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HEROISM AS A GLOBAL PHENOMENON IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Edited by
Barbara Korte, Simon Wendt and
Nicole Falkenhayner

Heroism as a Global Phenomenon in Contemporary Culture

Heroes and heroic discourse have gained new visibility in the twenty-first century. This is noted in recent research on the heroic, but it has been largely ignored that heroism is increasingly a global phenomenon in terms of both production and consumption. This edited collection aims to bridge this research void and brings together case studies by scholars from different parts of the world and diverse fields. They explore how transnational and transcultural processes of translation and adaptation shape notions of the heroic in non-Western and Western cultures alike. The book provides fresh perspectives on heroism studies and offers a new angle for global and postcolonial studies.

Barbara Korte is Professor of English Literature at the University of Freiburg and principal investigator at the Freiburg Collaborative Research Center on Heroes, Heroizations and Heroisms.

Simon Wendt is Professor of American Studies at the University of Frankfurt.

Nicole Falkenhayner is Senior Lecturer in British Literary and Cultural Studies and principal investigator at the Collaborative Research Center on Heroes, Heroizations and Heroisms at the University of Freiburg.

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Contents

List of Figures vii
Acknowledgements viii

Introduction: Studying Heroism from a Global Perspective 1
BARBARA KORTE AND SIMON WENDT

1 **'Like a Cinema When the Last of the Audience Has Gone and Only the Staff Remain': Biggles and (Post-)Imperial Heroism** 19
MICHAEL GOODRUM

2 **Y'a Bon? Popularizing the *Tirailleurs* as Heroes of (Anti-)Colonialism** 38
KONSTANZE N'GUESSAN AND MAREIKE SPÄTH

3 **Princess of a Different Kingdom: Cultural Imperialism, Female Heroism, and the Global Performance of Walt Disney's *Mulan* and *Moana*** 61
SOTIRIOS MOUZAKIS

4 **One Hero Fits All? Cultural Translations in *Doctor Strange* (2016) as 'Global Hero' Movie** 81
NICOLE FALKENHAYNER AND MARIA-XENIA HARDT

5 ***Zashchitniki* (*Guardians*): A Failed Russian-Soviet Answer to Superman and Batman** 99
DIETMAR NEUTATZ

6 **'This Beast in the Shape of a Man': Right-Wing Populism, White Masculinity, and the Transnational Heroization of Donald Trump** 114
MICHAEL BUTTER

7 Axe and Helmet: The Widening Range of New York Firefighters as (Super-)Heroes **132**
WOLFGANG HOCHBRUCK

8 Unlikely Tragic (Anti-)Heroes: Gangsters Translated into Hindi Films **150**
SUGATA NANDI

9 Heroism and the Pleasure and Pain of Mistranslation: The Case of *The Act of Killing* **167**
ARIEL HERYANTO

10 Shaolin Martial Arts Heroes in Industrial Hong Kong: Between Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Globalism **189**
RICARDO K. S. MAK

11 Interhuman. Interspecies. Global. Heroism in Wes Anderson's *Isle of Dogs* (2018) **209**
ULRIKE ZIMMERMANN

12 Global Heroism as a Discursive Tradition: A Critical Response **227**
KEN CHITWOOD

Contributors 242
Index 245

Figures

2.1 Banania advertisement, 1917 40
2.2 *Tirailleurs* parading in Paris in Didier Kassaï's *L'Odyssée de Mongou* (L'Harmattan, 2014) 44
2.3 *Tirailleurs* as henchmen of the colonial regime 'teaching a lesson' to the rebellious young Eyadéma in *Eyadema: Histoire du Togo* 45
2.4 The Sierra Leonean contingent of the British Army returning from World War I with a changed mindset about unity and justice as depicted in *Sierra Leone and a President Called Siaka Stevens* 48
2.5 a and b The *tirailleurs* coming to defend and rescue peace in Europe in Fayez Samb's *Tirailleurs Sénégalais à Lyon* (L'Harmattan, 2003) 52
2.6 Advertisement of the 2017 Salon Anticolonial in Paris, Mathieu Colloghan (artist) 54
6.1 Trump's face photoshopped into a still from the video game *Bioshock Infinite* (2013). This meme has been circulated widely online since 2015 120
7.1 Firefighter monument in Austin, TX 145

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Studying Heroism from a Global Perspective

Barbara Korte and Simon Wendt

The Currency of the Heroic in Globalized (Popular) Culture

The year 2018 saw the release of a Hollywood superhero blockbuster film that aroused far more attention by critics worldwide than other products from the Marvel industry. *Black Panther*, with its black director (Ryan Coogler) and predominantly black cast (with actors from not only the United States and the United Kingdom but also African countries), was widely noted as a timely comment on race relations in the United States, befitting the origin of its titular character at the time of the 1960s civil rights movement. But *Black Panther* goes far beyond the situation in the United States. By representing 'strong, regal, intelligent African men and women as warriors, scientists, and queens,'[1] it makes an intervention, via popular entertainment cinema, into issues of global significance that revolve around notions of the heroic.

The film shows how Prince T'Challa, aka the Black Panther, whose superpowers derive from the metal 'vibranium,' which is unique to his native country, returns home to become the new king. Vibranium has enabled Wakanda to escape the African historical traumata of slavery and colonization, and to develop into a wealthy country as well as the most technologically advanced civilization on earth. However, while defying all stereotypes about the 'dark continent' with a unique blend of futurism and tradition, Wakanda has hidden its wealth and power from the world and refrained from entering global relations of all kinds, thus also missing a chance to correct generalized perceptions of Africa as a third-world poorhouse or, as the American president pronounced with characteristic frankness shortly before the film was released, a collection of 'shithole countries.'[2] Almost immediately after ascending the throne, Prince T'Challa is challenged by his cousin 'Killmonger,' born and raised by an exiled father in an underprivileged American neighbourhood in Oakland. Killmonger intends to use vibranium as a weapon against some of the world's 'global cities'[3]—specifically London, New York, and Hong Kong—in order to create a Wakandan empire and so avenge the injustice done to black people all over the world. Killmonger fulfils the main

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villain function, but not without arousing understanding for the geohistorical and geopolitical reasons for his rage and destructiveness. Significantly, his fighting skills were honed by the CIA, which recruited him as an elite soldier for interfering in world politics, and his first weapons are stolen Wakandan artefacts that he re-steals from a museum in the former heart of the British Empire. References to the global historical crimes of slavery and colonialism permeate the entire film.[4]

This short sketch of *Black Panther* must suffice to indicate how prominently the film raises very different issues of global import: the CIA as an American instrument for manipulating world politics, the role of the United Nations (where two scenes of the film are set), international arms dealing, and globally operating aid organizations—a trope which the film ironically inverts at the end when Wakanda promises to provide aid for the world, including underprivileged areas in the United States. This global dimension is supported by the film's settings in America, Europe, Africa, and Asia (South Korea) as well as its portrayal of Wakandan futuristic weapons technology that can operate all over the world because it is virtual. At the same time, the film provides an explicitly Afrocentric and Afro-futuristic perspective on black heroism, using globalized imaginations of non-white people's resistance to colonial domination to project a story of black pride that reverberates deeply in both African American and African communities.[5] *Black Panther* is a remarkable film, using the established superhero genre that originated in American pop culture and the spectacle with which it can be endowed by Hollywood, to comment on the geopolitical situation of Africa and the African diaspora, as well as the role of race in global economic policies. It does this with far more immediate international impact than African—or more specifically Nigerian—cinema's own adaptations of the superhero pattern,[6] while, at the same time, having repercussions on Nigerian filmmaking and increasing worldwide interest in the country's cinema and comics production.[7]

Black Panther leads us right into the middle of the two topical cultural phenomena—the global and the heroic—with whose multiple entanglements the present book is concerned. The visibility of the superhero genre is only one sign of the new currency that heroic figures and heroic discourse have gained in the twenty-first century—an era that many see as informed by widespread insecurity. While this currency is noted in new research on the heroic, it has been largely ignored that heroism is increasingly manifesting itself as a 'global,' multicentred, transnational, and transcultural phenomenon, particularly in popular media culture, and that heroism may thus be considered a 'travelling concept' in quite a literal, spatio-cultural sense.[8] This 'travelling' is aided by the fact that concepts and embodiments of the heroic exist, and have a local appeal, in cultures across the globe. Heroes attract and enchant people in many corners of the world because they have capabilities that 'normal' people lack, and because they are able and willing to overcome difficulties even

at the cost of their own existence. They help others and champion ideals, projecting excellence and exceptionality over common human existence. People look for heroes in times of crisis and change, and the historian Geoffrey Cubitt describes heroes as 'products of the imaginative labour through which societies and groups define and articulate their values and assumptions' and 'establish their participation in larger social or cultural identities.'[9] In Max Jones's metaphor, heroes are projection screens for people's desires and needs.[10] This is possible, however, not only because heroes and their deeds reach ideals of perfection but also because they are essentially transgressive, and challenge the norms which communities have set to preserve their social order. Heroes and their counterparts are not always straightforward figures (see the villainy with noble intent that Killmonger in *Black Panther* represents). Indeed, the ambiguity of heroic figures and the dubious potential inherent in heroic discourse and practice seem to be a special mark of contemporary manifestations of the heroic. Notwithstanding such complications, the heroic as a cultural schema and as a category of cultural analysis and critique has quite obviously withstood attempts to declare its decline or even death.[11] On the contrary: As suggested earlier, in the twenty-first century we seem to face a new appreciation of, and critical interest in, heroic figures and performances. Indeed, the heroic is part of major cultural fantasies, like the superheroes that crowd our cinematic universe, and it is manifest in reports of real deeds—by soldiers, firefighters, and policemen, by those who fight against oppression, and by 'normal' people in everyday life.[12] Arguably, the renewed need for heroes can, at least in part, be explained by the uncertainties and anxieties aroused by the geopolitical crises of late modernity. It is also explained by a desire for the great, the mythic, and the sacred that the present shares with earlier times and which may even be a cultural universal. At least this is the claim made in one of the most influential studies of the heroic to date: Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, originally published in 1949.[13]

Theorizing a Global Heroic

While there are reasons to critique universalist, anthropology-based approaches like Campbell's assumption of an archetypical hero's journey, there is no doubt that heroes and heroizations have become a worldwide phenomenon through processes of cultural migration. In an age of globalization, as well as a time of mobile ethnoscapes, transnational finanscapes and mediascapes,[14] heroes transcend their cultural spheres of origin and are rerouted and re-rooted (in James Clifford's terms),[15] adapted and translated into new local contexts across the world. Filling a void in heroism scholarship, this multidisciplinary collection of essays takes a first step towards highlighting the complex and interrelated processes of creation, marketing, consumption, and impact of globalized

hero narratives, and towards identifying some of the cultural flows of exchange that have made these processes possible since the end of World War II. To this purpose, the contributions to this volume draw on a range of established concepts from not only postcolonial, cultural translation, and global studies but also the emerging field of heroism studies.

Much of the internationally visible research on the heroic and its cultural history has been limited to Western cultures and products from creative centres in the West, despite the fact that there are ancient heroic traditions all over the world, and that some of them have left a mark on Western cultural production and practice—like Indian Vedan epics, Shaolin martial arts, and narratives of Samurai bravery. Nevertheless, in the realm of popular culture criticism, American creations, especially comics and films, still attract the widest attention,[16] thus overlooking Bollywood and Chinese cinema and their respective star systems, or that of Japan's Kaiju (giant monster) films and its manga and anime traditions—all of which have been successful in Western and non-Western cycles of distribution.[17] In *Heroes in a Global World*, an edited volume published in 2008, the American scholars Susan Drucker and Gary Gumpert emphasize how today's globalized communication environment facilitates the dissemination of heroic narratives. But they focus primarily on the blurring lines between heroes and celebrities, a process that has certainly been accelerated by the introduction of the Internet, while their volume does not explain how the globalization of heroism works in practice, and how it affects local cultures around the world.[18] In contrast, selected case studies in this present collection aim to show how a transcultural perspective can complicate and challenge entrenched ideas about the heroic and its various functions in human societies.

That ideas and images of the heroic—as fantasy or actual deed—are increasingly shared across the globe and perceived across cultures is largely due to the global availability and dissemination of our media. Popular culture enjoys particularly wide distribution and so plays an extremely important role in this process. As early as 1983, the American cultural studies scholar Roger Rollin stressed the peculiar position of heroic figures in popular culture: 'Popular culture heroes may have the best claim to divinity: they are the most widely known, the most unreservedly celebrated, and they offer the greatest potential good for the greatest number.'[19] The present collection also puts special emphasis on popular culture, but without restricting itself to heroes as fictional creations. As it is increasingly difficult to differentiate between real-life and fictional heroes in contemporary culture, our volume conceptualizes narratives about 'the hero' as part of multilayered, overlapping, and interacting 'hero systems.'[20]

Given the multiple appearances and functions of the heroic in cultural production and everyday life, research on the topic is necessarily multidisciplinary. Heroes and heroisms have been studied in psychology,

sociology, and history, as well as in cultural, literary, and media studies.[21] What most approaches in these fields have in common, and what has already been indicated earlier, is the assumption that heroic imaginaries fulfil important social and cultural functions in specific historical (and sociopolitical) environments. An analysis of societies and cultures through the lens of their heroes and heroizations can therefore indicate structures of feeling (in Raymond Williams's terms[22]), which are, of course, embedded in larger frameworks of class, gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity. However, because of their contingency on historical situations, understandings of the heroic are not static, but vary within and across periods and cultures; they are subject to constant negotiation and renegotiation. As Geoffrey Cubitt states, 'The heroic is not a realm of fixed and timeless meanings, but one of changing definitions and shifting constructions, operating within and through the apparent regularities of heroic style and language.'[23] Furthermore, the heroic has a liminal quality: Most theories agree that heroes mark, and overstep, the boundaries which societies draw between the ordinary and the extraordinary, between norm and norm transgression, or between the profane and the sacred. It is this liminality that seems to imbue heroic figures with 'a special allocation of imputed meaning and symbolic significance' and which 'makes them the object of some kind of collective emotional investment.'[24] Heroes also oscillate in terms of their social functions: They have the potential to stabilize the social order, but they can also pose a risk to it when they become excessive or rebellious. Even interpretations of the same heroic figure may change over time and be completely reversed: from positive hero to villain, or from hero to victim. 'Dense' descriptions typically uncover the inherent tensions within heroic configurations, and acknowledge that the borderlines between heroes, anti-heroes, and villains are fluent and permeable. As Bernhard Giesen writes, 'What insiders revere as the embodiment of the sacred is considered by outsiders as ridiculous, crazy, mad, or even horrible and demonic. Viewed from the outside, the heroic revolutionary, the martyr, the suicide bomber is a terrorist, a madman, a criminal.'[25] It needs to be emphasized how important such 'culturalist' assumptions about the heroic are in the context of the present volume, where heroes cross cultural boundaries in a very literal, spatial sense. And it may not be far-fetched to claim that the malleable and fluid qualities of the heroic outlined earlier facilitate the way in which the heroic enters processes of cultural translation.

However, as indicated earlier, a look at heroism as a global phenomenon also (re)turns our attention to universalist approaches, such as Campbell's 'monomyth,' which has provided the basic plot of many popular films and is still widely used as a recipe in screenwriting, as well as playing a role in the coaching of global business leaders.[26] But how useful is Campbell's idea of a universal hero's journey for answering the questions asked in the present volume? After all, Campbell himself was

well aware that his work was grounded not only in mythography and psychoanalysis but also in the specific historical situation of a world that had just survived a world war. His preface to the first edition of *A Hero With a Thousand Faces* acknowledges that, for the sake of 'human mutual understanding,' he might have overemphasized similarities between the myths of the world, while de-emphasizing 'the difference between the various Oriental and Occidental, modern, ancient, and primitive traditions.'[27]

In the world that developed after World War II, universal assumptions about heroes and heroism need to be related to, and qualified by, the more recent theories, vocabularies, and tools of postcolonial and global studies.[28] It needs to be asked whether and how concepts of the heroic are compatible with theories of cultural translation,[29] of transculturation,[30] and with notions of syncretism, competition, hegemony, and resistance.[31] Does the migration of hero figures and heroisms create hybrid meanings? Can there be a true 'third space' of the heroic in Homi K. Bhabha's understanding—a space where the starting points and targets of translation can no longer be clearly perceived?[32] What is translatable, and what remains untranslatable, when heroes travel? Where are points of resistance when heroes travel from West to East, or East to West?

Susan Drucker and Gary Gumpert have ventured answers to at least some of these questions. They claim that '[e]ven in an age of globalization, individuals may be globally famous but not globally heroic. In a global age, an individual may be a worldwide celebrity but the status of hero is more local or culturally determined.'[33] The contributions to the present volume want to go further, and offer the thesis that, viewed from a postcolonial and global studies perspective, the dissemination, translation, and adaptation of heroic narratives across the world can help us to better understand not only the mechanisms of heroization but also processes of 'glocalization' and 'grobalization,' as well as the ambivalent nature of hegemony and resistance in colonial and postcolonial cultures. Roland Robertson's neologism glocalization stresses the 'simultaneity and inter-penetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local, the universal and the particular,' suggesting that globalization can create peculiar forms of pluralism and heterogeneity.[34] Grobalization, by contrast, was coined by the sociologist George Ritzer to describe how corporations, organizations, and nation-states thrust the global upon local communities to stimulate economic growth, while ignoring and silencing local ideas and identities.[35] Against the backdrop of this essentially neo-imperialist development, the theoretical insights of Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Stuart Hall are important because they have emphasized the ambivalent ways in which colonialism and imperialism can be subverted and rejected through globalized processes of translation and adaptation. Looking more closely at the global dimensions of heroism can shed fresh light on these particular dynamics in contemporary

culture, especially with regard to the various forms of resistance that emerge in response to processes of globalization and grobalization.

Indeed, countering the role heroes and heroizations have played in the building of empires, heroism can be conceptualized as a form of cultural decolonization when non-Western notions of the heroic intersect with Western narratives of heroism. New and hybrid hero figures can challenge the West's social, political, and cultural hegemony by amending or rejecting dominant Eurocentric notions of the heroic.[36] At the same time, such processes of syncretism might also reflect the lingering legacies of colonialism by muting the contradictions that are inherent in a strategy of using Western ideas and concepts to counter Western influence. Studying the global dissemination, translation, and adaptation of heroic figures and narratives enhances our understanding of how globalization affects culture in different regions, of how non-Western cultures engage Euro-American heroism vis-à-vis indigenous notions of the heroic, and which role global capitalism plays in these processes of dissemination and adaptation.

What we may also encounter, however, is the resilience and continuing cultural power of Euro-American fictional and real-life hero figures. In part, imperialism was so successful because European elites shaped and controlled representations of white supremacy and alleged non-white inferiority.[37] While this cultural dominance has been challenged since the beginning of decolonization, some of this volume's contributions show that Western notions of the heroic continue to influence non-Western cultures, echoing or even continuing traditions of cultural colonialism and imperialism. Finally, there are tensions between cultural translation and cultural imperialism. In the case of Asian filmmaking, for instance, Western notions of the heroic can be used to critique social and political inequality, but transformations of Asian heroic figures into a global commodity also have to be cognizant of Western notions of the heroic in order to be successful. At the same time, such developments hint at the emergence of and attempts to create a globalized discourse of heroism that might further transcend national and regional boundaries.

Yet in some cases, the limitations of such processes of globalization become apparent. For example, although the aforementioned film *Black Panther* was a global commercial success, ticket sales in China disappointed. Chinese audiences were much less enthusiastic about the film's anti-imperialist message than viewers in the United States and in African nations. Some reviewers mused that this lack of enthusiasm is, at least in part, due to traditions of antiblack racism in China, while others suspected that the film's focus on the fictitious African nation Wakanda was not global enough in the eyes of Chinese audiences.[38] Consequently, scholars need to thoroughly examine how the global impact of heroic narratives may be limited by local and regional traditions that might be unrelated to notions of the heroic, or limited by different interpretations of the global.

As a final note on the conceptual and theoretical challenges that one faces when studying the global dimensions of heroism, it is important to acknowledge that we remain affected by our own cultural boundaries, semantics, and assumptions. Our efforts to take seriously the subject position of the 'other' as part of an explicitly stated postcolonial studies perspective may inadvertently contribute to the reification of the very same cultural binaries we intend to challenge. Consequently, when studying heroism as a global phenomenon, we also need to critically examine our own position as scholars and the cultural and epistemological premises our analyses are based on.

Chapter Outline

With ten case studies and a final critical response, this volume takes up the theoretical and conceptual complexities sketched earlier. Its contributors ask how the meanings of heroic figures and narratives are changed in cultural translation, and what specific processes are active in the worldwide exchange of figures and concepts of the heroic. The subsequent chapters aim to offer fresh insights into the global dimensions of discourse on the heroic in today's globalized world by examining the legacies of colonialism and imperialism in contemporary globalized culture, the ways in which powerful American hero formulas can cause cultural frictions but are also available for local reinterpretations, and the way in which Asian cultures specifically have translated, mistranslated, and resisted Western concepts of the heroic.

The first two case studies explore the ambiguous legacies of European colonialism and imperialism, which entailed the heroization of both fictional imperialist adventurers from Britain and real soldiers of colour who helped defend the French Empire. In Chapter 1 on 'Biggles and (Post-)Imperial Heroism,' Michael Goodrum explores the ambiguities of the heroization of a fictional British soldier and adventurer between the 1930s and the 1980s. Created in 1932 as a manly exemplar of British imperialism and its impact, the novels and stories around 'Biggles' came to be read and revered around the globe. The daring globetrotters' adventures were translated for European as well as Asian children, while its original English-language editions found receptive young audiences not only in Britain but also in Australia and Nigeria. Biggles's global reach testifies to the ability of imperialist heroic figures to linger in European and non-European cultural imaginations long after decolonization. Although the ideology of empire disseminated by these narratives is at times ambivalent and changed as the interwar period and World War II gave way to the Cold War and postcolonialism, Biggles's adventures tended to affirm the legitimacy of white supremacy and the British Empire's continuing political influence in its former colonies. By the 1970s, British authorities grew hesitant to uphold Biggles as an admirable imperialist hero,

removing the books from many libraries. While the fictional adventurer's tales continue to be read today, the global appeal of his heroism has waned, suggesting that the imperialist heroic qualities he embodied are no longer compatible with postcolonial hero systems.

In Chapter 2, Konstanze N'Guessan and Mareike Späth shed light on similarly multilayered dynamics by exploring how African soldiers who served in the French army became transnational heroic figures that both affirmed and challenged imperialism in the twentieth century. Focusing on the way these *tirailleurs* were used in advertisements for the popular French breakfast drink Banania, N'Guessan and Späth argue that popular culture played a crucial role in the global dissemination of African imperial soldiers' heroism, which was interpreted differently depending on hero makers' intentions and local contexts. Significantly, the *tirailleurs* were ultimately transformed into transcultural symbols of anti-colonialism and decolonization, calling attention to subaltern groups' agency in reappropriating and adapting heroic narratives that originated as stereotypical affirmations of white supremacist imperialism.

Chapters 3 to 5 explore different ways in which powerful hero formulas of American popular cinema have been globalized in recent films with different aims in mind. While two American corporations, Disney and Marvel, incorporate cultural otherness with a nod to worldwide markets but with considerable cultural friction, Russian popular cinema has used the superhero pattern to serve a very local sense of imperial nostalgia. The Disney corporation is one of the most famous—or to some critics infamous—instances of American cultural imperialism, and there is no doubt that the heroes of Disney comics and films are global in the way they are produced, consumed, and experienced. In Chapter 3, Sotirios Mouzakis focuses on Disney's animated Princess Line movies. In the emerging field of the study of girl heroism, the Disney corporation holds a strong dominance, especially through the princess genre, where it has developed its title heroines from 'damsels-in-distress' to female heroes with a strong agency. Mouzakis problematizes the narrative of the rise of the feminist princess heroine by pointing to the frictions that are created transculturally by the ethnic and cultural diversification of the princess stories and the way they absorb 'other' cultures. Discussing the first non-white Princess Line movie, *Mulan* (1998), and a recent one, *Moana* (2016), Mouzakis shows that the films are transparently metaheroic (establishing female heroes with strong fighter and leader qualities, and exposing and ridiculing forms of masculine heroism) but fail in representing the respective local Chinese and Polynesian cultures in any authentic or culturally sensitive way. While marketed on both a feminist and a multicultural agenda, Mouzakis argues that both movies end up representing and exporting Western girl hero fantasies in exotic dress-up.

Chapter 4, by Nicole Falkenhayner and Maria-Xenia Hardt, explores the complex and controversial processes of cultural translation in relation

to a 2016 film from Marvel's superhero universe, *Doctor Strange*, whose titular character signals cultural otherness in his very name. Falkenhayner and Hardt see the character as a figure who is produced as a global hero, or even more, as master of the multiverse. The chapter shows how—as the story of magician-hero Strange enters the big business of the global film market—narrative, political, cultural, and economic needs, fears, and demands throw wrenches into the gearwheels of a seemingly frictionless superhero-market machinery. Regarding the whitewashing accusations surrounding the casting of the British actress Tilda Swinton as 'the Ancient One' from the original comic series, the authors show how this character in particular exposes multiple layers of cultural translation. Also, in the light of shifting economic and political powers, the change of the figure of the Ancient One is actually revealed to be an instance of 'Easternizing' rather than 'Westernizing': It is due to the rising power of China as an economic and political force that the Tibetan lineage of the figure was erased. The case of *Doctor Strange* thus demonstrates the challenge that an emerging shift in global power relations poses to the dominance of pop-heroes of American origin, reintroducing frictional cultural translations in global capitalism into a film which, on the level of its story, constantly seeks to undo the idea of authenticities, borders, or clear identity assignations.

In Chapter 5, Dietmar Neutatz investigates a recent instance of a now-common process in which the formula of the superhero movie is relocated to a non-American context—in this case even America's former prime enemy. More pertinent to the subject of global heroism, the relocation is one that moves the superhero formula into the structures of feeling of postimperial Russia.[39] The film *Zaščitniki* (*Guardians*) (2017) serves the increasing desire in Putin's Russia for power, military heroism, and the lost Soviet Empire. The film's heroes—once recruited in Soviet times from various republics for a secret military project, but then forgotten—stand for the former Soviet Union as a multiethnic empire of global importance. Reactivated to fight a villain who aims to bring Russia and ultimately the whole world under his control, these heroes articulate the claim that, united under Russian leadership, the people of the former Soviet Union can still be invincible.

Chapters 6 and 7 turn to the transnational heroizations of real-life figures in the global flows of popular culture. Michael Butter investigates how President Donald Trump is actively heroized—notably through a circulation of texts, images, and songs on the Internet—by a considerable number of people both in the United States and in Europe because his 'strongman' policies address worries and anxieties (including a fear of Islam) that concern increasingly large parts of the population on both sides of the Atlantic. The chapter illuminates how references to globally famous products of popular culture—including *Star Wars*, *Game of Thrones*, and *The Hunger Games* as well as computer games like *Bioshock*

Infinite—play a major role in this regard. Popular culture, Butter argues, appears to be progressively used to make sense of politics, especially in populist discourse, and this tendency is particularly pronounced in the case of Trump, whose presidential campaign capitalized on the fact that he was already a television celebrity, thanks to his reality television show *The Apprentice*. As Butter's close readings of (at times quite complex) examples show, Trump's American and European admirers (or fans) see slightly different things in him, but they share an international language of heroism, and their heroizations of Trump depend on and are enabled by a globally circulating popular culture that provides both the narratives and the tropes for it.

Chapter 7, by Wolfgang Hochbruck, addresses a less controversial heroization that has spread from the United States to other parts of the world: that of the New York Fire Department. The reputation of the NYFD reached global proportions in the aftermath of 9/11, but as Hochbruck shows, it had already enjoyed transnational esteem before the attacks on the World Trade Center—dating back to the nineteenth century. The chapter argues that the construction of an unmatched heroic reputation of the New York firemen—which has inspired firemen around the globe—depended on a series of social, as well as technological, factors and decisions, and that it was essentially supported by the circulation of popular cultural texts (stage melodramas, films, comics, and popular histories), as well as material objects (toys) at decisive moments in its history. Hochbruck also points out that at the bottom of the cultural history of the FDNY lies a strange duality, as it pitches elements of a traditional heroic narrative—including superhuman feats and accomplishments, symbolic objects of medieval chivalry, but also the typical transgressive behaviour of the hero—not exactly against but side by side with the modesty and humility of ideal members of a republican democracy: men and women who perceive themselves as doing what their special training and abilities enable them to do as a service to their community. Apart from its special interest, this chapter adds a historical dimension to the concerns of the present volume by pointing out that heroic reputations were being spread through travelling popular culture as early as the nineteenth century.

The following two chapters are concerned with translations of Western hero figures and hero systems in different contexts of Eastern societies and cultures. In Chapter 8, Sugata Nandi studies the gangster figure in Hindi film as the translation of a popular movie archetype that originated in a specific American sociocultural setting of the 1930s. Even in its originating field—the American metropolis during the Depression—the gangster is a 'shady' figure: As a criminal, he is a villain or at best an anti-hero, but at a closer look, the gangster also emerges as a tragic figure bound up in dire circumstances, thus crossing the borderline from anti-hero to hero. As Nandi argues, Indian gangsters, especially of the classic phase,

are even more prone to appear as tragic heroes than the American type because of the local combination of the imported gangster anti-hero plot with the romantic tradition of Bombay film. As this chapter's case study reveals, globalization often means localization and the establishment of analogies. Nandi shows in discussions of Indian classics from the gangster genre, *Deewar* (1975), *Shakti* (1982), and *Parinda* (1989), that the figure of the gangster was translated into Hindi film at a time when Indian modernization entered a phase of profound crisis in the 1970s and Bombay (as it was then still named) developed into a dangerous and many-layered metropolis comparable to the gangster's original American contexts. However, in recent years, Hindi film has innovated the genre and localized it more intensively by producing a series of films based on real-life Bombay gangsters, and also by moving the setting of gang strife outside the metropolis—such as in *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2011).

Chapter 9, by Ariel Heryanto, is also concerned with the borderlines between heroism and its opposites, but under very different premises and with a focus on the mistranslation of notions of the heroic. His exploration of the documentary film *The Act of Killing* testifies to the fact that while Western and non-Western notions of the heroic are frequently intertwined, they can fundamentally differ with regard to what particular actions are to be defined as heroism. Just as importantly, ideas about heroism that are predominant in the West are adapted and translated in often unexpected ways in non-Western local settings. Heryanto's case study about a documentary that allowed a group of Indonesian men to re-enact and re-imagine thousands of murders they had committed in the anti-communist climate of the 1960s reminds us that the memory of heroism tends to be shaped by the people who prevailed in social, political, and military struggles. In *The Act of Killing*, these victors turn out to consist of both the perpetrators who boast about their 'heroic' actions in the past and the United States, whose anti-communist Cold War rhetoric and seemingly unrelated interpretations of heroism in Hollywood movies helped to legitimize the killers' crimes and to inspire their 'heroic' actions. In a way, the chapter exemplifies a peculiar clash of overlapping 'hero systems' that appear to be incompatible due to the way that the norms and values believed to be embodied by heroic figures have diverged since the 1960s. Non-Western traditions of heroism, misinterpretations of genocidal historical events, such as the Holocaust, and the tendency to neglect the boundaries between fact and fiction further contribute to the manifestation of Indonesian notions of the heroic that are considered utterly unheroic in the eyes of Western nations. Heryanto's findings thus remind us that the 'glocalization' of heroism is much more complex than one would anticipate, since what seems to echo a Western 'hero system' can turn out to be a hybrid notion of the heroic that reflects a fundamentally different value system.

In Chapter 10, Ricardo Mak provides further proof that the increasingly global hegemony of American pop-culture heroes is frequently

countered by local hero figures and regional traditions of the heroic that take on particular urgency during actual or perceived social and political crises. At the same time, these local heroes can become global phenomena that make inroads into the Western canon of accepted hero figures. Mak explores the intersections and tensions between these two developments by focusing on the history of Shaolin martial arts heroes in Hong Kong. While Western audiences were familiarized with Chinese martial arts traditions through a plethora of martial arts movies that were produced in the 1960s and 1970s, residents of Hong Kong in the 1980s and early 1990s turned to martial arts movies to soothe their anxieties about local industrial instability and the looming reunification with China. In the case of Hong Kong, local notions of heroism became a counterforce to globalization and postcoloniality, reminding people of the importance of local value systems that promised stability during an era of uncertainty. While the popularity of Hong Kong's martial arts heroes waned in the twenty-first century, the chapter calls into question the idea that the American film industry has produced a homogenous group of hero figures that destroy or make obsolete local notions of the heroic.

The final case study, in Chapter 11, is dedicated to a film that is both an affirmation and a commentary on the possibility of cultural translation. Ulrike Zimmermann discusses Wes Anderson's *Isle of Dogs* (2018), a stop-motion-animated film whose country of production is listed as the United States but which is entirely set in Japan and refers to Japanese codes of heroism, while the characters it sets on a Campbellian hero's journey are both human and animal.

The concluding chapter by Ken Chitwood is a critical response to the preceding ones. It discusses a selection from the volume's diverse case studies to delineate discursive commonalities and the tensions between the local, national, regional, and global in the creation and dissemination of heroic narratives. Chitwood warns against the danger of essentializing heroism, arguing that conceptualizing ideas about the heroic as a 'discursive tradition' would help scholars to better understand the plurality and heterogeneity of various notions of heroism around the world, as well as the role that power struggles play in its creation and global dissemination. According to Chitwood, it is essential to understand and explore the simultaneity of diversity and commonality in globalized hero tales. Doing so would mean to acknowledge the cultural power of American hero templates in the global arena, while also studying the interstices of heroism discourse at the local, national, and regional levels, which might at times counter America's predominance. Ultimately, Chitwood reminds us to pay attention to the interrelationship between global dynamics and local agency in our efforts to understand the nature and impact of heroic narratives that travel across time and space.

