normative idea that going to work, focusing on the future, and not disturbing others is better than asking critical and philosophical questions. The normative dimension is especially evident in the original Swedish dialogue, where the guard suggests that Jonathan consider whether it is appropriate or suitable ["lämpligt"] to talk about these kinds of things this time of day ["så här dags på dygnet"].

The fact that Jonathan's question ("Is it right using people only for your own pleasure?") is repeated three times nevertheless suggests that there is something to take away from the line, and perhaps, from Jonathan's overall attempt at raising philosophical questions. Understood thus, Jonathan's function in these final tableaux may have less to do with his ability to distribute blame to any one specific agent, or to provide the audience with a sense of closure after the ambiguous organ sequence. Rather, he functions as an embodiment of how philosophical inquiries and ethical ponderings are often ignored. Moreover, when Sam and the guard reject Jonathan's questions, it is not out of malice, but an almost mundane disinterest in what he has to say. Their priorities lie elsewhere, in something more practical and future-oriented: getting some rest so that they can go to work in the morning or, in the case of the guard, doing his job by keeping Jonathan from waking up others in the building. For neither Sam nor the guard is work vicious, violent work. On the contrary, it seems mundane to the point of being boring. Their focus on work and the future nevertheless seems to have important consequences: It prevents them from listening to Jonathan and considering

questions pertaining to responsibility, including the relationship between self and other, past and present. Put differently, if Sam and the guard symbolize a focus on the practical and the future, Jonathan symbolizes someone who experiences time in a less linear manner, as he finds himself disturbed by thoughts (or memories) of the past – in short, feeling time in ways that others do not.

Tellingly, the idea that time can be felt in a subjective manner, and that those who “feel time” in this way are somewhat frowned upon, is foregrounded also in the very final tableau in the film – a tableau that provides, in my view, a clue to understanding *Pigeon* as a whole, especially its anachronistic tableaux. Like the majority of the other tableaux in the film, the final tableau is filmed in wide shot with a static camera and depicts a mundane conversation in an ordinary urban space. Five people are standing at a bus stop, waiting to go to work. At one point, one of them – a white, Swedish, middle-aged man who is dressed in a windbreaker and standing in the middle of the frame – realizes that he does not know what day it is. He thus asks the others for advice and is told, to his surprise, that it is Wednesday. After confirming twice with the others that it is in fact a Wednesday, the man says that he was certain it was a Thursday. Three female characters of different ages tell him, one more firmly than the other, that it is not, in fact, Thursday. The man looks at the ground and says gently, as much to himself as to the others: “But it felt like it was a Thursday” [“Men det kändes som om det var en torsdag”]. In response, another middle-aged man to the left, who is dressed in a suit and holding a briefcase, makes the point that it is absolutely quintessential to keep track of the days: “What weekday it is, that’s not something you can feel. That’s an impossibility. You have to keep track of that” [“Vad det är för någon veckodag, sånt känner man inte. Det är en omöjlighet. Sånt måste man hålla reda på.”] While counting on his fingers, he adds, in a voice that is as infantilizing as it is tragicomic: “Yesterday was Tuesday... today is Wednesday... and tomorrow is Thursday. If you can’t keep track of that chaos will reign” [“I går var det tisdag... i dag är det onsdag... och imorgon är det torsdag. Håller man inte reda på det, då blir det kaos i tillvaron”]. “That’s right” [“Just det”], the woman next to him chips in.

Deceptively simple, this dialogue at the bus stop juxtaposes two conflicting notions of time through the man who mistakes Wednesday for Thursday and the man with the suitcase, who emphasizes the necessity of order and organization. While the former represents time as an embodied experience, shaped by human memory and emotion, the latter represents an understanding of time as “calendar time”. As philosopher Victoria Browne (2014) notes in *Feminism, Time, and Nonlinear History*, it may seem rather far-fetched to claim that “calendar time” is a “social construct” (100), but a wide range of sociological, anthropological

and historical scholarship suggests that calendars are “socially and culturally specific ‘versions’ of cosmological time, rather than being straightforwardly natural or universal measures” (101). Calendar time is not “‘out there,’ waiting to be discovered”, she writes, but rather, “a temporal order that belongs to social, lived reality” and is, moreover, “deeply enmeshed in power relations” (101). If understood symbolically, the scene at the bus stop, where a man mistakes Thursday for Wednesday, raises questions about the seemingly natural, but socially constructed temporal order that is calendar time, and foregrounds instead how time is a lived experience that cannot be separated from human memory, however “disorderly” or “chaotic” that memory might be.<sup>196</sup>

The emphasis on time, experience, and memory in the final scene can help explain *Pigeon* as a whole, including its tendency to depict events and characters in the historical past as though they return to the (diegetic) present. Like the man at the bus stop, who experiences Wednesday as though it were Thursday, *Pigeon* breaks with the usual parceling of time into past, present, and future. In doing so, the film can evoke the idea that systems of injustice and privilege in the past may be an integral part of the present. While viewers may interpret those injustices and privileges differently, variously associating them with Sweden, Europe, whiteness, or humanity in general, *Pigeon* invites audiences to reflect on important ethical questions. What relationship do we, the living, have with underprivileged and privileged people in the past? What are the ethical implications of witnessing the suffering of others, and what difference does it make that the suffering is staged, fictional, and constructed – or even just a figment of someone’s (Jonathan’s) imagination – when similar acts of violence have, in fact, taken place throughout history? Last but not least, do contemporary societies talk about philosophical questions such as these? If they do not, who has to pay for that silence?

## **Conclusion**

On the one hand, *Pigeon* can be understood as a tragicomic and sobering reminder of what it means to be human – touching as it does on humanity’s capacity to feel lonely in the company of others, to talk yet fail to be understood, to dream and desire, and last but not least, to do harm to each other. On the other hand, *Pigeon* also touches specifically on systems of injustice and violence in the past and the present and highlights how humans also divide each other into human and less-than-human. These issues are most evident in the organ sequence –

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<sup>196</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the representations of time in *Pigeon* in further detail, I want to mention that it is possible to interpret the film in light of Paul Ricoeur’s philosophical writings on time in the third volume of *Time and Narrative* (1988), which also deals with calendars and the implications of measuring time.

with its blatant allusions to slavery and colonialism – but the two tableaux with Charles XII are important in that they establish the themes of violence, injustice, and social hierarchies. As I have shown in this chapter, the deliberate use of anachronisms is part and parcel of how *Pigeon* situates systems of injustice and privilege within a broader historical context and, moreover, suggests that injustices in the past are intricately linked to injustices in the present. As the organ sequence illustrates, the film uses anachronisms to point fingers at multiple culprits at the same time, and problematize the ethical relationship that people in the present have towards victims of violence and injustice in the past.

*Pigeon* both contrasts with and resembles my examples in the preceding chapters. In drawing attention to colonialism and to Swedish imperialism, *Pigeon* differs from *1,000 Times Good Night*, which refers to conflicts in the Global South from the last twenty years, yet elides the history of colonialism and, more generally, the influence that institutions in the Global North have had, and continue to have, on political instability in the Global South. Yet, like both *1,000 Times Good Night* and *Sweatshop*, *Pigeon* has, as mentioned earlier, a figure that becomes a direct witness to violence and suffering (i.e. Jonathan). As in the former two examples, the suffering victims in *Pigeon* are also non-white others who are, more or less, in the Global South. Yet, Jonathan is associated less directly with privilege than Rebecca and the *Sweatshop* participants, since the former is not represented as particularly privileged – rather, he is associated with a group of privileged people (i.e. the old bystanders) and seems to feel guilty by virtue of having served that group (thus bringing to mind the concept of collective guilt).

Interestingly, while most of the characters in *Pigeon* are fairly dreary-looking (with the exception of a few characters, especially children and certain couples in love), the film repeatedly associates privilege, and especially economic privilege, with *old*, white, dreary-looking people. For instance, one of the tableaux that features the line “I’m happy to hear that you are doing fine” centers on an old white man, dressed in a shirt, tie, and vest, who is standing in an expensive-looking office with a phone in one hand and, absurdly enough, a gun in the other. About to commit suicide, the man is interrupted by a phone call and ends up engaging – like so many other characters in the film – in a conversation filled with platitudes. The underlying implication in this admittedly morbid, yet tragicomic scene is that the man, despite his wealth and privilege, is deeply unhappy. To compare, the old bystanders in the organ sequence do not seem to be doing much better, looking mostly apathetic if not vacant-eyed. In sum, *Pigeon* seems to screen privilege as related to whiteness, affluence, the past, and dreariness – thus suggesting, perhaps, that being privileged is not necessarily something

to be coveted. By this, I do not mean to suggest that *Pigeon* depicts being poor as something positive, but rather, that the film seems to resist the notion that wealth leads to happiness. Moreover, since *Pigeon* affirms, especially through Jonathan, the importance of not using and exploiting other humans, the film also screens privilege as something not to be desired because privilege often entails precisely guilt and/or responsibility for injustices wrought against others for one's own benefit.

My final example, the science fiction TV drama *Real Humans*, shares thematic similarities with *Pigeon* in that it also explores what constitutes the human and the humane. However, unlike *Pigeon*, which uses anachronisms to complicate the relationship between the present and the past, *Real Humans* situates its entire plot in the future or an alternative present and in doing so, is able to explore topical social and political issues in contemporary Scandinavia. Moreover, while *Pigeon* seems to launch a social critique that comes at the viewer from various directions at once, referring as it does to multiple instances of injustice, *Real Humans* is noticeably less ambiguous. As I show, however, also *Real Humans* invites multiple interpretations, alludes to both historical and contemporary instances of injustice, and confronts characters in the diegetic present with those injustices – forcing the latter to reflect on their own relationship to less advantaged others.

## Chapter 6

### ***Real Humans:***

#### **Negotiating Privilege in an Alternative Sweden**

Set in the future or a parallel present, the first season of SVT's science fiction TV drama (*Real Humans*) (*Äkta människor*, 2012–2014) explores an alternative version of Sweden where a type of humanoid robot, referred to as “Hubots”, is becoming an increasingly ubiquitous part of society. Hubots are mass-produced, legal, but still relatively expensive substitutes for human workers in a range of sectors and areas of life. To ordinary consumers, Hubots are marketed as guilt-free solutions to both quotidian problems and as a means for fulfilling one's deep-seated fantasies. This can be gleaned from a brief TV advert for a household Hubot that appears early on in the first episode of *Real Humans*. Set to calm, classical piano music, the advert depicts a blonde, white, and feminized Hubot cutting colorful fruits in a sunlit kitchen. The Hubot then brings the food to a bedroom, where her owners – a white, middle-aged couple – are still lying in bed. A futuristic version of a breakfast in bed scenario, the advert plays on the idea of not having to cook for oneself, of having a (female) servant, and of being in a happy, fulfilled heterosexual relationship. In short, it suggests that buying the Hubot will improve your life, or, as the tagline for advert has it: The Hubot “takes care of the day-to-day chores – while you can focus on what *really* matters”.<sup>197</sup> The advert resembles a condensed version of *Real Humans* as whole, since both narratives invite the viewer to engage in a thought experiment: Imagine a world where tasks can be outsourced to emotionless machines that cannot suffer and thus be exploited in the way that human workers can. Yet, unlike the advert, *Real Humans* does not revolve around a purely idyllic fantasy. Instead, it deals with how robotics present possibilities as well as problems, raising questions about the ethics of outsourcing work in general, the relationship between privilege and work, and how far one's circles of concern can, and should, extend.

This chapter analyzes the first season of *Real Humans* (2012) and discusses the ways in which the series screens privilege by temporally displacing, into an alternative universe,

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<sup>197</sup> Unlike the rest of *Real Humans*, where the dialogue is in Swedish, the voice in the TV commercial speaks in British English. All translations of dialogue in the series from Swedish to English are taken from the subtitles on the official DVD. All other translations from the Scandinavian languages into English (e.g. translations of articles in the Scandinavian press) are my own.

contemporary socio-political and ethical issues related to privilege.<sup>198</sup> Thematically, *Real Humans* bears the mark of 21st-century globalization in a number of ways. Through exploring the relationships between humans and Hubots, the series tackles topical themes that pertain to technology – including the impact of robotics, artificial intelligence, transhumanism, and biotechnology – but it also deals with discrimination, inequality, and xenophobia in contemporary society. According to cultural studies scholar Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, *Real Humans* is a good example of science fiction’s “potential to address cultural anxieties” (2015, 416), as it evokes associations to racism, unemployment and alienation, the social construction of normative sexuality, human rights, and human trafficking and prostitution, among other social phenomena (2015, 417–8; see also Mountfort 2018, 66–7). These issues are explored through various relationships between humans and Hubots, and between humans themselves. As importantly, the series invites the viewer to see human-Hubot relationships not only in literal terms, but also in more allegorical or symbolical terms, i.e. as dealing with humans and how we relate to each other. In both the popular reception of *Real Humans* (see Åström 2012; Mattebo 2012; Lundin 2012; Platenik 2014) and the scant scholarly work that exists on the series to date, the Hubots have been interpreted as victimized and exploited humans, including underpaid and abused workers in the contemporary era and human slaves in the past (see Koistinen 2015).

Pursuing both an allegorical and literal interpretation of *Real Humans* reveals how the series not only sheds light on privilege and injustice from different angles, but also screens different characters as privileged and underprivileged. On the one hand, the series explores the extent to which being privileged may also entail, to use Rachel Sherman’s words, a concern with how to inhabit one’s privilege in “a morally worthy way” (2017a, 10). The series tackles this issue through one of the narrative threads in the series, which revolves around Inger Engman (Pia Halvorsen), her family, and their relationship to a Hubot named Mimi, who for various reasons ends up becoming the family’s household and care work Hubot. When understood allegorically, Inger and Mimi’s relationship very much resembles that of a human mother and a human domestic worker, au pair, or servant. While Mimi becomes a catalyst for moral dilemmas in the Engman family in general, the ambivalence that Mimi triggers in Inger is especially relevant to my discussion, since Mimi’s arrival leads Inger to construct, or “negotiate”, her sense of self as a privileged person. When I refer to privilege

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<sup>198</sup> There are altogether two seasons of *Real Humans* (the second of which was released in 2013). This chapter focuses only on the first season (Lundström [2012] 2013). Any mention of *Real Humans* thus refers to the first season (unless otherwise stated).

as something you negotiate, I take privilege to be closely related to a person's (or group's) sense of *identity*, specifically an aspect of one's identity that one may actively construct, struggle over, and try to grapple with.<sup>199</sup> In this chapter, I relate Inger's ambivalent relationship to Mimi to sociological research on privilege, including Sherman's work on how privileged people exhibit a concern with how to be at once privileged and a morally good person. *Real Humans* can be linked to what Sherman calls the affective and moral dimensions of privilege (2017a), and shed light on the ways in which acting compassionately towards less advantaged others is a key aspect of inhabiting one's privilege in a morally worthy, if not morally superior, way (see Sherman 2017a; Gaztambide-Fernández and Howard 2013).

On a related note, Mimi is also a figure through which *Real Humans* touches on a recent trend in both the Scandinavian and European labor market: namely, the rising use of paid domestic work services (Gullikstad, Kristensen, and Ringrose 2016, 3) and what geographer Rosie Cox calls a "new global domestic labour market" (2006, 13). The series represents domestic work as a fraught issue that seems to trigger feelings of guilt or shame on the part of privileged people (e.g. Inger), and as being related to power, gender relations, and ideas about egalitarianism. *Real Humans* depicts concerns expressed by real employees of domestic workers, as documented in recent research on domestic work in Scandinavia (Døving and Klepp 2010; Gavanas 2010; Sollund 2010) and elsewhere (Cox 2006). These concerns include a discomfort with employing someone else to do care work and household work (Cox 2006, 132–3; Døving and Klepp 2010, 373), and a desire to reconcile one's egalitarian values (e.g. gender equality) with one's decision to pay for domestic work (Gavanas 2010; Sollund 2010). As I argue, both of these concerns are closely related to normative ideas about socially acceptable or unacceptable ways of inhabiting one's privilege.

When interpreted more literally, *Real Humans* is an equally useful example for discussing the screening of privilege in contemporary Scandinavian media. The increasing use of robotics is one of the most pressing contemporary issues with which the world is faced today, and one that is closely related to privilege and structural injustice. After all, it raises questions about which kinds of workers may lose their jobs due to robot technology, and the extent to which these people will be able to find new work, re-educate themselves, or otherwise make it from one day to the next. Moreover, for what purposes, to whose benefits, and at what cost, will robots in the future be introduced and used? These are central questions in research and debates on robotics and artificial intelligence (A.I). Recently, in 2016, when

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<sup>199</sup> For more on privilege as something you negotiate, see my discussion of theoretical approaches to privilege in Chapter 1, and the concluding chapter.



five of the world's largest tech companies met to discuss and develop "a standard of ethics around the creation of artificial intelligence", the impact of A.I. on jobs and work places was a key issue on their agenda (Markoff 2016). Likewise, the implications of A.I. for employment and workplaces in the future was highlighted also in a 2016 report issued by a group of researchers working on A.I. at Stanford University (Stone et al. 2016, 8, 38; see also Boffey 2017).<sup>200</sup> *Real Humans* touches on the impact that robotics will have on human employment especially through the characters Roger (Leif André) and Malte (Jimmy Lindström), two white, Swedish, middle-aged men who in different ways embody the fear that robots will put humans out of work. In particular, Malte can be understood as a representation of "the precariat", which in Guy Standing's words is an "emerging dangerous class" whose concerns and emotions need to be taken seriously (2011, 25). As I argue, *Real Humans* draws attention to Malte but it also characterizes him as pathological and maladjusted. In these and other ways, the series delegitimizes some of the worries that Malte represents, including the fear that robotics will lead to unemployment among humans.