While this book's contributions will help scholars discern certain patterns in the global dissemination of heroic narratives, and the ways

in which they are adapted and translated, there is much that remains unknown. As our brief sketch of *Black Panther* at the beginning of this introduction suggests, African nations' interpretations of the heroic, and their efforts to adapt or challenge Western heroism, need to be studied in greater depth to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the postcolonial dimensions of globalized heroization processes. The same goes for heroic traditions in other parts of the world and the way they interact—or not—with Western concepts of the heroic. In terms of chronology, most of this volume's chapters focus on the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. However, in order to fully understand the combined effects of the alleged 'post-heroic' bias in the West during the second half of the twentieth century, and the post-1945 process of decolonization on globalized heroism discourses, future studies should pay more attention to these dynamics and how they influenced hero-making processes across the world before and after World War II. In this volume, Konstanze N'Guessan and Mareike Späth's chapter on the history and memory of the *tirailleurs* suggests fruitful approaches to studying such globalized hero-making processes in the twentieth century. Another analytical dimension that was only hinted at is that of intersectionality.[40] How do various forms of oppression and marginalization that revolve around such issues as race, gender, and class intersect in heroic narratives, and how do processes of adaptation and translation affect related social and political hierarchies?

Finally, this volume leaves out an entire group of heroic figures that would lend themselves to a more thorough analysis of both travelling concepts of heroism and the ways in which heroic achievement can transcend borders and regions. This group consists of heroized athletes (like Usain Bolt) or heroized musicians (like Bob Marley) who excel in their respective fields and not only are subject to global hero worship but also become transnational cultural commodities. Examining these heroization processes would allow scholars to find answers to the question of whether such transcendent heroes and heroines contribute to the emergence of, or rather reflect, a shared heroic lexicon across the world. It would also enable them to explore more fully the connection between transcultural heroisms and global capitalism.[41] It is to be hoped that this volume's findings, as well as the blind spots it has revealed, will prod scholars to delve deeper into a topic that promises to help us better understand both the global dimensions of heroism and the various processes of transcultural adaptation and translation that characterize twenty-first-century popular culture.

Notes

1. Ladee Hubbard, 'Why Do We Hide?,' *Times Literary Supplement*, March 2, 2018, 18–19 (18).
2. Ibid.

3. The term 'global city' is used in reference to the concept introduced by sociologist Saskia Sassen to describe the role of particular cities within globalization. See Saskia Sassen, 'The Global City: Introducing a Concept,' *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 11, no. 2 (2005): 27–43.
4. The Wakandians use 'colonizer' as a swearword, and after his defeat, Killmonger refuses to be healed and demands that his body be thrown to the bottom of the sea, like that of so many slaves during the time of the Atlantic slave trade.
5. Chika Oduah, 'Audiences across Africa Hail *Black Panther* for Humanizing Black Characters,' *The Root*, February 20, 2018, accessed September 19, 2018, www.theroot.com/audiences-across-africa-hail-black-panther-for-humanizi-1823155921. On Afrocentrism, cf. Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*. Revised and Expanded Edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998). On Afrofuturism, cf. André M. Carrington, *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Ytasha L. Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013).
6. Cf. Barclays Foubiri Ayakoroma, *Trends in Nollywood: A Study of Selected Genres* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2014). The book treats, among others, superhero films, such as *Oya: Rise of the Suporisha* (2014), by British-Nigerian filmmaker Nosa Igbinedion, which draws on African deities for its superhero characters.
7. Cf. numerous references and video clips of *Black Panther* spin-offs on the Internet. Even before the success of the film, the British *Guardian* had features on Nigerian superhero comics. Cf. Comic Republic, 'Africa's Avengers? Meet the New Black Superheroes-in Pictures: In Pictures,' *The Guardian*, January 21, 2016, accessed September 19, 2018, www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2016/jan/21/africas-avengers-meet-the-new-black-superheroes-in-pictures; and David Barnett, 'African Avengers: The Comic Book Creators Shaking up Superhero Genre,' *The Guardian*, February 3, 2016, accessed September 19, 2018, www.theguardian.com/books/2016/feb/03/african-avengers-comic-books-superhero-diversity-nigeria.
8. Mieke Bal originally used the term to describe the movement of critical concepts between disciplines, periods, or between academic and non-academic communities. Cf. her *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).
9. Geoffrey Cubitt, 'Introduction: Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives,' in *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives*, eds. Geoffrey Cubitt and Allen Warren (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 1–26 (3).
10. Max Jones, 'What Should Historians Do with Heroes? Reflections on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain,' *History Compass* 5, no. 2 (2007): 439–454.
11. For a diagnosis of post-heroic trends already in the nineteenth century see Thomas Carlyle's famous 1841 lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). The anti-heroic bias of modernity is discussed, for example, by Victor Brombert, *In Praise of Antiheroes: Figures and Themes in Modern European Literature 1839–1980* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).
12. Cf., for example, Robin S. Rosenberg and Peter Coogan, eds., *What Is a Superhero?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); J. William Thompson, *From Memory to Memorial: Shanksville, America, and Flight 93* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2017); Simon Wendt, ed., *Extraordinary Ordinariness: Everyday Heroism in the United States, Germany, and Britain, 1800–2015* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2016); Simon Wendt, ed., *Warring Over*

Valor: How Race and Gender Shaped American Military Heroism in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019).

13. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949).
14. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
15. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).
16. Cf. in particular the rising number of studies of the superhero phenomenon, including Roz Kaveney, *Superheroes! Capes and Crusaders in Comics and Films* (London: L. B. Tauris, 2008) and Marco Arnaudo, *The Myth of the Superhero* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013). On contemporary popular fantasy cf. Hal G. P. Colebatch, *Return of the Heroes: 'The Lord of the Rings,' 'Star Wars' and Contemporary Culture* (Perth: Australian Institute for Public Policy, 1990).
17. For studies of these global success stories cf., for example, Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Michael Curtin, *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience: The Globalization of Chinese Film and TV* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Gary D. Rawnsley and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley, eds., *Global Chinese Cinema: The Culture and Politics of 'Hero'* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010); Derek Bose, *Brand Bollywood: A New Global Entertainment Order* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006); Rini B. Mehta and Rajeshwari B. Pandharipande, eds., *Bollywood and Globalization: Indian Popular Cinema, Nation, and Diaspora* (London: Anthem Press, 2010); Rajinder Dudrah, *Bollywood Travels: Culture, Diaspora and Border Crossings in Popular Hindi Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2012). Cf., however, the following cautionary remark by Jyotika Virdi: 'A handful of Indian films have caught the West's attention. . . . Popular Indian films on the whole have failed to have the transnational appeal *Slumdog* [*Millionaire*] enjoyed among Western audiences, despite prodigiously borrowing popular Indian cinema codes.' Jyotika Virdi, 'A National Cinema's Transnational Aspirations? Considerations on "Bollywood",' *South Asian Popular Culture* 15, no. 1 (2017): 1–22 (1).
18. Susan J. Drucker and Gary Gumpert, eds., *Heroes in a Global World* (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2008).
19. Roger R. Rollin, 'The Lone Ranger and Lenny Skutnik: The Hero as Popular Culture,' in *The Hero in Transition*, eds. Ray B. Browne and Marshall W. Fishwick (Bowling Green: Popular Press), 14–45 (24).
20. Lance Strate, 'Heroes and/as Communication,' in *Heroes in a Global World*, eds. Susan J. Drucker and Gary Gumpert (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2007), 19–44 (20).
21. Cf., for example, Scott T. Allison and George R. Goethals, *Heroes: What They Do and Why We Need Them* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Bernhard Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2004); Cubitt and Warren, eds., *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives*. Considering the long tradition of the heroic in the cultural production of the West, there are surprisingly few publications that aim to offer surveys of this history: Victor Brombert, ed., *The Hero in Literature* (Greenwich: Fawcett, 1969); Norman T. Burns and Christopher J. Reagan, eds., *Concepts of the Hero in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975); Jenni Calder, *Heroes: From Byron to Guevara* (London: Hamish Hamilton,

1977); Robert Folkenflik, ed., *The English Hero, 1660–1800* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1982); Sara M. Putzell and David C. Leonard, eds., *Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century Heroism* (Potomac: Studio Humanitas, 1982); Edward T. Linenthal, *Changing Images of the Warrior Hero in America: A History of Popular Symbolism* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1982); Ray B. Browne and Marshall W. Fishwick, eds., *The Hero in Transition* (Bowling Green: Popular Press, 1983); Lynn Stiefel Hill, *Heroes, Heroines and Villains in English and American Melodrama, 1850–1990* (PhD diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1981); M. Gregory Kendrick, *The Heroic Ideal: Western Archetypes from the Greeks to the Present* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2010); Barbara Korte and Stefanie Lethbridge, eds., *Heroes and Heroism in British Fiction Since 1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

22. The concept was developed by Williams over several years and books. For its contemporary theoretical currency cf. Devika Sharma and Frederik Tygstrup, eds., *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the Study of Culture* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).
23. Cubitt, 'Introduction' (4).
24. Ibid. (3).
25. Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma*, 18.
26. Cf. Scott T. Allison, George R. Goethals, and Roderick M. Kramer, eds., *Handbook of Heroism and Heroic Leadership* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).
27. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, viii.
28. An edited volume that provides such a perspective is Max Jones et al., eds., *Decolonising Imperial Heroes: Cultural Legacies of the British and French Empires* (London: Routledge, 2016).
29. Cf., for example, Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, eds., *Translation, History, and Culture* (London: Pinter, 1990); Susan Bassnett, 'Postcolonialism and/as Translation,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Graham Huggan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 341–358; Clifford, *Routes*; Doris Bachmann-Medick, 'Introduction: The Translational Turn,' *Translation Studies* 2, no. 1 (2009): 2–16; Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: 'Japan' and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997).
30. Cf., for example, Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).
31. Cf., for example, Helmut K. Anheier and Yudhishthir Raj Isar, eds., *Cultures and Globalization: Heritage, Memory, and Identity* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2011); Fredric Jameson and Masao Myoshi, eds., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, ed., *Beyond Dichotomies: Histories, Identities, Cultures, and the Challenge of Globalization* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002); Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange*, 3rd ed. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).
32. Cf. Homi K. Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817,' *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985): 144–165; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).
33. Susan J. Drucker and Gary Gumpert, 'The Global Communication Environment of Heroes,' in *Heroes in a Global World*, eds. Susan J. Drucker and Gary Gumpert (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2007), 1–19 (15).
34. Roland Robertson, 'Globalisation or Glocalisation?,' *Journal of International Communication* 1 (1994): 33–52 (38).

35. George Ritzer, *The Globalization of Nothing* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 2007).
36. Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell, 2001), 64.
37. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 115.
38. Echo Huang, '"A Torture for the Eyes": Chinese Moviegoers Think Black Panther Is Just Too Black,' *Quartz*, March 12, 2018, accessed September 19, 2018, https://qz.com/1226449/a-torture-for-the-eyes-chinese-moviegoers-think-black-panther-is-too-black/; Pang-Chieh Ho, '"Black Panther" Struggles at Chinese Box Office, but Not Because of Its "Blackness",' *SupChina*, March 22, 2018, accessed September 19, 2018, https://supchina.com/2018/03/22/black-panther-struggles-at-chinese-box-office-for-reasons-beyond-reason.
39. Cf. also note 6 on adaptations of the superhero pattern in Nigerian cinema. Such translations are not the prerogative of popular cinema, but are also found in experimental films, like the Japanese mockumentary *Dainipponjin* (dir. Hitoshi Matsumoto, 2007), which blends the American superhero formula with that of the native giant-monster genre.
40. Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,' *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–1299.
41. Cf., for example, Susan J. Drucker, 'The Mediated Sports Hero,' in *Heroes in a Global World*, eds. Susan J. Drucker and Gary Gumpert (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2007), 415–432.

1 'Like a Cinema When the Last of the Audience Has Gone and Only the Staff Remain'

Biggles and (Post-)Imperial Heroism

Michael Goodrum[1]

Few heroes in British history divide like Biggles. James Bigglesworth, the man who would become known around the world as Biggles, began his published adventures in 1932 with retrospectively narrated escapades as a fighter pilot in the First World War. His creator was Captain W. E. Johns, a veteran of the Royal Flying Corps and then Royal Air Force who had served in these divisions throughout the world (and empire). By 1932, Johns was editor of the magazine *Popular Flying* and it was in this role that he became aware of a trend for stories written about the war in the air. Many of these stories were by and about Americans. Biggles therefore came into being as a corrective to this, a nationalistic assertion of British excellence in war aviation. Johns remarked that he 'needed an air story to counterblast some of the war-flying nonsense that was being imported in the cheap papers,' a statement indicative of a position asserting truth through fiction, with a conscious bias against the 'cheap papers' and their version of reality; it also, however, promoted Britain above its geopolitical competitors.[2] In the ways in which they were treated in fictional representations, the colonized often shared the fate of competitors; this is one reason why Biggles has been, and still is, so divisive: Within the narratives are embedded issues of race and empire in a decolonizing world. Biggles's popularity in Britain in this context might be understandable—a means of continuing to live a reality through culture that was itself becoming fictional. The popularity of the character elsewhere is harder to explain, but, contrary to initial assumptions, at the height of his popularity, Biggles was a global, as well as a globe-trotting, hero.

Biggles as Global Hero

Notions of heroism in Britain were already in flux before the First World War and 'by 1914, narratives of imperial heroism, exemplary scripts for admiration and emulation, had become so commonplace as to attract satire and critique.'[3] Yet Biggles began life in 1932 and, given the trend towards decolonization after the Second World War, Biggles's initial

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popularity might logically have been projected to decline with the empire that formed the backdrop of and context for many of his adventures. At least initially, Biggles was intended to capture something of the reality of war: In 'The White Fokker,' the first Biggles story, the hero is introduced as having a

> pale face upon which the strain of war, and sight of sudden death, had already graven little lines. His hands, small and delicate as a girl's, fidgeted continually. . . . He knew he had to die some time and had long ago ceased to worry about it. His careless attitude suggested complete indifference, but the irritating little falsetto laugh which continually punctuated his tale betrayed the frayed condition of his nerves.[4]

A commanding officer subsequently says that 'Bigglesworth's going to bits fast,' a far cry from how the character came to be defined after a successful diversion into more juvenile fiction with *The Cruise of the Condor* (1933). Dennis Butts remarks that 'by the late 1930s, Biggles has become a confident, almost imperturbable leader, and he gradually hardens into an increasingly masterful hero, impervious to almost all dangers.'[5] That persona developed in the interwar period as Biggles took to adventuring of the more general sort. It was through just such stories that 'many of the future pilots of the wartime RAF . . . were first introduced to air combat.'[6] It was also in this period that Biggles acquired his nemesis, Erich von Stalhein, a German spymaster from the First World War who was introduced in *Biggles Flies East* (1935).[7] Following on, and building on, this early success, Captain W. E. Johns wrote approximately 100 Biggles books; recent selections for republication represent the highlights of the first 35, those that were published up to and in the Second World War.[8] A great deal of the character's history is therefore being omitted in contemporary curations of Biggles. Yet it was after the Second World War that Biggles attained the greatest contemporary popularity: It is, however, this post-1945 history that has encountered the most resistance, both at the time of original publication and subsequently. Given the conflicts in and about his narratives, Biggles offers a heroic model of significant historical interest. Evolutions in characterization and reception chart shifting attitudes to changing geopolitical conditions and Britain's place within them.

As an indication of contemporary popularity, in 1964, Biggles was ranked by the UNESCO Statistical Yearbook as 'the most popular hero in the world to schoolboys'; Biggles also 'placed 29th in a list of the world's most translated books.'[9] Such popularity indicated that Biggles was therefore extremely popular outside Britain, even with colonial audiences. Max Jones argues that heroes are screens onto which contemporary values can be projected, and it is also readily apparent that heroes can be used (by themselves or by others) as a vehicle to promote the

values they are said to represent[10]—although screens are not just for projecting on to: In engaging with projections, those consuming them are drawn into a relationship where messages can either unconsciously reinforce or inspire consideration of the consumer's own reality—that is, the historical conditions that give rise to the ideologies that pervade them. There is also the question of where and when the screen is situated. Time and location will give rise to different, historically specific, ideological conditions that influence reception.

When Louis Althusser states that ideology has no history, he means that it is something illusory or that 'all its reality is external to it.'[11] It is therefore impossible to talk of ideology outside of the historical conditions that give rise to it. The hero is a particularly instructive way of investigating sociopolitical conditions at specific moments, since, in the bodies of heroes, we come close to witnessing an individual agent capable of representing, in complex ways, sociopolitical values. A fictional character such as James Bigglesworth might suggest that all reality is external to him and that we are dealing entirely with 'an imaginary assemblage'; ideology, however, is written into the very fabric of the character, whether consciously or unconsciously, and Biggles's creation and reception provide a means of investigating the ways in which ideology, in the form of heroes, circulates through societies with different approaches to the character and the ideologies that underpin him. Butts reports that Biggles was translated into Danish, Dutch, Finnish, Flemish, German, Hungarian, Icelandic, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish, and Bahasi Malaysian, and 37 Biggles books also appeared in Braille. Perhaps unexpectedly for such a 'British' figure as Johns, 'in the 1950s he became the fourth best-selling author in France.'[12] The recurring character of Marcel Brissac, who first appeared in *Biggles Works It Out* (1951), exists in dialogue with this positive reception in France.[13] Strong popularity in Australasia was boosted by radio broadcasts and frequent serialization of Biggles books in Australian newspapers in the 1950s.[14] An interesting perspective on postcolonial circulation is indicated by one book in my possession: *Biggles Flies to Work* (1963) bears the imprint of the 'Indian Association Library, Pulau Penang,' a society established to serve the desires of the Indian community in that region of Malaysia. Although a single example, it demonstrates the continuing popularity of Biggles in an expatriate Indian community into the 1960s.

Another, more fully realized, example of Biggles being read in the context of empire is provided by the Kenyan playwright Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who notes that 'in reading Biggles in the years 1955 and 1956, I was involved in a drama of contradictions': While Ngũgĩ consumed the adventures of an avatar of empire, his brother joined the Mau Mau rebellion, whose anti-imperial activities were ended only by RAF bombers.[15] In a testament to the concept of 'authoritative narration,' Ngũgĩ discusses how 'strong action . . . made one forget, or swallow, all the racist epithets

of the narratives. The books did not invite meditation; just the involvement in the actions of the hero,' and it was only when lived experience intruded forcefully on fictional reality that the ideological project of the latter was laid bare.[16] Alexei Sayle documents the same shift from a British perspective, noting how Biggles's pursuit of communists in the 1950s, which could have included Sayle's parents, ended his previously strong interest in the character.[17] It is testament to the strength of the authoritative narration, however, that the very ideological projects inherent in Biggles were initially missed: Ngũgĩ was reading Biggles even as his brother was fighting against British rule. He remarks that 'Biggles . . . would have been pitted against my own brother,' yet he failed to make the connection due to the strong action and simplistic juvenile morality that underpinned the authoritative narration of the series.[18] Ngũgĩ's ready acceptance of, or at least his failure to immediately acknowledge and resist, the ideological projects inherent in the Biggles series demonstrates the pervasive reach of the Western system of knowledge and the heroic models it sought to export through fiction and education more broadly. The Biggles series, according to Ngũgĩ, makes it clear that 'all white people were equal in relation to the non-European universe but the English were more equal than the other whites,' and, through the frequent recurrence of the trope 'what would Biggles do?' readers know that Biggles is the 'most equal' of all.[19] That system of knowledge, the framework for interpreting the world and events, was imposed on others for the benefit of itself, through colonial schools such as that attended by Ngũgĩ.

As indicated in these specific examples, shifts in ideological context go a significant way to explaining shifts in the critical reception of Biggles. New conditions give rise to new cultural products, values, and approaches that complicate the reception of manifestations of earlier systems of values. Ellis and Williams assert that 'there is no question that Biggles and his friends are always courageously on the side of right against might,' but it is not necessarily so simple.[20] Definitions of 'right' must be considered along the lines of the beneficiaries of actions, at both individual and national levels, and the sociopolitical values ascribed to the concept require consideration beyond simple platitudes. In this respect, Biggles does not exist in a vacuum. Graham Dawson states that 'the adventure hero is never the only available identification' on offer to readers. Rather, the figure of the adventure hero exists in 'complicated and conflicted relations with the other components of any lived masculinity,' factors that have an impact on the reception of apparently outdated elements.[21] While politics in terms of domestic relations and affairs of state are more obviously present in the stories, Biggles's masculinity is present largely through its absence: In this, it represents a specific fantasy of masculinity as an invisible norm, a factor that enables its possessor to undertake whatever actions are necessary. Femininity is represented only rarely, which led to accusations of misogyny being levelled at Johns (though

his protofeminist series about Worrals, a female pilot, significantly complicates this).[22] Glimpses of anything that might compromise Biggles's efficacy, such as romantic entanglements, are, like the stresses of war, introduced in the first collection of Biggles stories, never to reappear.[23] It is therefore necessary to consider how Biggles's temporality exists in relationship with, and potentially at odds with, the conditions that informed the creation and global reception of his adventures.

Conflicted Hero in a Decolonizing World

Biggles must be read in and through the context of his creation and reception. In doing so, it is possible to understand the tensions that emerge in these novels from every aspect: subject matter, characters, locations, and plots. All of these are framed through Biggles as the anchor of every book. Graham Dawson states that 'within nationalist discourse, narratives about soldier heroes are both underpinned by, and powerfully reproduce, conceptions of gender and nation as unchanging essences,' and elements of this are clearly apparent in Biggles.[24] Through his increasing power and control, over both himself and others, Biggles comes to represent an idealized version of British masculinity. We might remark that, following Althusser, Biggles's 'temporality was the sole temporality, all the rest was subordinate to it, even his opponents were made to his measure . . . the content of the struggle was the hero's consciousness of himself,' and, in the case of Biggles, his ability to comfortably exercise mastery throughout the world is underpinned by, and reproduces, notions of British male superiority.[25] The framework through which readers approach Biggles novels attempts to privilege a very specific version of the events they depict, predominantly through engagement with their hero. And it is not just opponents who are made to his measure—the empire and its inhabitants, whether friend or foe, are also constructed through Biggles's temporality and through his frame of reference. Narrative success (or otherwise) is therefore dependent on Biggles.

Biggles is not alone in his stories. His network of companions offers another guided method of reading the books through their largely unconscious emphasis on class. Biggles's cousin the Honourable Algernon Lacey (this title means the son of a viscount or baron) joined Biggles in the First World War. Once the Second World War began, Lord Bertram Lissie was introduced.[26] These three men are all from the upper classes of British society. To complicate this emphasis on the elite of the British class system, however, 'Ginger' Hebblethwaite, a youthful proletarian, had already joined the team in *Biggles and the Black Peril* (1935). Ginger's more humble status is continually reinforced through naming practices—he has no first name beyond 'Ginger' and his surname is decidedly not aristocratic. Ginger therefore provides a point of identification for younger readers (he is a teenager when he joins, by which time Biggles and Algy were in

their thirties) and those without an elite background. This is in keeping with George Orwell's observations on the nature of readership of British boys' weeklies from the same period and their strategies of offering a range of different characters to encourage reader engagement.[27] The combination of youth and class difference means that the texts feature a diegetic model of engagement with Biggles's world view that offers a preferred reading to audiences. In explaining things to Ginger and Bertie (who, while of the social elite, is often impetuous and has to be 'schooled' by Biggles), Johns constructs a recurring framework that allows for information to be dispensed in a way that manipulates diegetic reality and ideology. Part of this is achieved through the way Ginger offers a fantasy of a classless society, a claim that anyone can advance themselves through adopting the ideology of the nation and successfully defending it and its interests. Overall, the effect is to identify the British ruling class as inherently correct and suited to rule.

Although initially realistic in their representation of fatal peril and its effects, by the late 1940s, Biggles stories depicted an untiring, invulnerable avatar of Britain. As, by this stage, Britain was anything but untiring and invulnerable, there is a clear discrepancy between the diegetic reality and the 'real' reality that inspired many of the narratives. For all that this might suggest British weakness as a cause of imperial decline, it is too simplistic to say the empire just collapsed; it is more realistic to point to shifts in the profit- and power-sharing contracts struck between the metropole and the empire that took the latter farther from the formal domination they had once known, even if they remained bound up in patterns of more informal economic empire, be it British or American.[28] Colonial participants in the contracts, those 'client rulers or proto-nationalists who multiplied British power locally with their own authority for their own advantage,' are represented in these books as the sensible, honourable inhabitants of the countries which Biggles visits.[29] For instance, in *Biggles and the Black Raider* (1953), Biggles 'paid close attention' to the words of Mishu, the former companion of Major Harvey, a murdered British game warden.[30] Impressed by him, Biggles and Mishu plan their campaign together. However, Cetezulu, who killed Major Harvey and is the villain of the novel, plans to 'make himself master of Africa. In that respect, he may be genuine. Dictatorship has become a sort of epidemic,' putting a Eurocentric spin on Pan-Africanism and potentially representing independence movements in an extremely negative light.[31]

Biggles's opponents are not always so clear-cut. Villains are frequently unplaceable in terms of both racial and national origin, and do not command reader support. A prominent example of this is in *Biggles Makes Ends Meet* (1957): In a chapter called 'Oriental Tactics,' Biggles hears an English voice while in Ceylon and turns around expecting 'to see a well-dressed Englishman, or at any rate a European, and his astonishment was great when he beheld a figure which was certainly not British.'[32]

The remainder of the paragraph is dedicated to setting out the man's appearance and manner, concluding that he looked like 'a stage comedian.'[33] The non-European's performance of Englishness is funny and yet threatening. As Homi K. Bhabha notes, 'the menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority,' with mimicry of the colonizer's style by the colonized testifying to dominant images of power, but also introducing slippages and gaps into them that disrupt their ability to continually perpetuate themselves.[34] In his reading of Biggles, Dennis Butts suggests that Johns was 'particularly upset by any signs of miscegenation,' and while it is true that those of multiple or unclear origins are often subject to unsympathetic treatment by the narratives in which they appear, the general principle is countered by developments in the later canon.[35] However, it is true that those who do not conform easily to national stereotypes are treated with greater scrutiny, and are more often than not villains. Regardless of nuances on a particular point, Johns's work demonstrates the persistence of webs of ideological empire. While it might appear that it does so in a very straightforward way, however, there are points of interest.

Even as Biggles's triumphs attest to the possibility of empire, to the idea that Britain could hold this vast jumble of territory together, his adventures implicitly suggest the opposite. To give some idea of the scope of Biggles's travels, in their first post-war case, the team investigates the theft of pearls from India, which have been sold in the United States; diamonds from South Africa, which have been sold in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro; and the payroll of a copper mine in Northern Rhodesia.[36] The role of empire as something that facilitates and requires British global intervention is already apparent; the fact that criminals, inevitably facilitated by modern aircraft, also now have a similar reach provides an opportunity for Biggles to demonstrate the ongoing ability of the British to act, and regard themselves, as a world power—as, quite literally, one of the Four Policeman envisioned by President Roosevelt as the guarantors of global security.[37] However, further analysis indicates deeper issues. First, given Biggles's service in the First World War, his exploits become increasingly unrealistic as, post–Second World War, they are undertaken by a man in his mid-to-late forties at the youngest. While not entirely out of keeping with the average ages of special ops teams at this time, Biggles continues his international escapades well into his sixties.[38] Second, the sheer volume of novels published, usually two to three a year, has the effect of constructing each novel as an episode in a serial narrative, with each conclusion offering only temporary resolution. If Biggles is saving the empire in your summer birthday present, it is likely he will be doing the impossible again by Christmas. The empire is therefore rendered in constant peril, capable of being held together only by the actions of an ageing fictional team.

However, the destabilizing effects of constant imperial jeopardy are countered by the 'authoritative narration' of Biggles books. Reinforced by accurate pictures and accounts of local wildlife and geography, the narrative 'carries with it such a weight of persuasion that . . . [readers are] willing to assent to almost anything the narrator tells [them], no matter how obviously subjective.'[39] Repeated assertions, both explicit and implicit, as to the efficacy and right of British rule supported by the acquiescence of the 'good' colonial populations are a 'truth claim' built on the foundation of smaller truth claims, such as accurate accounts of flora and fauna. Manipulation of reality is therefore mixed with objective reporting of facts to create a persuasive fictional reality. Successful construction of reality depends on the continued suspension of the reader's disbelief. When the literary device becomes obvious, the reader ceases to read naively, in Susan Suleiman's terms, and 'rather than perceiving the novelist behind the device as a manipulator of the illusion of reality, I perceive him primarily as a manipulator of values.'[40] Authoritative narration operates most effectively when it cannot come into direct contact with opposing ideas; in Western Europe, the 'strong action' identified by Ngũgĩ as offering the main appeal of the story is far less likely to encounter resistance from reality than in the empire whose affairs it dramatizes (or whose terrain it at least utilizes for settings).

Authoritative narration might work for Biggles but it was far less effective for contemporary British politicians in the stories they sought to tell about Britain and its place in the world. While Biggles's attitudes to international law and concern for others are relatively flexible, when this level of international bravado found expression in reality, the outcome was disastrous. The Suez crisis of 1956, when Britain misguidedly colluded with France and Israel to regain control of the Suez Canal, which had been recently nationalized by Egypt, is a clear case in point. As the British Conservative government weighed its options, it concluded that 'international confidence in sterling seemed to depend on Britain acting as a great, imperial power,' which is 'muddled economics, but . . . good Tory politics.'[41] It was not, however, good international politics: The United States 'used various economic means including blocking access to IMF credit and preventing Britain from using US government securities as collateral against new commercial borrowing' to prevent Britain from continuing its actions in the Suez, with which they were in vocal disagreement.[42] Failure at Suez demonstrated that international escapades such as those undertaken by Biggles in his stories were best left there. It is far simpler for Johns.

In acknowledging the law, in demonstrating awareness of the conventions by which civilization must be governed, Biggles positions himself as quite clearly the 'good guy'; the omniscient narrator supports this by demonstrating awareness of the rules, and then the pressing need to break them in the service of 'good.' This is problematic as 'good' is

taken without question as that which serves British interests; it therefore reproduces the logic of empire, the idea that Britain is justified in operating anywhere in the world, in any way it sees fit, through its appointed agents, regardless of jurisdiction. British interests, however, were portrayed as altruistic by an enemy of Biggles: '[Y]ou British are the most extraordinary people, always worrying about someone else. It impairs your efficiency.'[43] Biggles's version of empire is allegedly Other-directed; another word for that might be 'paternalistic.' This is evident in *Biggles and the Leopards of Zinn* (1960), where Biggles states that 'we were sent to Africa to help the Zinns. I like them. They've never done anyone any harm,' and, as a result, he refuses to disclose to his superiors the knowledge that there are 'tens of thousands' of tons of bauxite in the ground under their village.[44] Notions of the 'noble savage' are certainly present in Biggles's statement that they should 'leave 'em alone, happy and content with their fishing,' but this also perhaps mediates the desires of Johns, who spent much of his time fishing and shooting around Pitchroy Lodge in Scotland, where he lived for nine years.[45] However, Johns goes further than just idealizing the life of the Zinns: Johns condemns the West and many of its practices when remarking that

> the Zinns, instead of living quiet, peaceful lives in a little world of their own, far from the scares of the hydrogen bombs and other horrors civilization is producing, would be wiped out, or what would be even worse, find themselves slaves, digging holes in the ground for stuff that's no use to them for purposes they couldn't begin to understand.[46]

It is for this reason that Biggles keeps the presence of the bauxite secret; he also applies for the mining concessions for that region to ensure that anyone who does discover the bauxite would need his approval to mine for it. Decisions on how to best manage their natural resources are therefore taken out of the hands of the Zinns, at least for the time being, because they could not possibly understand them. This apparently runs contrary to the foreword, where Johns talks of the 'casual seizure of other people's property' in negative terms.[47] The distinction seems to be that Biggles is maintaining the status quo rather than actively exploiting the bauxite, but without consultation. While Biggles's concerns for the Zinns are paternalistic, he also positions himself as a critic of the West and its practices.

How empire functions is of interest in this sense. Gerold Krozewski states that in the existing historiography 'the importance of the pivots of empire, such as India, is not questioned. Yet empire did not consist only of cornerstones . . . the value of the "minor" empire was transformed during late British imperialism,' and this is evident in Biggles.[48] India is a cornerstone of his own history as his father was stationed there as

assistant commissioner of the United Provinces of India, and Biggles grew up there; indeed, it is where he first emerges as a hero in *The Boy Biggles* (1968), a series of adventures imbued with colonial politics as Biggles demonstrates greater courage and ability than his Indian child counterparts, and even some adults. It is more complex than that, however, as the youthful Biggles also makes up for the deficiencies of adults in the colonial service; such adventures attest to Biggles's personal capacities but also highlight the shortcomings of some in the colonial service, opening chinks in the armour of Britain's claims to imperial mastery. Biggles's presence in other parts of the empire suggests their continuing importance to Britain—and Britain's ongoing ability to police and exert power over them and their environs, including making decisions as to what is best for their development, or otherwise.[49] However, the fact that it is invariably Biggles who makes the decision, which is then approved by his comrades (standing in for the reader), rather than the government or the local population, resonates with a maverick persona doing what is best for the Establishment by getting outside rules and regulations, thus locating authority in Biggles's elevated masculine heroism rather than institutional sources now openly committed to decolonization, while tacitly pursuing economic exploitation of the former colonies. It is this exploitation that Biggles refuses. Hierarchies of heroism, and more broadly of ideologies of empire, are maintained since, although Biggles apparently has the interests of the local population in mind, they are not offered a role in their own future, and indeed could not begin to understand the situation at hand. Again, as in the example earlier, the Zinn are of the past, while Biggles is of the present.

What Would Biggles Do?