As the final example in this study, *Real Humans* represents both a continuation and a break with my previous examples. Thematically, the series explores how being privileged is related to moral conflict, and thus resembles all the previous examples. By dealing with the relationship between being privileged and being able to outsource work to less advantaged others, *Real Humans* resembles *Sweatshop* in particular, which deals with so-called "off-shore outsourcing" and the ways that comfortable lifestyles in the Global North depend on cheap labor in the Global South. *Real Humans* touches on the outsourcing of care work and household work in particular, and appears to revolve less around the relationship between the Global North and the Global South. Unlike *Sweatshop* and *1,000 Times Good Night*, the series does not revolve around a physical journey to the Global South. However, in casting Lisette Pagler, a Swedish actress and Korean adoptee, in the role as Mimi, *Real Humans* also stages face-to-face encounters between white privileged protagonists from the Global North and less advantaged, non-white others. Furthermore, the casting of Pagler allows the series to hint at the fact that many au pairs working in contemporary Scandinavia come from Asian countries, including the Philippines. In its representation of Mimi, *Real Humans* plays on stereotypical images of Asian women as victimized and sexualized. In this sense, global injustice and the power relations between the Global South and the Global North is an issue

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<sup>200</sup> As the report states: "Social and political decisions are . . . at play" when it comes to A.I.'s influences on "employment and workplace trends, such as the safety nets needed to protect people from structural changes in the economy" (Stone et al. 2016, 8). "To be successful," the report adds, "AI innovations will need to overcome understandable human fears of being marginalized" (Stone et al. 2016, 38).

also in *Real Humans*, albeit an issue explored in implicit, allegorical ways.<sup>201</sup> Finally, like *Sweatshop* and *1,000 Times Good Night*, *Real Humans* features female characters that symbolize both the privileged and those who show a concern for, and want to help, less advantaged others.

At the same time, *Real Humans* stands out among my four examples, particularly in its debt to the science fiction genre. As literary scholar Fredric Jameson writes: “Science Fiction is generally understood as the attempt to imagine unimaginable futures. But its deepest subject may in fact be our own historical present” (2005, 345). By setting its plot in the future or an alternative present, *Real Humans* touches not only on issues in the historical present, but also in the historical past, as seen in the series’ references to the history of slavery. The thematic focus on unemployment in *Real Humans* furthermore sets the series apart from the other examples, which generally foreground work – be it in a depiction of alienating work (as represented by the underpaid sweatshop workers in *Sweatshop* and the two fairly miserable salesmen in *Pigeon*), or an exploration of meaningful, potentially self-actualizing, but complicated work (as seen in the images of journalism in both *Sweatshop* and *1,000 Times Good Night*). *Real Humans* also features characters whose work is depicted as meaningful or alienating, since the series repeatedly suggests that Hubots are comparable to human slaves – an idea that plays on the etymological origins of the English word “robot”, namely, *robot*, meaning “forced labor” in Czech (Prucher 2007, 125).<sup>202</sup> Nevertheless, *Real Humans* deals with the unemployed, and thus draws attention to an important issue: the loss of privilege in the Global North – including the fear and anger which that loss can engender.

### ***Real Humans***

Written and created by Lars Lundström and co-directed by Harald Hamrell and Levan Akin, the first season of *Real Humans* consists of ten one-hour-long episodes. The series, which was co-produced by the Swedish public broadcasting company SVT and the Swedish production company Matador Films, explores the impact of robotics on human relationships and human self-understanding. *Real Humans*, the title of the series, takes on different meanings during the course of the season, but initially refers to the distinction between real humans and “artificial humans” (i.e. Hubots). The title points specifically to the name of a small political

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<sup>201</sup> Pagler’s adoptive background is something Pagler herself has brought up in interviews in the Swedish press (see Alexandersson 2012). *Real Humans* also plays on Pagler’s being a Korean adoptee, as seen in the fact that Mimi is described as a Hubot model from Korea.

<sup>202</sup> The Czech word can be traced back to *R.U.R.*, a science fiction play by Karel Čapek (first performed in 1920, and translated to English in 1923) (Prucher 2007, 125). For more on the word “robot”, see Prucher 2007.

party, which calls itself “Äkta människor” (or “Real Humans”) and consists of humans who see Hubots as a threat and fear that the latter may take over society and/or put humans out of work. Speaking to the Swedish newspaper *Dagen* about *Real Humans*, Lundström states that he does not have a political agenda, and that *Real Humans* is “just a reflection of our society” [Serien är bara en spegling av vårt samhälle]. However, he then goes on to mention the problem of unemployment: “But when one thinks about how society may be transformed by Hubots, it does have political implications for us. Like when it comes to the labor market. After all, people lose their jobs . . .” [Men när man tänker på hur samhället skulle omformas på grund av hubotar, så får det en politisk innebörd för oss. Som när det kommer till arbetsmarknaden. Människor blir ju arbetslösa . . .] (Mattebo 2012).

The “Real Humans” group voices crucial concerns regarding the impact of robotics and artificial intelligence on human workers, but is notably also depicted as a small, underground community. Most humans in the series seem to have a less anxious, if not outright positive, attitude towards Hubots and find everything from companionship and emotional support to sexual fulfilment through Hubots.<sup>203</sup> As the series develops, it becomes evident that the title of the series can be understood allegorically and that distinctions between humans and Hubot hint at practices of social exclusion, discrimination, and racism in human societies. Thus, through the exploration of human-Hubot relationships, *Real Humans* reminds the viewer of how people judge, and have historically judged, certain individuals and groups as human, while treating others as less-than-human.

In exploring what constitutes humanity, the human, and the humane, *Real Humans* engages with long-standing issues in science fiction literature, cinema and TV – bringing to mind Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), supposedly the world’s first science fiction novel, as well as films like *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927) and *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), and TV series *Battlestar Galactica* (2004–2009), *Westworld* (HBO, 2016–), and the ever-expanding *Star Trek* media franchise.<sup>204</sup> Within Scandinavian TV, however, *Real Humans* represents “a true rarity”, given how few science

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<sup>203</sup> While *Real Humans* can be analyzed in light of Donna J. Haraway’s famous “Cyborg Manifesto” essay (Haraway [1985] 2016a), this chapter does not engage directly with Haraway’s theories, since it devotes more attention to an allegorical interpretation of the series and, in the latter half, examines the theme of unemployment. For lack of space, I thus focus less on the cyborg and the provocative questions Haraway poses in the “Cyborg Manifesto” and her more recent book *The Companion Species Manifesto* (Haraway [2003] 2016b).

<sup>204</sup> That several humans and Hubots develop romantic or sexual relationships also harks back to *Blade Runner* and the short novel which inspired *Blade Runner*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) by Philip K. Dick. The same theme has also been the subject of several successful sci-fi films in recent years, such as *Her* (Spike Jonze, 2013) and *Ex Machina* (Alex Garland, 2015). The influence of science fiction on *Real Humans* can also be seen in the fact that series includes various intertextual references to classic science fiction films and TV series (Koistinen 2015, 416).

fiction TV series are produced in the region (Koistinen 2015, 414).<sup>205</sup> Koistinen, who is one of the three scholars who have analyzed *Real Humans* in depth so far, describes the series as “both a critical and commercial success”, noting that it has won several awards at international festivals, been sold to almost 50 countries, and led to the making of an English-language, British-American remake called *Humans* (Channel 4/AMC, 2015) (2015, 414–5).<sup>206</sup>

The series explores a wide gallery of protagonists both human and Hubot, but generally follows three, central narrative threads. The first narrative thread revolves around a group of unusually advanced Hubots – or “liberated Hubots”, as they call themselves – who have escaped the laboratory in which they were designed after the death of David Eischer, the lone scientist who ran the laboratory and symbolizes the “Frankenstein figure” in *Real Humans* (Mountfort 2018, 69). Accompanying these Hubots is Leo Eischer, a young white male who is part human and part machine (i.e. a cyborg) and the son of David Eischer. Taken together, the liberated Hubots and Leo constitute a family of sorts, as we find out during the course of the season through the repeated use of flashbacks (which are set in the past, when Leo was still a child, and revolve around David Eischer’s laboratory). Gradually, it becomes evident that, unlike ordinary mass-produced Hubots, the liberated Hubots may have the capacity to think, feel, dream, and revolt. They thus represent an at once fascinating and monstrous mix between human and robot, perfectly embodying the word “Hubot”, which is itself a portmanteau of “human” and “robot”. That Mimi belongs to the liberated Hubots is established in the opening of the first episode, when she is kidnapped and dramatically split off from the rest of the group. Later, Mimi is illegally sold to the owner of Hubot Market, a retail store selling Hubots, and ends up with the Engman family, for whom she becomes a care work and housework Hubot.

The latter two narrative threads each revolves around a white Swedish family, one of whom is Inger Engman’s family, while the other is Roger’s family. Both families are white and Swedish, but the Engmans are clearly made to fit the stereotype of blonde, blue eyed Swedes. In the first episode, both families live in the same neighborhood – a small and

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<sup>205</sup> In this chapter, I focus on the influence of science fiction on *Real Humans* since I consider this one of the most obvious and important aspects of the series. At the same time, I want to point out that the series also draws on conventions from several other genres, such as crime, comedy, and drama (see Majsa 2014; Mountfort 2018, 67).

<sup>206</sup> As *Dagens Nyheter* reports, *Real Humans*’s first season received a fairly high number of viewers, on average 800.000 viewers in Sweden, many of whom were also younger than SVT’s usual target group (Linder 2013). When the French dubbed version of *Real Humans* aired on the French/German channel Arte in April 2013, it was also a commercial success (Durie 2013). When *Humans* premiered on Channel 4 in the UK in June 2015, it apparently had a record high number of viewers, i.e. 3.5 million (Nykänen 2015). In terms of awards, *Real Humans* received in 2013 the prize for Best TV Drama and the Students’ Special Jury Prize at the Prix Italia, and the prize for Best Script at the Seoul International Drama Awards.

stereotypically idyllic suburban neighborhood, which is surrounded by lush trees and whose main street is lined with neat, uniformly designed row houses (each of which has a tidy, green, square-shaped garden). Behind this idyllic façade, however, various problems lurk, including the issue of how to balance work and family life in the case of the Engmans. These problems are if not exacerbated by, then at least complicated somewhat by Hubot technology. By cutting between these two families and the runaway Hubots, *Real Humans* explores the impact of robotics on people's homes and work places, and speculates on the consequences of using so-called "care robots" and "home robots", with the latter category including robots that do housework, but also "entertainment robots" (e.g. robots that provide social interaction and, much more controversially, sex robots).<sup>207</sup> Given that some of the liberated Hubots have a propensity for violence (e.g. the self-proclaimed leader of the group, Niska, played by Eva Röse), the series also touches on the topic of "killer robots", or armed military robots and autonomous robots.

As mentioned above, reviews of the series in both the Scandinavian press and the existing scholarly work tends to combine literal and allegorical interpretations of *Real Humans*. Allegorical interpretations among reviewers in the Swedish press tend to see the Hubots as allegorical for human victims of slavery, trafficking, or racism. To illustrate, Lina Mattebo of *Dagen* writes that Hubots recall the history of slavery and racism, as well as global inequalities and racism in the present (2012), while Eva Åström of *Norrbottens-Kuriren* states that the treatment of Hubots makes one think of apartheid and slavery in the past (2012; see also Lundin 2012 and Platenik 2014). In the Norwegian press, Martin Bergesen of *Dagbladet* mentions anti-immigrant sentiments in contemporary Sweden when he compares *Real Humans* and another TV series by SVT, the political drama *Blue Eyes* (*Blå Ögon*, 2014), which deals with the rise of a far-right political party (see Gani 2016). To Bergesen, both series can be seen as critiques of the right-wing party *Sverigedemokraterna* (Sweden Democrats), with *Real Humans* using "robot scepticism as a metaphor for hostility towards immigrants" [robotskepsis som metafor for invandringsfiendtlighet] (2015). Koistinen makes similar points in her review of the series, arguing that the animosity that human characters in the series have towards Hubots "creates a connection to the hostile attitudes towards immigrants and the surge of neo-nationalist or patriotic political parties in the Nordic area and other European countries" (2015, 417). Bergesen and Koistinen's

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<sup>207</sup> I borrow these terms for different types of robots from the article "A Literature Review of New Robotics: Automation from Love to War" (Royackers and van Est 2015), which traces robotics developments in five areas – the home, health care, traffic, the police force, and the army – and explores societal issues raised by the new robotics.

interpretations of the series can be understood in relation to the specific historical period in which *Real Humans* was made. Released in early 2012, *Real Humans* came out not long after the Swedish parliamentary election in 2010, when Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats) made historically huge gains and, for the first time in history, won representation in the Swedish *Riksdag*, i.e. the national legislature and supreme decision-making body.

Taken together, the reviews mentioned above and Koistinen's analyses of *Real Humans* illustrate a common approach to science fiction narratives. "[A]mong popular fictional genres," film scholar Annette Kuhn notes, "science fiction above all appears to solicit critical commentary of a sociological kind," as exemplified by interpretations of science fiction films that "in one way or another address the relationship between the social worlds of science fictions and the 'real' worlds outside them" (1999, 3).<sup>208</sup> While Kuhn is commenting on science fiction films, the interpretive conventions she describes evidently apply also to science fiction TV series. Meanwhile, media studies scholar Julia Leyda compares *Real Humans* to other contemporary narratives about "fembots" (i.e. feminized robots), including its English-language remake *Humans*, and argues that the series draws on gendered and racialized ideas. More specifically, the representation of Mimi in *Real Humans* echoes "familiar narratives about male employers and female domestics, as well as the 'Western' male fetishization of allegedly hyperfeminine, submissive Asian women", Leyda writes (2016, 167). Moreover, while the casting of the Hubot characters in *Real Humans* is racially diverse and "produces a patina of equality", it also "invites skepticism" upon closer examination (Leyda 2016, 167).<sup>209</sup>

A central reason that *Real Humans* evokes associations to contemporary Sweden has to do with not only audience expectations towards the science fiction genre, but also the various Swedish elements in the series. Besides being set in Sweden, the series plays on stereotypical ideas of Swedes as white and blonde, as seen not only in the case of the

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<sup>208</sup> As Kuhn notes, common approaches to science fiction films include a reflectionist and an ideologically oriented approach (Kuhn 1990, 10). In the reflectionist model, "films are treated as, in a sense, sociological evidence", whereby "the overt contents of science fiction films are *reflections* of social trends and attitudes of the time, mirroring the preoccupations of the historical moment in which the films were made" (Kuhn 1990, 10). The second, ideologically oriented approach rests on "the idea that science fiction films relate to the social order through the mediation of *ideologies*, society's representations of itself in and for itself – that films speak, enact, even produce certain ideologies, which cannot always be read directly off films' surface contents" (Kuhn 1990, 10). Julia Leyda's analysis of *Real Humans* (discussed below) exemplifies this latter ideologically oriented approach. Besides the approaches mentioned so far, it is also worth pointing out that there is a long-standing tendency to dismiss science fiction as "escapist". As American science fiction and fantasy writer Ursula K. Le Guin points out: "The oldest argument against SF is both the shallowest and the profoundest: the assertion that SF, like all fantasy, is escapist" (1979, 204).

<sup>209</sup> See also Mountfort 2018 for a discussion of the ways that *Real Humans* and three other recent science fiction TV series explore the figure of "the double", specifically "doubles of human characters that owe their fictional existence to formative scientific/technological breakthroughs" (59).

Engmans (Fig. 16), but also in the characterization of Hubots. Since Roger initially works as a factory manager, various scenes are set in a factory and include Hubots who do heavy-duty work such as lifting and stacking boxes. All the Hubots in this factory are uniformly dressed, wearing overalls in a shade of light blue that resembles the blue color in the Swedish flag, and the feminized Hubots have long, blonde hair (even though some of them are played by Asian actresses) (Fig. 17). This representation of mass-produced and stereotypically Swedish-looking Hubots plays with ideas of Swedishness, and may, for instance, be interpreted as critical comment on how the notion of Swedes as blonde is constructed. The Engmans, a noticeably blonde, white nuclear family, can similarly be understood as symbolic of the Swedish nation. In other words, as the Engmans grapple with whether and why to open up their home to an outsider (e.g. Mimi), their disagreements are comparable to public discussions on immigration and diversity in contemporary Sweden, and in Scandinavia at large.



Figs. 16–7: *The Engman family (left) and Hubot factory workers (right).*<sup>210</sup>

*Real Humans* also invites allegorical interpretations of human societies in general, and it does so partly by making the liberated Hubots ambiguously and disconcertingly human-like, and by casting human actors in the roles of all the Hubots. The series does little to hide the fact that humans play the Hubots. Hubots look distinctly anthropomorphic, even if they move and talk in a stilted manner, have certain “robotic” behavioral tics, and often (but not always) an eye color that looks, by human standards, unnatural and incongruous with their skin color.<sup>211</sup> Moreover, several dialogues in the series which deal with the treatment of Hubots also explicitly refer to racism, discrimination, or slavery in human history, thus stirring

<sup>210</sup> All figures in this chapter are screen dumps from the official DVD of *Real Humans* (Lundström [2012] 2013).

<sup>211</sup> Most Hubots have an eye color that does not “fit” their skin color, either because it is too bright or of an unusual color by human standards. For instance, one of the liberated Hubots has brown skin but bright green eyes. However, Mimi has light brown skin, straight black hair, and black eyes – in short, she appears remarkably similar to an Asian woman. She is thus one of the most anthropomorphic of all the Hubots.

together the history of real humans and the speculative history of the fictional Hubots. To illustrate, the sixth episode features a sermon in which Åsa, a priest and human character, compares Hubots to enslaved Africans in the past in order to stir compassion for Hubots amongst the congregation. As Åsa says, 200 years ago, one spoke of African people as if they “lacked a spiritual life” [“inte hade något själsliv”], and one assumed “that they were like machines, that you could own them, and that they’d work until they break” [“att dom var som maskiner. Att man kunde äga dom, och att dom kunde arbeta tills dom gick sönder”]. Against those who see Hubots as mere machines, Åsa points out that Hubots “save our lives, take care of our children. And execute the dangerous tasks, so we don’t have to” [“räddar våra liv, tar hand om våra barn, och utför dom farligaste arbetena så vi skal slippa skada oss”]. Besides its direct references to the enslavement of African peoples, the mention of workers who do dangerous work (“so we don’t have to”) brings to mind the issue of privilege, and the fact that numerous underpaid workers in the contemporary world do precisely the dirty, difficult, and dangerous jobs (sometimes described as “the 3Ds”) that privileged people and countries can afford to outsource.<sup>212</sup> Dialogues such as these, in which Hubot workers are compared to human workers, appear throughout the series, and thus invite the viewer to perceive the Hubots not only as robots, but also as figures who resemble vulnerable humans.

### **Negotiating Privilege in the Swedish Family**

When introduced at the start of the series, Inger Engman and her family are positioned as relatively privileged by Inger’s job as a lawyer, and the fact that Inger’s father Lennart (Sten Elfström) has a Hubot that takes care of him. A dialogue between Inger and her husband Hans (Johan Paulsen) in the first episode revolves around Lennart and his need for a new care work Hubot, and foregrounds Inger’s ambivalence to Hubots per se. For the last few years, a Hubot has taken care of Lennart, even becoming his friend, but the Hubot has now begun to malfunction.<sup>213</sup> The conversation between Inger and Hans suggests that Hubots are relatively expensive (and thus, that the Engmans must be economically privileged if they can discuss whether to buy a new Hubot). The same theme also crops up later in the series, as seen in the eighth episode when the teenage son in the Engman family, Tobias (Kåre Hedebrant), hangs out with a girl from school who is classed as middle-class or working class (in contrast to the

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<sup>212</sup> “The 3Ds” also serve as shorthand for “dirty, dangerous, and demanding” jobs (for example, see Standing 2010, 85).

<sup>213</sup> As Koistinen suggest, through the representation of Lennart and his two care Hubots, *Real Humans* connects to contemporary debates on elderly care in Finland (2016). The same debates on elderly care evidently also shape the public discourse in the Scandinavian countries.



somewhat more privileged Tobias). Walking down the street in Tobias’s neighborhood in the evening, Tobias’s classmate asks him whether everyone in his neighborhood has a Hubot, and says: “Mom says she’s gonna buy one. She says it all the time, as if she could afford one” [“Mamma säger att hon ska köpa en. Hon säger det jämt, men det är inte som om hon kan få råd med det”]. The conversation between Inger and Hans is also important because it shows how Inger feels conflicted about mixing Hubot technology with intimate, familial relationships. Working full time as a lawyer, she does not have time to care for her father herself, yet the thought of delegating the care to someone else – or, in this case, to *something* else – appears to give Inger a bad conscience, to use Hans’s words.

While Inger ultimately decides to get a new Hubot, the choice clearly makes her feel uneasy, foreshadowing her discomfort when faced with a second, larger dilemma – namely, whether to accept that a Hubot, i.e. Mimi, should become part of her own home. Notably, Mimi is not designed to be a household and care work Hubot but becomes one by accident, after she has been kidnapped, reprogrammed, and sold. Hans acquires Mimi when he visits the retail store Hubot Market to buy a Hubot for Lennart and is offered a second Hubot, i.e. Mimi, as a freebie. Oblivious to Mimi’s backstory, Hans, together with his children, unboxes the Hubot and simply follows the instructions from the retail store, giving their new Hubot a name, “Anita” (Fig. 18).<sup>214</sup> When Inger comes home from work to discover that the family has a Hubot, she is outraged and objects to having a machine raise her children. However, due to pressure from her family, who seem more excited than worried about having Mimi around, Inger gradually approves that they at least try out the Hubot. Meanwhile, Mimi immediately takes up the role as a domestic worker, maid and/or servant in the household, unaware that she has a second identity as a liberated Hubot.



Figs. 18–9: Mimi, still in her packaging (left), and Mimi with Sofia (right).

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<sup>214</sup> To avoid confusion, I will continue to refer to the Hubot as Mimi rather than using her second name, Anita.

Mimi's arrival affects the lives of everyone in the Engman family: Depending on whether it is Hans or Inger, the two teenagers Tobias and Matilda (Natalie Minnevik), or young Sofia (Aline Palmstierna) who interacts with the Hubot (Fig. 19), Mimi is variously perceived as a commodity or piece of property, a servant, friend, or family member, and an (unattainable) love interest or an object of sexual desire. While each of the five family members projects his or her own needs and fears onto Mimi, Inger's ambivalent relationship to Mimi most explicitly addresses the moral dilemmas associated with privilege. Through Inger's relationship to Mimi, *Real Humans* explores how privileged people, especially parents in privileged families, grapple with their own advantaged positions and that of their children. On the one hand, Mimi relieves Inger and Hans of household chores and thus, at least in theory, makes their lives (and that of their children) easier and more enjoyable. On the other hand, Mimi also triggers fears on Inger's part that the children might become spoiled or entitled from having Mimi around. Thus, being able to delegate household chores to Mimi is convenient, but there is also something disconcerting about having someone (or something) else clean the house, do the laundry, care for the children, and more.

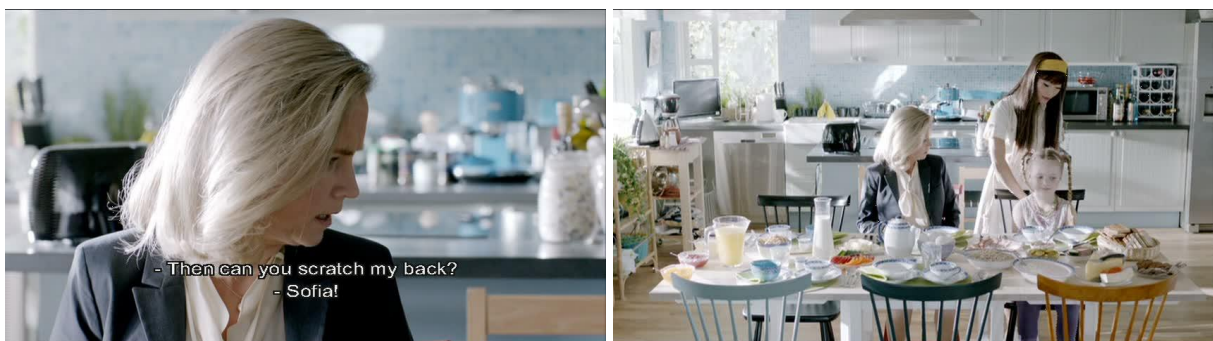
As mentioned above, the representation of Inger's ambivalence towards Mimi in *Real Humans* touches on Sherman's (2017a) discussion of the ways that being privileged can be, for some, shaped by moral conflict. In her sociological study on parents of elite families in New York, Sherman (2017a) finds that her respondents are "concerned with inhabiting their privilege in a morally worthy way" (10) and raising their children to do so as well. Indeed, these "[c]oncerns over how to be a morally worthy privileged person surfaced especially strongly in the case of children . . .", Sherman notes (10). Across her various interviews, a "remarkably consistent" element is a "fear of children's *entitlement*" (10), that is, a fear among the parents that "their kids would take [their] *class advantages* for granted" (2).<sup>215</sup> To grapple with this fear, parents in Sherman's study use various strategies so as to create "an *appropriate habitus of privilege*", as Sherman calls it, that is, a habitus "in which children are moderate in their consumption, hardworking, and 'aware' of their advantages" (10). These strategies include *creating limits* for their children (e.g. "regulating their consumption and behavior"), and *exposing* them to "their advantages relative to others, in the hope of inculcating appreciation for what they have and a sense of obligation to those with less" (10). While Sherman's respondents are real parents in New York and, moreover, far wealthier than

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<sup>215</sup> As Sherman adds: "In contrast to entitled brats, parents want to raise 'good people': those who consume reasonably, understand the value of work, respect others, and are aware of and appreciate their social position" (2017a, 2). For further discussions on notions of entitlement among affluent people, see Sherman 2017b.

Inger in *Real Humans*, there are noteworthy parallels between Sherman’s respondents and Inger: Inger also tries to negotiate her own privileged position, fears that her children will become entitled, and tries to create “an appropriate habitus of privilege” for her children.

Inger’s fear of raising entitled children is conveyed in a noticeably light-hearted and slightly comical scene near the end of the first episode. It is morning, we are at the Engman family’s house, and Inger has just walked into the kitchen to grab a cup of coffee only to discover that the kitchen table is set with a full breakfast, thanks to Mimi. Alone in the kitchen with Mimi, Inger is about to sit down at the table when Mimi comes and gently pulls out the chair for her (which makes Inger slightly uncomfortable). Soon after, Sofia (who is of primary school age), arrives and starts to ask Mimi for favors. Looking at Mimi, Sofia asks: “Can I have the blue spoon?” [“Kan jag få den blåa skeden?”] Next, a medium close-up shows Mimi smiling calmly, nodding, and walking towards the kitchen drawers to get the spoon. The camera then tilts down to Sofia, who adds: “Then, can you scratch my back?” [“Sen, kan du klia mig på ryggen?”]. Cut to a medium close-up of Inger, who looks shocked. “*Sofia!*” she says, so as to shush her daughter (Fig. 20). “But they do that. Alice and her family also have a Hubot” [“Men dom gör det. Alice och dom har också en Hubot”], Sofia replies in her defense. The problem is, of course, that Sofia is right: Hubots do take orders from humans – that is what they are designed to do (Fig. 21). The scene in the kitchen, then, touches on the difficult question: How do you teach children to not take their privileges for granted? Like Sherman’s respondents, Inger attempts to set boundaries for what her children can do despite (or because of) Mimi’s presence in their home. Later, in the third episode, for instance, she says to her family that everyone still has to do their usual household chores and that Mimi also needs to have time off. The latter is presented as a puzzling statement, given that Mimi is incapable of feeling tired and has been reprogrammed to have no real desires of her own.



*Figs. 20–1: Inger, Sofia, and Mimi in the kitchen.*

If Inger's behavior seems paradoxical, that is because it is: If she really wanted to prevent her children from becoming entitled, Inger and her husband could return Mimi to the Hubot store. While this would mean more domestic chores on Inger's part – chores she may not have the time to do – there are still other alternatives to having Mimi do them. One solution would be that the children, and Hans, take up more responsibility for household chores than they currently do. My aim here is not to speculate on how the series could have played out differently, but to show that Inger's challenge is exacerbated by her contradictory behavior: On the one hand, she tries to create an appropriate habitus of privilege for her children and ensure that they do not become entitled, but on the other, she allows material entitlements (i.e. Mimi) to remain an undeniably obvious part of her children's lives. Her behavior thus visualizes one of the conclusions that Sherman draws in her study, namely, that when parents want to prevent their children from behaving like entitled brats, they often attempt to manage “behavioral and affective ‘entitlement,’” but do not necessarily change the “material entitlement” of their children (2017, 29). As Sherman puts it:

Parents do not want their children to be ‘entitled,’ but they mean this behaviorally and affectively, not materially. . . . Behaving appropriately means acting as if one is equal, not superior, to others – being nice, working hard, not demanding special treatment. It does not mean challenging children's material or experiential entitlements in any significant way. Ultimately, although not always intentionally, parents are not only reproducing their children's advantaged social position but also teaching them how to occupy that position appropriately. (2017, 3)

At this point, it is worth pointing out that I have described the fear of raising entitled children as if it were Inger's responsibility, not that of Hans. I have done this deliberately in order to reflect how *Real Humans*, at least initially, represents precisely Inger as the one who worries about the children's upbringing. At the start of the series, Hans appears excited rather than worried about the prospect of having a household Hubot. Only later in the series, when Tobias falls in love with Mimi (and consequently becomes a sexual minority in society), does Hans become skeptical of Mimi and start to see her as a problem.

Even so, the fear of raising entitled children never explicitly becomes a worry on Hans's part. In this sense, *Real Humans* exemplifies a more general tendency to assume that the raising of children is a mother's responsibility. “The assumption that mothers, not fathers or families, are responsible for raising children is pervasive”, Rosie Cox writes in *The Servant*

*Problem: Domestic Work in a Global Economy* (2006, 132). Similarly, research on domestic services in Sweden suggests that discourses in Sweden often frame issues surrounding private domestic services as “women’s issues” (Cousins and Tang 2004, Björnberg 2002, cited in Gavanoas 2010, 117). More generally, the representation of Inger and Mimi’s relationship can also be understood in light of broader tendencies in contemporary Sweden and Scandinavia, specifically, the recent rise in the use of paid domestic services.

Recent decades have seen a rise in the use of paid domestic services in Europe, including the Scandinavian countries, according to the editors of the recent anthology *Paid Migrant Domestic Labour in a Changing Europe: Questions of Gender Equality and Citizenship* (Gullikstad, Kristensen, and Ringrose 2016, 3). As the editors point out, domestic labor is not only underpaid, demanding labor; there is also “a tendency for those buying domestic labour to be positioned within the Global North/West, and those selling it within the Global South/East” (Gullikstad, Kristensen, and Ringrose 2016, 6; see also B. Anderson 2000; Cox 2006). When domestic labor is shaped by both structural inequality and unequal labor conditions on a global scale, domestic labor is likely to contribute to “the (re)production of ethnic/|racial| hierarchies” (Gullikstad, Kristensen, and Ringrose 2016, 6).<sup>216</sup> This makes it important to consider the relationship between domestic labor and global injustice. Within the Scandinavian context, the increasing use of paid domestic labor may be seen as particularly noteworthy. Referring to the Nordic countries, Gullikstad, Kristensen, and Ringrose note that “extensive welfare systems and a political and cultural ideal of social equality have rendered paid domestic labour, which is bought and sold on the private market, both unnecessary and unwanted—at least officially” (2016, 3; see also Bikova 2010, Kristensen 2015).

In Sweden, “[t]he mere idea of private domestic workers goes against the grain of social democratic and feminist traditions, as well as cultural preferences for public care”, writes social anthropologist Anna Gavanoas, who has researched migrant domestic work in Sweden (2010, 117). “For many decades,” Gavanoas adds,

Sweden has been considered an international role model in terms of its work versus family reconciliation policies, encouraging women’s labour force participation as well as providing relatively high levels of benefits for parental leave and . . . public day care services” (2010, 117).

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<sup>216</sup> The original quote contains vertical bars (i.e. “|”) around the word “racial”. Like Gullikstad, Kristensen, and Ringrose, justice studies scholar Mary Romero argues in her research on nannies in the United States that “contemporary social, economic and legal conditions shape the constraints and opportunities for immigrant household workers and nannies (and their families)”. These conditions, she argues, “[c]onsequently . . . reproduce gender, race, ethnic and class privileges” (2003, 812).

While the hiring of domestic workers is becoming increasingly common, the practice seems to clash with values that are seen as important in the Scandinavian context, including egalitarianism and gender equality in particular (Gullestad 2002; Bendixsen, Bringslid, and Vike 2018). In Sweden, tensions between “egalitarian ideals on the one hand and the needs of working parents on the other” became especially obvious in Sweden in the 1990s, during a debate that has since been referred to as *pigdebatten* (the “maid debate”) (Gavanas 2010, 118). Described as a “morally and ideological[ly] charged” debate (Kvist and Peterson 2010, 192), *pigdebatten* revolved around a proposal that suggested private households be allowed to claim tax credits on domestic work (Kvist and Peterson 2010, 191–2).<sup>217</sup> In 2007, the questions raised by *pigdebatten* took centre stage again, when a new law on tax deductions on domestic services was officially implemented. As sociologist Ellinor Platzer notes, the 2007 law was preceded by “years of ideological debates about whether it should be acceptable to employ domestic workers at all, and if so, who was going to pay for it” (2010, 167). While *Real Humans* does not refer explicitly to this debate, the series was made in the wake of these discussions, and touches on the moral conflicts associated with domestic work services in Sweden, and in Scandinavia in general.