Max Jones sets out how the 'hero is an ideal man or woman,' and Biggles is clearly positioned as an ideal through his narratives, both in terms of masculinity and as an ideal Englishman.[50] His comrades routinely look to him for guidance or, when separated from him, attempt to view the world through his perspective, to ponder 'what would Biggles do?' (even when able to call on the expert knowledge of those who live in the country playing host to that adventure). This perpetuates the notion of a Western gaze that defines the world, of 'one sustainable system of knowledge . . . [that] serves not all humanity but only a small portion of it,' meaning the bearer of the gaze and the social orders they represent.[51] We must therefore consider Biggles in relation to his readership and the particular perspective on contemporary events manifested in the narratives and what this says about heroism and its functions. As a result, (ideological) belief and its processes of investment in heroic figures must also be considered. Kaja Silverman argues that belief 'is granted not at the level of consciousness, but rather at that of fantasy'

and therefore 'comes into play at the most profound sites of the subject's formation,' showing how the interpellative function of popular culture can have profound effects on narratives of the self and indeed the nation to which the individual imagines itself to belong.[52] As Silverman suggests, 'social consensus is not a matter of rational agreement, but of imaginary affirmation,' part of which involves the insertion of the self into its 'surrounding environment, the vraisemblance which the captated subject inhabits.'[53] Another way of considering this is Benedict Anderson's approach to nations as 'imagined communities,' with nations as abstract concepts defined and maintained through imagination as much as geography.[54] Biggles is interesting in both these contexts as he offers an upper-class white British figure for identification, one consumed both nationally and internationally when the values at his core were subject to contest and decentring. As this implies, the elevation of heroic individuals to facilitate this imaginary process is fraught with difficulties. Heroes can mean different things at different times; they can also mean different things to different people at the same time. Through offering a multifaceted heroism, images respond to the needs of many different groups, floating signifiers cut adrift from their signified. Biggles operates in a similar way, offering a geopolitical perspective with some flexibility of ideological approaches to it, underpinned by authoritative narration and 'strong action' that make it more difficult to question Biggles's heroic position.

It is, however, all too easy to paint an unceasingly negative picture of Biggles. Although some previous work has stressed Biggles as a blunt instrument, as a representative of a 'nationalistic outlook so outmoded as to be positively dangerous,' there are nuances in his character, the narratives, and their reception.[55] Eleanor Graham wrote that Johns's work in the 1940s was characterized by 'violent action' with a lack of 'character building or descriptions.' However, as Owen Dudley Edwards states, this proves that 'Graham had read little or no Johns and felt no obligation to do so before rating him so far below the good.'[56] Attendant elements of literary elitism informed some responses to Johns's work, largely as a result of critics dismissive of the action genre, but also due to his prolific output. In contrast to Graham, Edwards notes that Johns's work of the 1930s and 1940s 'had good plots, and gave lively descriptions of country or native life,' even going so far as to depict native resentment of British exploitation.[57] This certainly occurs in *Sergeant Bigglesworth, C.I.D.*, where the Tuareg people are shown to be independent agents with real grievances. It is therefore vital to remember that Biggles was complex and the apparently monolithic ideological projects cited by earlier critics are contested on multiple grounds within the narratives. Biggles has friends of multiple nationalities, and is shown to be fluent in Hindi (owing to his upbringing in India), indicating an awareness and understanding of, and on occasion appreciation of, non-European cultures.[58] While there

are notable appearances of racist language and values, Biggles explicitly states that

> While men are decent to me I try to be decent to them, regardless of race, colour, politics, creed or anything else. . . . I've travelled a bit, and taking the world by and large, it's my experience that with a few exceptions there's nothing wrong with the people on it, if only there were left alone to live as they want to live.[59]

Johns has Biggles break away from the immediate demands of the narrative to say this, adding to the more complex picture created by Biggles's friendships and fondness for other cultures. It does, however, conform to Johns's claim that he taught 'under a camouflage,' although this is problematized by the fact the he goes on to say that his lessons inculcate a 'spirit of team work, loyalty to the Crown, the Empire, and to rightful authority.'[60]

While 'Empire' and 'rightful authority' now raise significant, and justifiable, question marks over Johns's intentions, the words and actions of Biggles profess a commitment to equality, to basic principles of humanity and democracy. 'Left alone to live as they want to live' also recalls the second and third points of the Atlantic Charter, that 'territorial adjustments must be in accord with the wishes of the people concerned,' and that 'all people had a right to self-determination.'[61] In combination with Johns's remark about 'rightful authority' and 'Empire,' however, the words potentially suggest that, in his interpretation, colonial populations wanted to live under the imperial yoke, and that this was their way of observing 'rightful authority.' This, however, was in 1949. In 1960, Johns wrote of empire that

> this sort of thing, this casual seizure of other people's property, came to an end less than a century ago, and the coloured races, those that have managed to survive the disastrous habits and diseases introduced by the white men, are now reminding us of sinister facts that cannot be denied.[62]

Johns is far from monolithic, and his views changed, or at least were articulated in different ways, as the years progressed. Published in 1960, the foreword significantly precedes the majority of the attacks on Johns that labelled him an unrepentant imperialist. A more complex representation of non-European characters and their interests might also help to explain the global appeal of Biggles. While Biggles's heroism is based on authoritative narration and strong action, the detailed accounts of other people and places that constitute the truth claims on which it is based also construct a series of believable places inhabited by agents capable of making their own decisions on a rational basis. Core-periphery

relations are maintained, as are hierarchies of heroism, as the people Biggles encounters are always capable of exercising heroism only in the space they inhabit, as opposed to Biggles, who can master any space at any time.

Geopolitics and Biggles

Biggles and Johns are not the straightforward, simplistic relics of a past age. In adventures reductively painted as those of a nationalist stooge by some critics, it is of note that Biggles often finds himself at odds with members of the political elite. Although committed to the flag and the empire in his early adventures, Biggles always operates in the tradition of the maverick familiar from a number of police dramas—the figure who, while committed to the maintenance of the Establishment, has little time for its rules and niceties. For instance, in *Biggles Follows On*, Biggles is summoned by Air-Commodore Raymond to brief 'Major Charles, of the Intelligence Service, and a senior official of the Foreign Office' on his actions to that point.[63] Faced with a situation where an operative placed by Biggles looks set to be trapped in communist territory, and a national interest in destroying a propaganda station, Biggles insists on pursuing the former, despite the protests of Charles and the Foreign Office official. When questions of protocol are raised, Biggles exclaims, 'Regular! . . . What has regularity got to do with it? The trouble with us is, we're a thundering sight too regular. All we get for that is a kick in the pants. Don't talk to me about regulations!'[64] The force of Biggles's argument wins the day, but both Charles and Raymond refuse to sanction the operation, meaning Biggles has to act as a civilian without government protection. A similar attitude is regularly extended to international law.

Biggles regularly undertakes missions with the tacit approval of the government in the full knowledge that, should they be discovered, he and his mission will be disavowed. Such a scenario is explored in *Sergeant Bigglesworth, C.I.D.* Biggles is firmly told by an RAF group captain stationed at Khartoum, the largest city in Sudan, 'people are getting particular as to who waffles about over their territory,' and Biggles seems to take this on board; at least, he does until matters become more pressing.[65] As political pressure increases on Biggles from the metropole to bring about a swift resolution to his mission, he disguises a British plane as an Abyssinian one in order to fly through their air space to find the men he is pursuing; having found them, Biggles tails their plane to a public aerodrome. Arriving while the plane is being refuelled, the narration considers the problems with Biggles shooting it while on the ground: '[T]he men in it were not convicted criminals' and shooting a plane on the ground would be to attack 'without provocation—for so it would seem—and in such circumstances, if he killed the men he would be accounted little better than a murderer.'[66] With some understatement, this section concludes

that such a course of action 'might cause a political crisis.'[67] Despite this, after an altercation that allows one of the two planes used by the criminals to escape, Biggles shoots one of the men as he tries to run for cover, stating that 'the airport manager will probably say we murdered him.'[68] Biggles then gives chase to the other craft, eventually catching it and shooting it down; Julius Gontermann, a Nazi committed to continuing the war against Britain, parachutes to safety but is then shot and killed by Biggles in a gunfight. The death is textually justified through Gontermann's status as a Nazi, a label that has become a convenient (global) shorthand for irredeemable evil.

Biggles kept the good times going for longer than the British Empire but he could not keep them going forever. For instance, even at the height of his popularity in both Australasia and Britain, the first waves of criticism of the character and his author began. Ellis and Williams report that New South Wales State Library had begun banning Biggles books as early as the 1950s; by the 1970s, the books were no longer available in school libraries 'on the grounds that they were racist and violent.'[69] Australian pro-Biggles societies came into being as a result of these attacks, which were widely reported in both Australia and Britain. It was in this context that the Australian Stuart Kidd first read Biggles, and in 2009 he wrote of the 'insane 1980s political correctness that banned Biggles books because they use 1930s language or attitudes,' before quoting the foregoing passage from *Biggles Delivers the Goods* to counter such accusations.[70] Ongoing loyalty and debate in white settler colonies such as Australia might be attributable to the prominence of what George Lipsitz refers to as a 'possessive investment in whiteness,' as a factor that 'never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations' while actually playing a key role in the structures it defines and reinforces.[71] As legacies of colonial realities are still felt in such nations, characters that dramatize those realities as central elements of character and plot construction are likely to attract interest across the political spectrum. For readers aware of these tensions, the pictures in many of the Biggles books, which serve the function of making minor truth claims that contribute to the authoritative narration for readers in Britain, explicitly cut against that function, making real and obvious the manipulation of ideology rather than aligning narratives more closely with reality. The truth can quite easily be estranged from fiction as a result of the context in which it is received—the screen onto which it is projected.

Conclusion

Systems of knowledge production are intricately embedded in stories. Johns's fiction and the way it is constructed show Britain to be ready to meet any threat, anywhere, at any time. More than that, Johns's Biggles stories present the British as able to act as a leader in Europe, as

a guiding hand to the inexperienced Americans, and as a corrective to upstart nationalists (*Gimlet's Oriental Quest* [1948] is about the former commando Gimlet and his team seeking to recover treasure buried by an imperial collaborator in order to prevent it from falling into the hands of the evil nationalists). Continued claims to British ascendancy, alongside an ongoing role for empire, may explain why Biggles struggled to find an American audience that was naturally wary of British claims to greatness and increasingly aware of Britain's financial dependence on the United States. In Johns's work, Britain is a steady, moderate force, able to depend on steady, moderate allies in its empire and offer enlightened leadership against whatever foe the international scene has to offer. Cooperative groups in imperial and commonwealth countries enjoy representations that offer them a degree of autonomy, although only on terms dictated by the British; those who reject such influence or interference are invariably the villains, and, more often than not, are under the influence of British enemies or show resistance to Britain because of enemy actions against them. While Johns is by no means the reactionary force he has been labelled—women and people of colour are, on occasion, capable of agency and can be well-developed characters—this more liberal attitude occurs within a framework that limits the capabilities of non-traditional actors. Put another way, sympathetic portrayals of such characters do exist, but only when the politics of all concerned feed into the overarching goals of British ascendancy.

This brings us back to the beginning: to the quotation in the title, to be precise. By the late 1960s, 'the cinema,' the framework of empire, had just about survived, but the audience for it, certainly within the former colonies, had not. The staff—Biggles and his team—increasingly became men out of their time, as is evident from the novel Johns was writing when he died. *Biggles Does Some Homework* suggests that the hero was due to retire and pass on the mantle to a new, and more inclusive, generation. Alexander Gordon Mackay, the man Biggles chooses for the role, is the descendant of a Scottish soldier and a Native American girl, who remarks that 'it's no joke having to go through life explaining how I got my coloured hide, particularly in these days of race prejudice,' and he quickly provides examples from his days in flight school that show those engaging in acts of prejudice as being racist and ignorant, building criticism of such actions into the novel.[72] The attempt might be clumsy in its execution, but it shows the desire to engage with the controversies that were undoubtedly costing Johns readers. Times had changed and the values written into the Biggles series were becoming increasingly contested, disrupting the screen and process of projection and making it harder to simply immerse oneself in the pleasure of reading. The

> shrinking of the Empire in the fifties and sixties . . . and the Black people's resistance to institutional and personal discrimination . . .

> [showed that] racism no longer resided only 'out there' in the outposts of the Empire but also here in the original belly of the beast.[73]

And not just in reality: The ideological imprint of imperial values and practices was present in a range of texts, to varying degrees, and the Biggles books themselves can also be seen to offer divergent and developing readings that subject earlier elements of the canon to critique.[74] While this does not remove all of the blemishes critics have identified in the series, it does at least demonstrate a greater degree of nuance and sophistication on the part of the author and character, and demonstrates their worth as frameworks for the analysis of a tumultuous period in British, and global, history and attendant notions of heroism.[75]

Notes

1. I am grateful to Simon Wendt for inviting me to contribute to the conference where these ideas were first presented, to Michael Butter and Barbara Korte for useful comments on the chapter, and to Samira Nadkarni and Gavan Lennon for providing some reading that informed its direction. Phil Smith, as ever, offered useful insight. I am also grateful to Kay and Ian Goodrum for tracking down most of the Biggles books cited here, and more besides, and Emma Goodrum for not only tolerating the Bookcase of Biggles but also procuring a whole new bookcase. Matthew Orman (CCCU) filled remaining gaps in the collection and discussed minutiae of plot details at length. Roger Harris's expertise and especially his biggles.com and correspondence archive were invaluable. Finally, I would like to thank Max Jones for his advice and encouragement.
2. Captain W. E. Johns, 'Foreword,' in *The First Biggles Omnibus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1953), 6.
3. Max Jones, Berny Sèbe, John Strachan, Bertrand Taithe, and Peter Yeandle, 'Decolonising Imperial Heroes: Britain and France,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42, no. 5 (2014): 787–825 (788).
4. Captain W. E. Johns, 'The White Fokker,' in *Biggles: The Camels Are Coming* (London: Red Fox, 2003), 17.
5. Dennis Butts, 'Biggles: Hero of the Air,' in *A Necessary Fantasy? The Heroic Figure in Children's Popular Culture*, eds. Dudley Jones and Tony Watkins (London: Garland, 2000), 137–152 (142).
6. Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 16.
7. Captain W. E. Johns, *Biggles Flies East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935).
8. There is some debate as to the exact number, as Biggles sometimes appears as a support character in books starring other characters. Some people count these as 'Biggles' books, and some do not.
9. Peter Berresford and Piers Williams, *By Jove, Biggles! The Life of Captain W. E. Johns* (London: W. H. Allen, 1981), 230.
10. Cf. Max Jones, 'What Should Historians Do with Heroes? Reflections on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain,' *History Compass* 5, no. 2 (2007): 439–454.
11. Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,' in *Lenin and Philosophy & Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review, 2001), 159.
12. Butts, 'Biggles: Hero of the Air' (145–146).

13. Marcel Brissac also appeared in *Biggles: Foreign Legionnaire* (1953), *Biggles Cuts It Fine* (1954), *Biggles and the Pirate Treasure* (1954), and *Biggles on Mystery Island* (1958).
14. *Biggles Gets His Men* (1950), *Biggles Works It Out* (1951, serialized 1954), and some of the stories from the collection *Biggles of the Interpol* (1957, stories first published 1954) were all published in Australian periodicals. The rising interest from Australasia may help to explain the decision-making behind *Biggles in Australia* (1955).
15. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (London: James Currey, 1993), 138.
16. Ibid., 141.
17. Alexei Sayle, 'Once Upon a Time,' *Financial Times*, November 24, 2007.
18. Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre*, 138.
19. Ibid., 139.
20. Ellis and Williams, *By Jove, Biggles*, 243.
21. Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), 234.
22. Worrals appeared in a series of 13 books between 1941 and 1950.
23. Marie Janis, Biggles's love interest, first appears in 'Affaire de Coeur' in *The Camels Are Coming* (1932). Marie is a spy who falls for Biggles and as such is unable to complete her mission. She next, and finally, appears in *Biggles Looks Back* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965), where Biggles and von Stalhein team up to save her from Czechoslovakia, where she is threatened by its communist rulers who seek her family fortune for their own ends. The escape is effected and Marie uses the inheritance to buy a cottage in a Hampshire village, where Biggles and Erich are able to visit her and discuss old times. The involvement of a third party, indeed the fact that von Stalhein is the recipient of a letter from Marie and not Biggles, works against interpreting this as a grand act of romance on the part of Biggles.
24. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 11.
25. Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Verso, 2010), 147.
26. Bertie is introduced in 'Biggles Takes Over,' the first story in the collection *Spitfire Parade: Biggles at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941).
27. George Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies,' *Horizon* 3 (1940): n.p.
28. For more on this, cf. Wm Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Decolonization,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 22, no. 3 (1994): 462–511.
29. Ibid. (463).
30. Captain W. E. Johns, *Biggles and the Black Raider* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1953), 31.
31. Johns, *Biggles and the Black Raider*, 11. The 1950s were a crucial time for Pan-Africanism, particularly after the independence of Ghana in 1957 and the election of Pan-African advocate Kwame Nkrumah. See, for instance, Kwame Nkrumah, *I Speak of Freedom: A Statement of African Ideology* (London: Heinemann, 1961).
32. Captain W. E. Johns, *Biggles Makes Ends Meet* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983), 32.
33. Ibid.
34. Homi K. Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,' *October* 28 (1984): 125–133 (129).
35. Butts, 'Biggles: Hero of the Air,' 148. Johns's textual response to this criticism will be discussed later.
36. Captain W. E. Johns, *Sergeant Bigglesworth, C.I.D.* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947), 7–11.

37. The 'Four Policemen'—China, the USSR, Britain, and the United States of America—was a wartime proposal by FDR. Instead of these four nations guaranteeing peace through 'policing' their regions, these four powers became the first permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.
38. I am grateful to Steve Long (CCCU) for a helpful exchange on early Cold War covert ops. He is currently at work on covert ops in early Cold War Albania, which will no doubt feature the Biggles story that takes place there.
39. Susan Suleiman, 'Ideological Dissent from Works of Fiction: Toward a Rhetoric of the Roman à Thèse,' *Neophilologus* 60 (1976): 162–177 (167).
40. Suleiman, 'Ideological Dissent from Works of Fiction', 172–173.
41. Louis and Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Decolonization' (477).
42. Adam Klug and Gregor W. Smith, 'Suez and Sterling, 1956,' *Queen's Economics Department Working Paper No. 1256*, 1999, accessed April 5, 2017, https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/6494165.pdf, 1–30 (3).
43. Johns, *Sergeant Bigglesworth, C.I.D.*, 95.
44. Captain W. E. Johns, *Biggles and the Leopards of Zinn* (Leicester: Brookhampton Press, 1960), 126–127.
45. Ibid., 127. For an account of Johns's life and daily routine in Scotland, see Ellis and Williams, *By Jove, Biggles*, 198–205.
46. Johns, *Biggles and the Leopards of Zinn*, 127.
47. Johns, *Biggles and the Leopards of Zinn*, 7.
48. Gerold Krozewski, 'Sterling, the "Minor" Territories, and the End of Formal Empire, 1939–1958,' *Economic History Review* 46, no. 2 (1993): 239–265 (241).
49. Biggles's childhood, hinted at in *Biggles Goes to School*, is discussed at length in *The Boy Biggles* (London: Dean & Son, 1968).
50. Jones, 'What Should Historians Do with Heroes?' (440).
51. Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), xii.
52. Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (London: Routledge, 1992), 16.
53. Ibid., 24.
54. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).
55. A. E. Day, 'Biggles: The Anatomy of a Hero,' *Children's Literature in Education* 5, no. 3 (1974): 19–28 (25).
56. Owen Dudley Edwards, *British Children's Fiction in the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 282.
57. Ibid.
58. Biggles speaks Hindi in *Biggles Goes to School* (1951). He has several Chinese friends, including the recurring characters of Li Chi (*Biggles Flies Again* and *Biggles Delivers the Goods*), and Wung Ling (*Biggles of the Special Air Police* and *Biggles Follows On*).
59. Captain W. E. Johns, *Biggles Delivers the Goods* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1949), 12.
60. Captain W. E. Johns in Geoffrey Trease, *Tales out of School* (London: Heinemann, 1949), as quoted in Ellis and Williams, *By Jove, Biggles*, 218.
61. 'The Atlantic Charter,' *Yale Law School*, August 14, 1941, accessed October 5, 2017, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp.
62. Johns, *Biggles and the Leopards of Zinn*, 4.
63. Captain W. E. Johns, *Biggles Follows On* (London: Armada, 1972), 93.
64. Johns, *Biggles Follows On*, 97.
65. Johns, *Sergeant Bigglesworth, C.I.D.*, 142.

66. Ibid., 178.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., 180.
69. Ellis and Williams, *By Jove, Biggles*, 233.
70. Stuart Kidd, 'The Biggles Books Bug,' *Looking Glass: New Perspectives on Children's Literature* 13, no. 2 (2009): n.p.
71. George Lipsitz, 'The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the "White" Problem in American Studies,' *American Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (1995): 369–387 (369).
72. Captain W. E. Johns, *Biggles Does Some Homework* (Swanage: Norman Wright, 1998), 19.
73. Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre*, 143.
74. The effect of reading these books is open to debate. While many critics of the 1940s—1970s claimed that reading Biggles would lead the reader to racism and rampant nationalism, this betrays an overly simplistic, Effects School interpretation of the ways in which culture affects its consumer. I read Biggles and similar stories avidly in my formative years, and still read many now with unalloyed pleasure. A character's occasional racism and violence do not have any direct link to the violence and racism, or otherwise, of consumers.
75. Johns continues this pattern of critique in his other fiction. For instance, in *Return To Mars* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1955), Johns has his scientist protagonist remark of Mars that "why should we judge others by our standards? Are they so perfect? Here they may have developed the perfect Welfare State." (36).

2 Y'a Bon?

Popularizing the *Tirailleurs* as Heroes of (Anti-)Colonialism

Konstanze N'Guessan and Mareike Späth

Introduction

Globalization, the legacies of imperialism, and heroism are frequently intertwined. This chapter discusses the various ways in which the figure of the African imperial French soldier has been heroized, de-heroized, and translated into different colonial and postcolonial contexts. Between 1857 and 1964, African conscripts served in the French army in various parts of the French colonial empire.[1] In most cases, these so-called *tirailleurs africains* served in special *tirailleurs* units. They were given tasks that were believed to be suited to their supposed intellectual, military, and social skills, and, often enough, corresponding to ethnic stereotypes. From the beginning of World War I, the presence of black soldiers in France and in the French army was mirrored in everyday culture. Until today, the most popular image of a *tirailleur* is certainly that associated with Banania, a popular French breakfast drink made of cocoa, banana, and sugar (all imported from French colonies). Banania used the image of a *tirailleur* for marketing its breakfast drink from 1915 onwards—a time when the enthusiasm and propaganda surrounding the use of black soldiers in the French army during World War I were at their height.[2]

We argue that the *tirailleurs* are emblematic of a case of transcultural heroization that is rooted in, but also transcends and resists, colonialism. Our discussion is based on archival research and the analysis of iconographic material and media of popular culture that feature the *tirailleurs* as protagonists and, in some instances, explicitly as heroes. We analyse heroism as a social phenomenon involving actors with varying 'reputational projects' who use a variety of media in the making and unmaking of a heroic narrative. In our understanding, processes of heroization are inseparable from processes of popularization. In fact, heroism as a social phenomenon depends on successfully communicating a heroic narrative to a large audience.[3] Popular culture, then, is a particularly powerful medium for the making and unmaking of the heroic *tirailleur*. Indeed,

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what may be drawn from Frantz Fanon's passionate rejection of the 'Y-a-bon-type-Negro,' which populated not only advertisements but also films and postcards, is that these media of popular culture feed back into 'real-life-worlds.'[4] Popular culture and commodity culture not only put on display a particular imagery or narrative but also actually produce it.[5] Viewed from this perspective, the Banania *tirailleur* becomes a performative medium of heroization.

Focusing on the cultural dimensions of the *tirailleurs* adds much to our understanding of the global dimensions of heroism, since the propagandistic heroization of these soldiers was largely produced through public culture, of which Banania was only one prominent example. Whereas there have been changes to the brand face of Banania, the basic ingredients that iconized the Banania *tirailleur* remained the same. The early Banania ads showed a grinning *tirailleur* in his full-dress uniform that highlighted not only the exotic otherness of the *tirailleurs* unit (white flouting trousers, red *chéchia*) but also the civilizing impact of the military (military boots). He was sitting on a wooden box of Banania, eating from a bowl with a spoon. His rifle was lying by his feet and his friendly smile, displaying bright white teeth in a black face, was directed straight at the spectator. The Banania slogan, 'Y'a bon' ('this is so good' or 'sho' good eatin!'), was borrowed from the so-called *petit nègre* or *Français tirailleurs*, a Pidgin French that the military would teach its African conscripts.[6] Throughout the twentieth century, Banania used variations of this stereotypical depiction of soldiers to market its product. Commodity culture such as Banania established a heroic narrative of the *tirailleurs* as exotic and ruthless, brave and loyal. This narrative would survive not only World War I but also colonialism, albeit in an unprecedented way.

Critiques of the colonial imagery represented and reproduced through commodity culture such as Banania appeared as soon as Africans had opportunities to make their voices heard. Senegalese writer and politician Léopold Senghor, for example, explicitly referred to the iconography popularized through the Banania campaign in his anti-colonial *hosties noires* (1948), threatening to 'tear off the Banania grins from all the walls of France.'[7] Four years later, Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, reflected on the psychological effects of being surrounded by imaginaries of cannibalism, racial inferiority, 'and above all else, above all: "Y'a bon Banania".'[8] The works of Fanon and Senghor point to the crucial role of images and popular culture in the process of disseminating racist imaginary. But they also show how the French colonial icon of the ever-smiling and subaltern *tirailleur* was used to counter and destabilize Western influence and to subvert the colonial grip on the *tirailleurs* as icons of colonial subjection. Ultimately, the iconized Banania *tirailleur* was transformed into a symbol of anti-colonialism and anti-racism.

Figure 2.1 Banania advertisement, 1917

Source: Drawing by Giacomo de Andreis, courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Why and How to Study the *Tirailleurs* as Heroes

A number of studies have dealt with colonial images of the *tirailleurs* in popular media and in commodity culture.[9] However, while most of these studies recognize the complexity and ambiguity of the colonial image of the *tirailleurs*, they do not consider the flow of images across colonial

borders and the changes and appropriations that took place when imaginaries travelled from the metropole to the colonies and back. In addition to this global perspective that asks how the heroic operates when travelling around the world, we will extend our analysis to include popular media featuring depictions of the *tirailleurs* that were produced and circulated in the postcolonial period, thus allowing for an analysis of the intersections between heroization and memory.

The *tirailleurs* were celebrated as heroes of the colonial enterprise, admired as war heroes who had helped fight the Nazis in France and in its African colonies, applauded as vanguards of African independence during the period of decolonization in Africa, and praised as national heroes of colonial sacrifice in postindependence African countries. Today, they are honoured as reminders of continued Franco-African friendship in France, but they have also become heroes of a critical struggle in the postcolonial context. The heroic *tirailleur africain* represents opposing, sometimes contradictory ideas, and was used for different purposes and for different audiences. He could be claimed by some as representing loyal soldiers of greater France and, by others, as a torchbearer of colonialism's doom. In other words, it is the narrative that changed and the people or institutions that 'made' the hero.

We call these 'hero makers' mnemonic or reputational entrepreneurs (a term coined by Gary Fine) to highlight the ambiguity of actor roles in the hero-making process, since it is not necessarily the inventor of a heroic tale who serves as reputational entrepreneur, and even the hero himself may participate in it. Reputational entrepreneurs identify a hero because of his or her deeds as a figurehead of their movement to promote their particular cause. They tend to be members of the elite or the leaders of a specific movement. In some cases, they are family members or political associates of the hero. When creating heroes, reputational entrepreneurs are frequently guided by personal self-interest. They promote heroes to introduce claims about the social or political world and promote the heroic tale as a source of their legitimacy. The reputational entrepreneurs' access to sufficient resources for mobilizing others is central to the level of success achieved by the heroic narrative.[10]

In this hero-making process, commodity culture plays an important role. Ever since Banania's stereotypical depiction of the *tirailleur* made its way onto French breakfast tables, different imaginaries based on the red *chéchia*, the grin, and the notorious 'Y'a bon' have circulated in France and West Africa. All of these imaginaries heroize, victimize, or idolize changing aspects of the *tirailleurs* as heroes of colonialism and anti-colonialism. Before going into the details of popularizing the *tirailleurs* as heroes of one or another 'reputational project,' we would like to point out three aspects we consider important in this particular case of heroization. First, looking at the *tirailleurs* as a phenomenon in popular culture, we deal with (fictionalized) representations of historical and even political figures in public culture. The *tirailleurs* were real persons

who (or whose heirs) could and did participate in the process of producing heroic narratives or in questioning those that were produced by others. In many cases, this has triggered public debates that revolve around the question of who has the right to claim which history and who may claim heroic status for which cause. Second, our research deals with an example of collective heroism. The *tirailleurs* are a heterogeneous group of people, recruited during a hundred-year period, condensed into one stereotypical representation. In most cases, they did not appear as individuals, but as typical examples of a group, symbolizing the stereotypes and virtues that mnemonic entrepreneurs associated with them. This might have facilitated the transnational dissemination of their narrative because their story could be connected to multiple localities and numerous peoples' lives. Third, the heroism of the *tirailleurs* is indeed a global phenomenon, and our argument is built on comparing and connecting different imaginaries that circulate globally, but which are always rooted in local contexts. This approach helps us to address the problem of dealing with highly problematic iconographic material.

Several scholars have questioned analyses of colonial imagery. For example, Anne Donadey argues that, even in the critique or a theoretically informed analysis of colonial imagery, the use of images inevitably entails a repetition of stereotypes and the violence connected to colonial imagery, which is perpetuated through the constant reproduction of racist and colonial stereotypes. According to Donadey, even supposedly 'positive' stereotypes like the smiling *tirailleur* are violent, because

> (1) they serve to objectify and control the targeted group; (2) they are imposed by the dominant ideology to overdetermine any effort at self-definition; and (3) they serve to cover over colonial violence by domesticating African people into nonthreatening images of happy subordinates in the colonial order.[11]

The reproduction of these images in a 'show-and-tell-mode' without providing an explicit critique, Donadey argues, perpetuates colonial relations even in a postcolonial context.[12] But even if there is an accompanying critique, there is always the danger that the power of the image is stronger than the commentary. Mieke Bal concludes that 'the reproduction . . . of the objectionable images is a gesture of complicity, no matter how critical the text that accompanies them.'[13] On the other hand, shamefully hiding the pictures would in essence support the amnesia of the dominant history, which in the case of the *tirailleurs* has led to not only the continuous presence of, by now, 'nostalgic' imageries of Banania-like representations but also more concrete consequences (e.g., a still largely missing public debate about the question of pensions and reparations). We follow Donadey's suggestion that the only productive way of dealing with that dilemma is (1) to 'place the images in their historical and material context of production'[14]—in our case, to analyse processes of hero-making

by turning the gaze from the objectified hero to the hero-maker—and (2) to focus on appropriations and responses to these images and narratives by those who were the target of the controlling imagery—in our case the *tirailleurs* themselves.

In our analysis, we will elaborate on four imaginaries that emerged in the *tirailleurs* discourse and which were mobilized by different actors in France and in the colonies. We begin with colonial iconographic representations in selected examples of popular culture that present the *tirailleur* as (1) the exotic, ruthless, and savage warrior, or (2) the malleable African turned brave and loyal soldier, both of which were part and parcel of colonial propaganda, but which were also successfully appropriated by Africans for their own purposes. We then proceed to examine the reversal of colonial propaganda in anti-colonial critiques. In the context of anti-colonial activism, the *tirailleurs* were constructed as (3) protagonists who actively denounce colonial exploitation and amnesia, and they were used as (4) a contemporary symbol of neocolonialism and racism, as well as postcolonial fraternization. When studying representations of the *tirailleurs*, we have identified these four imaginaries as the most prominent and persistent ones. They were created at different times in response to contemporary circumstances, and to the needs of reputational entrepreneurs who contributed to establishing heroic narratives based on the figure of the *tirailleur*. Once established, such imaginaries rarely vanish or are simply replaced by competing ones. Instead, more recent narratives build on existing ones by commenting on or criticizing, countering, and reshaping them. As a consequence, all of these imaginaries exist simultaneously, and are to be understood as a complex web of meaning attributed to the heroic figure of the *tirailleur*.

The Exotic and Ruthless Savage

During the era of colonialism—and, thus, during the time of their active service—images of the *tirailleurs* appeared on field postcards, in songs, comics, and novels. As tin soldiers, they populated children's playrooms, and with Banania, they found their way onto the breakfast table of many ordinary French families. Whether deployed to strengthen morale among the troops or at home, to demonize the enemy, or to connect the soldiers at the front lines with the nation they were meant to defend, these images were produced and circulated in great numbers, and their importance as propaganda material cannot be overestimated.[15]

Before the Banania campaign, representations of Africans and black people in popular culture had been rather negative, strengthening racist stereotypes that revolved around inferiority, servility, barbarity, primitiveness, and brutishness. Postcards and pictures affirmed such stereotypes.[16] Although the French army cherished the *tirailleurs* and other colonial troops, the reactions of the German enemy and even British allies echoed racist traditions.[17] This particular imaginary emphasized the ruthlessness of African 'savage' soldiers who would not show any mercy with their

enemies. Cannibalism, for instance, was a common theme on postcards and in cartoons. In some cases, however, the supposed savageness of the *tirailleurs* was juxtaposed with that of the German 'boches.'[18] These myths and images primarily addressed European audiences to encourage French citizens while scaring and humiliating Germany.

In a somewhat unforeseen twist, this ambivalent image of the fierce warrior survived the wars and colonialism in African appropriations of the *tirailleurs* as heroes who were more determined and belligerent than the French.[19] This narrative, which praised the *tirailleurs* as valorous soldiers who came to the aid of their French comrades to defeat both European and African foes, was also picked up in novels and comic books. For example, Didier Kassaï's graphic novel adaption of Pierre Sammy Mackfoys novel *L'Odyssée de Mongou* (2014)

Figure 2.2 *Tirailleurs* parading in Paris in Didier Kassaï's *L'Odyssée de Mongou* (L'Harmattan, 2014)

Source: Reprinted by kind permission of Didier Kasaï. Copyright © Editions L'Harmattan.