In fact, Inger’s ambivalent response to having a servant figure in her home is strikingly similar to concerns expressed by real parents in Scandinavia who hire domestic workers or au pairs. According to recent sociological studies conducted in Norway (Kristensen 2015, 2016; Sollund 2010) and Sweden (Gavanas 2006, 2010), parents who hire domestic workers or au pairs have an ambivalent relationship to their employees, and grapple with how to reconcile, on the one hand, their own decisions to pay for domestic work and, on the other, Scandinavian cultural ideas of social equality and sameness. In her study of employers of au pairs in Norway, criminologist Ragnhild Sollund notes that several informants “[explain] their au pair’s role to their children so that they would *not* regard the au pair as a *servant*” (2010, 153, my emphasis). To cite one of Sollund’s informants:

. . . my children started to say, ‘We have a maid.’ And I felt hot and cold with embarrassment and I made it very clear that it is called ‘au pair’ . . . so there is nothing for the children to feel ashamed of, but I notice that I am very afraid of being perceived as a cold, cynical, exploitative person, because I am not! But I

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<sup>217</sup> For more on the maid debate, see Gavanas 2006.

know many people think that about those who have au pairs from the Philippines.  
(2010, 153)

Sollund's informant explicitly mentions embarrassment, shame, and a fear of being perceived as exploitative. In *Real Humans*, these emotions are not mentioned by name, but appear in the form of ambivalent interactions between Inger and Mimi. Through exploring this relationship, the series touches on how attempts at negotiating privilege may, in the Scandinavian context, be especially shaped by the awareness of egalitarian ideals mentioned above. Gavanoas discusses the relationship between Swedish employers of domestic workers and a belief in egalitarianism in her chapter "Privileged irresponsibility, structural responsibility and moral contradictions among employers in the EU domestic work sector" (2010). After conducting and comparing interviews with employers of domestic workers in Sweden, the UK, and Spain, Gavanoas finds that for the Swedish employers, "servant problems" revolve around a "nationalist preoccupation with *mythical Nordic egalitarianism*" (2010, 117, my emphasis).<sup>218</sup> Thus, a perceived commitment to egalitarianism seems to play a part in the ways that paid domestic work is perceived in the Scandinavian region.

At the same time, gender also appears to influence *who* feels uncomfortable about paying for domestic work services, especially who feels shameful or guilty because of it. In Norway, household work is unusually problematic for women, according to social anthropologist Runar Døving and ethnologist Ingun Grimstad Klepp (2010), and seems to give women a sense of shame regardless of whether the women perform the work themselves. Døving and Klepp list altogether four types or sources of shame connected to household work, which include not having a clean house, having someone else clean one's house, not having a gender-equal home where household work is equally divided, and the act of liking household work (which can be considered "reactionary") (2010, 373). In contemporary Scandinavia, where egalitarianism is valued and perceived as a political and social ideal, the unease that paid household work may trigger may be especially pronounced, but this unease is not unique to the Scandinavian countries. As Cox writes in her 2006 book *The Servant Problem: Paid Domestic Work in a Global Economy* (which focuses on the UK), guilt is "a

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<sup>218</sup> For UK and Spanish employers "servant problems" instead revolved around a "preoccupation with ethics of motherhood" and "preoccupation with otherness", respectively (Gavanoas 2010, 117). These differences bring to mind one of the points Sherman makes at the end of her study, namely, that research on parenting among elites and on elites generally needs to consider possible *national* differences. As she writes: "My respondents' belief in hard work, reasonable consumption, awareness, and giving back are anchored in American ideals and ideologies of meritocracy, self-discipline, and philanthropy. . . . Affluent parents in other countries, with different cultural repertoires and histories, economic arrangements, and welfare regimes, are likely to describe other affects and anxieties of parenting and privilege" (2017a, 30).

hugely important influence on the way that employers manage” – and struggle to manage – “their domestic workers” (132). Among her examples, Cox mentions that employers who think of themselves as feminist (132) or who have “left-wing leanings” (133) can feel guilty about employing someone else, especially another woman, to do their work for them. As she adds, “Lots of people do not want to be ‘the kind of person’ who employs domestic help. They don’t want to think of themselves as privileged or lazy . . .” (133). While Cox writes of the UK context, her observations on attitudes towards paid domestic work brings to mind tendencies in Scandinavia.

### **Imagining Domestic Work in Contemporary Scandinavia**

The representation of Mimi in *Real Humans* can be understood within a larger body of contemporary Scandinavian narratives that use an au pair (or, in the case of Mimi, an au pair-like figure) to thematize global inequality. As Elisabeth Oxfeldt notes in her article “‘I Come from Crap Country and You Come from Luxury Country’: Ugly Encounters in Scandinavian Au-Pair Novels”, several recent novels from Norway, Sweden and Denmark revolve around au pairs and their hosts or host families, and represent the au pair as a “guilt-triggering” figure that “rais[es] questions of femininity, feminism and global sisterhood” (forthcoming, 2). Drawing on Sianne Ngai’s (2005) concept of “ugly feelings”, Oxfeldt examines how these novels depict what she calls the “ugly encounters” between “the Scandinavian woman” and “the suffering Other”. As she suggests, the au pair figure can be connected to Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russel Hochschild’s discussion of the “global woman” in the 21st century, specifically the fact that “[t]he lifestyles of the First World are made possible by a global transfer of the services associated with a wife’s traditional role—child care, homemaking, and sex—from poor countries to rich ones” (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002, 4, cited in Oxfeldt, forthcoming).<sup>219</sup> While Oxfeldt’s examples are novels, her discussion of the au pair as a “guilt-triggering figure” fits well with Mimi vis-à-vis, as suggested by the kitchen scene we looked at earlier.

Moreover, Mimi also triggers guilt feelings that have specifically to do with Inger’s own role as an employed mother who struggles to balance work and family life. To illustrate, in the second episode, a dialogue between Inger and her youngest daughter draws attention to how Inger (i.e. the biological human mother) seems to feel inferior when she compares herself

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<sup>219</sup> Oxfeldt uses three novels as her examples: *Fågelbovägen 32* (Sara Kadefors, 2006), *Jeg kommer snart* (Selma Lønning Aarø, 2013) and *Tilfeldets gud* (Kirsten Thorup, 2011). In addition, she connects novels to the happiness discourse of the *World Happiness Reports*, and considers the extent to which “the au-pair novels respond to a sense of guilt at being privileged (i.e. ‘ScanGuilt’)” (Oxfeldt, forthcoming).



with Mimi, the surrogate Hubot mother. Set in Sofia's bedroom, the dialogue opens with Sofia and Inger sitting in Sofia's bed. They are getting ready to read a bedtime story, and the scene by and large cuts between close-ups of mother and daughter as they discuss whether Inger or Mimi should read the story. While moving between close-ups of Inger and Sofia, the viewer's attention is drawn to Inger (and her discomfort) in particular. During the dialogue, Sofia tells her mother that she wants Mimi – or “Anita,” as she calls her – to read the bedtime story instead. When Inger gets up to get the Hubot, Sofia looks up at her mother and says: “She’s never in a hurry like you are” [“Hon har aldrig sådär bråttom som du.”]. Inger pauses, looks at her daughter, sits down again and tries to explain: “I’m a little tired, honey” [Jag är lite trött själv, gumman”]. “You’re always tired” [“Du är alltid trött”], Sofia replies. Inger smiles, and suggest that she is not always tired [“Det är jag väl inte?”], to which Sofia, who embodies the idea of the child who has to tell the truth: “A lot of times you are.” [“Ofta.”] Inger then calmly asks Sofia once more whether she or the Hubot should read the story. Again, Sofia picks the Hubot.



Figs. 22–3: Bedtime reading, with Sofia (left) and Inger (right).

This dialogue between Inger and Sofia uses the contrast between Inger and Mimi to highlight Inger's struggle to balance work and family life. As the series repeatedly shows, Mimi is able to work more or less incessantly (as long as her batteries are recharged every evening), and also appears to be endlessly patient, given that she does not have the (human) capacity to get annoyed and feel undervalued as a caretaker. Meanwhile, Inger is often depicted as having to work over-time in her job as a lawyer, and as not always being able to keep track of what is going on with her children. In this sense, *Real Humans* resembles *1,000 Times Good Night*, since both examples explore the lives of women who must grapple with how to balance a demanding job with family life. Rebecca in *1,000 Times Good Night* has a job that draws her abroad, far away from her family, Inger's job as a lawyer does not put the

same geographical distance between herself and her family. Nevertheless, Inger still has to explain to her child why she cannot always be around. Rebecca's situation may at first seem more dramatic, but the scene with Inger and Sofia suggests that the day-to-day challenge of being an employed mother can be dramatic enough as it is. To viewers in Scandinavia, the scene may bring to mind discussions on the "time bind" or "time squeeze" – a term that is, especially in Norway, closely associated with the dual earner model for gender equality (Kristensen 2015, 209) and public debates on the everyday, practical challenges of reconciling work and family life.<sup>220</sup> In addition, Inger's situation is compounded by a fear that Mimi will replace her in her role as a mother. Indeed, while Rebecca does not seem to fear competition from another maternal figure, the scene with Sofia and Inger in *Real Humans* suggests that Inger has, in fact, good reasons to be worried.

The same scene may also invite the viewer to rethink idealized notions of motherhood. Although guilt is never explicitly mentioned in the scene, Inger's dialogue with her daughter evokes associations to guilt feelings on the part of employed mothers, or what psychologists such as Jean-Anne Sutherland refer to as "maternal guilt" (2010). Within the Swedish context, psychologist Ylva Elvin-Nowak's 2001 study *I sällskap med skulden: om den moderna mammas vardag* finds that guilt feelings among employed mothers in Sweden is a common phenomenon (see also Elvin-Nowak 1991). In *Real Humans*, Inger and her limitations as a human mother are contrasted with Mimi, but not in such a way that Mimi is the ideal mother. Rather, the latter embodies an artificial and unrealistic mothering ideal. More specifically, by virtue of being an always-present, always-attentive maternal figure, Mimi functions as a social critique, a reminder of what real, human mothers cannot possibly achieve. Not only is Mimi a machine, she is also a machine that has been forced to "forget" her real identity and programmed to play the part of a caretaker.

The constructedness and artificiality of Mimi's maternal role contrasts with the flesh-and-blood Inger, who can feel fatigued, has needs of her own, and is, in short, far more fallible. That fallibility is, however, what makes her human: a "real human", to invoke the title of the series. (That Inger can feel guilty about her own limitations only further underscores her humanity.) In short, the dialogue between Inger and Sofia draws attention to

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<sup>220</sup> In Norwegian, the term "*tidsklemma*" became a pivotal metaphor in public debates from the 1990s and onwards (see Ellingsæter 2005 for an in-depth discussion of *tidsklemma* and its history). The Norwegian term differs slightly from the English term "the time bind". In the United States, for instance, the concept of the "time bind", as it is used in Hochschild's 1997 book, *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*, refers to the blurring distinction between work and home. That said, Hochschild's book, which allegedly coined the term "the time bind", deals with mothers and their struggle to achieve a balance between work and family obligations. As such, there is a considerable overlap between the Norwegian and English terms.

Inger's predicament as an employed mother, and highlights the fact that a mother who always cares for her child(ren) and never feels tired is an unattainable goal – that is, lest human mothers become more like machines, and less like humans.

Generally, Mimi is a character through which *Real Humans* thematizes responsibility, compassion, and notions of the “good” human, as seen in the fact that human characters' moral standing (including that of Inger) is often established through how well, or how badly, they treat Mimi. To briefly return to the father in the Engman family, Hans is, as mentioned earlier, initially enthusiastic about Hubot technology and thus contrasts with Inger. His fascination with the possibilities that Hubots offer can partly be explained by gendered stereotypes in science fiction narratives. As art historian Julie Wosk writes in *My Fair Ladies: Female Robots, Androids, and Other Artificial Eves*, within representations of female robots and artificial women in US culture, “being enamoured with technology” is “a masculine stereotype” (2015, 98). Another reason has to do with Hans's role in the series as a slightly comical foil to Inger, who is generally characterized as serious, conscientious, and relatively nervous. Yet, Inger and Hans's attitudes to Hubots are gradually reversed during the course of the series, and by the end of the ninth and penultimate episode, Inger has learned more about the liberated Hubots, thank to her work as a lawyer and the help of Mathilda. Consequently, she not only wants to keep Mimi, but also to protect her and other liberated Hubots from harm. By contrast, Hans sees Mimi as a threat to the family and wants her out of the house.



*Figs. 24–5: Inger (left) and Hans (right) quarreling.*

Inger and Hans's opposing views on whether or not to help Mimi – views that, in turn, are framed as ethical reflections on moral goodness – are expressed in the ninth episode, during a quarrel in which Hans and Inger disagree as to whether they should hand in Mimi to the authorities or help her to hide. Mathilda and Tobias are present during the quarrel, which

takes place in the family's garage.<sup>221</sup> Inger pleads her case to Hans, who says that he feels like a hostage, surrounded as he is by Inger and Mathilda and Tobias (who, for different reasons, want to keep or help Mimi as well). During the quarrel, we cut to another room in the house, where Mimi is sitting alone in the dark, potentially overhearing the quarrel. If Hans feels like a hostage in his own home, then Mimi symbolizes another kind of hostage, someone who should not be in the Engman's home in the first place. In close-ups we see Inger getting up and looking out the window, as if searching for someone or something. We then cut back to the Engmans, where a frustrated Hans exclaims: "What is this about?" ["Vad handlar det här om?"]. In an impassioned speech, Inger replies (Fig. 24):

It's about being human. God, it's so simple. David Eischer's children are all our children. It's our responsibility. They're not machines, they're alive. And I think we can learn something from them. Something important. And I will do anything I can to save them.

[Det handlar om att vara människa. Men Gud, det är så enkelt. David Eischers barn, det är allas våra barn. Det är *vårt ansvar*. Dom är inte maskiner, dom lever. Och jag tror att vi har någonting att lära av dem. Något viktigt. Och jag tänker göra allt jag kan för att rädda dem.]

For Inger, whether or not to help Mimi has to do with "being human", but as Hans says, for him it is a matter of protecting his own family. The use of lighting and cinematography in this scene reinforces these contrasting views. Hans, the one person who challenges Inger's opinion in this scene, is symbolically positioned alone on one side of the room, while Inger and the children are grouped together on the other side. Moreover, we see various mid-shots and medium close-ups of Inger as she makes her point, clips in which her face is more clearly lit and visible than that of Hans. Hans's eyes are often cast in shadow and obscured by his glasses during this scene (Fig. 25). The symbolic use of light and dark is also achieved through the *mise-en-scène*: While the background behind Hans is generally dark, the background in clips of Inger occasionally includes the warm glow from lamps in the hallway.

Ultimately, the scene does not side with either of the characters but leaves it open to interpretation whether helping Mimi – and, moreover, helping the other liberated Hubots – in

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<sup>221</sup> This fight is foreshadowed in the first episode, in a quarrel (also set in the garage) in which Hans explains why having a Hubot would be helpful, while Inger objects and argues that she wants her kids to remember that they were raised by humans.

fact amounts to being human, as Inger puts it. Nevertheless, Inger's mention of "all our children" has religious connotations, and resonates with humanitarian discourse.<sup>222</sup> For viewers in Sweden, the words "allas våra barn" may evoke associations to the recent slogans in humanitarian campaigns by Unicef and Save the Children.<sup>223</sup> The scene's emphasis on the act of saving children also has evident parallels to *1,000 Times Good Night*, where Steph's school presentation emphasizes both the vulnerability of children in the Global South and her mother's responsibility to help these children (see Chapter 4). In both cases, the female protagonists, Inger and Rebecca, are screened as responsible human beings who want to help less fortunate others and whose responsibility is framed in light of their role as mothers.

### **The Gendered, Racialized Robot Servant**

Mimi's function in *Real Humans* can be seen in light of a longer history in art and popular culture, wherein female robots have been used to explore questions pertaining to gender roles, the family, and the perils and possibilities of new technology. As Wosk (2015) suggests in *My Fair Ladies*, depictions of female robots tend to harbor the values, norms, fears, and hopes of a given society, typically reflecting "gender stereotypes", "shifting social paradigms" and "changing developments in science and technology" (2015, 7). Examining the history of US TV series about female robots, Wosk shows how the female robot servant is a recurring figure, as seen in series ranging from *The Twilight Zone* of the 1940s to the animated series *The Jetsons* of the 1940s and 1970s. Mimi can be understood as a recent addition to these older, fictional female robots servants, and a figure through which *Real Humans* explores gender roles in contemporary Scandinavia. At the same time, as Leyda suggests through her critique of the gendered and *racialized* representation of Mimi in *Real Humans*, Mimi is also worth considering in light of race and racial relations. As scholars analyzing the role of race in science fiction convincingly argue, race relations, and images of slavery, are central to the science fiction genre at least in the United States (Nama 2008; Lavender III 2011). In light of the emerging scholarship on race and science fiction, it is worth considering how a fictional

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<sup>222</sup> More specifically, the line "David Eischer's children are all our children" evokes associations to Judeo-Christianity, bringing to mind the idea of God's children.

<sup>223</sup> On the website of the Swedish branch of Unicef, one campaign has the headline "Lite trygghet för allas våra barns insamling till UNICEFs katastrofärbete" (<https://unicef.se/egna-insamlingar/2944-lite-trygghet-for-allas-vara-barn>). Similarly, the website of the Swedish Save the Children (*Rädd Barnen*) features a recent fundraising campaign (for children who are victims of the war in Syria), which includes the sentence: "Detta är allas VÅRA barn, barn av VÅR värld och tillsammans kan vi göra skillnad" (<https://www.raddabarnen.se/stod-oss/egen/alla/68626/>).

robot servant such as Mimi is used to reflect on ideas about technology and gender as well as race.<sup>224</sup>

In addition, Mimi's role as a robot servant also bears the mark of the Scandinavian context in which it was made. More specifically, the representation of Mimi resembles existing media representations of au pairs in Scandinavia. According to gender studies scholar Elisabeth Stubberud, media representations of au pairs in Norway typically focus on au pairs from the Philippines, despite the fact that au pairs come to Norway from a range of places, including countries in Europe (2015b, 126). In her analysis of two recent TV documentaries that address the working conditions of au pairs in Norway, Stubberud (2015b) draws attention to how au pairs also tend to be framed as mothers who have left their own children behind, and as victims of exploitation and sexual abuse. To Stubberud, this framing of au pairs as "self-sacrificing poor mothers on the one hand, and, on the other hand, both vulnerable and sexually available girls" may "be both overly negative and reproductive of a particular stereotype" (2015a, 179). While Stubberud's objects of study are TV documentaries depicting actual human au pairs, *Real Humans* is obviously a fictional TV drama that features a robot whose role *resembles* that of a human domestic worker or servant. Despite these differences, however, the framing of au pairs in the TV documentaries examined by Stubberud resembles the framing of Mimi the robot servant.

For one, Mimi looks like an East-Asian woman, a casting choice that on the one hand reflects the fact that many au pairs working in the Scandinavian countries come from the Philippines and other Asian countries, but on the other hand reinforces the stereotypical idea that au pairs are Asian women.<sup>225</sup> Moreover, Mimi is also repeatedly framed as a potential victim whose body is an object of sexual desire, at least in the eyes of male human characters. Both Hans and Tobias appear to be attracted to Mimi, albeit in different ways. While Hans sees Mimi mainly as a potential sex doll, Tobias gradually becomes more and more interested in Mimi in both a sexual and romantic way. In the first episode, Hans discovers and secretly puts away a card that can activate one of Mimi's hidden functions, namely, that she can go into sex robot mode. Secrecy is central also to Tobias's infatuation with Mimi. Since being attracted to a Hubot is considered a social taboo, Tobias is tormented by shame through much

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<sup>224</sup> The argument that race or ethnicity shape science fiction narratives and their representations of robots is not new. In the 1980s, scholars of science fiction cinema, such as Annette Kuhn and Vivian Sobchack, point out how science fiction is a genre in which ideas about otherness are negotiated. What sets the recent scholarship on race and science fiction apart is that it centres on the issue of race rather than dealing with it in a cursory manner.

<sup>225</sup> Since 2004, most au pairs working in Norway come from the Philippines (followed by Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, albeit with significantly lower numbers) (Gullikstad and Annfelt 2016, 66). Similarly, statistics from Denmark in 2008 suggest that most au pairs working in Denmark came from the Philippines (followed by Ukraine, Russia, Brazil, and Thailand) (Stenum 2010, 24).

of the series, as he tries to hide his sexual orientation.<sup>226</sup> Yet, Tobias and Hans are not the only male human characters who see Mimi as a sexualized object. The viewer is repeatedly encouraged to see Mimi as a potential victim, someone who might at any time fall prey to the predatory behavior of male human characters. In the seventh episode, for instance, a suspenseful and uncomfortable scene depicts four teenage boys attacking Mimi while she is out on an errand. When the boys pin Mimi to the ground and try to have sex with her, the Hubot notably resists both physically and verbally, i.e. she says “stop it” [“sluta”]. Mimi’s resistance momentarily gives the viewer a sense that she might have a will of her own, despite her being a Hubot. When the four boys nevertheless ignore Mimi’s objections, the scene looks very much like a depiction of a sexual assault or rape. Indeed, whether or not the viewer believes Hubots like Mimi can think, feel or have a will of their own, the fact that Mimi looks anthropomorphic encourages the viewer to associate this scene with real instances of *human* violence, especially gendered violence.

Through Mimi and several other Hubots, *Real Humans* also thematizes human trafficking and prostitution. Here, too, the fact that Mimi looks like an East-Asian woman suggests that racial relations are inscribed in the series. Consider, for instance, the following scene in which Mimi is sold on the illegal market. Taken from the first episode, the scene is shot in a large, dark warehouse and depicts Jonas Boberg (Måns Nathanaelson), the owner of Hubot Market, as he buys Mimi from the man who kidnapped her. Notably, Mimi is lying on a brightly lit table, naked from the waist up (also, her eyes closed, suggesting that she is deactivated and unaware of what is going on). That Mimi’s body is exposed in this manner emphasizes her vulnerability, not least because she looks almost identical to a naked human, save for a power plug in the back of her neck. This is the first of several scenes where Mimi is depicted partially naked, and taken together, these nudity scenes can be said to reinforce stereotypical images that frame Asian women as sexualized objects, and what film scholar and filmmaker Celine Parreñas Shimizu (2007) calls the “hypersexualization” of Asian women, as Leyda also points out.<sup>227</sup> The dialogue in the scene evokes associations to

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<sup>226</sup> According to Leyda, the image of Tobias, “a white male teen” who develops a crush on his robot, exemplifies how *Real Humans* echoes “familiar narratives about male employers and female domestics, as well as the ‘Western’ male fetishization of allegedly hyperfeminine, submissive Asian women” (2016, 167). While agreeing with Leyda, I would add that Tobias is also a fairly ambiguous figure, given that the series also frames him as a sexual minority – more precisely, as a “transhuman sexual”, or “THS” – who struggles to “come out” to his family about his sexual identity (see Leyda 2016, 172n11; Koistinen 2015, 418).

<sup>227</sup> In her book *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen*, Shimizu analyzes representations of both Asian and Asian-American women as “hypersexual sex machines” (2007, 23). In addition, she discusses how Asian American women (including actresses, filmmakers, and viewers) have worked to challenge and critique “normative scripts for sexually and racially marginalized subjects” (2007, 21).

prostitution and human trafficking in particular. As Boberg says (presumably so as to bargain down the price for Mimi): “No, I’ll sell it on the street. You can always sleep with it” [“Nej, säljer den på gatan. Man kan alltid ligga med den”]. If Mimi embodies the victimized, sexualized Asian woman, the fact that Boberg is a white, middle-aged, suit-dressed man with slicked back, blonde hair can be understood as an embodiment of white, male privilege. By virtue of his blonde hair, blue eyes, and blue suit, he also brings to mind a particular idea of white Swedishness.

Racial and gendered relations are inscribed in the series not only through Mimi (and the violence she potentially “experiences”), but also through other racialized and gendered Hubots who are similarly subjected to what may or may not be described as direct violence. Since the viewer never learns whether Hubots are in fact sentient, these scenes of “violence” are highly ambiguous and at once position Hubots as victims and as machines incapable of being victimized. A striking example can be seen in the fourth episode, during a scene set in the law firm where Inger works. The scene features Inger, Inger’s boss (who appears to be the owner of the law firm), and a secretary Hubot. Sitting in her boss’s office, Inger and her boss are discussing whether Hubots should be granted rights.<sup>228</sup> To Inger, the fact that you cannot prove that Hubots do *not* have emotions means that you should err on the side of caution and be open to the idea that Hubots may need rights of their own. In response, Inger’s boss calls on the company’s Hubot secretary – who is, like Mimi, played by a non-white actress – to make a point. After giving the Hubot a compliment (to which the Hubot responds by smiling and saying thank you), he pauses briefly, then slaps the Hubot hard across her face. Notably, the Hubot moves like a human in pain, throwing her body to the side, raising her hand, and placing it on her cheek. Inger, who is shocked by her boss’s behavior, exclaims: “My God! What are you doing?” [“Men Gud, vad gör du?”] However, her concern is soon thrown into question when the Hubot straightens her back, looks at the man who hit her, and asks – with a neutral, affectless look on her face – whether there is anything else she can do. In short, the Hubot acts as if nothing has happened.

The scene with the Hubot secretary brings to mind gendered violence between humans, since Inger’s male boss is positioned as more powerful than both the feminized Hubot and her symbolic female ally, Inger, the human being. Moreover, the scene also

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<sup>228</sup> One of the plot elements in the series is a lawsuit which revolves around whether Hubots should be granted rights. As Koistinen points out, this lawsuit, which advocates “Hubot rights”, can be interpreted as “an allegory for real life struggles for the human rights of different groups of people, but simultaneously raises more concrete questions about the relationships between human beings and genuine nonhuman entities” (2015, 418). Inger is involved as a lawyer in this lawsuit, which partly explains why she gradually develops a more sympathetic and nuanced view of Hubots.



positions Inger as a witness – albeit to an act that may or may not be classified as violence. In this sense, she resembles Jonathan in *Pigeon*, who similarly becomes a witness to something the viewer does not properly know what is – is it actual violence, or does it just *look* like violence? Conversely, if the Hubot secretary is interpreted allegorically, as a human victim of gendered violence, then Inger comes close to resembling the participants in *Sweatshop* and Rebecca in *1,000 Times Good Night*, in the sense that they all witness the suffering of non-white, underprivileged others. Like the other witness figures in the previous examples, Inger also becomes a voice of conscience who objects to what she perceives as injustice and suffering. As importantly, the act of directly witnessing a less advantaged other “suffer” (at least as Inger understands it) becomes a step in Inger’s journey towards wanting to combat structural injustice and use her privileged position to help the less advantaged. Last but not least, the scene explores the ambiguous position of Hubots, encouraging the viewer to wonder whether Hubots are sentient beings and to consider the implications of the answer to that question. More specifically, the scene plays on the idea that Hubots are underprivileged and victimized, while simultaneously undermining that very idea by leaving it open to interpretation whether Hubots can constitute victims of violence and exploitation.

In *Real Humans*, direct violence against Hubots is used to make a point about structural violence against Hubots, and the fact that Hubots are treated as mere commodities. The commodification of Hubots can be understood as part of a social critique that *Real Humans* launches against capitalism and the power of corporations. Within science fiction cinema and TV, the corporation has often been depicted as a source of social problems, exploitation, and inequality. Writing in 1990, Kuhn notes that while the science fiction genre has had a “long-standing preoccupation with narratives involving masculine mastery over nature and creation”, a prevalent theme in recent science fiction films is *corporate power*: “power in these fictional worlds is typically constituted as invisible but all-pervasive, institutional rather than personal, corporate rather than governmental” (Kuhn 1990, 8–9).<sup>229</sup> In *Real Humans*, the critique of capitalism is most evident in the negative portrayal of Jonas Boberg, the owner of Hubot Market. Boberg is shown to have no scruples and his only motivation is to make a profit. He thus personifies capitalism as a system, wherein everything is reduced to its exchange value. By virtue of his role as a salesman at Hubot Market (and a successful one at that), Boberg is comparable to Jonathan and Sam in *Pigeon*, representing the

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<sup>229</sup> The critique of capitalism in *Real Humans* can also be seen in relation to thematic tendencies in Scandinavian crime fiction, a genre on which the series also draws. For more on the social critique of capitalism in Scandinavian crime fiction, see Nestingen and Arvas 2011. See also Stenport and Alm 2009.

kind of salesman that Jonathan and Sam never manage to be: someone who persuades his customers that his products will make them happier, and becomes wealthy as a result. For Jonathan and Sam, persuading customers and getting rich remain impossible goals or only empty phrases (i.e. Jonathan's line "we want to help people have fun", and Sam's hope of doing "big business", as he puts it). In *Real Humans*, Boberg is not a laudable character, however, but more or less the antithesis to Inger and her conscientious, if somewhat conflicted, character. In using Boberg to personify the corporation and capitalism as a system, *Real Humans* thus resembles *Sweatshop*, *1,000 Times Good Night*, and *Pigeon*, in that all four examples critique corporations and capitalism.<sup>230</sup>

### **The Problems of the Precariat**

Compared to the above examples, *Real Humans* complicates the categories privileged and underprivileged by presenting the Hubots as underprivileged but simultaneously casting certain humans as the underprivileged. This brings us back to the fact that the series can also be interpreted literally, as dealing with dreams and fears associated with robotics, including the concern that robots will put humans out of work. In the series, both Roger and Malte embody this fear and consequently represent underprivileged characters, at least as far as their work conditions are concerned. According to Koistinen, "resentment towards the Hubots is mainly negotiated through the character of Roger, who is struggling to cope under the pressures that the Hubots create in his life" (2015, 417). "Through Roger," Koistinen writes, *Real Humans* "addresses issues such as unemployment and alienation from work, family and society", as well as "the so-called crisis of the modern male subject, as Roger can no longer take his status as a husband, a father or the breadwinner of the family for granted" (2015, 417). To this, I would add that while Roger certainly has a more central role than Malte and is, in addition, a more complex character, it is worth looking closer at Malte and his symbolic function in the series.

A white, middle-aged male, Malte is framed as working class, and claims to have been a postman in the past. However, we never see him work during the course of the series, and thus are encouraged to assume that he is unemployed. Indeed, his main concern seems to revolve around how to stage a revolt against the Hubots, using any means necessary, including violence. When Malte is introduced in the third episode, he is already a social

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<sup>230</sup> The former three examples allude to (global) capitalism and multinational corporations through evocative objects in the *mise-en-scène* (e.g. the cylinder in *Pigeon*), and through dialogues that critique specific companies (e.g. H&M in *Sweatshop*, and Boliden in *Pigeon*) or multinational corporations in general (e.g. Rebecca's explanation of the war in Congo in *1,000 Times Good Night*).

outcast and underdog, ready to radicalize Roger, whom he meets during a gathering for “Real Humans” members. Thus, while Roger and Malte both have fraught relationships to Hubot technology, Malte is noticeably more hostile towards Hubots. During the course of the series, Malte’s hostility is variously associated with right-wing political discourse, and the discourse of political revolutions.<sup>231</sup> The “Real Humans” gathering takes place in the evening and has about thirty something attendees, but Malte is one of the few who gets up to speak his mind, as seen when he criticizes the chairman of the organization for being too lenient on Hubots. Unlike the chairman, who is dressed in a suit and has blonde, slicked-back hair, Malte is dressed in a faded green shirt and trousers (Fig. 26). In a statement that echoes right-wing political discourse, Malte says, addressing everyone in the room: “Soon there will only be a few hundred of us left. Don’t you get it? Wake up! Soon we’ll be working for them.” [“Men snart är det ju bara några hundra människor kvar. Fattar ni inte? Vakna! Det er ju snart vi som jobbar för dem.”] Connotations to right-wing politics are also evoked visually, through the logo of the “Real Humans” party, which we see in a long shot during this scene (Fig. 27). The logo consists of a red drop (resembling a drop of blood), superimposed on two raised hands (in black). While the two hands may be seen as hands raised in prayer, they also bring to mind the Nazi salute, since they are raised, straight, and tilted at an angle.



Figs. 26–7: Malte (left) and the “Real Humans” members at large (right).

Together with Roger and Bea (Marie Robertson) – the latter being a cop whom, we gradually learn, is a liberated Hubot in disguise – Malte forms a separate, reactionary political group, for which Malte passionately draws up a new, political manifesto. Despite his firm political beliefs, however, Malte is not presented as a potential political leader, but rather, as a neurotic, maladjusted, lonely, and neurotic individual. As the series develops, the viewer

<sup>231</sup> Notably, in the latter half of the series, Malte’s hostility towards Hubots is also given a more psychological explanation: He is framed as someone who is in fact sexually attracted to Hubots, but suppresses that desire. In short, *Real Humans* associates Malte with the idea of the homophobe who is a suppressed homosexual.

learns that Malte lives with his mother in a tenement block, where he hides weapons in his bedroom. With the exception of Roger and Bea, Malte does not seem to have much of a social life. Taken together, these aspects of Malte's life not only make him seem unreliable and pathological, but also delegitimize his concerns. More specifically, his fear of and anger towards Hubots come across less as legitimate and urgent concerns in the 21st century, and more as the warped thoughts of a paranoid man. As importantly, by the end of the series, Malte is symbolically punished, as seen when he is murdered by Niska, the cunning, self-proclaimed leader of the liberated Hubots. In the ninth and penultimate episode, Niska – a Hubot counterpart to Malte and his violent tendencies – tracks Malte down and kills him in the basement of his tenement block. During his final moments, Malte tries to flee from Niska by hiding in the laundry room, behind sheets of white bed linen hanging to dry, but he eventually runs out of layers to hide behind. When Niska stabs him in the stomach and leaves him to die, it not only suggests that Niska is the more intelligent and powerful of the two, but also symbolically punishes Malte's character, and challenges his fear that Hubots will lead to unemployment.