Figure 2.3 *Tirailleurs* as henchmen of the colonial regime 'teaching a lesson' to the rebellious young Eyadéma in *Eyadema: Histoire du Togo*

Source: Published by Maison d'Édition ABC (1976).

contains a key scene that narrates the moment when the commander of the colonial army summons Mongou and reveals to him that 'la France est à feu et à sang.'[20] In order to counter German superiority, he requests Mongou to support the French army in this menacing situation, and Mongou generously agrees. According to popular myths, Africans fought tenaciously in the face of the overwhelming superiority of the German troops in the First World War, repeatedly outperforming their French comrades.[21] In public ceremonies after the war, they were celebrated as war heroes. This form of acclaim also features prominently in *L'Odyssée de Mongou*, which contains images of the *tirailleurs* parading through the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, while being admired by French onlookers. Official praise for their discipline and courage allowed French citizens to regard black soldiers as part of an overwhelmingly white nation.

The brutality of the *tirailleurs* as aiding and abetting the colonial enterprise is another part of this imaginary. *Tirailleurs* acted as conscripts in the conquest of colonial territory and in establishing and maintaining colonial law and order. A common theme in popular culture is the heroization of African resistance to colonial conquest. The comic book *Eyadema: Histoire du Togo* relates the rise of Etienne Gnassingbé Eyadéma as a hero of the resistance against colonial suppression and humiliation.[22] In the early years of colonialism, he stands up against the forced labour imposed upon him and his fellow Togolese by the colonial authorities. In this comic book, the *tirailleurs*, identified by their red *chéchia*, are depicted as ruthless henchmen of the colonial regime, executing its orders and putting down rebellious Africans. In this narrative, they become anti-heroes who embody the brutality of the colonial regime.

The Malleable African Turned Brave and Loyal Soldier

A second imagery that was first introduced through colonial propaganda but soon appropriated to turn the colonial civilizing project down is that of the malleable child, which is closely connected to the history of the 'civilizing mission' of French colonialism. The French colonial project was legitimized and justified—within the colonial philosophy of *indigènes* versus *evolués*—as the opportunity to rise on the ladder of civilization.[23] With the first returnees to the African continent from the European battlefields, the French also used the *tirailleurs* for propagating the colonial project as a civilizing mission in Africa. Photographs that were sometimes turned into postcards played a major role in this process. By having served in the French army, the soldiers were no longer 'simple natives,' and could now serve as a role model for their compatriots.[24] The comic series *Mamadou s'en va-t-en guerre* (1939) was published in the fortnightly publication *La Gazette*

du Tirailleur and addressed African conscripts and potential conscripts. It narrated the story of Mamadou and Ibrahima, who voluntarily signed up when the motherland appealed for help. They were dispatched from Dakar, regarded as heroes by the African public, and warmly received by grateful French citizens who showered them 'with gifts of cigarettes and flowers.'[25] They experienced the French as equals and no longer as their superiors, and their adventures in the military introduced them to civilization. As the case of *Mamadou s'en va-t-en guerre* demonstrates, this imaginary was primarily produced in and for the colonies with the aim of boosting voluntary conscription.

But the imaginary of the civilized, assimilated, and loyal soldier who was not so different from the French was also popularized among French audiences. To appease the French population and to counter earlier tales of head-cutting barbarians, the French army distributed propaganda material featuring a narrative that actively sought to downplay exotic characteristics and to present the *tirailleurs* in everyday situations, such as washing clothes, engaging in recreational activities, and fraternizing with the French. The circulation of these images can be seen as a way of humanizing the African soldiers, and of diminishing the distance between the foreign *tirailleurs* and civilian onlookers.

An important and recurring theme was the injured soldier, who was cared for by a French nurse.[26] What the Mamadou comic strip and the postcards of *tirailleurs* being fed and cared for by French women have in common is an emphasis on the childishness of the black soldiers. They were portrayed as colonial France's 'big children' who were domesticated, civilized, and friendly: 'a grand enfant in French service and in need of French paternalism.'[27] Unsurprisingly, the *tirailleurs* quickly came to represent the success of the assimilation project of French colonialism. The Banania campaign contributed to the durability and tenacity of this imagery. Compared to earlier representations of black people, the Banania *tirailleur* was neither a caricature nor grotesque, nor depicted as savage. This was most likely due to the fact that the Banania *tirailleur* populated the life worlds of women and children and, thus, could be displayed only in a peculiar 'peaceful, asexual and nonthreatening' way.[28] Leaving aside these marketing strategies, the Banania *tirailleur* also has to be regarded as part of a larger project of '[making] a lukewarm French people and Parliament espouse the idea of a French colonial empire through colonial expositions, education [which] then trickled down to popular culture and media (cinema, postcards, cartoons, comic books and advertisements).'[29]

In the 1920s, Banania was advertised with a comic strip featuring the *tirailleur* Bamboula. He is quite obviously depicted as a disseminator of the civilizing project. In one of the strips, he takes his annual leave and takes along two boxes of Banania. On his way home, his ship sinks, but he survives by holding onto his two boxes. In the land of half naked primitives where Bamboula ends up, he sets up a banana plantation for

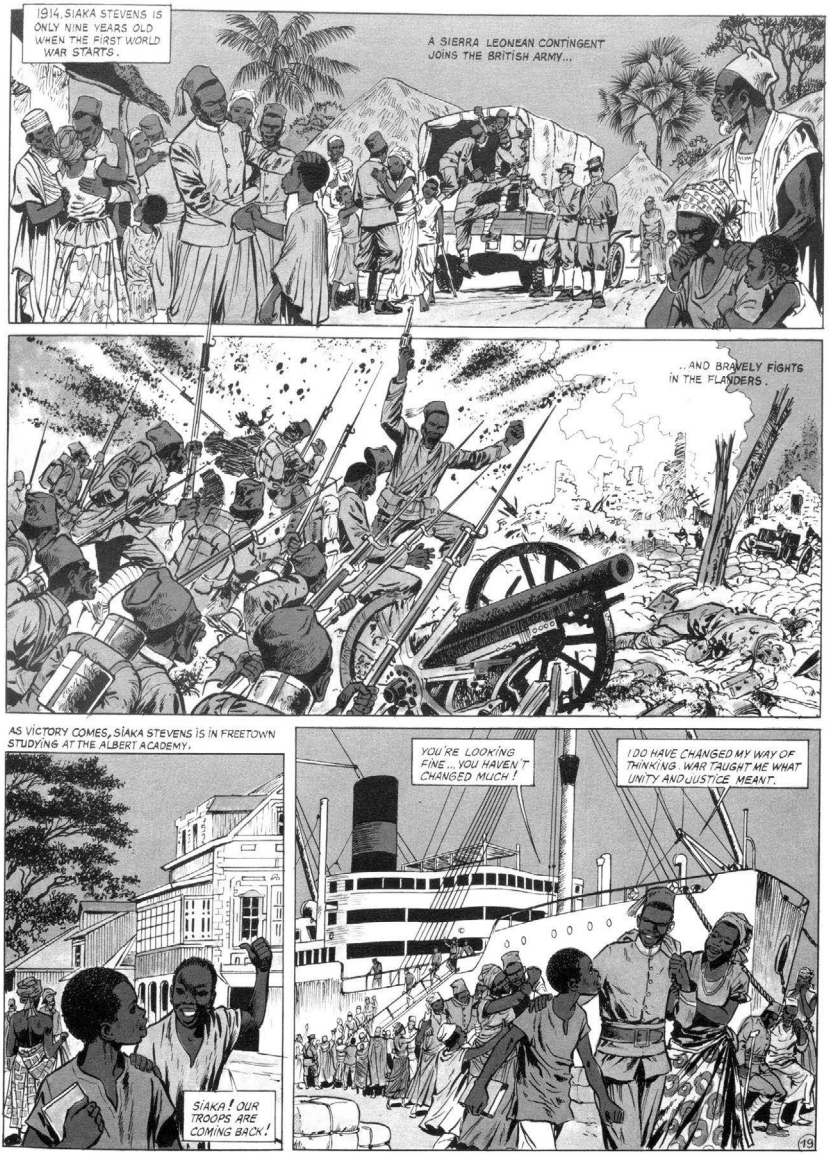

Figure 2.4 The Sierra Leonean contingent of the British Army returning from World War I with a changed mindset about unity and justice as depicted in *Sierra Leone and a President Called Siaka Stevens*

Source: Published by Maison d'Édition ABC (1984).

Banania and marries a 'beautiful indigene' in a white bridal dress. Still clad in his *tirailleur* uniform, he represented the civilized African who helped the metropole, as well as the colonies, to prosper.[30] Apart from the comic, there were also popular Banania scrapbooks with trading pictures to be found in every Banania box, which contributed to popularizing *tirailleurs* as 'le petit négrillon devenue grand bienfaiteur,' as the cover of the scrapbook reads.[31]

Undoubtedly, none of these imaginaries had much in common with the reality of the lives of the *tirailleurs* during their service. Thus, it is not surprising that alternative imaginaries arose in the colonies once the first black veterans returned. Another comic book of the *Once Upon a Time . . .* series, *Sierra Leone and a President Called Siaka Stevens*, depicts the young Siaka Stevens learning a lesson from his father, who goes to join a Sierra Leonean contingent of the British Army in 1914 and 'bravely fights in Flanders,' well equipped with his red *chéchia*. When he returns to Sierra Leone after the victory of the British Army, still wearing his military attire and *chéchia*, he confides to his son, 'I do have changed my way of thinking. War taught me what unity and justice meant.'[32]

This story of brotherhood was turned against colonization itself when the first African veterans reclaimed the freedom and equality they had been made to believe they were fighting for. When they were denied these citizenship rights, the *tirailleurs* turned into icons of the injustice of colonialism and, after independence, into symbols of a forgotten part of shared history.

The Protagonist Who Denounces Colonial Exploitation and Forgetting

This section looks at the imaginaries in which the *tirailleurs* turned from heroes of a colonial assimilation project into vanguards in the making of new postcolonial narratives: that of an entangled Franco-African history, that of victimhood and exploitation, and that of neocolonialism and racism in the present. As an answer to the stereotypical *tirailleurs* in colonial propaganda, anti-colonial activists imagined the *tirailleurs* as protagonists who actively addressed colonial exploitation and racist amnesia. Black writers such as Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, and Abdoulaye Ly denounced not only the use of African recruits as 'the empire's black mastiffs' but also the way in which they were publicly deployed as symbols of a supposedly mutually beneficial project of colonization as civilization.[33] Their narrative broke with the image created by the French—celebrating the brave and loyal soldiers in order to shed light on the colonial exploitation to which the *tirailleurs* had been subjected. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon deconstructed the French image of the *tirailleur* as 'the-good-soldier-under-command, the brave

fellow-who-only-knows-how-to-obey' or 'the nice Negro with the red army tarboosh and the infinite Fernandel-like grin, the symbol of some chocolate confection.'[34]

A dominant narrative was that of the brave Africans who had fought and died for the freedom of French and Africans alike, only to be denied their reward by French conservatives and colonial diehards.[35] Encouraged by the tale of brothers-in-arms who had helped defend and reconquer the motherland, and by Charles de Gaulle's speeches and promises in 1944 at the Brazzaville conference—during which citizens of French colonies were granted full citizenship rights—Africans made use of the heroic image generated in French war propaganda for the benefit of the colonized people. An early and prominent example of this representation in the realm of popular culture is Léopold Senghor's poem *Tyaroye*. In it, the Senegalese poet mourned the victims of a massacre that took place in November of 1944 at Thiaroye, a military demobilization camp near Dakar, where Senegalese ex-soldiers who had mutinied to protest against discriminatory treatment by their French officers were murdered.[36] Thiaroye symbolized the ingratitude of the French and it was quickly integrated into a discourse that projected a different postcolonial world order. Written shortly after the massacre, *Tyaroye* celebrated the heroism of the victims and linked it to a totally different cause—African emancipation and self-determination. In this poem, the soldiers were stylized as heralding a new world order, in which Africans were no longer suppressed.[37]

Senghor took up the heroic narrative of the *tirailleurs* and—in the light of their new suffering and victimhood—transformed it into one of heroic martyrdom that was intended as a reproach towards the French, and as an appeal to African audiences to take revenge for their murders. However, although the Senegalese poet had described the *tirailleurs* as 'witnesses of the new world to come,' nationalist movements did not systematically 'exploit' the narrative of the *tirailleurs* as heroes and martyrs for French liberty in their quest for African emancipation and decolonization. Similarly surprising, after independence, when Senghor became president of Senegal, he did little to commemorate the event to avoid tensions with France. In the context of crafting a new post-war colonial project, Thiaroye became an embarrassment not only for the French but also for the African advocates of the *communauté française*, who campaigned for integrating France and its colonial territories in a federation of states. Remembering the *tirailleurs* as victims of colonialism would not have suited the interests of the political elite of the time. Instead, it was the country's political opposition that organized pilgrimages to Thiaroye to commemorate the victims. The *tirailleurs* became an icon in the postindependence efforts to protest against the non-representation of Africans in the global historiography of the world wars, and to critique the continuing neocolonial relationship between African governing elites and France.

It was not until the 1980s that Thiaroye was remembered more openly, particularly in the realm of popular culture. Ousmane Sembène and Thierno Faty Sow's 1988 film, *Camp de Thiaroye*, anticipated the official Senegalese memory offensive in the 2000s.[38] In this semi-autobiographical film, the event is interpreted as an unjustified massacre. Sembène scripts the *tirailleurs* as righteous and heroic fighters in their own right and for their own cause. He thus opposes narratives that depicted the *tirailleurs* as unruly rebels or as victims. Instead, he addresses the injustice of representing black soldiers as mere 'fleeting shadows' in popular representations of the world wars.[39] Sembène turns this victimization into the basis for a heroic appropriation of history: 'We are going to highlight our participation in history. . . . These men will no longer be dead, thanks to the cinema.' For the first screening of the film, he invited war veterans, white as well as black, claiming that 'we . . . put on the film . . . for the sake of the history of all the people in the world. It bears witness to our past in the history of mankind.'[40]

A similar enterprise is a comic book series that was created by the Senegalese artist Fayez Samb between 2003 and 2010, and published by the French publishing house L'Harmattan. In four volumes advertised as a 'historical' comic,[41] Samb tells the history of the *tirailleurs* on European battlefields during World War I as 'the history of Senegal.'[42] Fayez Samb's work is described by his critics as 'a vibrant homage to the sacrifices, practically buried in silence, by the *tirailleurs sénégalais* obliged by the colonizers to fight in Europe.'[43] The stories revolve around the adventures of corporal Samba, clearly a biographical reference to the author's father, who was a *tirailleur* himself. The story evokes the exemplary conduct of the Twenty-Fourth Battalion of *tirailleurs* and their sacrifice in the defence of France. Samb merges individual and collective histories, family history, and global history into a heroic narrative that clearly has an educational mission, and aims at popularizing the perspective of the *tirailleurs* in the historiography of the world wars.

At first sight, Samb's style and narrative strategy appear to echo colonial imaginaries, since the *tirailleurs* are depicted as naïve, sometimes lazy, sometimes dutiful, and brave in the execution of orders. He uses similar iconographic representations and a language imitating the *tirailleurs*' particular way of speaking French to underline this image. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that he intelligently comments on this stereotype and creates a differentiated picture of black soldiers' experience and agency. Samb caricatures French superiority by subordinating the French characters to the heroic agency of the *tirailleurs* who come to the rescue of Europe, thus turning their alleged inferiority into active heroism.

Both Sembène and Samb create a heroic narrative that differs sharply from that of the colonial era by focusing on individuals who are identified by name and become protagonists of the particular stories they

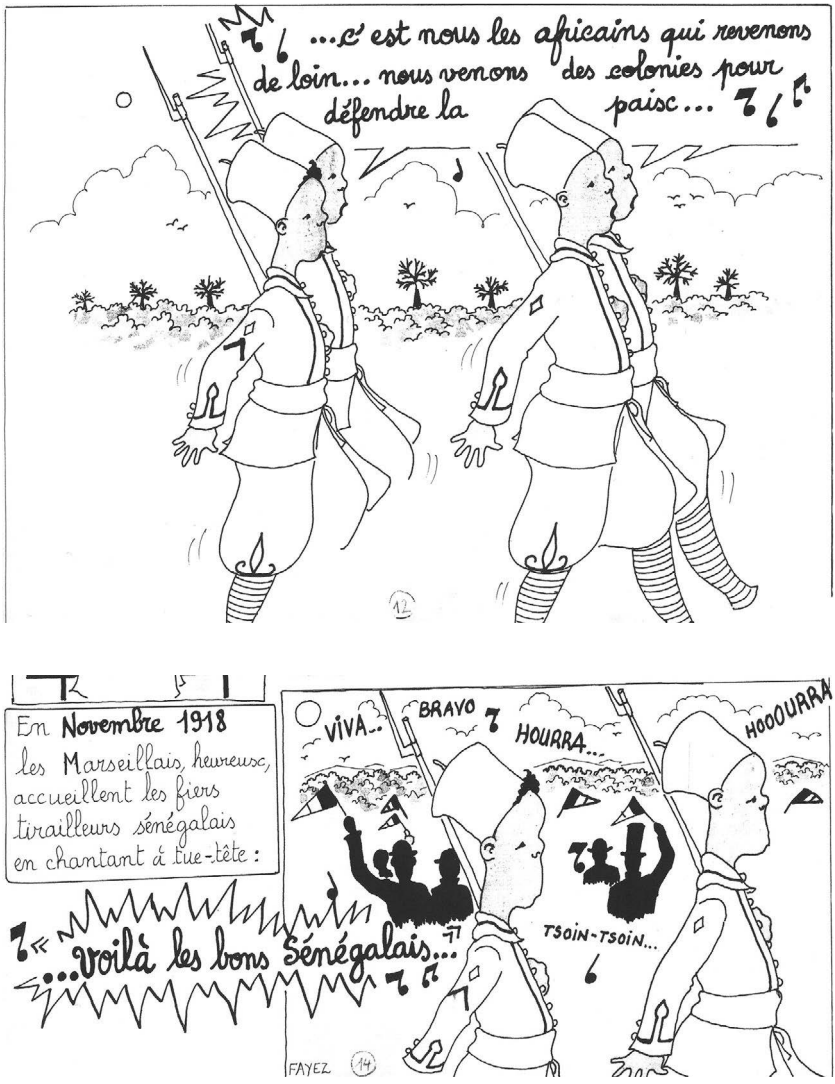

Figure 2.5a and b The *tirailleurs* coming to defend and rescue peace in Europe in Fayez Samb's *Tirailleurs Sénégalais à Lyon* (L'Harmattan, 2003)

Source: Copyright © Editions L'Harmattan.

have to tell. Just as importantly, this time the reputational entrepreneur scripting the story was not the colonial regime. Instead, the former *tirailleur* (Sembène) and the son of a *tirailleur* (Samb) created a narrative of auto-heroization in which Africans (and former *tirailleurs* or their heirs)

promote the image of the *tirailleurs* to make their own story of exceptionalism heard. Contrary to Superman, the *tirailleurs* are, or were, real persons who actively participate in the construction of heroic narratives or in questioning those that were produced by others. While the *tirailleurs* had been heroized by the European colonial elite in order to control a colonial mass audience and their perception of the colonial enterprise, they have in later times been transformed into a means of rebellion against an elitist colonial nostalgia.

A Contemporary Symbol of Neocolonialism and Racism

Ultimately, the iconized Banania *tirailleur* also turned into a symbol of anti-colonialism and anti-racism. In fact, the Banania case shows how the imagery of the ever-smiling Banania soldier could be turned upside down by using the very same icons to criticize postcolonial France's neocolonialism and racism. For example, the annual award ceremony, the 'Y'a bon awards,' which is organized by the organization *Les indivisibles*, designates the most racist public person of the year. In the Salon Anticolonial, organized by a network of anti-colonial groups in Paris, the aesthetics of the Banania *tirailleur* have been used to illustrate and advertise anti-colonial and anti-racist activism. The ads for this event subvert the images provided by Banania and turn them into an iconography of both critique and empowerment. The 2017 ad, for example, shows the Banania soldier in the same setting in which he was depicted in the 1917 version of the Banania marketing. However, instead of a box of Banania, he sits on a ghetto blaster (referring to the impression that the representations of male blacks in France today are predominantly associated with youth culture in the *banlieues*). The empty Banania box lies at his feet. The white trousers, as well as his rifle, are blood-tainted (which might hint at the actual killing of *tirailleurs*, to the brutality of colonialism and war, or to the realities of young black men in France today) and one of the military boots is replaced by a sneaker (another reference to *banlieue* youth culture). The Banania man is not grinning, nor does he have the look of a friendly child. Instead, he is staring aggressively and/or desperately at the onlooker. The spoon in his hands is replaced by a gesture of showing his middle finger.

In the former colonies, a range of different memory entrepreneurs also rediscovered the *tirailleurs* as heroes for their efforts to address contemporary racism and neocolonialism. In Senegal, for instance, President Abdoulaye Wade introduced Thiaroye to Senegal's commemorative calendar and declared 23 August—the day when *tirailleurs* liberated Toulon in 1944—a commemoration day for the *tirailleurs* in Senegal.[44] The date, as well as the rhetoric of the commemorative event, returned to the heroic narrative of the brave *tirailleurs* who defended and liberated France, while featuring only a subtle criticism of France's ingratitude.[45]

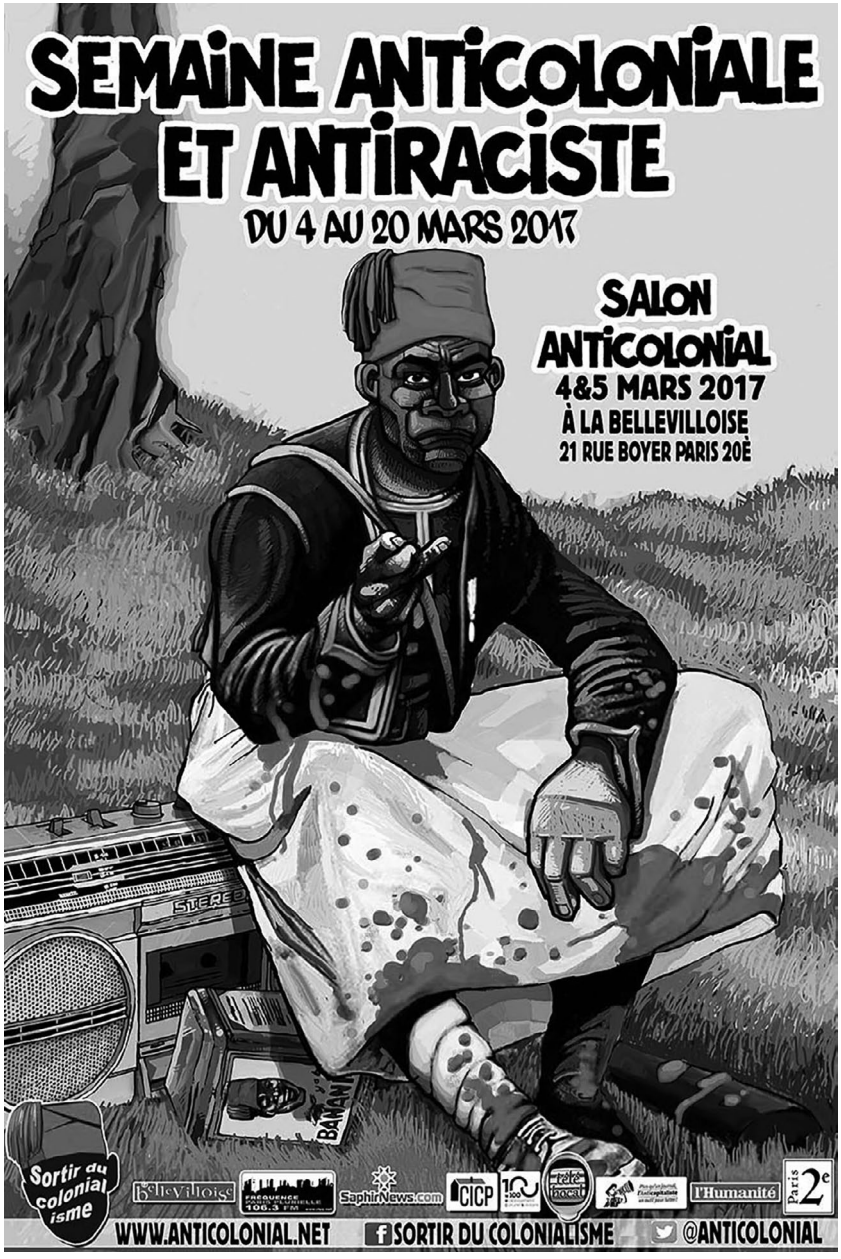

Figure 2.6 Advertisement of the 2017 Salon Anticolonial in Paris, Mathieu Colloghan (artist)

Source: Courtesy of Sortir du Colonialisme.

This rediscovery of the *tirailleurs* in state memory politics comes along with a more general reassessment of Franco-African history and its legacy.[46] The *tirailleurs*, as icons of Franco-African history, embody highly ambiguous and even paradoxical meanings in this changing context: They are both heroes and martyrs in the struggle for freedom and victims of French colonialism still being treated shabbily by France in the present.[47] Here the *tirailleurs*, as popular-culture heroes, translate back into a protagonist in real-world politics.[48] For example, the continuous presence of their image in the media and in political protest against neocolonial practices has led to the naturalization of 28 Senegalese *tirailleurs* by the French president of the time, François Hollande, in April of 2017. Yet, although these men were hailed by Hollande as heroes, hundreds of veterans still await official recognition and reparation. In the realm of popular culture not linked to official memory politics, this trend was even more explicit. In Côte d'Ivoire, popular music, such as reggae and zouglou, was an important medium for the symbolic reinterpretation of the *tirailleurs* as symbols of ongoing neocolonial exploitation. For many Ivorians, the *tirailleurs* were not icons of a shared Franco-African history. Rather, they were used to construct a genealogy of resistance to foreign domination from slavery to neocolonialism, culminating in the civil war that lasted from 2002 to 2011.[49]

As is hinted at by the examples discussed earlier, the narrative of the *tirailleurs* does not necessarily end with the death of the last hero.[50] Different reputational entrepreneurs use the heroic narrative of the *tirailleurs* to address contemporary concerns. The idea of a succeeding generation continuing the struggle, or maintaining the hero's heritage, is a common pattern that keeps the heroic tale alive, and continuously adapts it to changing contemporary needs. In the case of the *tirailleurs*, official commemorations of these men and their deeds have multiplied rather than diminished over the past decade. The fact that most *tirailleurs* have passed away by now has not been an obstacle to this development, but has actually facilitated their memorialization in France and the former colonies.[51]

Conclusion: Y'a Bon?

This chapter has looked at different media and highlighted some examples used by various reputational entrepreneurs to construct and popularize heroic narratives based on the historic figure of the *tirailleur africain*. The heroization of the *tirailleur* was based on the collective representation of African soldiers in the French armed forces in France and in its (former) colonies. The *tirailleurs* and the various tales and images that sang—and still sing—their heroism literally transcend borders: between Africa and Europe, between colonies and metropole. As a result, the heroic narratives of the *tirailleurs* have been adapted to different contexts. In different

times and different historical and cultural contexts, they have represented different concepts of the heroic, depending on the reputational projects in which they were used.

Heroes are resources that are drawn upon in response to the need for a symbolic object to define or explain a course of action, or to promote moral and ethical values. The hero's deed symbolizes the moral values and virtues of the mnemonic community that hails him as a hero. As soldiers on battlefields around the world, the *tirailleurs* symbolized bravery, fearlessness, and brutality; in France, they embodied exoticism; as French soldiers in Africa, they represented discipline, evolution, and upward mobility; later, they stood for political diplomacy or resistance and military knowledge; and, finally, they stood for Franco-African fraternity. The different imaginaries surrounding the *tirailleurs* made efforts to popularize and heroize them a difficult and ambiguous enterprise. Usually, a basic characteristic of the heroic tale is its simple and undisputed nature, which does not allow for complex or ambiguous aspects or nuances. But once we compare several local versions of the *tirailleurs* narrative that work in different regional and social contexts and for different audiences, we discern a complex web of multiple meanings and perspectives that the symbol of the *tirailleur* manages to incorporate.

As heroes of a postcolonial world—claimed by both the former colonizer and the former colonized—the *tirailleurs* pose a challenge to the mnemonic communities that claim them. Using similar popular media and almost identical iconography, the heroic *tirailleurs* have been established for opposing and frequently contradictory ideas and for different audiences. This is where further factors involving the making and unmaking of heroes come into play: the addressees, the actors, and the media of dissemination and conservation. A heroic tale depends on narrators and witnesses. Whether the heroic tale is 'historically correct' is of minor importance. But the spreading of the word is central to the narrative. Indeed, the case of the *tirailleurs* proves that their representations in popular culture were far more important than the sacrifices they had actually made during the conquests and trench warfare of the world wars. In many cases, the addressees of the heroic tale not only consume it but also participate in the making or unmaking of heroes through their consumption. Popular culture and objects of everyday use, such as those provided by the Banania breakfast drink marketing, in this sense are potent media of producing and consuming heroism around the world.

Recently, European colonial and imperial heroes have become more and more contested, and critics have petitioned, argued, and demonstrated for the removal of statues that commemorate their deeds. Sometimes, the debates on such remnants of colonialism have led to violent protests, as has happened in South Africa and Great Britain. One would have expected similar conflicts to erupt over the history and legacy of

the *tirailleurs*, but such conflicts remained rare, primarily because their heroism cannot be attributed to one specific heroic narrative. Just as importantly, although this heroic figure was created in the context of colonialism, it has been transformed into an icon of decolonization in the present, which reflects the ambivalent processes of translation that characterize the global dissemination of heroic narratives. Thus, the case of the *tirailleurs* clearly shows that heroism can be conceptualized as a form of cultural decolonization, as the editors of this volume suggest in their introduction. Today, the iconic *tirailleur* simultaneously stabilizes and destabilizes norms, values, and social hierarchies around the world, depending on the heroic imaginary and the ways in which this imaginary has been interpreted.

Notes

1. On the history of the *tirailleurs*, cf. Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa 1857–1960* (London: James Currey, 1991); Nancy Lawler, *Soldats d'infortune: Les tirailleurs Ivoiriens de la IIe guerre mondiale* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996); Chantal Valensky, 'Soldats malgaches et culture française (fin du XIXe–première moitié du XXe siècle),' *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer* 84 (1997): 63–84; and Sarah Jean Zimmermann, *Living beyond Boundaries: West African Servicemen in French Colonial Conflicts, 1908–1962* (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011).
2. Prior to that, a woman from the French Antilles was used to market the drink. On the history of Banania, cf. Jean Garrigues, *Banania, histoire d'une passion française* (Paris: Édition du May, 1991). For a critique of Garrigues, cf. Anne Donadey, '"Y'a Bon Banania": Ethics and Cultural Criticism in the Colonial Context,' *French Cultural Studies* 11 (2000): 16–22.
3. For a more detailed discussion of our understanding of the process of heroization, cf. Konstanze N'Guessan and Mareike Späth, 'In the Crossfire of Commemoration: Entangled Histories of the Tirailleurs Africains as Heroes in National-Day Parades in Francophone Africa and France,' *Working Papers of the Department of Anthropology and African Studies of the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz* 169 (2016).
4. Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952), 27.
5. This is true for racist stereotypes but also for heroic tales.
6. Jana Evans Braziel, *Artists, Performers, and Black Masculinity in the Haitian Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 48. The 'petit nègre' replaced the verbs 'être', 'avoir,' and 'aimer' with the expressions 'y a', 'y a à gagner,' and 'y a bon'—thus evading grammatical finesse, such as conjugation. Cf. Brett A. Berliner, *Ambivalent Desire: The Exotic Black Other in Jazz-Age France* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 22. For a detailed interpretation of the iconography and language, cf. also Cécile Van de Avenne, 'Bambara et Français-Tirailleur: Une analyse de la politique linguistique de l'armée coloniale française, la Grande guerre et après,' *Documents pour l'histoire du Français langue étrangère ou seconde* 35 (2005): 123–150; Raymond Bachollet et al., *Négripub: l'image des noirs dans la publicité* (Paris: Somogy, 1992); Nicolas Bancel, ed., *Images*

et colonies: iconographie et propagande coloniale sur l'Afrique française de 1880 à 1962 (Nanterre: BDIC, 1993); and Emmanuelle Sibeud, 'Y'a bon Banania,' *L'Histoire par l'image*, last accessed September 25, 2018, www.histoire-image.org/etudes/y-bon-banania.

7. Léopold Senghor, *Hosties noires* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1948), 55.
8. Fanon, *Peau Noire*, 90. Interestingly enough, the Portuguese translation of *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* shows a mosaic of images, including several versions of the Banania *tirailleur*.
9. Cf. for example, Bancel, *Images et colonies*; Berliner, *Ambivalent Desire*; Pascal Blanchard, et al., eds., *Colonial Culture in France since the Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); Peter Bloom, *French Colonial Documentary: Mythologies of Humanitarianism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Donadey, *Y'a Bon Banania*; Richard Fogarty, 'Race and Empire in French Posters of the Great War,' in *Picture This: World War I Posters and Visual Culture*, ed. Pearl James (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); Malte Hinrichsen, *Racist Trademarks: Slavery, Orient, Colonialism and Commodity Culture* (Münster: Lit, 2012); Stephan Likosky, *With a Weapon and a Grin: Postcard Images of France's Black African Colonial Troops in WWI* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer, 2017); Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); János Riesz, 'Die Heimkehr des Helden: Zur Gestalt des "Tirailleur Sénégalais" in der französischen Kriegs-und Kolonialliteratur nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg (1919–1929),' in *Die Vielfalt der Kultur: Ethnologische Aspekte von Verwandtschaft, Kunst und Weltauffassung—Ernst Wilhelm Müller zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Karl-Heinz Kohl, et al. (Berlin: Reimer, 1990), 441–452.
10. Cf. Gary Allan Fine, 'Reputational Entrepreneurs and the Memory of Incompetence: Melting Supporters, Partisan, Warriors, and Images of President Harding,' *American Journal of Sociology* 101 (1996): 1159–1193.
11. Donadey, *Y'a Bon Banania*, 15.
12. Ibid., 16.
13. Mieke Bal, 'The Politics of Citation,' *Diacritics* 21, no. 1 (1991): 25–45 (39).
14. Donadey, *Y'a Bon Banania*, 24.
15. Cf. Likosky, *With a Weapon*, 7.
16. Cf. Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 32.
17. Ibid., 32–38.
18. Likosky, *With a Weapon*.
19. Cf., for example, the website http://heros-tirailleurs.net, which features ten portraits of heroic *tirailleurs* that outperformed their French comrades in terms of determination and (French!) patriotism.
20. Didier Kassaï, *L'Odyssée de Mongou: D'après le roman de Pierre Sammy Mackfoy* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014), 25.
21. Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 89–96.
22. Serge Saint-Michel and Dominique Fages, *Il était une fois . . . Eyadema: Histoire du Togo* (Paris: Afrique Biblio Club/ABC, 1976).
23. In Senegal, for example, some African activists regarded the French declaration of war first and foremost as an opportunity to secure French citizenship for the *originaires* (Senegalese from the four communes that had a special status among the colonized subjects). The *évolués* saw conscription as a powerful instrument to claim not only equal duties but also equal rights. They thus demanded to serve as French citizens in the regular French army. Cf. Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 44–45.
24. Valensky, *Soldats Malgaches*, 69.
25. Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 90.