It is in one sense not surprising that Malte is ultimately punished in *Real Humans*. Part of his role in the series is to embody right-wing extremism, and given that *Real Humans* is co-produced and funded by SVT, one might expect the series to distance itself from such extreme views. Conversely, Malte is not reducible a right-wing extremist, since he also seems to embody the role of the precariat. While several scholars have theorized this term, development studies scholar Guy Standing defines “the precariat” as “a distinct socio-economic group” and as “a class-in-the-making” (2011, 7) in *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. As Standing (2011) notes, the precariat includes people who lack, among other things, various “forms of labour-related security” (10), “a work-based” or “occupational” identity (12), and a sense of belonging to “a solidaristic labour community” (13). In short, various types of lack thus define the precariat. As importantly, the precariat is also marked by the experience of certain emotions: “The precariat experiences the four A's – anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation”, as Standing writes (19).

In *Real Humans*, both Malte and Roger fit aspects of the precariat, but it is the former whose situation appears the most precarious, given that Malte is serially unemployed. Malte also most clearly embodies the “danger” that Standing associated with the precariat. As seen in the opening of *The Precariat*, Standing warns that the increase in “labour market flexibility” has led to the creation of “a global ‘precariat’, consisting of many millions around the world without an anchor of stability”, and these people form “a new dangerous class” that

is “prone to listen to ugly voices, and to use their votes and money to give those voices a political platform of increasing influence” (1). Later in the book, Standing elaborates on the “danger” that the precariat represents, stating that a group that sees “no future of security or identity will feel fear and frustration that could lead to it lashing out at identifiable or imagined causes of its lot” (2011, 25). The character in *Real Humans* who comes the closest to representing the precariat, Malte, seems more one-dimensional than the other characters in the series, including both privileged humans such as Inger, and the Hubots who, in an allegorical interpretation, symbolize exploited human workers. While the liberated Hubots may initially seem to embody aspects of the precariat, the Hubots differ significantly from the precariat in one key way, namely, that they may not be able to feel the emotions that define the precariat, i.e. anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation. Ultimately, Malte is the precariat in *Real Humans* and, I would argue, a character that the series makes problematically simple. Consequently, the series also renders Malte’s concern that robots will lead to unemployment – a pressing and important concern, to say the least – less complex and less central than other issues in the series.<sup>232</sup>

## Conclusion

Out of my four examples, *Real Humans* seems to most evidently tackle the relationship between privilege and work – both in the sense that having work can be a form of privilege, and that being unemployed can amount to a *loss* of privilege. This is not to suggest that being employed should necessarily be thought of as a form of privilege – after all, work can also be grueling and linked to exploitation and suffering. Moreover, as scholar of liberal studies McKenzie Wark writes in an essay on the Occupy Wall Street movement: “To have work, security, a little left over at the end of the week. *This is not privilege. It’s a right*” (Wark 2011, my emphasis).<sup>233</sup> Nor does being unemployed necessarily have to be seen as a loss of privilege. Nevertheless, *Real Humans* seems to screen privilege as closely connected to work.

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<sup>232</sup> The influence of robots is not a central part of Standing’s argument in *The Precariat*, but he mentions robots in a 2016 article, published on the website of the *World Economic Forum*. In this article, he advocates for a basic income for every legal citizen and lists as arguments for a basic income that it “would be a defensive strategy against *the march of the robots*” (2016). He adds: “Evidence is mixed for the claim that robots and other forms of automation are about to displace human labour on a huge scale, leading to an era of mass unemployment. However, what is clear is that the new technologies are disruptive, have increased the ease by which corporations can redesign and relocate production and labour, and have added to the growing inequality and insecurity. It is those aspects that deserve our immediate attention” (2016).

<sup>233</sup> In the same paragraph, Wark also calls the “language of privilege” “reactionary”. I take Wark’s comment to refer specifically to neoliberal rhetoric that describes access to work as something the individual must struggle to deserve as a matter of each individual’s own responsibility (this view contrasts with the idea that employment is, to a large extent, a product of social and political circumstances beyond the control of the individual worker).

Through Malte and Roger, the series connects the *loss* of work to a loss of privilege. Meanwhile, through Inger's relationship to Inger, it suggests that being privileged entails an ability to avoid certain kinds of work and to have someone else (or something else) perform the work instead. At the same time, the act of outsourcing care work and household work in particular appears to bring with its own set of problems in *Real Humans*, including a fear of becoming *too* privileged. The series' emphasis on employment, including Malte and Roger as unemployed, can be seen in light of the Scandinavian context in which the series was made. As the editors of *Egalitarianism in Scandinavia: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* state, employment takes on particular importance in the Scandinavian context:

An important characteristic of the Scandinavian welfare state model is the organization of the labor market . . . *Arbeidslinjen*, a directive prioritizing employment, has become a central feature: it dictates that in order to maintain a high level of welfare spending, people must engage in productive work. There is a presumption that a universal, "generous" welfare state rests on a well-functioning and strongly regulated labor market, and that this is not sustainable if some people or groups are not participating in the labor market. (Bendixsen, Bringslid, and Vike 2018, 22)<sup>234</sup>

The emphasis on employment in the Scandinavian countries helps explain why, in Scandinavia as well as in *Real Humans*, being unemployed is associated with loss – be it a loss of privilege, of pride, of purpose in life, or of one's position as a citizen that contributes to society at large.

*Real Humans* also connects the experience of being privileged with the act of witnessing the suffering of less advantaged others. Yet, the series stages a different kind of face-to-face encounter between privileged and unprivileged characters than *Sweatshop* and *1,000 Times Good Night* does. For while Inger fervently believes that the liberated Hubots need her help, it remains unclear whether the Hubots are sentient and, as a result, potential victims. *Real Humans* thus invites the viewer to reflect on the question: How do you know whether someone else is, in fact, underprivileged and in need your help? From a postcolonial perspective, *Real Humans* thus foregrounds ideas of otherness, and makes it hard for the

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Various scholars, including sociologist Nikolas Rose (1989) and political theorist Wendy Brown (2015), have pointed out connections between neoliberal rhetoric and a focus on self-responsibility, or "responsibilization" (for a relevant, and brief, overview of contemporary discourses on responsibility, see Trnka and Trundle 2017).

<sup>234</sup> The Norwegian *arbeidslinjen* translates to the work line in English, and has a Swedish equivalent, i.e. *arbetslinjen*. What I have omitted from the quoted excerpt is a reference to Brochmann 2016.

viewer to fully grasp the Other, as embodied by the figure of the Hubot. As importantly, the series also complicates the relationship between privileged and underprivileged characters by casting in the role as the underprivileged not only Hubots such as Mimi but also certain humans, such as Malte. Depending on whether one interprets the series or – more accurately, a given scene in the series – allegorically or literally, the figure of the underprivileged appears to shift and change during the course of the series. If we extend this point further, even Inger can to some extent be understood as privileged in certain sense (in terms of her occupation and socio-economic situation), but disadvantaged in other senses (for instance, by virtue of being a woman who is faced with gendered expectations of what an ideal mother is). This is not to suggest that *Real Humans* represents Inger as underprivileged, but rather, to point out that what constitutes privilege (and the lack thereof) may be less stable than it may at first appear.

Taken together, the analyses in this study all shed light on privilege as something you are *part of*, something you *have*, something you *are*, and something you *negotiate* (see my definition of privilege in Chapter 1). In *Real Humans*, we see the ways in which privilege may be thought of as something you have through the depiction of characters that lose their privileges. That privilege is something you are pertains especially to the distinction between humans and Hubots – most humans are more privileged and advantaged than Hubots by virtue of *being* human. As I explain in the next, concluding chapter, however, *Real Humans* can also be seen as the example that most evidently screens privilege as something you negotiate – that is, as an aspect of one's identity that one struggles over, constructs, and actively grapples with.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

In the early 21st century, a moment in history when the consequences of globalization are increasingly felt, the Scandinavian region provides an especially fruitful context for thinking about global injustice, privilege, and responsibility. Not only are the Scandinavian countries imagined, both domestically and internationally, as peaceful and peace-building nations invested in egalitarianism at home and humanitarianism abroad; they are also regarded as privileged, resourceful, and affluent countries whose citizens live fairly comfortable lives compared to people in other parts of the world. These two notions – of being morally good and being comfortable – influence how Scandinavia and Scandinavian people are imagined in the current era. The two notions need not necessarily conflict with one another, but when they do, they get to the heart of what makes privilege, and the experience of being privileged, a complex issue. After all, to become conscious of your own privileged position entails that you acknowledge that social inequality exists. This may in turn lead to awareness that you are implicated in structural injustice, even responsible for alleviating it. In the latter case, becoming aware of one's own privileges may throw into question a person's sense of identity, particularly their sense of somehow being uninvolved in structural injustice. Moreover, grappling with how to be both a privileged and a responsible or morally good person is no simple matter, as suggested not only by scholars researching privilege, but also by my previous analyses of contemporary Scandinavian audio-visual narratives that screen privilege.

As this study has shown, contemporary Scandinavian film and media explore the intricate connections between being privileged, being aware of global injustice, and feeling responsible. The study has been guided by two key questions: How is the relationship between global injustice, privilege, and responsibility represented in four selected examples, and in what ways do the examples in question relate to social and political issues in 21st-century Scandinavia? To answer these questions, I have focused on four examples made in Scandinavia during the 2010s and analyzed them on a textual level (both formally and thematically) and shown how they relate to the context in which they were made: early 21st-century Scandinavia. The four examples in question – the web series *Sweatshop* (2014), the two feature films *1,000 Times Good Night* (Erik Poppe, 2013) and *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* (Roy Andersson, 2014), and the TV drama *Real Humans* (2012–2014)



– were chosen based on their having thematic commonalities. For one, they explore the relationship between Scandinavia and the world, and revolve around protagonists who are either positioned as or associated with privileged people from Scandinavia or the Global North. While all four examples thematize global injustice, responsibility, and privilege, my analyses have shown that they touch on a variety of topical socio-political issues in the Scandinavian region, such as globalization, egalitarianism, the historical legacy of imperialism, and recent and future changes in the Scandinavian labor markets. There are also significant variations on the formal level, since the examples draw on different narrative strategies, tropes, and conventions in genres spanning from reality TV to melodrama, art cinema, and science fiction. Bringing together these four examples has allowed me to analyze a range of media in which privilege is screened in contemporary Scandinavian film and media.

A central aim of this study, then, has been to discuss the ways that the four examples screen privilege – that is, how they represent privilege on a screen, and in the process construct, reproduce, and engage with existing notions of privilege. These notions include ideas about *who* constitutes the privileged at a given time and place, *how* privileged people should behave and feel in order to inhabit their privilege in morally acceptable ways, in addition to *whether and why* the privileged acknowledge the underprivileged and the existence of structural injustice. In my analyses, I have used privilege to shed light on my chosen examples, but also shown how the examples can shed light on theoretical approaches to privilege. As I argued in Chapter 1, the emerging scholarship on privilege suggests that privilege can be understood in at least four ways: as something you *are part of*, something you *have*, something you *are*, and something you *negotiate*. The first two approaches frame privilege as something extrinsic to individuals and groups, whereas the latter two notions imagine privilege as something more intrinsic, as forming part of an individual's or a group's identity. The four understandings of privilege are not mutually exclusive and can, when taken together, shed light on different aspects of the experience of being and/or feeling privileged. When applied to the films and series in this study, they can also illuminate how privilege is screened in a variety of ways.

Indeed, while all four approaches to privilege can be applied to the audio-visual narratives I have examined, it is also useful to think about how each approach may be mapped onto one of the four examples. The first notion of privilege (as something you are *part of*) can be related to *Pigeon* and its representation of Jonathan. While Jonathan himself is not all that privileged, he seems to feel, at the end of the film, as though he is associated with privileged people and *their* acts of violence, and consequently feels guilty and responsible. In other

words, the film seems to suggest that Jonathan is guilty by association and privileged by association, so to say. The second notion of privilege (as something you *have*) can be connected to *1,000 Times Good Night* and its protagonist, Rebecca, since the latter to a large degree embodies someone who *has* a number of privileges and, moreover, is able to actively use her privileges to *do* something about global injustice – or at least, that is what she hopes and aims to do. Unlike Jonathan, who seems paralyzed by his being part of an unjust world, Rebecca comes across as far more active, as an agent who can at least try to use her privilege to instigate social change. Meanwhile, the third notion of privilege (as something you *are*) fits well with *Sweatshop* and its emphasis on three youth consumers from Norway who are not only framed as being privileged, but also as undergoing a personal transformation. Identity is thus a key aspect in the series, since the three participants are to a large extent defined by their being privileged and by their gradually realizing how privileged they are. Lastly, the fourth notion of privilege (as something you *negotiate*) can be connected to *Real Humans*, specifically its representation of Inger’s ambivalent relationship to Mimi. Inger’s paradoxical behavior around Mimi brings to mind the ways in which people struggle with how to inhabit their privileges in morally acceptable ways and construct their identities as privileged, as discussed by sociologists and others who research privilege.

In this conclusion, I summarize my analyses in the past four chapters, and discuss my key findings as well as the consequences of my overall approach. I then comment on the implications that this study has for film and media studies, Scandinavian studies, and privilege studies, in addition to pointing out possible avenues for future research.

### **Summary of Analyses**

In Chapter 3, “*Sweatshop – Deadly Fashion: Shaming and Blaming Multinational Corporations and Norwegian Youth Consumers*”, I showed how *Sweatshop* screens privilege and injustice by staging a social experiment in which three youth consumers from Norway are chosen to travel to Cambodia, where they learn about sweatshop labor. The series draws attention to the unjust working conditions in textile factories in the Global South, and thus restores to visibility a form of injustice that is usually hidden from many consumers’ view. *Sweatshop* draws specifically on the reality TV genre and constructs a narrative of personal transformation, framing the three participants as relatively naïve consumers who gradually learn to appreciate the working and living conditions of textile factory workers in Cambodia. As importantly, the participants are also shown to recognize sweatshop factory workers’ political struggle for a fair wage. All three eventually become budding political activists

themselves. At first glance, *Sweatshop* appears to explicitly blame and shame multinational clothing companies, and therefore fits into a longer critical debate about the impact of globalization, the increasing power of multinational corporations, and the problem of mass consumption. Upon closer examination, however, the series implicitly blames and shames youth consumers – especially young women consumers. As I argued, the series reinforces gendered ideas about young women as ideal agents for humanitarianism and social change on the one hand, and as vain and irresponsible consumers on the other. The story that *Sweatshop* tells about global injustice is thus hopeful, but also problematic, since it appears to frame young women consumers as disproportionately responsible both for causing, and for alleviating, global injustice.

The role of gender and the relationship between privileged people in the Global North and underprivileged people in the Global South are also central issues in Chapter 4, “*1,000 Times Good Night: Troubling Conflict Photography and Global Motherhood*”. If *Sweatshop* focuses on what Johan Galtung (2013) calls “structural violence”, then *1,000 Times Good Night* revolves more explicitly around “direct violence”.<sup>235</sup> *1,000 Times Good Night* screens privilege and injustice through the figure of Rebecca (Juliette Binoche), a white, French conflict photographer whose job it is to witness and mediate injustices in the world’s conflict zones. That Rebecca is also a mother and wife forces her to grapple with a conflict between her two circles of concern: one pertaining to her own family and the other pertaining to distant strangers who live in war- and poverty-stricken countries in the Global South. As I showed, *1,000 Times Good Night* draws on both narrative conventions in the melodramatic genre and long-standing, often heroic myths about journalists and conflict photographers. In addition, the film plays on ideas of the “good Norwegian” (or Scandinavian) and occasionally appears to border on what Matthew W. Hughey (2008) calls a “white savior film”, as seen in the film’s use of saviorism tropes. In certain pivotal moments in the film, Rebecca’s role as a mother becomes closely intertwined with an idea that she should help people, especially children, in the Global South. *1,000 Times Good Night* thus exemplifies a general tendency to frame white mothers as “global mothers”, as Raka Shome (2011) calls it. Ultimately, *1,000 Times Good Night* breaks with the typical white savior film, but reproduces Eurocentric discourse in the sense that it frequently elides the influence of past and present governments in the Global North on political instability in the Global South. This elision is paradoxical for

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<sup>235</sup> For more on Galtung’s concepts of violence, see Chapter 2.

a film that clearly tries to thematize global injustice, responsibility, and the relationship between the Global North and the Global South.

Unlike *Sweatshop* and *1,000 Times Good Night*, which focus primarily on global injustice in the contemporary era, the film I examined in Chapter 5 is noticeably more concerned with the historical past, including the history of colonialism and slavery. In Chapter 5, “*A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence: Historicizing Privilege and Injustice*”, I focused on the anachronistic tableaux in *Pigeon* and connected them to what Michael Rothberg (2009) calls “anachronistic aesthetics”. Following Rothberg, I argued that a deliberate use of anachronisms can have a subversive and creative potential. In *Pigeon*, the use of anachronistic tableaux is part and parcel of how the film challenges common conceptions of history and raises questions about more laudatory notions of Sweden as a politically neutral, egalitarian, and “happy” nation. Drawing on David Bordwell’s ([1979] 2002) definition of art cinema and Thomas Elsaesser’s (2014) concept of “guilt management” in cinema, I argued that *Pigeon* uses anachronisms to evoke questions of responsibility and guilt for injustice in the historical past. By analyzing key anachronistic scenes in the film, I showed how the film refers in particular to *Stormaktstiden* (“the Great Power Era”), i.e. the period during the 17th and early 18th centuries when Sweden was an empire, and thus broaches a topic that is often avoided in Scandinavian cinema and public discourse. Moreover, *Pigeon* uses anachronisms to associate European colonization in the past with global capitalism in present. Ultimately, the film’s play with history and time invites the viewer to consider multiple instances of injustice and forms of privilege at once. In doing so, the film also raises questions about the neat parceling of time into the past, present, and future, and affirms the importance of reflecting on how systems of injustice and privilege in the historical past linger on in the present.

Chapter 6, “*Real Humans: Negotiating Privilege in an Alternative Sweden*”, discussed the ways in which the sci-fi TV series *Real Humans* screens privilege by temporally displacing, into an alternative universe, contemporary socio-political and ethical issues related to privilege. By pursuing both an allegorical and literal interpretation of *Real Humans*, I discussed how the series not only sheds light on privilege and injustice from different angles, but also screens different characters as privileged and underprivileged. As I argued, the series explores the extent to which being privileged may entail, to use Rachel Sherman’s words, a concern with how to inhabit one’s privilege in “a morally worthy way” (2017a, 10). The series tackles this issue especially through the ambivalent relationship between two of the characters, Inger and Mimi. When interpreted allegorically, Mimi brings to mind a human au

pair or domestic worker – a figure that seems to trigger questions about egalitarianism and the consequences of globalization, at least in the context of contemporary Scandinavia. When interpreted more literally, the series draws attention to a pressing issue that is closely related to privilege and structural injustice – namely, the impact of robotics on human employment. As I argued, the series explores this topic through characters such as Malte, a figure who unlike Inger symbolizes the *loss* of privilege in the Global North – including the sense of fear and anger which that loss can engender.

### **Key Findings**

My first key finding concerns the fact that, across the four examples in this study, the relationship between privilege, global injustice, and responsibility is foregrounded through the use of two narrative strategies in particular. The first of these is a tendency to stage face-to-face encounters between privileged characters and less privileged, suffering others, while the second is a tendency to focus on goods that privileged individuals consume. The staging of face-to-face encounters may at first glance seem like a pretty obvious, even simple, strategy. After all, creating encounters between individual characters can be an effective means of visualizing global injustice, an issue that may otherwise seem fairly abstract. Across the various examples, however, these face-to-face encounters take on different forms.

In *1,000 Times Good Night*, for instance, encounters between the privileged and the underprivileged is, due to Rebecca’s role as a conflict photographer, related to the act of witnessing and mediating the suffering of others. While Rebecca seems somewhat aware that her presence as a photographer can shape, also in negative ways, how events unfold in the world’s conflict zones, she is generally not depicted as someone who feels complicit or involved in violence. *Pigeon* resembles and differs from *1,000 Times Good Night* in that it also features the figure of the witness (i.e. Jonathan), but represents that witness as someone who feels complicit in the violence he witnesses – as he puts it, he feels “involved”. Moreover, *Pigeon* represents the face-to-face encounter between privileged and underprivileged in a far more ambiguous fashion than *1,000 Times Good Night* does. As mentioned earlier, Jonathan is not really depicted as someone who is privileged, and it is never clearly established whether he has, in fact, witnessed an act of violence or merely had some sort of nightmare. Thus, as a witness figure, Jonathan is an unreliable figure. His purpose is, perhaps, not to point out guilty culprits (as Rebecca seems able to do) but rather, to invite the viewer to consider the questions: For which events in the past should we feel a sense of guilt? And who constitutes this guilty “we”? As importantly, Jonathan’s response to his encounter with the suffering of less

advantaged others furthermore raises the question of what guilt can do – that is, whether guilt can be a politically motivating emotion, or whether it, on the contrary, has a paralyzing, demotivating effect (as discussed in Chapter 2). In the case of *Pigeon*, Jonathan’s relative lack of agency may seem rather pessimistic, but the film as a whole and Andersson’s role as a director is evidently not reducible to Jonathan’s position: In short, while Jonathan may not be able to do much with his sense of guilt, Andersson – who himself repeatedly talks of his own sense of collective guilt (as mentioned in Chapter 5) – does have agency, and is clearly able to channel his sense of guilt into making critically acclaimed films about guilt, responsibility, injustice, and privilege.

Generally, the four examples use the staging of face-to-face encounters between privileged and underprivileged characters to suggest that privilege cannot be isolated from injustice and that those who are privileged should be confronted with the suffering of less advantaged others. At the same time, the consequences of these encounters also hint at how difficult it can be to respond to injustice. We see this not only in the case of Jonathan, but also in the ambiguous final scene in *1,000 Times Good Night*, where Rebecca seems deeply uncertain as to what her role as a conflict photographer (and human) really is. A closely related theme is the difficulty on the part of the witness to *communicate* to others what one has seen, and what one believes is at stake. Again, Jonathan in *Pigeon* is an instructive example, since he does not seem to be understood by those around him. Similarly, Inger in *Real Humans* finds that she and her husband have radically different conceptions of responsibility, with Inger insisting that they help and protect a group (i.e. the liberated Hubots) that her husband does not see as potential victims but rather, as a source of conflict.

Meanwhile, the second narrative strategy draws attention to the manner in which the consumption of material objects indirectly connect the privileged to the underprivileged, and can be intricately related to questions of identity. This strategy is typically combined with the staging of face-to-face encounters, as seen in both *Sweatshop* and *Real Humans*. In the former example, the consumption of clothes is part of the reason that the three participants from Norway become (or rather, are shown to become) aware of unfair working conditions in the global textile industry. *Sweatshop* is at the same time structured around a journey to Cambodia that leads to face-to-face encounters between the participants on the one hand and workers and political activists in Cambodia on the other. In the series, clothes function as a metonym for exploitative practices in the global capitalist system, and the consumption of clothes becomes a symbolic reminder that people in the Global North are implicated in systems of privilege and injustice – and on an everyday basis at that. After all, clothes are

something you put on your body and feel on your skin, not a mere abstract concept. When the clothes you wear turn out to be made in sweatshop factories, by workers laboring in hazardous and unjust conditions, this not only links the otherwise abstract concept of global injustice to your everyday life: It may also raise questions about your sense of self. While clothing is often seen as an important part of or expression of people's identities, *Sweatshop* illustrates how clothing can be part and parcel of one's identity as privileged as well.

Meanwhile, in *Real Humans*, the ambivalent relationship Inger has to Mimi the Hubot is shaped both by the act of consuming a certain product and of having a face-to-face encounter with someone less fortunate than oneself. After all, while Mimi is, at least initially, a product or service that Inger and her family consumes, the Hubot gradually becomes a figure towards whom Inger feels sympathetic. The relationship between Mimi and Inger thematizes both the ethical consequences of consumption, and the question of what to do when you witness someone else's suffering. *Real Humans* is thus comparable to *Sweatshop*, even if the former draws more attention to the question of what can or cannot be bought and sold, as well as whom or what is defined as a "real human".

In the 21st century, those who produce consumer goods and those who consume those products are intricately related to the globalization of work, and to the global production networks that not only transcend national jurisdictions, but often "defy both understanding and regulation" (Vallas 2012, 134). The examples in this study which focus on consumption ask what ethical implications these global flows of labor and goods mean to privileged consumers. They also explore how the relationship between privileged consumers and unprivileged workers is often an ambivalent one – a relationship can be shaped at once by convenience, dependence, and exploitation. As Martin Luther King Jr. put it in a sermon in 1967: "Before you get through eating breakfast in the morning, you're dependent on more than half the world".<sup>236</sup> King Jr.'s statement comes at the end of a longer anecdote, in which he mentions how a number of everyday objects – from the soap and towel in our bathrooms, to the coffee, tea, and bread in our kitchens – have been "handed" to us by strangers in far-away countries. By referring to how his audience is "served" and "given" things by others, King Jr. conjures up the notion of a hierarchy, yet he ultimately tells his listeners: *we* are the dependent ones, "dependent on more than half the world".

Since King Jr. spoke these words in the late 1960s, the relationship between those who produce consumer goods and those who purchase them has changed in considerable ways.

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<sup>236</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. delivered the sermon (titled "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life") on April 9, 1967, at New Covenant Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois (King Jr. 1967).

While it is beyond the scope of my discussion to chart the economic changes in the last six decades, it is important to note that the period since the 1970s has been marked by increasing deregulation and liberalization of the economy, or what is often referred to as neoliberalization (see Harvey 2005). In the same period, the power of multinational corporations has skyrocketed, with the majority of the world's most powerful multinational corporations maintaining headquarters in the Global North (Steger 2008, 49). In the 21st century, the asymmetrical power relations between the Global North and the Global South thus seem hard to deny, regardless of whether one ascribes to neoliberal discourse and ideology (e.g. a belief in free trade and so-called "trickle-down economics", or what Steger [2008] calls "market globalism") or considers neoliberal policies and processes as a problem that lead to more, not fewer, inequalities (i.e. "justice globalism", in Steger's [2008] terms). The examples in this study foreground the notion that the contemporary world is shaped by global injustice and that this injustice triggers questions of responsibility and guilt on the part of the privileged – especially, but not only, on the part of privileged consumers.

My second key finding in this study is that the characters who are screened as privileged and as feeling responsible for alleviating global injustice are by and large females. Indeed, while I chose examples that depicted privileged protagonists of different backgrounds (be it in terms of age, gender, class, work situation, and nationality), my analyses suggest that women (including young women) are more often than not framed as the privileged characters who witness the suffering of others and want to prevent structural injustice. Three of the four examples foreground the role of women. *Sweatshop* admittedly revolves around altogether three youths from Norway, but focuses especially on the two female participants and their consumption and journeys towards political activism. Both *1,000 Times Good Night* and *Real Humans* feature female protagonists whose responsibilities as mothers conflict with their responsibilities towards suffering others. For Rebecca in *1,000 Times Good Night* and Inger in *Real Humans*, motherhood is also used to frame the characters as caring and responsible. Moreover, in *1,000 Times Good Night*, we see the transformation of Rebecca's teenage daughter Steph, who learns about global injustice and witnesses, both vicariously and directly, the suffering of others and consequently becomes an advocate for humanitarian work.

This begs the question: Why females? Part of the answer might have something to do with real and perceived gender roles in the Scandinavian societies. More specifically, framing women as at once privileged and responsible figures may be understood as an attempt at giving women, including young women, agency. In a similar vein, another possible reason pertains to discourses on global feminism and global sisterhood, an issue Oxfeldt



(forthcoming) discusses in her analysis of recent Scandinavian novels about privileged women and their relationship to *au pairs*. As I discuss in Chapters 3–4, images of white women (including girls) as capable of helping, or wanting to help or even save, non-white women and children can be seen in light of tendencies in contemporary humanitarian discourse and maternalistic discourses. The latter is a maternalistic counterpart to the paternalistic thinking that undergirds, and has undergirded, Eurocentric and imperialistic discourse and practices. While both maternalistic and paternalistic discourses have a long history (see Chapter 4), the latter has arguably been more problematized. Contemporary attempts at depicting women instead of men as well-meaning and responsible figures may thus be a means of sidestepping more paternalistic discourses. This may, however inadvertently, lead to the reproduction of older tropes, including the journey of white protagonists to exotic, faraway countries, where they witness violence and chaos and must grapple with their own relationship to non-white others.

*Pigeon* represents a striking exception to the tendency to cast women as the privileged who feel compelled to take responsibility for less fortunate others, centering as it does on a male duo. Andersson himself describes Jonathan and Sam as characters influenced by his “favorite classic odd couples” in the history of film, literature, and theater, including Laurel and Hardy, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza in Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, and Vladimir and Estragon in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (Pham 2014). While some of these “odd couples”, including Vladimir and Estragon, are conventionally seen as symbolizing the human condition, it is worth pointing out that they are all men. (Absurdist theater, a category in which Beckett’s plays are often placed, is generally quite centered on male characters, despite being seen as plays about the human condition.) The focus on a male duo in *Pigeon* might also be influenced by the fact that film explores war, imperialism, and colonialism in the historical past – phenomena that may be associated more with men than with women (in the sense that men are perhaps more likely to be imagined as perpetrators of these forms of violence). A third point that might be worth mentioning is that Andersson has previously been criticized for giving female characters peripheral roles in his films (Lundblad 2000; see also Lindqvist 2016, 26). *Pigeon* may, in other words, be a continuation of that tendency.

### **Reflections on Methodological and Theoretical Approach**

My decision to focus on four examples (rather than providing a larger survey) makes it important to ask: What are these four examples, and my findings, *representative* of? Since my

study is qualitative rather than quantitative and concentrates on a small sample of audio-visual narratives, my findings are not generalizable to the wider body of contemporary Scandinavian film and media. As mentioned in the introduction, I selected my examples based on specific thematic criteria, namely themes such as the relationship between Scandinavia and Scandinavians and the world, global injustice, and responsibility. As a result, my study necessarily gives the impression that contemporary Scandinavian film and media deal with precisely the themes I was looking for. There are, however, numerous examples of films and series made in contemporary Scandinavia that do not tackle these themes at all, or touch on them only in a cursory manner. Briefly put, my examples are but a small sample from the wide array of audio-visual narratives in contemporary Scandinavia, many of which do not embody what Steger (2008) calls a “global imaginary” nor fit neatly into what I have described as “screening privilege”.

Nevertheless, my specific examples and my findings can be understood in light of what the “ScanGuilt” project suggests is a tendency in contemporary Scandinavian culture. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, that tendency can be summed up as a propensity for narratives of various kinds (literary, filmic, pedagogical, or political) to touch on an uneasy awareness of global inequality – an unease that stems from one’s feeling privileged when others are not, and often not knowing what to *do* with that unease. My own study explores this tendency by focusing on four audio-visual narratives from recent years and providing a “thick description” of these examples, i.e. situating them within a Scandinavian socio-political, cultural, and historical context. As I see it, these examples are not representative of Scandinavian film and media at large, but they are to some extent representative of broader discourses in Scandinavia (on privilege, globalization, egalitarianism, gender, history, and the role of the Scandinavian countries in the world). My four examples can be seen as attempts at reflecting on what it means to be Scandinavian in the contemporary world, especially if we understand them alongside the larger body of “ScanGuilt”-themed narratives in contemporary Scandinavia. In addition, they seem influenced by tropes, generic conventions, and ideological tendencies outside of Scandinavia, as seen in my discussion of the “white savior” figure, for instance (see Chapters 3–4). In the case of my second finding – that female protagonists tend to be associated with privilege and responsibility for global injustice – this is a tendency that also fits into a general trend in contemporary humanitarian discourse (perhaps especially in the Global North), whereby women, including young women, are framed as privileged, resourceful, and humanitarian (see Chapter 4).

Analyzing four examples from a specific historical period, i.e. the 2010s, has also allowed me to provide a cultural analysis of a particular moment in Scandinavian history. Treating 21st-century Scandinavia as my overarching framework has enabled me to shed light on how the examples grapple with contemporary issues in the Scandinavian region, and what I have described as a tension between notions of Scandinavia as a benevolent, humanitarian region on the one hand and as privileged and implicated in global injustice on the other. At the same time, I have also zoomed out from the Scandinavian context from time to time and considered how my examples may be influenced by broader tendencies. These tendencies include narrative and generic conventions within specific media, Eurocentric discourses, and social, political and economic issues associated with 21st-century globalization. Where relevant, I have considered national differences within the Scandinavian region. Focusing on a small sample has furthermore allowed me to analyze the chosen examples at a textual level while also situating them within a broader socio-cultural and historical context. It was my intention from the start to combine textual analysis and contextualization, since I see the analysis of social context as one of the key contributions that a Cultural Studies approach brings to film studies. One of the pitfalls of the same approach is, however, a disregard for medium specificity and the “text” itself – a pitfall I have sought to avoid precisely by analyzing each example formally (not only thematically).

My commitment to combining textual analysis and contextualization necessarily puts limitations on how many examples I could discuss in this study. Indeed, while I initially planned to include more Scandinavian films among my examples, I decided to provide in-depth analyses of four examples in particular. That I chose these particular four examples was partly shaped by my decision to shed light on less researched examples within Scandinavian film and media and consequently expand the scope of the existing scholarship on Scandinavian cultural productions. For this reason, I decided to exclude Bier’s films (as mentioned in the introduction), as well as Norwegian director Sara Johnsen’s ensemble film *Upperdog* (2009), and Swedish director Lukas Moodysson’s melodramatic feature film *Mammoth* (*Mammut*, 2009) – two films that can also be, and have been, discussed in light of privilege, global injustice, and responsibility.<sup>237</sup> Other examples were omitted more because of a lack of space. This was the case with Annette K. Olesen’s *The Shooter* (*Skytten*, 2013) (which I mention in a footnote in Chapter 4), a film that deals with the responsibilities of privileged people in a world shaped by global injustice. Unlike my chosen examples, however,

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<sup>237</sup> See Dancus 2014 for an analysis of *Upperdog*. For analyses of *Mammoth*, see Stenport 2012, Nilsson 2014, Käätä 2014, and Björklund 2016.