26. For numerous examples, cf. Likosky, *With a Weapon*.
27. Berliner, *Ambivalent Desire*, 14.
28. Donadey, *Y'a Bon Banania*, 14.
29. Ibid., 13.
30. http://taban.canalblog.com/archives/2014/01/03/28843027.html; http://nevsepic.com.ua/art-i-risovanaya-grafika/page,6,10013-kolonialnye-arhivy-francii-xviii-xxe-colonial-archives-of-france-335-rabot.html; https://www.pinterest.de/pin/475481673149086007/, last accessed January 25, 2019.
31. http://bananiaphile.free.fr/BonPoint.html, last accessed January 25, 2019.
32. Xavier Seguin and Bernard Dufosse, *Once upon a Time . . . Sierra Leone and a President Called Siaka Stevens* (Paris: Afrique Biblio Club/ABC, 1984), 19.
33. Senghor, *Hosties Noires*, 84; Aimé Césaire, *The Original 1939 Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, bilingual ed. (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 2013 [1939]); Fanon, *Peau Noire*; Abdoulaye Ly, *Mercenaires Noirs: Notes sur une forme de l'exploitation des Africains* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1957).
34. Fanon, *Peau Noire*, 77, 155.
35. Lawler, *Soldats*, 223.
36. On the incidents at the transition camp in Thiaroye, cf. Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 100–104.
37. Léopold Senghor, *The Collected Poetry*, trans. and with an introduction by Melvin Dixon (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 68. With *Hosties Noires* (1948), Senghor published a whole anthology of poetry imagining the *tirailleurs* as heroes of the French liberation movement. Cf. Marc Michel, 'Hosties noires entre mémoire et reconnaissance,' in *Léopold Sédar Senghor: Africanité-universalité*, eds. Jacques Girault and Bernard Lecherbonnier (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002), 101–110, 110. For a comprehensive study of Senghor's poem and further cultural representations of the massacre, cf. Sabrina Parent, '(Re)writing the Massacre of Thiaroye,' in *Narrating War and Peace in Africa*, ed. Hetty ter Haar (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010), 233–235; and Sabrina Parent, *Cultural Representations of Massacre: Reinterpretations of the Mutiny of Senegal* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
38. Ruth Ginio, 'African Colonial Soldiers between Memory and Forgetfulness: The Case of Post-Colonial Senegal,' *Outre-Mers Revue d'Histoire* 93, no. 350 (2006): 141–155.
39. Ousmane Sembène, 'Ousmane Sembène's Remarks after the Showing of His Film "Camp de Thiaroye",' *Contributions in Black Studies* 11 (1993): 71–74 (73).
40. Ibid., 73, 74.
41. Namely, *Tirailleurs Sénégalais à Lyon* (2003); *Le naufrage de l'Africa* (2004); *Le Tirailleur des Vosges* (2007); and *Le Tirailleur et les cigognes* (2010), which were all published with l'Harmattan, Paris.
42. Alain Brezault, *Biographical Note on Fayez Samb, Africultures*, last accessed September 25, 2018, http://africultures.com/personnes/?no=26605.
43. Ibid.
44. Cf. Ginio, *African Colonial Soldiers*.
45. Ibrahim Thioub, 'Die staatliche Erinnerung im Senegal,' in *Gefangene Bilder: Wissenschaft und Propaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Benedikt Burkard (Petersberg: Imhof, 2014), 138–141 (141).
46. Cf. Tony Chafer, 'Forgotten Soldiers,' *History Today* 58 (2008): 35–37.
47. Ibid., 37.
48. It is often on the occasion of commemorative events such as the fiftieth anniversary of African independences in 2010 and the 2014 commemoration of

the beginning of World War I that the question of pensions re-emerged in the public discourse and, in turn, triggered activism. This points to the fact that popular culture is an important medium of memory and heroization that should not be treated in isolation. For an elaboration on memory-making as multimediatized and multivocal project, cf. Konstanze N'Guessan, *Histories of Independence: An Ethnography of the Past in the Present in Côte d'Ivoire* (PhD diss., Department of Social Anthropology and African Studies, Mainz: Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, 2014).

49. In 2002, a partly successful coup d'état turned into a rebellion that split the country in two, with a rebel-held north and a government-controlled south. The Gbagbo government accused the rebels of being string puppets defending the interests of France. The Gbagbo camp viewed the rebellion as proof that patriotic resistance had to be organized in order to defend the newly started programme of *refondation*. On the imagination of the Ivorian civil war as a war of second independence, cf. Konstanze N'Guessan, '"Independence Is Not Given, It Is Taken": The Ivorian Cinquantenaire and Competing History/ies of Independence,' *Nations and Nationalism* 19 (2013): 276–295.
50. For a discussion of the death of the supposedly last World War I *tirailleur* Abdoulaye N'Diaye in 1998, cf. Martin Mourre, 'Der letzte Tirailleur, das Dorf und die Medaille (1914–1918),' in *Gefangene Bilder: Wissenschaft und Propaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Benedikt Burkard (Petersberg: Imhof, 2014), 142–145.
51. Ginio, *African Colonial Soldiers*, 141–142.

3 Princess of a Different Kingdom

Cultural Imperialism, Female Heroism, and the Global Performance of Walt Disney's *Mulan* and *Moana*

Sotirios Mouzakis

Disney Princess Power

Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse is the most famous animated symbol of American popular culture worldwide.[1] The smiling mouse with the iconic circular face is recognized everywhere, and this success has expanded over time in the advertising and popularizing of its many siblings, human and non-human, in movie theatres and on television screens all over the globe. Especially the 'Princess Line' has contributed significantly to the overall economic success of the Disney company: Apart from the Princess Line movies, there is an abundance of merchandise products ranging from dolls, silverware, and clothing (both costumes and everyday casual street wear) to stationary supplies and countless other items. Adult and young audiences alike enjoy these products that proliferate in malls and shopping centres, inside and outside the United States. In fact, Disney, as a global player, markets their products and resorts with significant help from its Princess Line characters.[2]

The Disney Princess Line, including the films, is designed first and foremost for a young female audience. Stereotypical features such as glittery ball gowns, the predominant use of the colour pink in these products, and a stark focus on outer appearances underline (but also reduce) the specific address to young girls, who can easily be influenced by the (American) values and norms the popular princesses represent. As such, this character-type takes on a twofold role. First, the princesses serve as a sales guarantee for Disney. Ever since *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), Disney princesses have not lost their appeal to global audiences and even experienced a huge revival in the so-called second princess wave that *The Little Mermaid* initiated in 1989.[3] Second, they have an exemplary function and are loved and adored as heroines by generations of girls, not least because they have developed—to a certain extent—from being 'heroines' in a more traditional sense—as focalized versions of the 'damsel in distress,' such as Snow White—into confident, self-aware female heroes that overcome obstacles and experience a character trajectory similar to the canonical hero journey template, including strong agency—even

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warrior agency. Often, as in *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Mulan* (1998), or *Moana* (2016), these girl heroes' journeys start with defying the will of their fathers, giving them a limited feminist impulse, which is, however, often resolved at the end of the plots. The global impact that the Disney princesses have—as products that are used, especially by young girls, and as tools for subjectivation—turns them into prime sites for an investigation of global representations of the heroic, since Disney princess heroes point out cultural differences concerning especially female self-perception among children. The woman with heroic potential may be compatible with current Western notions of femininity, but this can be different in other cultural contexts around the world and become a point of cultural friction.

Empirical research has been conducted on identification processes related to Disney princesses with young girls in America and in parts of Asia. It is hardly surprising that American girls could easily identify with the animated princesses they were presented with. Not only did they stem from their own cultural background but also they were designed in correspondence with American stylistic, ethnic, and aesthetic features the audience was familiar with. This perception differed with girls from non-Western countries. As Diana Nastasia and Charu Uppal put it,

> Girls from non-Western countries seem to have a sense of helplessness whereas U.S. children have a sense of entitlement. Fijian, Indian, and Chinese girls see themselves as too dark and not good enough to be princesses in specific [*sic*], whereas U.S. girls of various descent see themselves as beautiful and good, just like the Disney princesses. . . . The 'exotic' princesses have been appropriated by girls in the U.S. rather than girls in other parts of the world . . . as raceless characters, with a Western world type of beauty and set of ideals.[4]

There has been little research on this phenomenon, and none with regard to global heroics.[5] Indeed, the recent Disney Princess Line movies are specifically interesting as a test case for the possibilities and the limits of 'global' heroism because at least the recent princess characters are often of non-Western origin and non-white ethnicity. The following pages will therefore investigate how far these 'new' Disney characters represent an actual opening of the Princess Line in the sense of a cultural translation of heroic stories, or if this new diversity is to be seen merely as intensified marketing that continues to globally market basically American culture.

The Globalization or Grobalization of Disney?

'Cultural industries, such as film, music, and television, are major sources of American exports,' Diana Crane observes. As a consequence, '[t]he

goal of the American government's film policy is to eliminate film quotas in other countries so as to ensure that their film markets are open to American films.'[6] This is highly suggestive of cultural imperialism, since the necessity to adjust to foreign markets becomes more and more irrelevant as American culture, once it is imported into a different cultural context, dominates, threatens, and overpowers local products. Consequently, dependence on America increases.[7]

However, research on the globalization of American culture is an ambivalent field. On the one hand, there are those postulating cultural imperialism and grobalization,[8] while, on the other, some try to explain in a more apologetic fashion the dynamics underlying American culture in a globalized context.[9] They emphasize that American society has never been homogenous, but rather a diverse mixture of different indigenous and migrated cultures that interacted with and nurtured one another. To talk about American culture thus always necessitates adopting a multicultural and multiethnic perspective. Given this circumstance, mass culture in the United States has been—and still is—designed to cater to the tastes of a comparatively diverse consumer market.[10] From a historical perspective, Richard Pells therefore states that

> America's mass culture has not transformed the world into a replica of the United States. Instead, the ethnic and racial pluralism of American society, together with its dependence on foreign cultural influences, has made the United States a replica of the world.[11]

In this light,

> [T]he United States has been a recipient as much as an exporter of global culture. . . . It is precisely these foreign influences that have made America's culture so popular for so long in so many places. American culture spread throughout the world because it has habitually drawn on foreign styles and ideas. . . . In effect, Americans have specialized in *selling the fantasies and folklore of other people back to them* [my italics].[12]

Trying to situate Walt Disney and his company into the context of American global culture, Paul Wells claims that the power of the Disney empire and its penetration into everyday life suggest that 'Disney's work is characterised by a highly charged right-wing perspective, resulting in a catalogue of ideological offences including—among the most easily evidenced—sexism, racism, nationalist jingoism, and quasi-cultural imperialism.'[13] Wells shows how the dynamics and resources that Disney has had at its disposal in recent years spread 'Disney's own moral, ethical, cultural, and—most important—*aesthetic* archetypes.'[14] Apart from these

ideological elements, Jonathan Matusitz and Lauren Palermo argue in a slightly different direction:

> As a radical form of globalisation, grobalisation refers to the imperialistic goals, desires, and needs of multinational corporations (MNCs) to enter diverse markets worldwide so that their supremacy, impact, and profits can grow. . . . Regarding grobalisation and the Walt Disney Company, Disneyfication implies the internationalisation of the entertainment values of US mass culture. It is the idea of bigger, faster, and better entertainment with an overarching sense of uniformity worldwide.[15]

The aggressiveness with which Disney enters global markets is in stark contrast to the often innocent and likeable characters of the film franchise. George Ritzer identifies the mechanisms of grobalization as 'growth imperatives of organisations and nations to expand globally and to impose themselves on the local,'[16] which a decade after his publication still resonates in Donald Trump's infamous inaugural motto 'America first.'

Given the gargantuan size of the American film industry and its global impact, the popularity of Disney products can be traced back to two basic factors. First, there is the ubiquitous presence of Disney merchandise worldwide, which is hard to evade. Second, there is no serious international competition that could possibly keep up with the global success of Disney. While Matusitz and Palermo argue that 'grobalisation seeks to eliminate the local and impose the global,'[17] the Disney Company tries to persuade the world that it is exactly this that it is not trying to achieve. Instead, 'Disney claims to possess and share a friendly universality, with products continuously designed to appeal emotionally to the largest possible audience.'[18] Producers and filmmakers working for Disney have prided themselves on their self-perceived cultural sensitivity and their efforts to spread other cultures on a global level. However, '[g]robalisation renders local cultures less capable of introducing or exploiting new ideas, or even creating themselves and their worlds because these cultures are being inundated with the products and cultures of Disney . . . and the like.'[19] At least since the 1990s, Disney has tried to include different cultures and ethnicities to promote, as producers state, diversity, and plurality on screen.[20] The opinions on the success of this enterprise differ vastly depending on whose perspective is adapted. While American critics and audiences recognize the attempt at cultural diversity and the incorporation of other countries for the sake of an authenticated exotic setting in which the 'foreign' heroic princess can operate, non-American critique disagrees on the subject, as has been outlined. Disney's heroic princesses do not cater to the needs and expectations of audiences abroad but, rather, utilize these alien

places and spaces for aesthetic reasons—that is, to dislocate the story line from a strictly American sphere to a 'somewhere else,' in order to amplify the fairy-tale, far-away-land setting for their own purposes. As a result, critics have raised the reproach of cultural appropriation and imperialism.

To explore this critique, this chapter will show how two successful Disney Princess Line movies with distinctly non-American princesses, *Mulan* and *Moana*, managed to win over audiences worldwide with their eponymous female leads as identifiable heroines, while they failed to deliver their message and idea of female, or, more precisely, girl heroism in the cultural contexts in which their respective stories are located. The liberal, progressive, emancipist understanding of female agency projected in these films was perceived to be in dissonance with established gender concepts of the contexts they evoked and to reveal a fundamental insensitivity—despite claims to the contrary—to cultural difference. This was especially the case concerning one of the first attempts of Disney to turn to a non-Western girl hero—its adaptation of a Chinese folktale of a girl warrior.

Saving China the American Way: *Mulan* (1998)

Mulan tells the story of a girl in Imperial China who never fits the feminine role society holds for her. In an event for the marriage market, she is clumsy and chaotic, and embarrasses her family. When her old father is called to arms by the emperor in a war against the Huns, she tries to stop him, but her father reprimands her because he wants to fulfil his duty for his country. Mulan decides to go in her father's place cross-dressed in male clothes. She leads a heroic ambush that defeats the Huns' army. The movie-script is loosely based on a very famous Chinese folk-motive from the fifth century that has seen many indigenous, as well as Chinese American, adaptations over the centuries.[21] There are two main differences between the traditional story and the plot of the Disney movie: In the early Chinese adaptations, the wilfulness of the state is criticized by the idea that even a girl would go to war to protect her old father from being used by the empire's war machine; her heroism lies in the protection of her family, and the cross-dressing of Mulan was, for a long time, seen as a source of comedy. Mulan the Disney princess also wants to save her father, but she does so openly against his will, and rather than being only comic (which it also is later in the film), her cross-dressing serves as an expression of her inner 'warrior-self,' in a typical American psychologization of the character's motivation. Significantly, in the Disney adaptation, scenes that depict Mulan cutting her hair and dressing in armour are aestheticized with heroizing American film conventions.

When *Mulan* was first released in June 1998, it received mainly positive critical acclaim in the United States. Western critics unanimously

lauded the film's aesthetics as well as its original script. *Mulan* was predicted to become a new instant Disney classic. After six years of production, *Mulan* seemed to renew the success of Disney animated features.[22] It was Disney's first take on Asian material in order to make a full-length animated feature following a formula that had proved successful. Disney made use of basic elements that are globally intelligible, but, according to the US-based Chinese researcher Lan Dong, thereby created 'at best a hybrid—an artefact of global culture' that 'is neither genuinely Chinese nor entirely American.'[23] In another publication, Dong states that 'the very concept of the "authenticity" that the Disney group searched for is questionable, not to mention the highly Disney-stylish result of the production and distribution.'[24] The underlying ethics and aesthetics of the film, then, are seen 'as a commercial fantasy of the "other" produced by Disney. . . . Mulan [is] the Oriental "other" that, ironically, represents the values of the American "self" in order to appeal to an American and international audience.'[25] Joseph Chan agrees, even if a little more reserved in his wording:

> Given the equal importance of the domestic market and the global market to Disney, there is a tendency for Disney to give a foreign culture an American and universal spin. Americanization and universalization are done along with essentialization. The producers have to identify what are to them the key elements of the original culture and subject them to transformation that will help meet the needs of the transculturator. For Disney, its challenge is to sell its animated feature to the Americans and people in other parts of the world.[26]

Through this attempt to simultaneously globalize and Americanize foreign cultural narratives, the company reduces the risk of economic failure since 'these stories have stood the test of time in their home cultures.'[27]

On the economic level, *Mulan* grossed $22,745,143 during the opening weekend in the United States, making for 18.9 per cent of the total domestic income and entering the charts at position two.[28] The economically promising market of China let Disney down, however. The Chinese government allowed American film productions to enter their market in 1994, which proved to be a both very profitable and yet very precarious market for American products. In the beginning, the number of films to be imported was limited to ten per year.[29] 'The American films quickly captured 70% of China's film market,'[30] which led to further controversies over the desirability of these imports as they imposed a clear threat to local productions. When *Mulan* was finally admitted by the Chinese government, which had been displeased with the depiction of China in *Kundun*, a previous American movie about the Dalai Lama, the film, despite the fact that its heroic protagonist saves China, did not manage to win over Chinese audiences.

Ivy Haoyin Hsieh and Marylou Matoush observed that 'the storyline was transformed into the European fairy-tale structure that Disney has become famous for, without respect for the Chinese origins of the tale.'[31] They proceed to argue that

> Disney dismissed the essence of Mulan's self-sacrifice for the sake of filial piety, and instead interpreted the theme in a very Eurocentric way. . . . 'Finding oneself' is a modern American concept and a noble goal from a western perspective, but one that conflicts with East Asian perspectives regarding the more communal nature of the self.[32]

And, one might add, the female self in particular. The first impression of Mulan in the film is anything but heroic. The young woman is shown chronically late and chaotic, reminiscent of a Western teenage girl dealing with her family and trying to master her chores.[33] There is no clear indication as to when and where exactly the action takes place other than the Great Wall and a Hun invasion, which opens the film, thus suggesting a premedieval Chinese setting.[34] This China, however, is clearly constructed and imagined through an American's eyes—another fact many Chinese viewers criticized.[35] Mulan is set up to meet a matchmaker in order for her to get married off. Her clumsy, non-conformist gender behaviour indicates her conceptual origin in a post-enlightened Western society rather than in a relatively conservative, tradition-bound Asian context. The meeting with the matchmaker is detrimental: Mulan interrupts her, spills the tea, and tries to fish the lucky charm cricket her grandmother gave her out of the cup, much to the displeasure of the matchmaker. It is a scene overburdened with elements of slapstick comedy and conventional American elements of humour. Afterwards, Mulan questions her role inside both her family and society—having lost face and brought dishonour on herself and, even worse, her parents.

During the song 'Bring Honor to Us All,' the audience sees how no less than ten women, Mulan's mother and grandmother included, are busy preparing the young woman for the ceremony: washing and clothing her, putting make-up on her face, and ultimately shaping her into their idea of a perfect daughter. Mulan's transformation resembles a masquerade rather than a comfortable transition from girl to young woman. These scenes are interspersed with little acts of deviant behaviour, questioning the role a woman has to play within Chinese society and, by extension, on a more global scale. On a micro-level, these deviations symbolize Mulan's transgressive character, embedding her in a context of exceptionality that nurtures a different side of heroic potential for her great achievement to come. Mulan's defence of a little girl and her doll from two bullies, for example, foreshadows her defiance of male supremacy and the rescue of China from the seemingly invincible Huns. This scene is alluded to later on, when Shan Yu, the leader of the Huns, pokes fun at a doll he finds in

the snow near the village he has burnt down, threatening to extend this degree of devastation and destruction to China as a whole. While Mulan's female peers seem at ease with the role bestowed upon them, she does not quite fit in. Her behaviour suggests discontent and a rejection of the Chinese notion of filial piety. Among the assembly of young women gathered to meet the matchmaker, Mulan's look, make-up, and outfit are the only ones that display inharmonious colour blocking and asymmetry, making her stand out on the visual level. Her looks become indicative of her identity, since it is only in the disguise of a man and the pursuit of American values and ideals that Mulan can become a hero. Even though the American take on the Chinese setting is tied to the notion of honour (a value of traditional esteem in Chinese culture), the motivation and underlying concept differ significantly, estranging Asian audiences that cannot relate to the behaviour Mulan displays on screen.[36] Disney recontextualizes the story by retelling it according to 'an internal logic that sounds convincing to the potential audience.'[37] Dong argues, however, that

> Mulan becomes a super heroine modelled on American archetypes, except for her Chinese body. As such, Disney shapes Mulan from contemporary American perspectives rather than interpreting the legendary figure and her myth within the cultural context of premodern China, even though the trip to China prior to production is obviously an effort to brand the animation with cultural authenticity.[38]

Dong's assessment is supported by Langfitt, who reports that Chinese audiences 'occasionally refer to the cinematic heroine as "Yang Mulan," or "Foreign Mulan" in Chinese—while complaining that she looks either Korean or Western. Others say her character does not exhibit the same depth of filial piety as her literary predecessor.'[39] The song following the matchmaker scene, 'Reflections,' summarizes Mulan's discomfort with obliging the patriarchal set of values she is expected to fulfil. Instead of questioning her role as daughter and how to correspond to filial piety, she faces a crisis of her own, wondering how to live her own life without making her parents unhappy. She wants to find out who she really is and develop an identity without societal constraints limiting her well-being. 'Somehow I cannot hide who I am though I've tried.'[40] The lyrics are not only an expression of Mulan's status as a misfit but also, and more importantly, a prism through which her exceptionality and transgressive nature shine. Albeit interwoven with an existential identity crisis at first, Mulan's rejection of playing by the rules and attempt to develop her own individuality correspond to a more progressive Western set of values instead of a more traditional, less individualistic, Chinese one.

These particular personality traits are significant with regard to the film's interpretation of heroism. Heroes rarely follow the fixed set of rules that is laid out for them. 'Finding herself' thus becomes more than just a

quest for personal individuality—it becomes her quest to be a hero. Chan argues that '[Mulan] might have gone through all the ordeal not because of her father, but because of her desire to achieve something on her own. This stress on individuality, particularly for a female, is at odds with China's feudalistic past.'[41] Evidently, this cultural difference also clashes with Joseph Campbell's seminal thoughts about the heroic quest, which is also elementary to the Disney formula as described by Dong, where 'an adolescent protagonist who is disappointed by his or her present life and thus embarks on a journey of process in search of a true self.'[42] Disney's interpretation of the Chinese ballad is adapted to suit, first and foremost, a Western audience's taste and understanding (for the most part) of womanhood and heroism.[43] These two entities are presented as not being mutually exclusive in this interpretation of the source material, while the Chinese audience criticized the film's inauthenticity—mainly due to the lack of adherence to Chinese core values and the Americanization of their heroic discourse.[44] Mulan's question 'when will my reflection show who I am inside?' is answered shortly afterwards when she prepares to elope and take her father's place in the army, or, put differently: when she sets out to become a hero of the prototypically male warrior type.

Upon cutting off her hair, she holds her father's sword in front of her face. The weapon's blade becomes a mirror: In perfect symmetry, the reflection of Mulan's face aligns with her actual face, devoid of make-up or any stereotypically feminine connoted element. This implies that it is Mulan the warrior who she really is inside and not Mulan the bride, whose reflections were blurry, asymmetrical, and fragmentary. The sword grants her more meaning in terms of heroic agency than a comb to ornate her hair.[45] Yet, Mulan has to adjust to her newly adopted gender role. This transformation looks more natural and convincing than her previous set-up, which further stresses her heroic character and individualistic desire for agency. Mulan initially falls behind the other soldiers. She underachieves in the drills and is dependent on others' help and support. She is, however, quick to use her wits to overcome and compensate for her physical shortcomings. Having trained hard, she ultimately catches up with (if not exceeds) her comrades, becoming one of the prime soldiers in Captain Li Shang's division. Defeating the Huns temporarily in the mountains, Mulan, in the guise of her male persona Ping, finds herself praised and celebrated for her 'masculine' heroic exploits, and accepted and trusted by Captain Shang. Her elation swiftly collapses when the charade is discovered and Mulan is dishonourably discharged. The attribution of heroic traits gives way to misogynist insult: Mulan is called a 'treacherous snake.' Her comrades' change of behaviour reduces her identity to her female sex alone, which everyone, including her eventual love interest, Shang, deems inappropriate when it comes to armed military exploits. The fortune cookie philosophy of the emperor in the beginning of the film falls short when he proclaims that '[a] single grain of

rice can tip the scale. One *man* may be the difference between victory and defeat [my italics].' Neglecting the twofold meaning the word 'man' takes on in the English language, it will later be seen that it was not the prowess of a thousand men but, instead, the courage of a single woman that ultimately saved China, restored her family's honour, and proved her worth in the battlefield and elsewhere.

The movie is bestowed with a typical Hollywood happy ending as spectacle: The enemy is defeated in a fast-paced showdown, including another comic scene of male-to-female cross-dressing, there are sidekick punchlines by Mulan's dragon friend Mushu in Eddie Murphy's much commented and criticized African American accent,[46] and explosions and fireworks galore. These uses of Hollywood's aesthetic conventions estrange and alienate Chinese viewers who cannot relate to the less than humble fashioning of Mulan's victory. Mulan comes back to the known realms of her American context, but does not return to her original Chinese ancestry like it was described in the ballad.

Polynesian Amalgamation: *Moana* (2016)

Moana tells the story of how a Polynesian princess saves her tribe and her island from a dark curse brought about by the hubris of the former hero and demigod Maui. The personification of the islands and the ocean and their 'corruption' can be interpreted as carrying some ecocriticist overtones. Western media reactions to *Moana*, Disney's fifty-sixth animated feature film, and its own version of a non-Western princess, were positive. Grossing $56,631,401 during the opening weekend (22.8 per cent of the total domestic income), the film entered the charts in first place.[47] To critics and fans, it seemed noteworthy that the action of the film could do completely without romance and a love interest on the side of the heroine.[48] The innovation of *Moana*, such as it was perceived, lay in the fact that the film had a strong focus on adventure, which, in a stereotypically heteronormative assessment, would speak to a young male audience. Moana's self-assertion and self-fashioning were described as 'just the latest feminist, progressive Disney hit' by Brent Lang.[49]

Taking up motifs and material from Polynesian cultures and mythologies, Moana (which translates as 'Ocean') is a chief's daughter.[50] While most traditional Polynesian cultures are patrilineal, social rank also plays an important role.[51] Concerning the representation of Polynesian cultures, viewers with a Tongan background voiced slight irritations concerning the ideas of a female chief, while the (maybe ironic) naming of the antagonist crab also irritated viewers, as one remark shows: 'In my culture, Tamatoa is the name of legends and represents tough heroes! Not some slimy crab.'[52] In the same report, viewers lauded the figure of the grandmother as a loving representation of the important role that ancestors play in the traditions of Polynesian cultures.

The film starts with Moana's grandmother recounting the story of demigod Maui's downfall—withholding the heroic deeds attributed to him. Moana is fascinated by the story, whereas all the other children stare at the storyteller with a look of fear. Already as a little child, Moana displays bravery and a longing to leave home and sail beyond the reef to experience adventures, just as Maui did. Moana's connection to the sea is closely linked to Maui. He stole the heart of Te Fiti, the mother island, who in turn transformed into the lava monster Te Ka, spreading darkness and destruction to the islands.[53] The personified ocean interacts with Moana and offers her the heart of Te Fiti in the form of a green gem stone. As such, the film evokes Campbell's hero journey by taking up the motif of the chosen one who is assigned a task that usually includes some sort of saving or rescuing of a greater community. Being chosen, one can either fulfil the task satisfactorily or fail miserably while trying. The ocean might also be read as Moana's subconscious, which pushes her towards becoming a heroic person. Her inner drive is externalized visually and creates a multilayered approach to dealing with heroism. Moana's interaction with the ocean might also compensate for the—in the context of a film with a 'girl power' message—paradoxically missing goddess Hina, who is a central female figure of Polynesian myth. Tēvita Ka'ili criticizes the absence of this specific goddess as a key element of overarching Polynesian mythology, as she is the complement to Maui. Both deities commonly appear as a pair, and can only seldom be found in isolation.[54]

Usually, there is a moment of doubt and/or throwback in the hero's quest shortly before accomplishing his or her mission, stressing the larger-than-life character of the enterprise and giving more meaning to its heroic dimension.[55] When Moana is made chief of the tribe, one can already guess her leadership ability. The responsibilities she takes on prove her agency as an exceptional persona within society—however, for the most part, as one rooted in an American context, where women very well may take on leading positions in society, as opposed to the somewhat more restrictive Polynesian societies.[56] When Te Ka's curse hits Motu Nui, ruining the coconut harvest and making the fish in the reef disappear, Moana is quick to confront her father and suggests leaving the island, a plan that he had failed at when he was younger. Since her father is infuriated and overly protective of his daughter, she steals away at night, embarking on a quest to find Maui, restore the heart of Te Fiti, and, in this way, save her island and her tribe. The heroic nature of this project is the altruistic act of selflessness paired with the willingness to face great, unknown dangers, alongside the transgression of both paternal and spatial limits. Interestingly, Moana's longing to leave the island is not tied to the wish of leaving behind her home in favour of a strange new world; instead she embraces her cultural heritage and is 'looking to grow so she can be better for *her* world.'[57]

When the protagonist succeeds in finding Maui, he proclaims himself a hero in the song 'You're Welcome,' trying to establish a hierarchy between him, the heroic demigod—or rather: the divine hero, who once was loved by people for the innumerable deeds he did to their advantage—and her, the unexperienced young human girl. Significantly, when Moana addresses Maui, it is the title 'hero of man' that she forgets and that Maui seems to be very keen on, which implies that the awarding and maintenance of a heroic status are a bigger achievement than the mere denomination as a god or deity, which, per se, does not necessarily require any sort of heroic action. When Moana cannot convince Maui to help her on the adventure, she manages to trigger his interest only by questioning the hero status he takes exuberant pride in. Foiled against his egocentricity, Moana's humble heroism radiates even brighter. It is only after recovering Maui's magic hook and rescuing him again (now for the third time) that he starts acknowledging Moana's heroic potential and looks at her at eye level.[58]

While the audience has long realized that Moana is the actual hero and driving force of the film,[59] it takes her a little longer until she comes to this conclusion. During the first encounter with Te Ka, she remains in the background, thinking it is Maui who has the power to defeat the lava monster. When he is overpowered again and abandons Moana, doubts and insecurities about her being the chosen one overcome her—the burden of being a heroine seems to overwhelm her. Asking the ocean to revoke her exceptional status, her dead grandmother appears to her in the form of a ray. She comforts her granddaughter and reminds her of what she is able to do. This moment of doubt in Moana's journey is instrumental in cementing her status as a female hero, as it shows both her humility and modesty in accepting this outstanding role and the volatility of heroism. Her grandmother's pep talk does not fail to have its desired effect: Convinced and determined, Moana sets out to restore the heart of Te Fiti herself, taking over the part of the demigod/hero Maui. As such, Moana goes from being the chosen one to actively choosing to perform a hero function and fulfil the task circumstances have served her. She embraces her exceptionality and lives up to the reputation of a hero by solving the predicament her tribe finds itself in. Their roles being inverted, Maui's status is downgraded even further as he becomes a sidekick to the teenage girl. The gender constellation here is salient, as hypermasculine, divine (pseudo)heroism is subordinated to a female and more ordinary notion of the heroic. Moana, then, not only saves Maui, her island and her tribe but also retaliates against her disparaged princess sisters in the Disney universe. Her resilience, self-assertion, and persuasiveness make her a heroine with which Disney attempted to set a new female standard in its princess family, while Maui's attachment to stereotypical and exaggerated traits of manliness symptomizes—rooted within a Western context of discourse—a crisis of masculinity in the face

of female empowerment. The innovation in *Moana* thus lies not only in the double address of a young female and male audience but also in a female character's active embrace and choice of adventure, independence, and heroism instead of the formerly defining feature of the pursuit of—or, rather, the passive conquest by—a love interest. Agency and action may be taken by an act of conscious choice, and, in the case of *Moana*, it is the eponymous girl hero who seizes the opportunity.

The creative team behind *Moana* takes particular pride in the musical elements from Samoa and New Zealand that were incorporated.[60] To Americans—producers, critics, and reviewers alike—it seems important to stress the voices' origin and how multicultural the team behind the film is. However, that does not suffice to qualify for a credible display of a multilayered culture. While 'vibrantly [drawing] from Samoan and Maori musical history, incorporating tribal dance rhythms into the orchestration'[61] may add local colour to the non-specified Pacific setting of Motu Nui island, it most certainly cannot guarantee authenticity on an overall level. Director John Musker fails to convince when he argues that he conducted thorough research in advance, as is evidenced by the following comment:

> We spent *almost three weeks* going to Fiji, and to Samoa, and to Tahiti. We actually met with people really connected to the culture, their identity as the greatest navigators ever, what it was like to live in a village on an island. We tried to really absorb *that kind of stuff* and learn from them what their experience was [my italics].[62]

While others spend years of intensive research and education on the subject, the Disney squad took a prolonged vacation, hopping from one main Pacific island to the other. The result is a film that uses Polynesian culture as a catch-all term that is devoid of nuance. There is no distinction between different Pacific cultures; anything and anyone from the ocean left of mainland America, from the US state of Hawaii to New Zealand, fit into the *Moana* context and are viewed as one and the same culture.

This comprehension of Polynesia bears problematic potential since this very broad subsumption obliterates details and specifics of individual cultures in favour of a general, but as a consequence, partially meaningless categorization. Just like American culture has been generalized into global culture, individual Pacific cultures get merged into and summarized by the film's comprehensive notion of Polynesia. Critics seem to notice this, but do not care to problematize this fact when they say '"Moana" is populated by Pacific Islanders, a far more diverse set of people than the ones who pop up in the lily white worlds.'[63] It is questionable where non-Pacific Islanders derive their self-proclaimed expertise from when they certify *Moana* being an authentic film which displays Polynesian culture with utter care and vigilance lest nobody take offence. It seems almost

comical how everyone involved in the making of the film and interviewed about it can talk only in superlatives about the production—almost as if the team tried to persuade themselves of the film's high standards and cultural authenticity.[64] In an interview, Lin-Manuel Miranda, for example, asserts that '[if] you're making a movie about a part of the world, for many people that will be their only exposure to that culture. . . . So you should know something about that culture [laughs] when you write it.'[65] In light of such statements, it is the American cultural machinery alone that can propagate the culture, mythology, history, and music of 'weaker' (and, as such, possibly inferior) regions of the world without considering the impact their actions might have on these respective regions, nations, and people. Dan Kois carries the matters to extremes and displays a complete lack of cultural understanding and sensitivity when he claims laconically, and without the slightest hint of irony or justification, that 'I suspect the film will be embraced by viewers of Pacific Islands origin, *starved for* any portrayals of their heritage in pop culture [my italics].'[66] In an interesting twist of argumentation, Tim Greiving does seem to note the cultural imperialism that the US cultural industry is still exercising, when he says that '[the] studio has taken flak in the past for appropriating other cultures in misguided—and sometimes insulting—ways,' while failing to see how *Moana* perpetuates stereotypes and continues to do just that.[67] Alissa Wilkinson goes even further in her opinion that 'animation doesn't just depict a story in a cool way, but actually helps shape the way we perceive it, and lets [the filmmakers] pay homage to art from other cultures and time periods.'[68] Clearly, there does not seem to be any sensitivity whatsoever when it comes to economically silencing weaker cultures, bereaving them of their cultural heritage by means of appropriation and alienation, thereby exploiting and falsifying it for entertainment purposes.[69]

The selection of cultural elements to create a Polynesian heroine who, according to the Disney self-perception, is ground-breaking and innovative when it comes to the American quest to explore new horizons—or rather enter a new market that is economically promising—seemed not such a bad idea per se. However, by exploring (and exploiting) the Pacific region, Disney first and foremost pursues financial interest, such as the establishment of entertainment tourism, which poses a severe threat to indigenous cultures, despite the enterprise's skin-deep claims of a reciprocal win-win situation for both sides.[70] *Moana* is yet another white, masculine creation of a cultural hybrid, despite the partially feminist message the film tries to convey through a female heroic character. She does not belong to America but most certainly cannot be located within an authentic context of one of the many Polynesian cultures either.

Since authenticity has become a quality marker in recent years, Disney created the so-called Oceanic Story Trust to make sure *Moana* would pass as authentic.[71] However, one might ask, with numerous non-US critics,

if the establishment of this trust per se serves to promote a better understanding of the region's many cultures and thus to silence/appease critics, or if it is merely a cleverly orchestrated publicity stunt to legitimize the latest instance of cultural appropriation, while propagating progress and a genuine interest in spreading cultural awareness on a larger scale.[72] It may be progressive that Moana is given the chance to be a hero for herself and her tribe, and can do completely without romance. But cultural authenticity fails Disney in this film yet again as it goes on to perpetuate, propagate, and move American values and perspectives to a fashionably exotic, colourfully animated paradise island instead of giving a voice to one specific Pacific culture.

Disney's 'Globalized' Heroic Princesses

In the examples discussed earlier, Disney departs from the entrenched notion of a princess and tries to broaden the spectrum.[73] This process of democratizing and, simultaneously, heroizing the Princess Line defies (some) social, ethnic, and gender-related stereotypes and makes it easier for younger audiences to identify with the protagonist. These perceptions are, however, not globally shared, as research conducted in Asia and the Pacific region has revealed.[74] American culture 'has transformed what it received from others into a culture everyone everywhere could comprehend and embrace' so that it 'has never felt all that foreign to foreigners.'[75] While this assessment might be true in Western cultures—that is, the United States and big parts of the European market—its worth can be challenged when it comes to other regions.

Although the two films analysed in this chapter are set almost two decades apart, only little seems to have changed when it comes to cultural sensitivity. Admittedly, animation techniques have evolved, more money has been made, and the musical pattern of the songs has undergone some changes. But Disney cannot shake off the accusation of cultural imperialism and appropriation, despite many claims of only the best intentions and an attempt to be culturally sensitive and strive for authentic depictions of non-US-American source material. As the foregoing readings suggest, Disney's aim to create two ostensibly global girl heroes must be considered a failure. The nature of heroism as depicted in *Mulan* and *Moana* is not apt to transfer the strong feminist claim from the domestic market to the world scale and, additionally, clashes with (or even contradicts) the world view and set of ideals and values of traditional Chinese and Polynesian cultures, respectively. A live-action remake of Mulan is set to be released in 2020. Disney aficionados and the fan base alike are anxiously waiting to see if Disney will finally succeed and take the next big step, creating an authentic foreign heroine, or if it is just going to be yet another American fantasy, dislocated into a still mostly unspecified exotic East.

Notes

1. Cf. Jonathan Matusitz and Lauren Palermo, 'The Disneyfication of the World: A Grobalisation Perspective,' *Journal of Organisational Transformation and Social Change* 11, no. 2 (2014): 91–107 (95).
2. Cf. Vincent Ng, 'How Disney Princess Became a Multi Billion Dollar Brand,' *MCNG*, March 18, 2013, accessed September 26, 2018, www.mcngmarketing.com/how-disney-princesses-became-a-multi-billion-dollar-brand; Claire Suddath, 'The $500 Million Battle Over Disney's Princesses: How Hasbro Grabbed the Lucrative Disney Doll Business from Mattel,' *Bloomberg*, December 17, 2015, accessed September 26, 2018, www.bloomberg.com/features/2015-disney-princessprincess-hasbro.
3. Cf. Rebecca-Anne Do Rozario, 'The Princess and the Magic Kingdom: Beyond Nostalgia, the Function of the Disney Princess,' *Women's Studies in Communication* 27, no. 1 (2004): 34–59; Dawn Elizabeth England, et al., 'Gender Role Portrayal and the Role of the Disney Princesses,' *Sex Roles* 64, no. 7–8 (2011): 555–567; Juliana Garabedian, 'Animating Gender Roles: How Disney Is Redefining the Modern Princess,' *James Madison Undergraduate Research Journal* 2, no. 1 (2014): 22–25.
4. Diana Nastasia and Charu Uppal, 'TV Princesses in the Eyes of Western and Non-Western Girls: Learning About Being a Girl From the Exotic Disney Princesses,' *Televizion* 23 (2010): 34–37 (36–37).
5. For the general context cf. Sherry A. Inness, ed., *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
6. Diana Crane, 'Cultural Globalization and the Dominance of American Film Industry: Cultural Policies, National Film Industries, and Transnational Film,' *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 20, no. 4 (2014): 365–382 (372).
7. Ibid.
8. Cf. Crane, 'Cultural Globalization and the Dominance of American Film Industry'; Matusitz and Palermo, 'The Disneyfication of the World'; John Carlos Rowe, 'Culture, US Imperialism, and Globalization,' *American Literary History* 16, no. 4 (2004): 575–595.
9. Cf. Petra Goedde, 'The Globalization of American Culture,' in *A Companion to American Cultural History*, ed. Karen Halttunen (Malden: Blackwell, 2014), 246–262.
10. Cf. Crane, 'Cultural Globalization and the Dominance of American Film Industry,' 374.
11. Richard Pells, 'From Modernism to the Movies: The Globalization of American Culture in the Twentieth Century,' *European Journal of American Culture* 23, no. 2 (2004): 143–155 (152).
12. Ibid. (144).
13. Paul Wells, '"I Wanna Be like You-oo-oo": Disneyfied Politics and Identity from *Mermaid* to *Mulan*,' in *American Film and Politics from Reagan to Bush Jr.*, eds. Philip John Davies and Paul Wells (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 139–154 (139).
14. Ibid. (140).
15. Matusitz and Palermo, 'The Disneyfication of the World' (91).
16. George Ritzer, *The Globalization of Nothing* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 2007), xiii.
17. Matusitz and Palermo, 'The Disneyfication of the World' (92).
18. Ibid. (95).
19. Ibid. (93).

20. Cf. Jo Bradley, 'The Evolution of the Disney Princess,' *Film Inquiry*, last modified January 12, 2017, accessed July 24, 2018, www.filminquiry.com/evolution-disney-princess/; Lia Lewis, 'Disney Has a Diversity Issue,' *Odyssey*, last modified July 24, 2017, accessed September 26, 2018, www.theodysseyonline.com/disney-has-diversity-issue.
21. Cf. Lan Dong, *Mulan's Legend and Legacy in China and the United States* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011); Louise Edwards, 'Transformations of the Woman Warrior Hua Mulan: From Defender of the Family to Servant of the State,' *NAN Nü* 12, no. 2 (2010): 175–214.
22. Cf. Coria Brown and Laura Shapiro, 'Woman Warrior,' *High Beam Research*, last modified June 8, 1998, accessed September 25, 2018, www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-20790971.html.
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24. Lan Dong, 'Writing Chinese American into Words and Images: Storytelling and Retelling of the Song of Mu Lan,' *The Lion and the Unicorn* 30, no. 2 (2006): 218–233 (228).
25. Ibid. (228–229).
26. Joseph Chan, 'Disneyfying and Globalizing the Chinese Legend of Mulan: A Study of Transculturation,' in *In Search of Boundaries: Communication, Nation-States and Cultural Identities*, eds. Joseph Chan and Bryce McIntyre (Westport: Ablex Publishing, 2002), 225–248 (232).
27. Ibid. (231).
28. Cf. 'Mulan,' *Box Office Mojo*, accessed September 25, 2018, www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=main&id=mulan.htm.
29. The number was readjusted in 2001, when 20 American films were permitted. As of 2012, 34 American films are imported annually.
30. Crane, 'Cultural Globalization and the Dominance of American Film Industry,' 373.
31. Ivy Haoyin Hsieh and Marylou Matoush, 'Filial Daughter, Woman Warrior, or Identity-Seeking Fairytale Princess: Fostering Critical Awareness through Mulan,' *Children's Literature in Education* 43, no. 3 (2012): 213–222 (219).
32. Ibid.
33. Cf. Dong, 'Mulan: Disney's Hybrid Heroine' (159).
34. Cf. Jun Tang, 'A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Production and Reception of Disney's Mulan through Its Chinese Subtitles,' *European Journal of English Studies* 12, no. 2 (2008): 149–162.
35. Cf. Frank Langfitt, 'Disney Magic Fails "Mulan" in China,' *Baltimore Sun*, May 3, 1999, accessed September 26, 2018, http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1999-05-03/features/9905030250_1_disney-s-mulan-sui-dynasty-chinese; Dan Damon, 'China vs. Hollywood on the BBC,' *Chinese Cinemas*, August 14, 1999, accessed September 25, 2018, www.chinesecinemas.org/bbc.html.
36. Cf. Langfitt, 'Disney Magic Fails "Mulan" in China'; 'Chinese Unimpressed with Disney's Mulan,' *BBC News*, last modified March 19, 1999, accessed September 25, 2018, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/299618.stm; Linyu Zhou, 'Otherizing the "Other": An Ideological Mirror Image: Rethinking the Cultural Identity in Disney's Animated Feature Mulan,' *Comparative Literature in China* 63, no. 2 (2006): 117–127.
37. Chan, 'Disneyfying and Globalizing the Chinese Legend of Mulan' (234–235).
38. Dong, 'Writing Chinese American into Words and Images' (230).
39. Langfitt, 'Disney Magic Fails "Mulan" in China.'

40. Barry Cook and Tony Bancroft, *Mulan* (USA: Walt Disney Pictures, 1998).
41. Chan, 'Disneyfying and Globalizing the Chinese Legend of Mulan' (234).
42. Dong, 'Mulan: Disney's Hybrid Heroine' (158).
43. Ibid. Dong argues in this context that Mulan 'is aimed at a predominantly white, middle-class American family audience' (158).
44. Chan, 'Disneyfying and Globalizing the Chinese Legend of Mulan' (234).
45. Cf. Dong, 'Mulan: Disney's Hybrid Heroine' (161).
46. Cf. ibid.; Langfitt, 'Disney Magic Fails "Mulan" in China.'
47. Cf. 'Moana,' *Box Office Mojo*, last accessed September 26, 2018. www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=main&id=disney1116.htm.
48. Cf. Amanda Hoover, 'Disney's "Moana" Wins at Box Office with Feminist Narrative,' *Christian Science Monitor*, November 28, 2016, accessed September 26, 2018, www.csmonitor.com/The-Culture/Movies/2016/1128/Disney-s-Moana-wins-at-box-office-with-feminist-narrative; Alissa Wilkinson, 'Disney's Moana Tells an Emotional, Funny Story Worthy of Its Luminous Heroine,' *Vox*, last modified November 24, 2016, accessed September 26, 2018, www.vox.com/culture/2016/11/22/13713820/moana-review-disney-dwayne-johnson-lin-manuel-miranda.
49. Brent Lang, '"Moana" Is Just the Latest Feminist, Progressive Disney Hit,' *Variety*, November 27, 2016, accessed September 26, 2018, http://variety.com/2016/film/news/moana-box-office-feminist-disney-1201927383/.
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51. Robert Carl Suggs et al., 'Polynesian Culture: Cultural Region, Pacific Ocean,' *Encyclopedia Britannica*, January 3, 2018, accessed September 26, 2018, www.britannica.com/place/Polynesia.
52. Will Varner, 'Some Things about Disney's "Moana" That Real Polynesians Want You to Know,' *Buzzfeed*, December 10, 2016, accessed September 26, 2018, www.buzzfeed.com/willvarner/we-asked-polynesian-people-what-they-thought-of-disneys-moan?utm_term=.fj9maoOLD#.duJAqlpD5.
53. Critics identify the storyline of a dark danger polluting the ocean and endangering the islanders as hypocrisy given the stance of US politics on environmental issues and the amount of waste Disney produces yearly, contributing to a very large extent to the pollution of the oceans itself; cf. Tina Grandinetti, 'Moana Might Be Great for Representation but It's Not All Heartwarming for Hawaii,' *The Guardian* January 12, 2017, accessed September 26, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/jan/13/moana-might-be-great-for-representation-but-its-not-all-heartwarming-for-hawaii; Tina Ngata, 'Te Reo Māori WON'T Fix Moana,' *The Non-Plastic Maori*, June 12, 2017, accessed September 26, 2018, https://thenonplasticmaori.wordpress.com/2017/06/12/te-reo-maori-wont-fix-moana/.
54. Cf. Tēvita Ka'ili, 'Goddess Hina: The Missing Heroine from Disney's Moana,' *Huffington Post*, last modified December 6, 2016, accessed September 26, 2018, www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/goddess-hina-the-missing-heroine-from-disney%CA%BCs-moana_us_5839f343e4b0a79f7433b6e5.
55. Cf. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Novato: New World Library, 2008 [1949]), 49–57.
56. Cf. Varner, 'Some Things about Disney's "Moana" That Real Polynesians Want You to Know.'
57. Dave Quinn, 'How Lin-Manuel Miranda's Oscar-Nominated Moana Track Evolved into Disney's Most Unique Ballad,' *Box Office Mojo*, 2014, last modified February 24, 2017, accessed September 26, 2018, https://people.

com/awards/lin-manuel-miranda-story-behind-writing-moana-how-far-ill-go/ (Emphasis by author.)

58. Cf. Madeline Streiff and Lauren Dundes, 'From Shapeshifter to Lava Monster: Gender Stereotypes in Disney's *Moana*,' *Social Sciences* 6, no. 91 (2017): 1–12.
59. As opposed to Dan Kois, who fails to recognize Moana's personal and intellectual development and identifies the entertaining and feisty Maui as the exclusive driving force of the narrative; cf. Dan Kois, 'A Whole New World: With Moana, Disney Gives a New Generation Its Aladdin,' *Slate*, November 21, 2016, accessed September 26, 2018, www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2016/11/disney_s_moana_featuring_music_by_lin_manuel_miranda_reviewed.html?wpsrc=utm_medium=promo&utm_campaign=plus_content&utm_content=story&utm_source=article.
60. Cf. Tim Greiving, 'In "Moana," New Voices Both Uphold and Challenge the Disney Tradition,' *NPR Music*, November 20, 2016, accessed September 26, 2018, www.npr.org/2016/11/20/502572461/in-moana-new-voices-both-uphold-and-challenge-the-disney-tradition; Jake Cole, 'Moana,' *Slant*, November 22, 2016, accessed September 26, 2018, www.slantmagazine.com/film/review/moana.
61. Cole, 'Moana.'
62. Agnes Constante, 'Critics Accuse Disney of "Culture Theft" Ahead of "Moana" Release,' *NBC News*, November 18, 2016, accessed September 26, 2018, www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/critics-accuse-disney-culture-theft-ahead-moana-release-n685866.
63. Lang, '"Moana" Is Just the Latest Feminist, Progressive Disney Hit.'
64. Cf. Melinda Newman, 'Lin-Manuel Miranda, Mark Mancina & Opetaia Foa'i on Creating Disney's "Moana" Music as "Hamilton" Exploded,' *Billboard*, November 23, 2016, accessed September 26, 2018, www.billboard.com/articles/news/7588008/lin-manuel-miranda-mark-mancina-opetaia-foai-disney-moana-music.
65. Greiving, 'Moana.'
66. Kois, 'A Whole New World.'
67. Greiving, 'Moana.'
68. Wilkinson, 'Disney's Moana Tells an Emotional, Funny Story Worthy of Its Luminous Heroine.'
69. Cf. Constante, 'Critics Accuse Disney of "Culture Theft" Ahead of "Moana" Release'; Vincente Diaz, 'Don't Swallow (or Be Swallowed by) Disney's "Culturally Authenticated Moana",' *Indian Country Today*, November 13, 2016, accessed September 26, 2018, https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/opinions/dont-swallow-or-be-swallowed-by-disneys-culturally-authenticated-moana/; Doug Herman, 'How the Story of "Moana" and Maui Holds Up Against Cultural Truths,' *Smithsonian.com*, December 2, 2016, accessed September 26, 2018, www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/how-story-moana-and-maui-holds-against-cultural-truths-180961258/; Ngata, 'Te Reo Māori WON'T Fix Moana.'
70. Cf. Grandinetti, 'Moana Might Be Great for Representation But It's Not All Heartwarming for Hawaii'; Kaite Murar, 'Disney's "Moana" an Advertisement for Hawaii Tourism,' *Pacific Business News*, November 17, 2016, accessed September 26, 2018, www.bizjournals.com/pacific/news/2016/11/17/disneys-moana-anadvertisement-for-hawaii-tourism.html.
71. Cf. Aisha Harris, 'Moana Makes It Official: Disney Has Entered a Progressive, Inclusive Third Golden Age,' *Slate*, November 21, 2016, accessed September 26, 2018, www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2016/11/21/with_moana_frozen_big_hero_6_and_zootopia_disney_has_entered_an_inclusive.html; Benjamin

To, 'Dance, Storytelling, and the Art of Wayfinding: Behind the Scenes of Disney's "Moana",' *NBC News*, October 25, 2016, accessed September 26, 2018, www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/dance-storytelling-art-wayfinding-behind-scenes-disney-s-moana-n672141; Murar, 'Disney's "Moana" an Advertisement for Hawaii Tourism.'

72. Cf. Ka'ili, 'Goddess Hina: The Missing Heroine from Disney's Moana.'
73. Cf. Aisha Harris, 'All the Disney Predecessors behind the Characters in Moana, in One Chart,' *Slate*, December 7, 2016, accessed September 26, 2018, www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2016/12/07/from_ariel_to_aladdin_to_belle_all_the_disney_characters_who_seem_to_have.html; Kois, 'A Whole New World.'
74. Cf. Nastasia and Uppal, 'TV Princesses in the Eyes of Western and Non-Western Girls.'
75. Pells, 'From Modernism to the Movies,' 151.

4 One Hero Fits All?

Cultural Translations in *Doctor Strange* (2016) as 'Global Hero' Movie

Nicole Falkenhayner and Maria-Xenia Hardt[1]

Introduction: The Trickiness of Creating a 'Global Hero' Movie

For much of the second half of the twentieth century, the production of popular culture geared towards global dissemination had local origins: Most of the economically and imaginatively influential products in this field were developed in and disseminated from the United States of America, be it in the form of superhero comics, pop music, or Hollywood movies. Due to their dominance in a potentially worldwide market, and their reach in global 'mediascapes,' it was American products that set models for the kinds of figures and stories that one was to expect in much of globalized popular culture—a popular culture deeply fascinated by heroic stories.[2] This reach of American cultural products was, however, predicated not only on the ability of such products to 'localize' to different markets but also on their 'glocal' nature, in Robertson's sense:[3] American pop culture has always drawn in figures, stories, and aspects of other cultural spheres. As such, American popular cultural products of the second half of the twentieth century are often already deeply hybridized. However, they are shaped by specifically American developments and the needs of a multicultural nation. Also, the way in which aspects of non-dominant—that is, non-white—cultural traditions were appropriated was—and is—causing much concern among ethnic minorities and cultural studies scholars alike for their essentialism and racist overtones. The figure of the 'Oriental monk' in US hero stories, of which more will be said in this chapter, is a case in point. We state that the American superhero genre, as it was developed in comics dominated by the publishers Marvel and DC, can be understood as a 'hero system' in the sense outlined in the introduction to this volume. The specificities of this hero system are both its global economic and cultural reach and its embeddedness in multiple cultural translation processes on a level beneath the global reach—as quintessential American products. With the production of superhero blockbuster movies, Marvel has become a global super-player as a subsidiary of Disney Motion Pictures. Having already marketed its old superheroes, like

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Spiderman, Batman, Captain America, the Hulk, Iron Man, and Thor, to their full super-seller potential in the twenty-first century in film adaptations, Marvel now must dig deeper into its archives to find 'new' heroes in its system to market to a global film audience. With this deeper dig, figures appear that might not be more complex in their intradiegetic make-up, but that are in their culturally entangled make-up, thus rendering global popularity more precarious.

One of these figures is the sorcerer superhero Doctor Strange. In 2016, Marvel Studios released the film adaptation of its 'counter-culture' hero.[4] Following the release of the decision to cast Tilda Swinton as the Ancient One, the producers had to face accusations of 'whitewashing' the role. Producing a film for the global market poses a variety of challenges, ranging from securing entrance to restricted markets, such as China, to ensuring diverse representation on screen. The role of ethnic casting is only one of the aspects that matter in this context—and is bound by more complex constraints than it might seem. Additionally, *Doctor Strange* differs from older 'Asian-style' film productions with heroizing elements, such as Disney's Chinese princess film *Mulan* (1998) or the historical fiction *Seven Years in Tibet* (1997),[5] in the sense that, in this case, cultural translation is twofold: While the original comic appropriates an Orientalist pop-culture mysticism, today the film has to cater to demands of the Chinese film market and the rules of its regime. What new frictions appear in cultural translations that are not geared at 'Westernizing' stories, but instead, at 'Easternizing' them, in the sense of making them acceptable for the restrictive Chinese market? In addition to the extratextual cultural translation, the film also deals with these processes on an intratextual level. Ultimately, the concept of time and space in the film's aesthetic, as constantly collapsing and reforming, is also reflected in its heroic figures and the entailed processes of creating a hero figure with a global reach. In the following, this chapter will unpack some of the layers of the frictions involved in the creation of a 'global hero' film, which *Doctor Strange* clearly attempts to be. We will first analyse the specific shape of the plot structure of the hero journey in the film and show which kinds of cultural translations the origin story of a 'truly' global hero wishes to present. Secondly, turning towards the history of the original Marvel comic serial, we wish to show how especially the figure of the Ancient One, and the embeddedness of the comic in American Buddhism and the New Age movement, shows the complex web of cultural translations found in contemporary American culture and its 'glocal' products. In a last analytical move, we will discuss how the representation of space in the aesthetics of the film itself seems to cater to a late-capitalist logic of globalization that erases specific cultural 'deep structures.' The chapter concludes by pointing towards the difficulties a once-dominant American superhero system faces in an emerging 'new' global order, in which both cultural and economic power differentials are increasingly shifting.

A Globalized 'Hero Journey' in *Doctor Strange* (2016)

Like most movies in Hollywood since the rise of epic tales on the silver screen, *Doctor Strange*'s narrative structure embeds itself in the plot tradition of the 'hero journey' as proposed by the religious scholar Joseph Campbell in his monograph *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, first published in 1949.[6] In this widely popularized text, Campbell argues for a universal structure of heroic narratives, boldly universalizing traits from the heroic traditions of Greek, Sumerian, Norse, Egyptian, Buddhist, Judeo-Christian, and other cultures, heralding Jungian psychoanalysis and literary formalism along the way. In Campbell's own narrative, the hero goes through a specific set of trials and tribulations to transcend the self, benefitting his community in return. Although dubious from a contemporary academic perspective, the book has had a tremendous influence on Hollywood movie writers and directors. While George Lucas, for example, explicitly modelled his *Star Wars* epic on Campbell, the dominance of the 'hero journey formula' in Hollywood movie production was further enhanced by the popularizing of his ideas in one of the first widely available guide-books for aspiring screenwriters: Linda Seger's bestselling *Making a Good Script Great*, in which the author extended the adaptability of the basic tenets of Campbell's hero journey to fit it to basically any kind of context, from the everyman hero's story to romantic love movies.[7] Much, if not most, of contemporary film production, in the superhero genre at least, is modelled on Campbell's formula, and so is the 2016 version of the origin story of Doctor Strange, which narrates how an arrogant man becomes a transcended, selfless saviour of humankind and the multiverse. Interestingly, we find in the film adaptation a return to 'original' Campbellian ideas because of the transcendental aspects of *Doctor Strange* and its connection to American popular notions of Eastern mysticism, as well as open attempts at a 'making global' of this story by expanding the identity of the title hero.

Stephen Strange (played by Benedict Cumberbatch) is first introduced as a rather one-dimensional fame-hunting doctor, exceptional in both his skills as a surgeon and his arrogance. When he enters a hospital scene, he immediately takes over control, with other (even the senior) members of staff merely assisting him—simultaneously noting his ingenious diagnoses and bearing his insults. No matter how impossible a brain surgery seems to be, if Strange takes on the challenge, he will succeed. He is shown to be extremely self-assured, refusing to treat people that might ruin his perfect record. He literally decides over life and death, which positions him somewhere between human and God, and his extraordinary medical skills can be read as a kind of superpower with heroic potential. This heroic potential, however, remains just that—potential—due to the character's complete lack of any moral compass or empathy for others. Strange is uniform in his success and defines himself through his success

in a distinctly 'white' way. His hair and face, his clothing choices and preferred consumption goods, from expensive watches to his Ferrari, are all prototypically Western status symbols. His identity is fixed, resting firmly on his status as the infallible super-doctor.

After a dramatic car accident, this identity is shattered to pieces and he sets out on a journey to retrieve it. The glass of his precious Swiss watch—an epitome of his existence as star surgeon—is also shattered. He cannot work as a doctor any longer. His beard and hair grow and give him a wild, untamed look. He loses most of his earthly possessions. He cannot even write his name. When he first leaves London to travel east, he starts his journey because he is 'trying to find [his] way back.' In Kathmandu, both the 'companion' figure Mordo (played by Chiwetel Ejiofor) and the 'magic guide' figure, the Ancient One (played by Tilda Swinton), ask him to look beyond what he thinks he knows. Mordo tells him that he once stood in the same place, that he, too, 'was disrespectful,' and he advises Strange to 'forget everything [he] know[s].' Similarly, the Ancient One, after showing him different representations of the human body ranging from anatomic drawings used for acupuncture to MRA scans, tells him that 'each of those maps was drawn up by someone who could see in part but not the whole' and that, if he wants to understand, he needs to broaden his mind. The Ancient One recognizes his potential, acknowledging that he spent his 'whole life trying to see more, to know more' but accuses him of rejecting the possibility to achieve just that because it would happen 'in ways [he] can't imagine.' Strange leaves London with the aim to come back—both to that specific place in the world and to his own coherent self closely connected to that place. Leaving for the 'unknown'—as in an unknown but specific place, Kathmandu—is not the initiator for his hero journey yet. To embark on that journey, he must set out for a far greater, and less locally fixed, 'unknown.'

In the course of the film, Strange learns and accepts that, in order to find his place as a hero in a manifold multiverse, he himself has to look beyond the uniform, coherent identity he used to have. The Ancient One teaches him that 'this universe is only one of an infinite number' and asks him who he is 'in this vast multiverse.' Mordo acknowledges Strange's potential, telling the Ancient One that 'there is a strength to him'; the Ancient One, though, hesitates to give him power because of his 'stubbornness, arrogance, ambition.' This discussion connects to the observation of the 'initial' Strange having heroic potential due to his extraordinary abilities but not living up to this because of a lack of morals and an inflated ego. Living up to his potential is then closely connected to overcoming his ego and transgressing to being 'more.' When he first fails to produce simple magic, the Ancient One tells him to 'silence [his] ego' because only then '[his] power will rise.' Right after he finally succeeds to conjure up a circle that allows him to step into any place in the world, he manages to shave and cut his hair—and does so in a way that makes him look less

'Western' and more 'Asian.' The first step towards becoming a superhero is thus closely linked to becoming less selfish and more flexible in terms of ethnic association.

The next step in expanding himself is entering a network of both people and things, for which Strange must partly give up control. He learns from the master magician Mordo that he is ready to get his own magic relic 'when the relic decides.' In one moment, Strange still insists that he 'came here to heal [his] hands, not to fight in some mystical war,' hanging on to his selfish notion of saving himself and his coherent identity. In the next moment, however, the villain Kaecilius (Mads Mikkelsen) attacks and Strange finds himself right in the middle of a war bigger than himself. He lives up to the challenge, fighting to protect 'the Order' of magicians around the Ancient One, which has vowed to protect the earthly realm from invasions by the dark powers of other dimensions—fighting for something bigger than himself. This is the moment when the relic—his red cape—finds him. It drags him in this and that direction, taking away part of his agency and factually directing Strange in several comic scenes in the film. The relic is not merely a weapon, not just an accessory Strange can use as he pleases, but an extension of his formerly uniform identity. The cape has its own will, contradicting Strange's, making him both more powerful and more manifold. It teaches Strange implicitly to become 'more.'

The Ancient One, as Strange's most prominent mentor figure, similarly 'expands' Strange, preparing him for a heroic mission far beyond everything he used to be and used to know. She tells Strange that he has 'always excelled but not because [he] craved success but because of [his] fear of failure' and that this is 'precisely what kept [him] from [his] greatness.' She states that 'arrogance and fear still keep [him] from learning the simplest and most significant lesson of all: . . . It's not about [him].' To fulfil his potential, Strange has to overcome his fear of failure and his wish to save himself above all. At the end of their conversation, he does just that, realizing that he now has the power to save himself and go back to his old life and self, but chooses not to return to who he was. Instead, he takes the Ancient One's advice on teaming up with Mordo, whom he needs for his strength, just like the latter needs Strange for his flexibility because only 'together [do they] stand a chance of stopping Dormammu.' As with his relic, Strange moves further away from being self-centred towards being part of a larger constellation. Different from the distinctly Western Doctor Strange at the beginning of the film, who was always in charge, refused to work with others, and decided over life and death by taking or refusing cases based on whether CNN would interview him about them, the now expanded, hybridized Strange is only partly in control—powerful only as a member of a team—and, in fact, willing to risk failure.

The ultimate step in his hero's journey is completed when Strange decides to give himself up for others by failing multiple times. After the

Ancient One dies, Strange lives up to the possibilities she saw in him, choosing the 'harder way' to save lives than the way he did before, as a selfish surgeon. The film very strongly suggests that Strange finally lives up to his heroic potential in this very moment: To the sound of dramatic music, he puts on his cape, looks at himself in the hospital mirror, and does not see anything left of the man who used to look into that mirror so often before his accident. The smug, selfish face is gone. In its place, a man with a distinctly Easternized look and a superhero's cape instead of a super-doctor's uniform inspects the hospital mirror once more before he takes off to save everybody *but* himself. Together with Mordo and the Order's librarian Wong (Benedict Wong), he faces the higher-dimensional mystical demon Dormammu, who threatens the existence of the universe. When the Hong Kong Sanctum of the Order, one of several such 'hot spots' at neuralgic locations all over the world, has fallen, Mordo states that 'nothing can stop him [Dormammu]', but Strange finds a way: He makes use of his superpower of turning back time, going back to the moment when Dormammu defeats him repeatedly. When Dormammu tells him that he will 'spend eternity dying,' Strange replies that at the same time 'everyone on earth will live.' Even if he will 'never win,' he will 'lose again and again and again and again, forever.' While he used to refuse to operate if he could fail to keep his record clean, he now chooses to relive the same moment of failure *ad infinitum* to save the earth.

In serving 'the greater good,' Strange in the end is a hybridized hero; a hero who had to give up control rather than seize it; one who must overcome his arrogant, outspoken knowledge of being special. At the same time, he holds on to his watch, which now has only symbolic and personal value, and he serves tea as guardian of the London sanctum. He is not limited to 'East' or 'West,' no longer one-dimensional as the doctor he used to be, but ever-changing and multiple. The shattered glass of his token Swiss watch becomes a symbol for having accepted that being shattered is not a bad thing after all: His new sense of self allows Strange to refract himself and by that renew his identity, as he is now interested in others more than his own advancement. Simultaneously, the broken watch signals his acceptance of not being infallible.