*The Shooter* also touches on the subject of global warming and the ecological dimension of globalization and can, like *Mammoth*, be discussed in an ecocritical perspective (see Kääpä 2014). In my chosen examples, there is by contrast a striking disregard for environmental issues – an absence that is perhaps the most puzzling in the case of *Sweatshop*, a series that tackles the subject of ethical consumption, but does not at any point ask whether consumption itself might be part of the problem.

This brings me to an aspect of my methodology – namely, that I occasionally discuss issues and events that are not foregrounded in my chosen examples. “The point of cultural analysis,” sociologist Eva Illouz writes, “is not to measure cultural practices against what they ought to be or ought to have been but rather to understand how they have come to be what they are and why, in being what they are, they ‘accomplish things’ for people” (2008, 4). In my own analyses, I sometimes linger on what my examples have *not* explicitly represented or emphasized. I do this because such elisions are important for understanding how the films and series in this study “accomplish things” for people (and by “people” I refer to both potential viewers and the makers of the examples). As my analysis of *Sweatshop* suggests, the series’ focus on youth consumers – and especially on young women consumers – can be usefully understood in light of the question: Why not other groups, including adult men who have more spending power than youths? In asking such questions, I have aimed to read against the grain and to point out how a given example *could* have been different. The point is not to simply list *what* is downplayed in my four examples but rather, to discuss *why* things are downplayed. As I claim in several of my chapters, what and who is omitted from these examples is often central to how responsibility for global injustice is distributed.

A central aim of this study has been to explore the multi-faceted meaning of privilege and show how the concept is a useful analytical tool, especially if we consider the connections between privilege, identity, and cultural production. Following Howard (2008) and Sherman (2017a, 2017), I argue that privilege is not merely something that people have and are part of – rather, privilege is also reproduced through the manner in which people imagine and construct their own identities, and the ways in which popular culture represents, and “screens”, privilege. In this study, I have written about privilege with the awareness that the concept can on the one hand be a powerful analytical tool, but that it can, on the other, also become what sociologist Philippe Corcuff calls a “bulldozer” concept – namely, a concept that is “so encompassing that [it] end[s] up flattening the complexity of the social” (Illouz 2008, 4;

Corcuff 2005).<sup>238</sup> The frequency with which privilege as a concept is used in public discourse and everyday speech makes it all the more important to ask what privilege means, or rather, what people mean by privilege.

In this study, I have drawn on different strands of existing research on privilege to develop a working definition of privilege that can shed light on the role of privilege in contemporary Scandinavia. One of the contributions this study makes to privilege studies is to shed light on how, in the Scandinavian context, notions of national (e.g. Norwegian) or regional identities (e.g. Scandinavian, European, the Global North) may be a significant factor in how privilege is understood and imagined. Moreover, while I generally adopt an intersectional approach to privilege in this study – addressing how notions of privilege are shaped by factors such as national/regional identity, gender, age, class, work situation, and race – I consider the issue of race a subject that could, and should, be discussed further in the context of Scandinavian film and media. Racial relations and whiteness are inscribed in all four of my examples (as I mention briefly in each of my analyses). This study could thus have gone into dialogue with the emerging research on race in Scandinavian film (e.g. Pallas 2011). In the following, I propose other avenues for future research, in addition to discussing the implications of my own research.

### **Implications and Suggestions for Future Research**

This study has implications for film and media studies, Scandinavian studies, and privilege studies. Questions worth pursuing further are the extent to which my findings are specific to Scandinavia, and the degree to which they are representative of broader trends in 21st-century film and media. On the one hand, the examples can be understood as grappling with notions of what it means to be Scandinavian and privileged in the 21st century. On the other hand, the Eurocentric tendencies in some of the examples (especially *1,000 Times Good Night*) suggests that these Scandinavian audio-visual narratives are usefully discussed in relation to ideas about Europe, the Global North, and/or “the West” in general. With regards to my second finding, an avenue for further research could be to examine the role of gender in a larger body of audio-visual narratives that thematize humanitarian work (and by “humanitarian work”, I include journalistic work that is framed as having a humanitarian bent, as seen in *1,000 Times*

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<sup>238</sup> Among her examples, Illouz mentions “bio-power”, “surveillance” and several other concepts established by Foucault, a thinker she describes as “brilliant” but whose concepts also have “some fatal flaws: they do not take the critical capacities of actors seriously; they do not ask why actors are often deeply engaged by and engrossed with meanings; and they do not differentiate between social spheres, collapsing them under . . . ‘bulldozer concepts’” (2008, 4).

*Good Night*). Such a study could include the films of Susanne Bier, specifically *In a Better World* and *After the Wedding*, since both of these films revolve around white, male protagonists who do humanitarian work in the Global South.<sup>239</sup>

To explore the degree to which the findings in this study are specific to contemporary Scandinavia, a fruitful approach would be to compare Scandinavian examples with cases from outside of the region. The films and series I have examined in this study could, for instance, be compared to the Hollywood films that Higonnet and Higonnet (2014) describe as “human rights films”, or the movies that Hughey examines in his 2014 book *The White Savior Film*. Since Scandinavian films are commonly discussed precisely in relation to Hollywood, an alternative approach would be to consider examples from, for instance, countries in the Global South, Europe,<sup>240</sup> or Canada. I mention the Global South because the audio-visual narratives I have examined are very much representations of the Global South crafted by practitioners in the Global North, for viewers in the Global North. A meaningful comparative study could thus look at examples that convey the other side of the story, so to say.

Alternatively, one would not really have to look to film or media industries in the Global South to find such narratives: Within Scandinavia, there are noteworthy examples of films and series that wrestle with the experiences of minorities, as exemplified by recent feature films such as Swedish-Sami director Amanda Kernell’s *Sami Blood (Sameblod)*, (2016) and Norwegian-Pakistani director Iram Haq’s *What Will People Say (Hva vil folk si)*, (2017), as well as Norwegian director Thomas Østbye’s collaboration with the refugee Emanuel Agara in the documentary films *Imagining Emanuel* (2011) and *Out of Norway* (2014).<sup>241</sup> The reason I propose a comparative study between Scandinavian and *Canadian* examples stems from the fact that the cultural imagination in Canada is shaped by ideas of peacekeeping (see

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<sup>239</sup> An obvious starting point for a discussion on gender and humanitarianism in Bier’s film is Belinda Smaill’s 2014 article “The Male Sojourner, the Female Director, and Popular European Cinema: The Worlds of Susanne Bier”. For a general overview of research on *In a Better World* and *After the Wedding*, see the opening of Chapter 1.

<sup>240</sup> Relevant European examples include the recent films of Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki, especially *The Other Side of Hope (Toivon tuolla puolen)*, (2017) and *Le Havre* (2011), both of which touch on refugees and the theme of responsibility; the Belgian-French film *The White Knights* (2015, *Les Chevaliers Blancs*), directed by Belgian filmmaker Joachim Lafosse; and the French-German-South African film *Zulu Love Letter* (2004), directed by South African director Ramadan Suleman. While *The White Knights* and *Zulu Love Letter* both revolve around journalists, *Zulu Love Letter* notably follows a black South African female journalist in South Africa during the post-Apartheid era and touches on, among other issues, how she must balance work and family.

<sup>241</sup> To expand on this point, one could include examples not only from Sampí, but also from Greenland and the Faroe Islands, and draw on the growing research on these regions (see Körber and Volquardsen 2014; Körber, MacKenzie and Stenport 2017).

Härting and Kamboureli 2009), and thus shares notable similarities with notions of the Scandinavian nations as *humanitarian* nations.<sup>242</sup>

Besides comparative analyses, another useful approach would be to consider responsibility and guilt in light of contemporary debates on film and ethics. In my own analyses, I have drawn on scholars in moral philosophy, psychology, and political philosophy with an interest in responsibility and guilt, but not engaged directly with what film scholar Asbjørn Grønstad calls “the contemporary ethical turn in cinema” (2016, 55; for more on film and ethics, see Downing and Saxton 2010; Choi and Frey 2014; Sinnerbrink 2016). As Grønstad notes in *Film and the Ethical Imagination*, the turn to ethics in film studies can be divided into three main theoretical approaches or “strands”: one thematic, one conceptual, and one artistic. Since each of these strands could be useful for future research, I summarize them briefly here. The *thematic* strand stems from Holocaust studies, and revolves around what can (or cannot) and should (or should not) be represented, and questions of representation, imagination, debt, and responsibility (Grønstad 2016, 56). Meanwhile, the *conceptual* strand explores the connections between film on the one hand, and philosophy, conceptual thinking, and ethics on the other. Generally building on the work of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, this strand emphasizes “the concept of alterity and the subject’s responsibility toward the other” (Grønstad 2016, 57).<sup>243</sup> The third and final strand is the *artistic* strand, which includes “auteur- or genre-based studies that place their object within an ethical framework” and often revolve around “certain styles of complex (and occasionally controversial) humanist cinema” (Grønstad 2016, 62).<sup>244</sup>

It is beyond scope of this chapter to explore how my own study could fit into each of these strands, but it is worth mentioning that the artistic strand seems especially relevant for

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<sup>242</sup> See also Härting’s analysis of humanitarianism in contemporary Canadian film culture (2013). There are also striking parallels between my own analyses and Barry Freeman’s discussion of recent Canadian plays in his book *Staging Strangers: Theatre and Global Ethics* (2017). In particular, a handful of plays that Freeman refers to as “a new melodrama of globalization”, resemble my own examples in that they thematize globalization, revolve around journey narratives, and stage encounters between privileged individuals from the Global North and suffering strangers in the Global South (see Freeman 2017, 84–110).

<sup>243</sup> The conceptual strand includes the considerable amount of research that uses the theories of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas as its starting point (Grønstad 2016, 55; see also Downing and Saxton 2010, 1–5).

<sup>244</sup> For a different overview of existing research on film and ethics, see Jinhee Choi and Mattias Frey’s introduction to the anthology *Cine-Ethics: Ethical Dimensions of Film Theory, Practice, and Spectatorship* (2014). In Grønstad’s (2016) summary, Choi and Frey divide scholarship on film and ethics into three perspectives: a revisionist, moral perceptionist, and cognitivist perspective. The *revisionist* perspective has “allegedly [been] embraced by thinkers like Levinas, [philosopher Alain] Badiou, and [film scholar David Norman] Rodowick, [and] aims to connect ethics to philosophical subjects like ontology, epistemology, and metaphysics” (54). The *moral perceptionist* perspective is exemplified by the work of Martha Nussbaum and film and media scholar Vivian Sobchack, and emphasizes “affect and the viewer’s sensorial engagement with the screen” (54). Finally, the *cognitivist* perspective is exemplified by the work of Noël Carroll, Gregory Currie, and Murray Smith, and focuses on “the viewer’s emotional affiliation with on-screen characters” (54).

this study. Given my emphasis on genre (and, in the case of Andersson, the role of the auteur), my analyses could easily be expanded further so as to engage with issues within the artistic strand, including the question: In what ways does cinematography, and “film form” in a broad sense, influence the ethical importance of a given film or scene? For instance, what role does the use of close-ups (or the lack thereof) play?<sup>245</sup> Future research could, moreover, expand on my discussion of responsibility and guilt by considering the potential responsibility of *spectators* and discussing how ethics relates to spectatorship (see Aaron 2007). Another pertinent question is whether audio-visual narratives such as those in my study may not only depict guilt feelings, but potentially also trigger guilt feelings in the viewer. While my own discussion has centered on what Wheatley calls “diegetic guilt”, future research could delve deeper into the issue of “spectatorial guilt”, as Wheatley calls it. A useful starting point in this regard could be film scholar Carl Plantinga’s 2009 book *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator’s Experience*, in which the author explores the role that shame and guilt may play in film spectatorship (2009, 159–66), and the growing scholarship on film and TV that draws on theories of emotions and affect (see, for instance, García 2016).

Finally, what I have referred to as “screening privilege” in this study can also be understood from a more institutional perspective, whereby screening is understood *as* a form of privilege. From this point of view, it becomes important to ask: Who has the privilege to screen privilege in contemporary Scandinavia? This question, which invokes Edward W. Said’s concern with who has the “power to narrate” (1993, xiii), could be the starting point for a discussion on gender imbalance in the Scandinavian film and media industries (see Stenport 2013; Hjort 2010, 15–23), and the role of filmmakers/practitioners who are, in other senses, minorities within these industries. Closely related to the issue of *who* the practitioners in the industries are, is the role of funding, production, and distribution. Which films/series get funded, produced, and distributed – and why? In a Scandinavian context, such an institutional approach is especially relevant, given the considerable amount of state funding that is devoted to film and TV productions every year in Norway, Sweden and Denmark (see Hjort 2005; Elkington and Nestingen 2005a, 2). If we understand screening as a privilege – or as an *aspect* of being privileged perhaps – this brings us back to one of my earlier suggestions for further research – namely, to compare the audio-visual narratives in this study with examples that explore the experiences of minorities in Scandinavia (i.e. individuals or groups that, in one way or another, can be said to lack certain privileges that the majority population have), or

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<sup>245</sup> A discussion of close-ups and ethics could start with the canonized writings of film theorist André Bazin, or Dimitris Eleftheriotis’s more recent research on cosmopolitanism, empathy and the close-up (2016).



with examples that are made outside of Scandinavia, for instance, the Global South. This study has explored how films and series in contemporary Scandinavia represent what it means to be privileged. An exciting prospect for a future study would be to ask: How do those who identify as (and/or are perceived to be) the underprivileged represent their own perceived lack of privilege?

By focusing on the ways in which privilege is screened in 21st-century Scandinavian film and media, this study has laid the ground for a discussion of privilege in Scandinavian film and media by providing formal and thematic analyses and socio-historical contextualizations of a selection of recent narratives that thematize privilege. In doing so, the study has taken the pulse of a small area in the world at a moment in history when globalization is becoming an ubiquitous part of everyday life, shaping not only how people see the world, but also how they see their own place in the world (cf. Steger's [2008] concept of a "global imaginary"). The study also contributes to the study of film and media in general by showing how privilege is a useful analytical concept for discussing the ways that audio-visual narratives may construct, reinforce, and challenge notions of privilege. Finally, the study adds to the emerging field of privilege studies by synthesizing recent research on privilege, and showing how the concept of privilege can be applied to contemporary visual culture. My argument is that privilege can deepen our understanding of film and media in the Scandinavian context, and that audio-visual narratives are themselves fruitful starting points for critically discussing what we mean by privilege, how we imagine privilege and, last but not least, who constitutes this "we" that gets to define and influence ideas of privilege. This argument is evidently applicable not only to the Scandinavian region, but to other contexts as well – contexts where film and media, including popular culture, screens privilege on a daily basis and thus influences how people perceive privilege, its connections to structural injustice, and the question of who should take responsibility for that injustice.

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## Selected Filmography

*This filmography includes audio-visual materials I mention in the body text. I list the entries according to the name of the director, but in the case of some of the TV series, information about the director was not available.*

### Films

Andersson, Roy, dir. [1991] 2010. *Härlig är jorden (World of Glory)*. DVD. Studio 24 Distribution.

Andersson, Roy, dir. [2000] 2004. *Sånger från andra våningen (Songs from the Second Floor)*. DVD. New Yorker Video.

Andersson, Roy, dir. [2007] 2008. *Du levande (You, the Living)*. DVD. Studio 24 Distribution.

Andersson, Roy, dir. [2014] 2015. *En duva satt på en gren och funderade på tillvaron (A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence)*. DVD. TriArt Film.

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Bier, Susanne, dir. 2006. *Efter brylluppet (After the Wedding)*. DVD. Zentropa.

Bier, Susanne, dir. 2010. *Hævnen (In a Better World)*. DVD. Zentropa.

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Johnsen, Sara, dir. 2009. *Upperdog*. DVD. Star Media Entertainment.

Kernell, Amanda, dir. 2017. *Sameblod*. DVD. Nordisk Film Distribusjon AS.

Moland, Hans Petter, dir. 2006. *Gymnaslærer Pedersen*. DVD. Star Media Entertainment.

Moodysson, Lukas, dir. [2009] 2014. *Mammut*. Blu-ray. Universal Sony Picture Home Entertainment Nordic AB.

Olin, Margreth, dir. 2012. *De andre*. DVD. Star Media Entertainment.

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Poppe, Erik, dir. [2004] 2005. *Hawaii, Oslo*. DVD. Fox Paramount Home Entertainment ANS

Poppe, Erik, dir. [2014] 2015. *A Thousand Times Good Night*. DVD. Arrow Films.

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Sødahl, Maria, dir. 2010. *Limbo*. DVD. SF Norge.

Trier, Joachim, dir. [2015] 2016. *Louder than Bombs*. DVD. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

Trier, Lars von, and Jørgen Leth, dirs. 2003. *The Five Obstructions*. DVD. Gardners.

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### TV Series

*Some of the series are neither available for online viewing, nor on DVD. In these cases, I link to the official website, where further information about the series can be found.*

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BBC Three. 2008. *Blood, Sweat and T-Shirts*.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00b439q/episodes/guide>

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BBC Three. 2010. *Blood, Sweat and Luxuries*.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00s6103/episodes/guide>

Fredriksen, Geir, dir. 2017. *Stuck*. Available on *Aftenposten*.

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Kleven, Joakim, dir. *Sweatshop – Deadly Fashion*. Available on *Aftenposten*.

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