It becomes clear from this description that the hero journey, presented in the 2016 film version of *Doctor Strange*, is intended to be a model of global hybridity. It presents distinct cultures and different cultural designations as being understandable to a global audience largely without friction. But, if we regard the history of the comic series, and take a closer look at the spatial constellations and other cultural markers that the film uses, we may find other designations in which the frictionless globalism that the film appears to represent becomes questionable. This is especially the case concerning the shifts in characterization that were performed to appease the powerful Chinese film market, and the film's spatialization of the logic of global capitalism. To analyse how frictions in cultural

translation appeared both in the production decisions and in the reception of these decisions, we need, first, to turn towards the history of the hero figure Doctor Strange in the Marvel comic series of the 1960s. It will become clear that this figure itself has a troubled hybridized lineage, which makes it a quintessentially American superhero figure of the second half of the twentieth century. Secondly, the frictions that developed upon the release of the 2016 film, especially in the US, permit us to see how frictionless globalization becomes a precarious endeavour in the face of deeply entangled issues of minority representation, the economic reach of globalized cultural products that face a new power differential among cultural spheres in the twenty-first century, and the role of the 'mystic guide' within the 'hero journey formula'.

The 'Other' Marvel Hero: The History of the *Doctor Strange* Comic Series

The inside cover of the first comic story marketed in a collection under the title *Strange Tales* by Marvel in 1963 showed the drawing of a sinister-looking man, with high-pinched brows and moustache, his gloved hands raised in a conjuring gesture. In the foreground of the image panel, we see the drawing of a scroll inscribed with the following introduction of the new Marvel hero:

> Men call him Dr. Strange! Never have you known his like! It is a great pleasure and privilege for the editors of Strange Tales to present, quietly and without fanfare, the first of a new series based upon a different kind of super-hero: Dr. Strange.[8]

In an insightful article on the entering of a fascination with the 'Orient' into American popular culture in the 1960s, Joel Gruber traces how the evolvement of this fascination throughout the second half of the twentieth century is bound up with the development of a distinctly American brand of Buddhism. For Gruber, the comic serial *Doctor Strange* and its production history are a paradigmatic site for the investigation of this link. The most important entry-point that binds the *Doctor Strange* comic serial up with American representation of Eastern religions on the one hand and the US counter-culture of the 1960s on the other is the introduction of the figure in *Strange Tales* quoted earlier: He is presented as 'a different kind of super-hero.'

The *Strange Tales* serial was itself Marvel's experimentation field: It 'provided its young readers with some of the creepiest, most visually unique comics on the newsstand.'[9] The serial had a license to cater to niche markets and enabled part of the resistant potential that the superhero genre had at the time—a fact we easily forget in the face of today's streamlined, and completely non-creepy, superhero blockbusters. Thus,

the arrogant doctor who, after his downfall from hubris, must decide whether he wants to help others, is—visually and discursively—situated in the Marvel universe as something like an anti–Captain America. As such a counter-figure, Strange set a tone that would become dominant in a popular culture dominated by psychedelia, mysticism, and the development of the New Age movement. Nevertheless, the occult wisdom of the 'mystic guide' figure in the series, the supposedly Tibetan monk of the 1960s, had very strong Orientalist and racist overtones: The Ancient One in the first series did not look like a Tibetan Buddhist nor was the mystic advice he uttered more complex than your average fortune cookie. This changed when the series was revived and reached its highest popularity in the 1970s.

The creators of the series were then themselves embedded in the counter-culture that the later series presented, especially the head writer during the mid-1970s: When Steve Englehart took over *Doctor Strange* (together with lead artist Fran Brunner), he was himself a practitioner of 'magick,' the New Age eclectic mix of (often highly subjective) appropriations of the theosophical occultism of Blavatsky, of Golden Dawn hermeticism,[10] and various other kinds of mysticism. In turn, the elements of 'Buddhism' provided by the figure of the Ancient One became more dominant and, at least partly, less unrealistic. But this did not necessarily mean that the cultural translation processes in the series would ever upset the cultural hierarchy of the hero stories the series presented. At the end of his first series, the Ancient One dies because he is too weak to stave off the greatest danger. It is the white hero whose power is strong enough to save the world. In his article, Gruber puts forward the argument that killing the Ancient One was the most non-Orientalist move that Englehart could make when he inherited the series because 'he also freed future authors and illustrators from the most offensive aspect of the comic serial, the racial symbolism involving Tibet and Tibetans.'[11] This is significant concerning the embeddedness of the superhero figure in the evolvement of the American New Age movement, and especially the cultural translations involved in American Buddhism.

Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and into the 1990s, American interest in and understanding of Tibetan Buddhism grew exponentially, and in the comic series, Tibet began to figure as an actual place. As is certified by the tremendous success of films such as *Seven Years in Tibet* (1997)—itself not uncontroversial because of the unapologetic Nazi connections of the historical model for the lead hero, Austrian mountaineer Heinrich Harrer—Buddhism, and specifically an imaginary of *Tibetan* Buddhism, has held a prominent place in the identity of many liberal Americans ever since the Beat Generation, whose members were also the first generation of readers of *Doctor Strange*. When Marvel included *Doctor Strange* in its set of superheroes in its blockbuster movies, this specifically American imaginary of Tibet acted as a wrench in the globalized superhero-market

machinery. This friction was created, for the most part, by the problematic return of that problematic figure, the Ancient One.

Frictions of Cultural Translation: The Ancient One

In reception, frictions of cultural translation developed concerning the casting of Tilda Swinton as the 'Ancient One.' A white, female, British actress was chosen to represent the comic's incarnation of a specifically American pop-cultural type, the Oriental monk. In her intriguing study on the representations of Asian religions in American popular culture, Jane Iwamura describes this type, or notion, as follows:

> The term Oriental Monk is used as a critical concept and is meant to cover a wide range of religious figures . . . subjected to a homogeneous representational effect as they are absorbed by popular consciousness through mediated culture. Racialization (more correctly, 'orientalization') serves to blunt the distinctiveness of particular persons and figures. Indeed, the recognition of an Eastern spiritual guide, real or fictional, is predicated in the icon of the Oriental Monk: his spiritual commitment, his calm demeanour, his Asian face, his manner of dress, and—most obviously—his peculiar gendered character.[12]

Doctor Strange's mystic guide, the Ancient One, as created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko in the original comics, fits Iwamura's type of the Oriental monk in all characteristics. As a comparatively early incarnation of this icon that became so dominant, especially in Hollywood history since the mid-1960s, he might even be a figure that helped establish the type. A spiritual guide or master magician is a necessary inaugurating ingredient for the typical structural set-up of the hero journey as developed in Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Tolkien's Gandalf is another prototype. Gandalf himself is possibly an appropriation of the figure of Merlin in the medieval romances that Tolkien worked on professionally as a scholar, but also the Merlin figure he was familiar with through Victorian remediations of the Arthurian legends. Therefore, while the fantasy genre in its origins cast its spiritual guide in the mould of the Celtic magician, this figure is translated into an 'Oriental' type in American popular culture during the second half of the twentieth century. That the type stays recognizable even when the figure is not only not 'Asian' but also not even human anymore is evidenced by a figure that is probably the most globalized mystic hero guide: Yoda of the *Star Wars* storyworld. Yoda, while being a peculiar, small, alien creature, keeps all the necessary features to make him recognizable as an instantiation of the stereotypical Oriental monk: He talks in a convoluted English grammar, he wears a somewhat East Asian–looking robe, and the religion or knowledge system of 'the Force,' of which he

is a master, has obvious Buddhist overtones. While Yoda is probably a male creature, his gender or any sexual interests are never addressed or represented.

That East Asian Buddhism was so popular in the medium of film is also connected with the visual possibilities that Shaolin martial arts afford to filmic representational codes, having come to the West from Hong Kong cinema, and eventually inspiring the Jedi fighting style in the *Star Wars* universe.[13] So, is the Oriental monk a racist stereotype, or a hybrid figure of a long-since globalized popular culture—or both? If the Oriental monk is an American type cut from the cloth of Celtic Merlin, and if his gender designation is typically unclear, the reshaping of the Ancient One into a Celtic mystic in Asian dress, played by the British actress Tilda Swinton—who has often been cast in androgynous roles[14]—appears as a surprisingly coherent development of this pop-cultural type.

However, the fictional character of the Ancient One as an incarnation of the Oriental monk type created considerable friction in the context of contemporary Hollywood culture, where a new consciousness of ethnically 'correct' casting and representational space of women and minorities are hotly debated issues.[15] Oddly, it is in this originally Orientalist type so typical for American popular culture that we can also see other needs, cultural demands, and fears appear: the need to gain access to the Chinese market, now the biggest grossing film market in the world; the cultural grievances of the Asian minority in the US; and, probably lying underneath both concerns, the uneasy fear of reverse cultural appropriation—the appropriation of an always already globalized, but nevertheless American, popular culture by the Chinese regime and its political and cultural system of censorship.[16] Positive depictions of Tibet as a cultural (or political) realm distinct from the People's Republic of China are an especially thorny issue in this context, and might prevent Western films, whose access to the Chinese film market is very restricted if it is not connected with Chinese co-producers, from entering Chinese cinemas and their promise of large-scale revenue.

Christopher Robert Cargill, the co-writer of the *Doctor Strange* film, justifies the controversial casting decision by evoking the problematics inherent in the figure of the Ancient One, 'a racist stereotype who comes from a region of the world that is in a very weird political place.' He further states that he did not want to dive into the difficult political territory that the portrayal of a Tibetan character on screen would have opened up and which could have led to not only disapproval from Chinese viewers but also the censorship of the film by the Chinese government. The casting decision was thus explicitly made to cater specifically to Chinese demands in order to access the Chinese market.[17]

According to Western critics, the 'whitewashing' of the mentor figure into a Celtic woman and the displacement of the setting to Nepal constituted an attempt to circumnavigate the issues of the Tibet-China conflict

in order to access the Chinese box office. The impact of the Chinese market on Hollywood movies has been growing in recent years as its box office value has been growing by an average of 34 per cent a year, and China is now the biggest grossing movie market in the world.[18]

In most cases, the catering to Chinese demands has not increased the representational space for characters of Asian descent on screen because characters with an Asian background are still played largely by Caucasian actors. The lack of film characters played by Asian actors in US productions is probably not solely based upon discriminatory casting practices in Hollywood, as the demands of the Chinese film market might in fact reinforce this discrimination. Indeed, the demand of Chinese audiences to watch films starring famous Hollywood actors, such as Benedict Cumberbatch (*Doctor Strange*) or Matt Damon (*The Great Wall*, 2016, Chinese co-production), also has to be considered in this context.[19] The Chinese film business has an elaborate star system of its own, and when foreign films are watched, there is an expectation of seeing international stars—who are, for the most part, white. Indeed, many of the whitewashing accusations to be found in international media were brought forth by Asian American actors who felt that the casting choice reinforces their marginal status in Hollywood in general and the Marvel Cinematic Universe specifically. Actress Margaret Cho explains the outrage like this: 'Our stories are told by white actors over and over again and . . . this particular case of the Ancient One is just another in a long list of "whitewashed" Asian characters, and so you're likely to feel the heat of history.'[20] It is interesting to think about what Cho actually means with 'our' stories here: Presumably, she refers to Asian or Asian American stories. While it is out of the question that *Doctor Strange* the Marvel comic serial is an American story, the Ancient One is not a 'historical' Asian American character. Rather, as outlined in the excursus on the figure of the mystic guide, this figure is a particular expression of a function within a specific narrative pattern: the hero journey according to Campbell. That Asian American actors feel compelled to fight for being cast as an Orientalist stereotype shows how emotional and heated the issue of representational space is in the Hollywood system, as is the demand to be part of the global reach of its transmedial superhero products. It also shows how products that are made of narrative imaginaries, as fantastical as they may be, end up being bound up in the frictions of cultural translation, even in a storyworld as outlandish as that of the film *Doctor Strange*, that intends to do away with both the idea of any 'actual' cultural designation and their attached frictional, unruly potential.

It can only be assumed that the outrage in China was less pronounced because the marginalization of Asian actors and actresses in Hollywood does not affect the casting diversity of the Chinese film industry, which produces by far most of the films broadcast in China. The Swiss-born

social blogger Clara Chen, for example, argues that native Chinese viewers, profiting from their own film and television productions, are less concerned about whitewashing than Asian Americans, who do not see themselves represented by the American movie industry: 'I watch Caucasian-made contents and I am not able to find a reflection of myself in there or anyone who portrays myself accurately.'[21]

The discussion about the whitewashing of the figure of the Ancient One centred on the legacy of Hollywood representations of Asian characters. This seems mainly a concern of people of Asian descent living in the global West, who do not see themselves represented in the majority of films shown in cinemas and on television. This is a concern which is, however, of absolutely no interest for the Chinese film market: the market in which Marvel Cinema, as well as Hollywood blockbuster productions more generally, now seek a substantial part of their revenue. Thus, the interest of Hollywood productions in the Chinese film market does nothing to elevate the representational imbalance of ethnic diversity in Hollywood production. On a more sinister note, restrictive and censorious China, due to the prime place of economic concerns in the film business, also has the upper hand concerning decisions of cultural representation: While the *Doctor Strange* film might have been banned in China if Tibet had been shown in the positive, admiring way it is represented in much of American popular culture—including its being represented as a nation in its own right—it might have been banned from a massive market promising massive revenue. The Asian minorities in the West fighting for representational space in globalized hero stories have no such power. Thus, an uneasy feeling about the power China is starting to exert over globalized superhero stories, and thus an extremely popular genre of representation, underlies the whole discussion on Tilda Swinton as the embodiment of the Ancient One and problematizes the idea of any truly 'global' hero story.

In the most widely received accounts of cultural hybridity—for example, by Homi Bhabha and Arjun Appadurai—cultural hybridity is a fact of modern life, and a positively valued one at that. In both political and intellectual realms, the West has experienced a backlash against this positive view of cultural globalization and hybridity in recent years.[22] But cases such as *Doctor Strange*'s new Celtic-Nepalese master show a larger complexity underneath the dichotomous opposition of 'good' and 'bad' globalization. First, the film shows how deep cultural hybridity can go, if only in the shape of a seemingly dismissible Orientalism. Doctor Strange is a quintessentially 1960s and 1970s American pop-hero *because* of the special place that Tibet, as a dream-scape of Western desire, holds in the imaginary of those American generations. The undoing of the Tibetan lineage and the 'Asianness' of the Ancient One is thus, in fact, emotionally perceived as an undoing of the *Americanness* of Doctor Strange. This specific Americanness, fed from 1960s counter-culture, has long become

the muddled convention-base for globalized pop culture. The new, tremendous power of China as a film market and its censorship and political system create frictions in a seemingly unproblematic, globalized fun and entertainment machine.

Heroes of the Global Marketplace: Cultural Space in *Doctor Strange*

Doctor Strange has been a culturally hybrid figure from the outset, achieving large-scale popularity at a time in American popular culture when the reverence of the cultural 'other' was strong. As a post-World War II generation became increasingly critical of the West, it was the East—especially Tibet, and a sort of hybrid Buddhism—which was providing images to create an alternative imaginary. Strange is the superhero of that generation, the attempt of Marvel to cater to an audience that was a little different—and often having a different political inclination—than the typical, old-school Captain America fan. This legacy of a counter-culture in which the Otherness of Asia was highly valued is hidden in here. But both the counter-culture of the 1960s and the demands for ethnic casting in the case of the 2016 film cater to the logic which two theorists of cultural translation, Naoki Sakai and Jon Solomon, have called 'the sanitization' of cultural spheres. The aim of cultural translations, they state, is a 'merger of horizons' for which the cultures must be sharply dislocated from one another:

> In order for the merger of horizons to take place, each horizon must at first be sanitized of the foreign contamination and homogenized, so that the foreign may come only from without. Ultimately, this transcendental suturing enables a notion that particular readers immanently 'embody' the ideas of a certain corpus of texts on account of the putative linguistic-ethnic identity. In other words, the presupposition that Westerners understand Western texts in a primary, authentic manner—in short, better than non-Westerners.[23]

Concerning the status of Eastern religions in the West, the idea of primary, authentic 'Otherness' was connected with figures such as the Ancient One. Much of the fascination that the counter-culture generation of the first creators and readers invested in the *Doctor Strange* comics was created with the image of a revered cultural Other in the East. The imaginary of a culture holding deeper knowledge of the world is constituted by exactly this kind of essentializing of the other realm in which 'the Tibetan' embodies a fictional knowledge of the multiverse, as well as the skills to transform it at will. The original *Doctor Strange* comics, as we have discussed, just as many other representations of Eastern Asia in American popular culture since the late 1960s, use an imaginary designation of this East as

an archive of arcane knowledge. How does a popular cultural product that now wishes to cater to a self-confident film market in China deal with its legacy in a mystifying reification of 'the East'?

As the introductory description of Strange's hero journey has shown, *Doctor Strange*, in its intradiegetic displacements, tries not to cater to the dichotomy that pins the idea of an original, authentic cultural knowledge against its representation 'in translation.' Rather, the 2016 film version predicates itself on a logic of a seamless global dynamism that has—supposedly—replaced the sovereignty of nations and cultural spheres. Fixed centres of sovereignty have, in the film, been replaced by cities which appear as 'global' in the sense that Strange and the other characters instantaneously move from one to the next, and from one continent to the next, through gates in the multiverse. On a critical plane, the role of locations in the film seems to illustrate the mutations of sovereignty that Sakai and Solomon describe for late modernity:

> It is crucial to understand that the apparatus of sovereignty does not initially concern the national space, which is primarily structured by the markers of social distinctions such as class, but concerns first and foremost the international space of a world system. Hence, the relative erosion of sovereignty seen in the transnational flows of global cities does not indicate that the system of sovereignty has diminished; it has simply mutated.[24]

The cities we see in *Doctor Strange* are the same ones that the sociologist Saskia Sassen calls 'global cities' in her prominent analysis of globalized space and work migration.[25] In Sassen's analysis, London, New York, and Hong Kong have mutated from actual locations in actual cultural spheres into nodes in the networked exchange of global capital. In the logic of the film, they are nodes in the networks of secret, magic knowledge that dominate the world—not unlike global finance in reality. Thus, because of the settings it uses, the fact that the film is a product bound up with global flows of capitalism is not even erased on the fictional plane of the film's intradiegetic storyworld.

Although *Doctor Strange* uses concrete settings—London, New York, Hong Kong, Kathmandu—these settings do not have any meaning attached to them. They function as signposts, as sights for the worldwide audience with something to recognize for everybody. The film then literally takes these settings apart, multiplies them, turns them around, and twists them. The settings are not there for 'their own means' but as a means for something else, a channel and transmitter for the actual meaning the film conveys: The universe is shown to be part of a multiverse, time is relative, everything is far less fixed and more flexible than the London skyscrapers and Nepali temple look at first sight. That does not, of course, imply that the settings were chosen randomly. Quite on the

contrary: On the economic level, they function as door-openers for different markets. Why does the Order have sanctuaries in London, New York, and Hong Kong rather than in, say, Lima, Canberra, and Tver? Quite possibly the reasoning behind this is that London, New York, and Hong Kong are at the centre of three important markets for the film—Europe, the US, and metropolitan Asia respectively.

How lightly one concrete physical place can be exchanged for another can be illustrated with two examples: To get around the complicated political situation between China and Tibet, the location of the Order is simply moved to Nepal—at least explicitly. Implicitly, of course, the architecture, the fighting, the costumes, and much else still evoke a Tibetan temple. Similarly, the Ancient One is once mentioned to have Celtic roots explicitly, while implicitly the film roots the character in an Asian tradition. What the film does explicitly can be read as a political safety net modelled on the economic needs of the film and with the aim of successfully placing the product in as many markets as possible, while the network of implicit meanings, evocations, and allusions reveals itself to be much more complicated and less 'politically correct.'

Doctor Strange, the Ancient One, Wong, and Mordo, just as much as Kaecilius and his disciples, are not British, Chinese, or American, nor white, Asian, or black—they are superheroes (or, respectively, supervillains). As heroes, they transcend the seemingly fixed nationalities and ethnicities of their actors. The film implicitly draws parallels between the flexibility and limitlessness of both its characters and its turning, splitting, and evolving settings. Implicitly, the connection becomes clear right at the beginning of the film: When the villain Kaecilius and his followers, dressed in their distinctly Asian costume, walk through a distinctly Western London, they first look alien. As soon as they start fighting the Ancient One and London starts folding and rebuilding (this is the first time this happens in the film) the characters do not seem out of place any longer. Just like the parts of buildings do not add up to 'London' when breaking and reshaping, the dresses do not signal 'Asian' any longer (2:40). Both designations—the ethnic and the spatial ones—seem to have lost any sense of cultural 'origin' or claim to authenticity.

That *Doctor Strange* is a hero story located in this field of a dream of globalized fluidity, rather than a re-entrenchment of cultural and ethnic borders, originals, and translations, can be seen in the way the film represents both space *and* ethnicity, and the heroes that transgress both. On this level of meaning, ethnic designations such as 'Tibetan' or 'Celtic' are represented as interchangeable, as empty signifiers that signal a frictionless translation from one cultural realm into the next, each of which appears as already familiar both to the intradiegetic characters and to the viewer. Mysticism is ironized: When, in the first scene in which Strange meets the Ancient One, and is sceptical about her transcendental knowledge, he makes comparisons of her statements and that

of salespersons in esoteric shops in California—shops in which, maybe in the 1960s, one would have found one or the other copy of the original Marvel *Doctor Strange* comics. In this way, the main character creates a level of meta-irony that refers to the world outside of the film and takes up his own history as a cultural product connected to Orientalist esoteric New Age movements, and their dream of deeper knowledge from an unspecified 'East.' At the same time, of course, these characters are still portrayed by human actors; these actors are present on screen as bodies just like the concrete settings—London, New York, Hong Kong—are as spaces, and they similarly function as market segment–winning signposts. Doctor Strange works as a hero figure only because casting Benedict Cumberbatch transfers sympathy and heroic potential from the similarly snobbish, arrogant, and gifted Sherlock to an initially completely unsympathetic and underdeveloped protagonist. Stephen Strange's hero journey during the film from pretentious, distinctly Western, capitalist super-doctor to multi-faceted, beneficial superhero follows a pattern similar to the collapsing of distinct cities and their reshaping as flexible, ever-changing multiverses that the film uses as stunning, high-end digital visual effects. At the beginning of the film, Strange seems as solid and fixed in his identity as the London he is based in. Just as the skyscrapers start falling apart and reassembling in new shapes less locally specific, Strange's formerly coherent self breaks into a million pieces, opening the possibility for a new, more flexible, and fluid identity. The search for this identity becomes his heroic quest, his journey into an unknown world that reveals itself to be larger than he imagined it could possibly be. Only when he lets go of the idea of a coherent and distinctly Western self, only when he is ready to base his identity not exclusively on success but embraces failure, can Strange become a (super)hero ready to truly save others rather than just himself.

Conclusion

Only on the surface—if at all—is *Doctor Strange* an unproblematic Marvel superhero film. The cultural translations that are at work on every level of the film, intradiegetic and extradiegetic, complicate the matter to a degree where it becomes difficult to offer one coherent reading of the film as a global product. The cultural translations at play here are far more complicated than a simple 'Westernization' or, as the producers have been accused of, a whitewashing of the Eastern figure of the Ancient One. Intertwined with this process of translating to and from a cultural location outside the West into the West, the film must take complex steps at 'Easternizing,' and thereby further globalizing, an originally American pop-culture formula, the Marvel superhero story. These different translation processes entail various, and partly unexpected, frictions related to questions of revenue, of self-censorship, of how to go from catering

to a niche audience to pleasing a global one, and of ethnically 'correct' casting. Even if, as has been argued, neither the concrete filming location nor the nationality or skin colour of the actors has a meaning for the film on an intradiegetic level, they do serve a purpose on the extradiegetic or, if one wants to put it this bluntly, economic level. Just like the polished mega-city-settings favourably spread out across the most important markets, the actors also 'sell' the film to different audiences. Chinese viewers have enough Chinese heroes. When they decide to watch one of the few foreign-produced films that enter China, they probably expect to see globalized superstars, who are, like Benedict Cumberbatch, mostly white. Like Cumberbatch's Steven Strange being dragged in this and that direction by his red cape, the film is pulled into different directions by narrative, economic, and political needs. By discussing Strange as a globalized hero figure combining Campbell's hero journey and the mystic transcendence of a popular cultural version of Buddhism, being aware of the counter-culture roots of this 'other' Marvel hero figure, and considering complications of market entrance and political correctness, this chapter has offered explanations for the various frictions created by processes of cultural translation. In the end, one hero does not neatly fit all audiences—but much is stuffed into one hero's journey. This might, in fact, be in line with one of the film's main ideas. Maybe we as viewers and critics have to let go of the quest for one coherent reading, like Strange has to let go of the idea of one coherent self, and, instead, accept the frictions created by questions of cultural translation, sovereignty, and economics like he accepts his shattered watch. Tracing the frictions to their manifold roots inside and beyond 'the global' instead of trying to make them fit in neatly is what will keep us discussing which kinds of heroes go global in which ways.

Notes

1. With the assistance of Julia Ditter and Özlem Sarica.
2. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
3. Roland Robertson, 'Globalisation or Glocalisation?,' *The Journal of International Communication* 6, no. 1 (1994): 33–52.
4. Scott Derrickson, *Doctor Strange* (Marvel Studios, Walt Disney Pictures, 2016).
5. Tony Bancroft, *Mulan* (Walt Disney Pictures, 1998). Cf. the chapter by Mouzakis in this volume. Jean-Jacques Annaud, *Seven Years in Tibet* (Mandalay Entertainment, 1997).
6. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 3rd ed. (Novato: New World Library, 2008 [1949]).
7. Linda Seger, *Making a Good Script Great* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1987).
8. Joel Gruber, 'The Dharma of Doctor Strange: The Shifting Representations of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism within a Comic Book Serial,' *Implicit Religion* 18, no. 3 (2015): 247–371 (248).

9. Gruber, 'The Dharma of Doctor Strange' (247).
10. The 'Theosophical Society' was founded in New York in 1875 and still has branches worldwide. The founding members saw themselves as spiritual renewers of magical knowledge, and looked towards Asian knowledge systems to build up their own understanding of the universe. The psychic Helena Blavatsky was one of its most influential members. The 'Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn' was founded in London in 1888. Other than the Theosphians, who were fascinated with the Far East and Tibet especially, the Golden Dawn saw itself as the keeper of the secret knowledge of the European Rosicrucian tradition. The magician Aleister Crowley was one of its more spectacular members, as was the author William Butler Yates. Erstwhile member Arthur Edward Waite went on to found the New-Age religion Wicca, which was based on quasi Celtic and English folk knowledge with a matriarchal outlook. Both organizations were extremely influential in the development of New Age esotericism throughout the twentieth century.
11. Gruber, 'The Dharma of Doctor Strange' (257).
12. Jane Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6–7.
13. Cf. the chapter by Ricardo Mak in this volume.
14. Cf., for example, her performance as Virginia Woolf's gender-bending Orlando in the 1992 film version.
15. Cf., for example, the 'Oscars So White' debate surrounding the Academy Awards season of 2016, when well-known African American directors like Spike Lee threatened to boycott the awards because of the lacking ethnic diversity of the nominees.
16. Cf. Beina Xu and Eleanor Albert, 'Media Censorship in China,' *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2014, accessed September 12, 2018, www.cfr.org/china/media-censorship-china/p11515.
17. Brian Gallagher, 'Doctor Strange Writer Reveals Why Ancient One Isn't Chinese,' *Movie Web*, 2016, accessed September 12, 2018, https://movieweb.com/doctor-strange-movie-writer-ancient-one-not-chinese.
18. Cf. Anousha Sakoui, 'China Could Beat Hollywood by 2017,' *Bloomberg Businessweek*, accessed September 12, 2018, www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-02-25/china-could-beat-hollywood-by-2017.
19. Yimou Zhang, *The Great Wall* (Legendary East, Atlas Entertainment, China Film Group, 2016).
20. Esther Addley, 'Tilda Swinton Releases Margaret Cho Emails about Film Role Diversity,' *The Guardian*, December 21, 2016, accessed September 12, 2018, www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/21/tilda-swinton-releases-margaret-cho-emails-about-film-role-diversity.
21. Clara Zhijin Chen, 'Social Media's Impact on #Whitewashing and #Colourism,' *Colourimetry: Skin Colour and Identity*, January 21, 2017, accessed September 12, 2018, www.blog.buprojects.uk/2016-2017/clarachen/2017/01/21/social-medias-impact-whitewashing-colourism.
22. Cf. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
23. Naoki Sakai and Jon Solomon, 'Introduction: Addressing the Multitude of Foreigners, Echoing Foucault,' in *Translation, Biopolitics, and Colonial Difference* (Traces 4), eds. Naoki Sakai and Jon Solomon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 1–35 (8–9).
24. Sakai and Solomon, 'Introduction' (23).
25. Cf. Saskia Sassen, *The Global City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

5 *Zashchitniki* (*Guardians*)
A Failed Russian-Soviet Answer to Superman and Batman

Dietmar Neutatz

Translating the Superhero Genre in Contemporary Russia

In February 2017, the Russian film *Zashchitniki* (*Guardians*) was released and ostentatiously announced as a Russian response to Hollywood's superhero blockbusters. Its titular characters are a superhero squad that was originally created during the height of the Cold War by genetic manipulation. While the Soviet heroes were unneeded and lived in hiding during the intervening years, they come into action in the twenty-first century, when a villain strives to destroy Moscow and plans to take over the whole of Russia and, eventually, the entire world. This chapter puts the film into the current political context and examines how the globally successful American superhero genre was translated into the setting, and to meet the needs and aspirations of contemporary Russian culture—specifically its imperial nostalgia for the Soviet Union and its uncontested status as a global superpower. In this light, the following pages will ask what features characterize the Russian superhero in contrast to the American type, explore the motivations behind the film, and finally ask how successful the adaptation of the superhero model in *Zashchitniki* actually was with its intended audience. The film was also released in the West, but its main intended audience is in Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union. What this chapter analyses is thus in the first place a process of glocalization.[1] Through the film's international release, its glocal vision of superheroism was then globalized to a certain extent.

Since the turn of the millennium, hero figures have experienced a boom in Russia, and heroism is closely linked to a new form of patriotism and a reflection on Russia's history and culture. This boom of heroes is part of a demarcation against the West—its individualism and consumer culture—pursued by the Putin administration. This was explicitly addressed and discussed in a publication of the Russian Museum of Saint Petersburg in 2010, on the occasion of an exhibition dedicated to heroes. It is pointed out here that the reactivation of the pantheon of one's own national heroes constitutes 'an issue of crucial importance,' and that its urgency today is 'the direct result of the "revolutions" Russia has undergone' since

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the fall of the Soviet Union. 'Among these,' the author states, 'the revolution in leisure culture has been one of the deepest and most destructive.' And he elaborates:

> It liberated a formerly repressed sensuality but at the same time significantly lowered the capacity for cultural and intellectual effort, which by their nature limit that very sensuality. . . . More and more, people oriented towards eternal values and travelling the difficult path toward spiritual adulthood find themselves losing ground to infantile personalities unburdened by the paradigms of culture who think strictly in terms of pleasure, profit and career.[2]

This demarcation against the West is part of a policy that endeavours to restore Russia to the state of a self-confident and strong actor on the international stage. This policy is essentially tied in with the size and power of the former Soviet Union. It is a reaction to what occurred in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union: Russia had experienced a decline in its economy and international power and had been flooded by Western products and Western entertainment culture.

The patriotic anti-Western rhetoric that arose in this context takes up motifs of the Slavophil ideology of the nineteenth century,[3] and it postulates a moral superiority of Russia and its national-orthodox canon of values in contrast to a West that has declined into consumerism and individualism.[4] The protagonists of such opinions are confronted with the problem that Western entertainment culture is very sought after by the Russian population. Attempts to contain it completely did not even work out in the Soviet Union. The interest of Soviet citizens in the 'West'—its culture and products—was always greater than the available information and contacts. That led to a twofold imagination of the world outside the Soviet Union: Besides the real 'West' there was a second, imaginary one that was not specifically localized—a kind of 'elsewhere' of the late Soviet Union, a projection of dreams. It was based on a selective knowledge associated with the 'West' and, as an outside world, became a constitutive element of people's own culture.[5] Western films, clothing, and popular music were very attractive and idealized. Jeans, T-shirts, Marlboro cigarettes, and other attributes of the 'American' or 'Western' lifestyle were just as popular as Western-branded products. Travels abroad and contacts with foreigners were used to obtain such things.[6] Great parts of the Soviet youth in the 1960s and especially in the 1970s eagerly absorbed several waves of cultural influence from the West—from the 'Beatles Mania' to the 'Deep Purple Mania,' the 'Disco Madness,' and 'fascist punk and heavy metal hysteria,' as horrified KGB men described their observations.[7]

Despite such judgements, even in Soviet times it became clear for the authorities that globally successful Western models of popular culture could not be banned completely but had to be adapted and localized. The

communist youth league (Komsomol) endeavoured to combat the worrying tendencies in youth culture, but in the face of great demand since the end of the 1960s, it became necessary to provide cultural products to meet the needs of young people in a controlled way. Almost every school and factory soon had its own rock band, which the Komsomol engaged for official celebrations, and the Komsomol maintained its own discotheques, making them part of its youth work and trying to use them as an instrument of communist propaganda.[8]

Western mass culture thus found its way into the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s, but it was integrated into and modified to suit Soviet culture. After the end of the Soviet Union, the influence of Western, especially American, entertainment and consumer culture became very strong as a result of the opening up of Russia. This was especially true for film and television. Russian television and cinema were flooded with American films and TV series that were eagerly absorbed by a broad audience—this consumption compensating for decades of unsatisfied demand. Even today, Western entertainment culture is strongly present in Russia; partly through direct imports, but also—as in Soviet times—in an adapted form that is integrated into Russian culture. Superhero films, however, had not been the subject of such adaptations. *Zashchitniki* was the first Russian attempt with this genre.

Zashchitniki's Aspirations

The film was announced in March 2016, one year before its completion, as the first Russian superhero film—an ambitious project about the first Russian heroes who gain superpowers.[9] From the beginning, it had been put into relation to American models, such as *Superman*, *Batman*, and similar stories about superheroes. After the idea for *Zashchitniki* had emerged in 2013, the screenplay was written in 2014, and shooting began in 2015. The aim was to transfer the standards of Hollywood blockbuster cinema into Russian culture, and to satisfy the demand of the Russian audience for this kind of cinema with the Russian film industry's own products—not merely to present a copy of the American model but to infuse it with Russian mentality and culture.[10]

The film was produced by the Russian company Enjoy Movies (Endzhoi Muviz), founded in 2010 by the brothers Sarik and Gevond Andreasian and Georgii Malkov and located in Moscow. The company specialized in movies for a broad public and, between 2011 and 2016, produced a lot of successful entertainment films. In 2014, it split into two production lines, and the Andreasian brothers began to experiment with the genre of high-budget blockbusters.[11] The first of such large-scale experiments came in 2016 with *Mafia: igra na vyzhivanie* (*Mafia: The Game for Survival*), a fantasy story set in the Moscow of 2072, which was received mainly negatively by the public and the critics.[12]

Sarik Andreasian, who had the idea for *Zashchitniki* and directed the shooting, was born in 1984 in Erevan (Armenia) into an Armenian family and grew up in Kustanai (Kazakhstan) and Moscow, where he studied and graduated as a film director.[13] When the Soviet Union collapsed, he was 7 years old. His personal memory therefore does not reach back to the 'golden years' of the Soviet Union (the 1960s and 1970s) that are the main projection screen of nostalgia for the USSR. When he was a child, life in the Soviet Union was shaped by shortages and economic decline. His biography nevertheless encompasses the experience of living in a somehow still cohesive space of the former multiethnic Soviet Empire—in which Moscow plays a central role. Being an Armenian, he speaks about Russia as 'our country,' as we see in the quotations ahead.

'We need our own Batmans and Supermans,' he stated in an interview, 'but not in the Hollywood style, but according to our own mentality, made in our country and with our heroes.' It would have been ridiculous to use traditional figures of Russian folk tales to this purpose. Andreasian did not explain this in more detail, but it is clear that the warriors (*bogatyri*) of the Russian medieval heroic songs are not suitable for hyper-technic superhero films. Rather, so the director maintains, the challenge was to invent one's own superheroes, heroes who 'are suitable for our children as role models, like the Marvel productions all over the world.' In contrast to America, the director states, there exists no tradition of comics in Russia that could serve as a basis for a superhero film, but there exist national stereotypes and a 'mental code' for the individual nationalities as a heritage of the Soviet Union which cannot be found elsewhere. This explains the unique make-up of *Zashchitniki*.[14]

Andreasian explains the essential difference of his film to American superhero films as follows: 'Our cinema has our philosophy. A cinema about unity, about different nationalities, and about the fact that nothing can scare us when we act together. A cinema about friendship. Good values for the adolescent generation.'[15] This special philosophy, according to the director, enables the Russian audience to associate itself with the heroes of his film rather than with American heroes. *Zashchitniki* was created on the basis of an American storyline, but every single scene was worked out creatively.[16] Its hero characters behave like normal people in Russia, and they represent their respective national characteristics.[17]

The film's hero squad consists of four characters, of which three can be assigned clearly to a nationality of the former Soviet Union. The first hero is a Russian named 'Arsus,' derived from the Russian name 'Arsenii,' and the Latin word for 'bear' ('ursus'), who can transform into a bear. The second hero, 'Ler,' is an Armenian who, maybe thanks to his origins from the Caucasian mountains, can spin rocks through the air as if by magic. The third hero is a Kazakh. He is called 'Khan' and fights with two bent swords at lightning speed. The fourth hero is female and called 'Kseniia.' Her superpower consists in the fact that she becomes invisible in contact

with water. One finds out that she was born in Sevastopol, the Black Sea port on the Crimea, but in light of current political conflict between Russia and Ukraine (in 2014, Russia took away the Crimea from Ukraine) it is significant that the film leaves it unclear whether Kseniia is Russian or Ukrainian. In Ukraine, the film was prohibited before its release because of this character. The producers and the director of *Zashchitniki* therefore thought about transforming Kseniia into a Belarusian, but in the end decided to leave her nationality uncertain.[18] The co-producer Gevond Andreasian (a brother of the director) connects this ensemble of heroes explicitly with the expectation that the film would have a unifying effect on the nationalities it represents. 'All of us are one people,' he said,[19] thus even including Kazakhstan and Armenia—a very extensive recourse to the Soviet multinational empire.

The film's nostalgic and retro-imperial aspirations, formulated in several interviews with its makers, are also expressed clearly in its official trailer.[20] This trailer transports important messages with image and sound, starting with a disaster scenario: The Russian capital Moscow is obviously in the hands of enemies. The viewer sees destruction, smoke rising from houses, and the television tower of Ostankino, where something threatening takes place with huge construction cranes, steel cables, and helicopters. The television tower of Ostankino is one of the landmarks of Moscow. It was put into operation in 1967 and, at 537 metres, was the tallest building in the world for almost one decade. It stands for the 'golden years' of the Soviet Union under Brezhnev—for a life in an internationally respected superpower, which could provide social security and modest prosperity for its citizens at that time.

The shift in the trailer from the disaster scenario of burning Moscow to the film's heroes is a step back into the Soviet Union. We do not see the Soviet Union, but we can clearly hear it: First, a female voice sings the song 'Shiroka strana moia rodnaia' (Wide is my home country). This is one of the most popular songs from the Stalin era; it became the unofficial second anthem of the Soviet Union and is known to everybody in Russia today. While the song is being played, one sees combat machines on the roads of Moscow, and the television tower of Ostankino is disassembled and carted off. In voice-over, the narrator of the trailer informs us that, in this threatening situation, a team of superhumans has entered the stage: the last hope in the battle against the supervillain and his army, which have caused all the destruction. Subsequently, the trailer shows stunning fighting scenes that are accompanied by ballet music composed by Tchaikovsky, making the fighting resemble Russian dance choreography. The last scene of the trailer, when Arsus the bear squeezes into the lift, is underscored by Soviet film music: 'Why, why, why am I in such a light mood,' a duet sounds, 'because you turn around the corner.' It is a song from the comedy film *The Girls* (1962), which is quite popular in Russia, and once more raises nostalgic memories of the 1960s.

Astonishingly, while music is such a powerful signifier in the trailer, the film itself does not use music to create a Russian atmosphere, nor does it take up the musical subtext of the trailer with its reminiscence of the feel-good Soviet Union.

Realizing the Film's Aspiration: Looking Back to the Soviet Union

Zashchitniki has a straightforward and simple plot that is typical of the superhero genre. It realizes its aspirations in the specific way this plot is adapted to Russian culture and history. As already noted, the film's 'guardians' originate in the Cold War, when a secret project named 'Patriot' was undertaken in the Soviet Union: In laboratories, people were genetically modified and turned into superhumans with superpowers. Each Soviet republic had such a lab, where one representative of the titular nation was transformed into a superhuman. However, these fighters never got into action, but were submerged. One of the scientists—with the strange name August Kuratov—who took part in this project at the time has gone insane and mutated into a monster. He has now, in present-day Russia, taken control of a military base, steered tanks and fighting machines to Moscow, and disassembled the television tower of Ostankino. He needs the tower as an antenna in order to put a secret Soviet satellite into power—a satellite that had been built in the 1980s as an answer to Ronald Reagan's so-called Star Wars programme. It can control all the other satellites in the world, which makes the villain a threat not only for Russia but for the entire globe. To fight the maniac, the Russian Ministry of Defence decides to reactivate its 'Patriot' programme and tracks down four of the superhumans. Predictably, after some problems, the heroes succeed in defeating the villain.

Quite obviously, the story takes place in Russia and has a clear Soviet-Russian topic. But does that suffice to realize the aspiration to show heroes that distinguish themselves from the American type of superhero and embody the national character? One can argue that the film's attempts to achieve this aim are crude, starting with its use of national symbolisms.

When preparing the film, the producer aimed for 'Hollywood standards' and sent members of his staff to the workshops of Hollywood, where the costumes for the Superman and Batman films had been produced. But the costumes for the Russian film were intended, as the director argued in an interview, to reflect the respective nationality of the superhero.[21] For the Russian hero, this is the form of a bear into which he is able to transform. For centuries, the bear has been a common symbol for Russia. The Armenian hero wears a robe made of leather, with an Armenian symbol, the sun-cross. He is intended to remind one of a shepherd and at the same time of a medieval warrior.

The Kazakh fights with bent swords, which are inspired by Central Asian weapons. Kseniia, the hero from Crimea, lacks a significant 'national' figuration. She comes across as very feminine, dressed in a tight latex suit and high heels, always made up and pretty—maybe a 'Slavic beauty' (see a review of the film cited ahead)—but her reference to Russian-Ukrainian culture is self-ironic: When asked about her specific superpower, she replies, 'I can cook borscht' (beetroot soup). Likewise, the supernatural skills of the characters were intended, according to the director, to embody 'the strongest attributes and traditions of the nationalities represented.' Furthermore, the plan was to market franchise products on the basis of these national figurations, and to successively add to the original squad further representatives of the remaining former republics of the USSR.[22]

Apart from their national features, the four heroes of *Zashchitniki* also deviate from the pattern of American superheroes in other respects. They are not idealized winners, nor simply fighting machines, but, rather, very human. There are plenty of scenes with action and effects in the style of American movies, but occasionally, the plot is interrupted by melancholic reflections of the heroes—perhaps a reference to stereotypes of the images and self-perceptions of the 'Russian soul,' or merely the attempt to give the film intellectual depth. Each of the heroes has a sad story to tell in the course of the film, and doing so needs an understanding listener. Arsus suffers from not being a normal man anymore. Ler feels exploited since his modification, and thrown away. Immortality is a burden for him, especially since his daughter has died. Kseniia is unhappy because she lost her memory and does not know anymore where she is from—perhaps a subtle message to Ukrainians who, in the Russian view, have forgotten their common history with Russia. Khan suffers from having killed his brother by accident with his superpowers.

An important part of the film's message to audiences in the former Soviet Union is that its four heroes experience a development in the decisive phase of the confrontation with the villain: They will no longer remain lone fighters but instead become members of a team. Indeed, a scientist informs them that their supernatural powers increase tenfold when they act together as a whole. With a collective gigantic effort, they succeed in defeating the villain. The message is obvious: If the former Soviet Republics act together, they are strong, and in the projected sequels to *Zashchitniki*, this would be demonstrated for all 15 superheroes created in the republics. An advertising text states that 'the number of heroes resembles the number of republics. And that means that shoulder to shoulder fight the Russian and the Ukrainian, the Kazakh and the Georgian, notwithstanding their national differences.'[23]

Simultaneous with this reminiscence of the Soviet Union as a superpower and the related appeal for solidarity and desirable unity of the former republics of the USSR, the competition between Russia and the

United States of America is part of the film's messages. The advertising text quoted earlier claims that while there are superheroes that exist outside the United States, the superheroes of the Soviet Union are largely unheard of 'as they are part of a secret structure.'[24] The reference to the 'secret structure' not only explains that hitherto unknown superheroes are suddenly found but also calls up the experiences of former citizens of the Soviet Union: Concealment and the resulting rumours were characteristic of life in the Soviet system. Speculations as to the secret places and miraculous technologies and institutions the state maintained were welcome to the Soviet regime—and are still welcome to the Russian state today—in order to enforce its authority.

While, overall, the motivation of the four heroes for their heroic endeavours stays astonishingly unclear, it also has a backward-looking element. Some of their statements indicate that they affiliate with the commando out of personal revenge, because the villain, who now menaces the world, destroyed their normal life with his genetic modifications 40 years ago. A review of the film states critically that the behaviour of the heroes corresponds to the current conception of patriotism in Russia: The heroes show a collective willingness to fight and to obey the orders of the Russian Ministry of Defence, although at least two of them are not citizens of Russia. In a comment, we can read that their only ideology is the disposition to kill those who are marked as enemies by the authorities.[25]

Reception of the Film

This leads us to the reception of the film. The film was released in the cinemas—certainly not by chance—on February 23, 2017. In Russia, this is the Day of the Defender of the Fatherland (Den' zashchitnika Otechestva), a public holiday. The film started with promising box office results,[26] but, after only one week, the numbers of visitors collapsed massively.[27] In the first week after its release, the film was found in first place; in the second week only in fourth place;[28] after the third week, in tenth place.[29] The film brought in significantly less profit than predicted,[30] and the company Enjoy Movies, which produced the film, announced bankruptcy in July 2017.[31] The financial problems, though, had begun with an earlier film, and *Zashchitniki* simply did not fulfil the hopes that its success would get the company out of its trouble. Nonetheless, in September 2017, Enjoy Movies came to an agreement with its creditors and survived.[32]

The film was more successful abroad. No other Russian film produced higher revenues in 2017 in foreign rental: $7.1 million compared to $4.7 million in Russia itself.[33] The lion's share was earned not in Europe or the United States but on the Chinese market, where the film did not make it to the top position, but, nevertheless, brought in a lot of money.[34]

Without further research, one can only speculate if audiences outside the former Soviet Union felt attracted to the film because it offers a novel variation of the superhero model. Arguably, they did not feel attracted to the film because of its quality.

Russian reviews and commentaries in newspapers and on the Internet rated the film mostly negatively. The short period of time that *Zashchitniki* was actually shown in the cinemas, as well as the negative comments of the audience, reveals a great gap between the high expectations which were raised by the announcements and the cinematic result. The Russian website *Kritikanstvo*, where critics of films are aggregated, classified *Zashchitniki* on February 27, 2017, as the fourth worst film of the whole period of observation.[35] Critics complained with great agreement that the film was not original but a stereotypical copy of the American model and followed well-trodden paths. They also reprimanded the illogical and interchangeable plot, the poorly developed set of characters, the bad dialogue, the bad quality of the special effects and masks, and the unfitting music. Some critics compared the film to the American superhero film *Fantastic Four* (2015), which had been slated just as mercilessly (also by Western critics).[36] Another reviewer described it as 'our response to Howard the Duck' (a silly American science-fiction comedy from 1986 that had been nominated for the 1980s Golden Raspberry—an 'award' for the worst film of the decade), as a 'meaningless and relentless blockbuster' with which you should not waste your time. To make matters worse, this critic noted, the authors of the film had supplied the four heroes with internal conflicts, making one of them speak a long tragic monologue every ten minutes—and then saying nothing for the rest of the film.[37] Even the government newspaper *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* gave the film a devastating review, claiming that it had no script, but consisted of 'a few badly connected episodes in which a group of four surrogates fight against a muscleman with protruding ears, a tough mouth and rubber muscles.' According to this review, the dialogue of the simpleminded heroes only pretends philosophical depth and is in reality shallow and stupid. The fights are unimpressive, the design is tasteless, and the acting unconvincing. 'Whatever element of the movie you look at, everything is stale and tasteless.'[38] The Russian news agency *RIA Novosti* described *Zashchitniki* as the 'worst movie in the audience's judgment' in November 2017, based on a rating on the cinema portal *KinoPoisk*.[39]

One of the few positive reviews was printed by the journal *Kinoafisha*, which suggested that the Russian superhero film had to start with something, and that, therefore, *Zashchitniki* had done great. It saw the film at 'the beginning of an evolving "Patriot" programme on the domestic screen' and claimed that the director had managed to distinguish the film from the American movies through 'strong mental codes.' The film's multinational troop of heroes is hailed as 'a living embodiment of the Russian soul, in which not only a real Slavic beauty, but also a bearded

giant and a strong Kazakh have found a place.'[40] The reviewer clearly follows the ideology of collecting the nations belonging to the former Soviet Union under the roof of Russia, and also evokes the picture of the 'Russian soul,' which can be dated back to the Slavophil thinking of the nineteenth century.

This positive evaluation is an absolute exception. Quite predominantly, the infusion of the superhero genre with supposedly Russian culture was mostly perceived as a banality with superficial symbolism. The attempt to imitate Hollywood was acknowledged with mockery. The reviewer of the widely read newspaper *Izvestiia* criticized that the main concern of the film—to realize the subject of superheroes in a recognizable Russian variant—had completely failed. Besides, the review expresses hurt patriotic feelings. Not only does its author find the film, despite its announcements, nationally unspecific, claiming that it might also be set in New York or Zimbabwe, but also he notes that the Russian army is presented in the film in a considerably unfavourable light, with some 'random dude' being able to 'hack our armed forces with ease' and a Russian general hoping for an agreement with the enemy. 'The worst thing is that *Zashchitniki* damages the reputation of the whole Russian cinema. Try after such a product, which was promoted in the whole world, to convince the spectators to vote for our home-made films with their rubles.'[41]

The foreign reviews of the film were extremely divergent. The English-language version, which came out almost simultaneously with the Russian, was mostly criticized as very bad. In addition to the deficiencies noted in the Russian reviews regarding originality, logic of the plot, and technical implementation, it was criticized that 'the English dub of Guardians lacks any kind of wit, humor, or sense of fun.'[42] Another reviewer described the heroes and their superpowers as 'unabashedly silly,' felt 'clocked over the head with overwrought string music,' and found it unfortunate that the film was 'being sold as Russia's answer to The Avengers. For some US viewers, this will give the impression that mainstream Russian cinema is trashy and low-budget, which really isn't the case.'[43] Such negative verdicts are found not only in English and American media but also in the *Times of India*:

> Take a bowlful of The Avengers, add a teaspoon of the Fantastic Four and sprinkle some X-Men superpowers for taste. And voila! You have Guardians—The Superheroes. Originality certainly isn't this Russian superhero movie's superpower. Ripped from the Marvel recipe books and following in the footsteps of The Avengers movies, this one starts out with a quasi-Frankenstein mad scientist. . . . The movie reluctantly checks the boxes that a superhero movie is supposed to: there's decent camerawork, the actors look gorgeous, the villain is made scary, the visual effects are satisfactory and there's an emotional backstory to every character, which is dutifully placed between

> explosions. But it is so similar to every other superhero movie you've seen, that you feel a perpetual sense of deja vu through its runtime. Watching these superheroes save the day will only slow down yours. Stay home and do a Marvel marathon instead.[44]

Interestingly, for the German dubbed version, which came on the market with a few weeks' delay, the dialogue was strongly changed and turned ironic. Maybe that was a reaction to the bad reviews the film had received earlier. For example, when the tanks controlled by the villain penetrate Moscow, the Russian television announcer says, 'The advancing vehicles seem to be in good technical condition, so they do not belong to the normal stocks of the Russian army.' This sentence does not feature in the Russian version—and was nevertheless identified by the German reviewer as an example of 'specifically Russian humour.'[45]

The dialogue was also charged with sexism in the German version, with sentences that do not appear in the Russian original and sometimes appear parodic because the facial expressions and body language of the actors send out different signals. A blatant example is the dialogue between an old scientist and a female major from the Ministry of Defence who track down the four heroes: In Russian, this is rendered as a serious conversation; in the German version, the dialogue plays with the attractiveness of the female character. At the astonished remark of the major that the scientist is still alive, he replies, 'You know, sometimes I have days when I'm not sure either, but when I look into your blouse, something is still stirring!' A little later, there follows a statement that would not have worked in Russian cinema at all: 'I have something important to tell you—your new hairstyle looks a bit lesbian.' German commentators liked that and came to the—for the Russian original completely unfounded—impression that *Zashchitniki* is an ironic parody of the superhero genre. A German commentator praised 'the sometimes crazy comic dialogues' and the self-irony.[46]

Stereotypes about Russia and the Russians have repeatedly entered into speculations about the film and its origins. A German critic imagined that, one night, the screenwriter had discovered that there was no vodka in the house and wrote the script in an 'unaccustomed sobriety-induced seizure of madness.'[47] He praised the result for its play on words and its satire of American superhero films: 'Better a quick, funny trash grenade than an overloaded semi-blockbuster with equally clichéd character development. . . . Guardians has long been the first (volitional?) Trash movie to entertain me consistently.'[48]

In conclusion, one can state that the translation of the American superhero genre into Russian culture was difficult to implement. The audience that watches such kinds of films in Russia knows the American original and measures the adaption against that. The possibilities to reencode the genre are limited: Such films live on action and effects, not

on profound dialogue and complex stories. The attempt in *Zashchitniki* to domesticate the personality and mentality of the heroes failed, due to the one-dimensionality of the type itself and due to shortcomings in its realization. The messages that the film transmits are quite simple and so transparent that even Russian viewers felt embarrassed. Even though the film catered to nostalgia for power, military heroism, and the lost Soviet Empire in contemporary Russia, its attempt to glocalize the superhero genre was an outright failure. As shown earlier, when the film was distributed internationally, reactions were diverse but also often negative, especially because the Russian film was perceived as an unoriginal adaptation of the American model. However, as the example of the German dubbed version shows, translation could also work in quite another direction. Thanks to deliberate mistranslation of some parts of the dialogue, *Zashchitniki* became open to a reading that the makers of the original had certainly not intended—namely, as a (self-)parody, not only of the genre of superhero films but also of Russian stereotypes.

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6 'This Beast in the Shape of a Man'

Right-Wing Populism, White Masculinity, and the Transnational Heroization of Donald Trump

Michael Butter

Politics, Heroes, and the Global Flows of Popular Culture

On August 25, 2017, many of Donald Trump's liberal critics breathed a short sigh of relief. That day, Sebastian Gorka was fired from his position as deputy assistant to the president responsible for developing strategies to fight Islamist terrorism. A controversial figure ever since he had been appointed, Gorka, who had worked for Hungarian populist Victor Orban in the late 1990s, had never received the necessary security clearance to properly do his job anyway, and the departure from the White House a few days earlier of Steve Bannon, who had served as the president's chief strategist, had fatally weakened Gorka's position within the Trump administration. Unsurprisingly, however, when talking to the press, Gorka did not admit that he had been asked to resign but claimed that he had voluntarily withdrawn from the White House because of frustration about the direction in which the administration was moving. In his resignation letter to Trump, which was swiftly published by several news outlets, he wrote that 'Regrettably, outside of yourself, the individuals who most embodied and represented the policies that will "Make America Great Again," have been internally countered, systematically removed, or undermined in recent months.'[1]

Gorka thus articulated a concern widespread at that time among those committed to what one could label the 'nationalist agenda' for which they and Trump had campaigned. Gorka, Bannon, and others who had been instrumental in getting Trump elected feared that the 'globalists'—Chief of Staff John Kelly, then national security adviser H. R. McMaster, but also Trump's daughter Ivanka and his son-in-law Jared Kushner—were winning the upper hand. Increasingly shaping White House policy, they were perceived to betray what Trump, whom Gorka fashioned in his letter as the last one still dedicated to the campaign's original goals, and those who had elected him really wanted. Gorka elaborated on this idea, and his alleged new role in the fight to restore the country to its former glory, a day later in an interview with *Breitbart.com*, the right-wing

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news platform that played a major part in getting Trump elected and that continues until today to firmly support his 'Make America Great Again' agenda. Viciously lashing out against anybody who he believed deviated from this agenda, Gorka compared his departure from the White House to one of the last scenes of the original *Star Wars* movie:

> Do you remember what Obi Wan Kenobi said to Darth [Vader]? 'If you strike me down, I will be more powerful than you can ever imagine.' The left thinks they're winning. They have no idea what's coming around the corner, and it's going to be fun.[2]

Gorka's self-fashioning as Obi-Wan Kenobi speaks directly to complex connections between heroism and the global flows of popular culture that this volume is concerned with. Gorka draws on a fictional narrative extremely well known inside and outside the United States to characterize not only himself but also Trump: If Gorka is Obi-Wan, then Trump is, by implication, Luke Skywalker. Obviously, many people will consider this comparison not only odd but also deeply inappropriate. Even though Luke Skywalker's image may have suffered a bit through *The Last Jedi*, the saga's latest instalment at the time of writing, he remains the flawless hero of the original *Star Wars* trilogy—a force of good in the perpetual galactic fight against evil. Trump, by contrast, is one of the most controversial and least popular presidents in the history of the United States, and, for many of his liberal critics, it therefore would be far more appropriate to compare him to Darth Vader or even Emperor Palpatine and thus to the leaders of the evil empire that Luke Skywalker fights against.

However, 'good' and 'evil' are cultural constructions, and their meaning may vary widely between and within cultures and societies. The same is true for heroes and concepts of heroism.[3] As the editors to this volume stress in their introduction, heroes do not exist as such. There is no essence to heroism, but heroes are culturally and socially constructed in that individuals and groups label real-life figures and fictional characters 'heroic' and/or attribute to them characteristics that are considered heroic at a specific time and in a specific context. Accordingly, a hero is always a hero for somebody, and one group's hero can easily be another group's villain. The men responsible for the 9/11 attacks are a case in point, as they are vilified as terrorists in the United States but celebrated as heroes in some Muslim countries.[4] The case of Donald Trump is, arguably, even more interesting because, in this case, the dividing line between heroization and vilification does not run *between* cultures but, as we will see, *within* American and, more generally, Western culture.

Trump is considered a hero and is actively heroized by a considerable number of people both in the United States and in Europe, and, as I will demonstrate, references to popular culture are of the utmost importance in this regard. To be sure, such references are used these days, particularly

in American culture, to make sense of politicians in general. A week before Barack Obama's inauguration in 2009, Marvel published 'Spidey Meets the President!' as instalment #583 of *The Amazing Spider-Man*. While this comic already suggested that Obama himself was superhero material, it did not quite yet turn him into such a figure. However, countless image memes inspired by this association did, and others performed the same kind of cultural work by casting him as Superman or Captain America. Popular culture, then, appears to be increasingly used to make sense of politics, but this tendency, I would suggest, is particularly pronounced when it comes to Donald Trump. After all, Trump's successful presidential campaign hinged to a large degree on the fact that he was familiar to Americans as a figure of popular culture. He had spent more than a decade on a reality television show, *The Apprentice*, and constructed a persona for himself which he then transferred to the realm of politics. Thus, it is not surprising that ever since he announced his candidacy, the fans—and I am using this term deliberately here—of Trump the politician have been drawing on films, novels, comics, and computer games to heroize him. In on- and offline discussions, he is frequently compared to figures such as Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games* or superheroes, such as Captain America, Thor, or Superman.

This chapter's argument about the heroization of Trump unfolds in two steps: I will first focus on the national level and discuss how Trump was heroized by his supporters, what they celebrated him for, and how they used images, tropes, and narratives from popular culture to turn him into a hero. I will focus on an image meme based on the computer game *Bioshock Infinite* to demonstrate how the digitally circulating products of popular culture can be used for the work of heroization, and how their original meanings and ideologies are at times completely reversed when consumers appropriate them for their own purposes. Moving from the national to the transnational, I will show in the second and longer part of this analysis that Trump is also revered in Europe. While this might seem slightly surprising at first sight because of his explicitly nationalist 'America First' agenda, it makes perfect sense upon a second look. After all, there are obvious parallels between Trump's most devoted supporters in the United States and their worries and the anxieties that concern increasingly large segments of the population in Europe.

The populist movements on both sides of the Atlantic, which have gained so much traction in recent years, are fuelled by a distrust of established politicians and global elites, and concerns about economic and cultural decline. As Jonathan Rothwell has demonstrated in a study based on the data of 125,000 Americans, Trump was supported by voters both considerably above and below the average income level. Predominantly white and male, these voters, however, were all concerned about what they perceived as the decline of the country and threats to their own status in society. Tellingly, these are the same concerns that drive, for

example, the Pegida movement in Germany.[5] Accordingly, just as much as Americans, some of these Europeans tend to see Trump as the remedy for what they regard as a broken political system and the threats to white supremacy, traditional masculinity, and the wealth of the nation in general that are posed by such diverse phenomena as, for example, globalization, immigration, feminism, and the growing acceptance of same-sex partnerships. What is more, adoring American *and* European representations of Trump frequently cast him as a 'charismatic strongman'—and, thus, as a type of populist leader 'often related to authoritarian regimes' and not to democratic ones. Since such strongmen are typically seen as 'm[e]n of action, rather than words,' they lend themselves to be heroized in very traditional ways.[6] A Swedish YouTube clip that I will discuss in some detail is a case in point here, as it conflates the notions of the traditional warrior hero and the populist strongman in its celebration of Trump.

My analysis of this clip will also show that popular culture is a driving force in the transnational movement and adoration of a figure like Trump, as it is, once again, internationally available images and ideas that are used to heroize Trump. However, despite much common ground, the specific concerns of European populists differ from those of their American counterparts to a certain degree. Hence, Trump is reconfigured and adapted to answer to their needs and anxieties as his persona travels across the Atlantic. Since heroes are screens onto which audiences project their desires, as Max Jones has pointed out, Trump, the hero, comes to stand for slightly different things in Europe.[7]

'To Save the American People': The American Heroization of Trump

When Donald Trump took the stage on November 8, 2016, shortly after the election had been called for him, he did so to the music of Wolfgang Petersen's 1997 film *Air Force One*, in which a heroic president fights a group of communist terrorists aboard his plane. While there is a certain tension between the agenda of global policeman that President Marshall (played by Harrison Ford) pursues in the film by intervening in international conflicts that do not concern the United States and Trump's campaign promise to put American interests above those of the world, the music was probably chosen to suggest that, like his fictional counterpart, Trump would be a president who would act rather than just talk. This, of course, had been one of his most popular claims on the campaign trail, and one can take the slogans often shouted for minutes at his rallies—'Lock her up,' 'Build the wall,' and 'Drain the swamp'—as celebrations and reminders of his promises to act. The last chant is particularly pertinent for my topic, as it projected Trump as the fearless defender of the rights of the people, as someone who would heroically go

to Washington and single-handedly drain it of all elitist corruption, just as Hercules cleaned King Augeas's stables. Referencing a film in which a president almost single-handedly eliminates a serious threat to the nation, for which the plane is a rather obvious metaphor, must thus be understood as a moment of self-heroization carrying the promise that Trump would honour his pledges.

To be sure, candidates who seek political office are always praised or criticized for their plans rather than what they have done already, especially when they are running for the first time and have no record of achievements. But much more than the average candidate, and especially his direct opponents, Trump was from very early on seen by his core supporters as somebody who would surely deliver. They appear to have arrived at this conclusion, on the one hand, from the persona of the self-made businessman that he had constructed for himself on *The Apprentice* and through other media outlets for years, and, on the other, from what others found offensive about him—namely, his complete disregard for political correctness. In his attempt to understand the widespread appeal of a candidate he found despicable, Silicon Valley businessman Sam Altman quotes one of the 100 Trump supporters he talked to after the election as saying, 'He says true but unpopular things. If you can't talk about problems, you can't fix them.' And Altman adds, 'This sentiment came up a lot, probably in at least a third of the conversations I had.'[8] Moreover, as media studies scholars have shown, the way Trump communicated via Twitter was perceived as unprofessional and therefore particularly authentic, enabling Trump to project himself in prototypical populist fashion not only as a man of action but also as one of the people.[9]

One might assume that such a self-fashioning was made difficult if not impossible by Trump's tremendous wealth and a lifestyle that could not have been further removed from that of the voters he particularly appealed to. However, many of his core supporters apparently perceived the fact that he was running for office to get the country back on track as a sacrifice of his privileged life to serve the people. As one widely circulated meme put it, drawing on the established trope of the hero as somebody who gives up his personal happiness to serve the greater good, 'Trump the man who gave up his billionaire lifestyle to be humiliated, ridiculed, and slandered in order to save the American people.'[10] Obviously produced after the election, another meme also projects Trump as a populist hero when it declares, 'He beat the Democrats, Republicans and the media. His only ally, the American people!!'[11]

It is not always possible to track such memes back to their creators, but while many Trump memes originated in rather secluded online spaces, like the Reddit thread where many of his early supporters came together, they then spread over the Internet and were shared and liked by tens of thousands of users. They are thus indicative of how Trump was seen by a part of the electorate. And it was by no means only memes that

represented him in this fashion. In March 2017, journalist Jean Card claimed that Trump was

> the closest thing to Katniss [Everdeen] I could find in the moment. Our hero fires off tweets instead of arrows. But his framing of the enemy and his ability to capture our total attention is [*sic*] as strong as that of any science fiction hero.[12]

Trump, she thus suggested, was a hero of the common people just like Katniss, who in the dystopian *The Hunger Games* trilogy eventually defeats the corrupt and degenerate elites of the city, tellingly called the Capitol, to restore democracy and equality.

Card's comparison fits the populist drive behind the heroization of Donald Trump and is quite typical in that it draws on a popular culture reference. It is untypical, though, in that it compares Trump to a female hero. For apparent reasons, visual representations such as image memes drew on only male superheroes to heroize Trump,[13] turning him into Superman, Thor, or Captain America, and thus into a hypermasculine hero whose muscular body is emphasized by the tight-fitting clothes that these superheroes usually wear. Moreover, in such images, Katniss's bow—a weapon traditionally more readily available to women than swords or axes, as the myths of the Amazons and the goddess Diana show—is replaced by Thor's hammer or Captain America's shield—that is, by weapons that require physical strength to be used effectively. These memes thus highlight a notion of masculinity whose hegemonic status has been increasingly challenged in recent years. It is therefore safe to assume that, for many of his supporters, Trump's campaign was also about restoring this traditional—and, by implication, white and heteronormative—masculinity to its proper place in society.

What becomes rather obvious in these examples, then, is the intensification of a phenomenon that Roger R. Rollin observed more than 30 years ago: 'popular culture heroes . . . are . . . *communal* creations . . ., they bring about a kind of community, one whose citizens are the fans whose popularly supported leaders are the heroes.'[14] What Rollin meant was that fictional heroes such as Superman (and as I suggested earlier, Trump, too, is on a certain level a product of popular culture) were constantly adjusted by their makers to the shifting needs and desires of their audiences. Writing in the early 1980s, Rollin could not envision the advent of what Henry Jenkins labelled 'convergence culture' two decades later: a cultural moment in which 'people take media in their own hands.'[15] Under the conditions of digital culture, not only do fans provide feedback to the creators of their heroes, who then transform these heroes, but also fans themselves actively modify the heroes. They are both producers and consumers, makers and audiences of heroes, no matter if the hero is Superman or Donald Trump.

Significantly, the meaning of the images and narratives used in such heroization processes sometimes changes completely when they are appropriated by fans or supporters. This becomes apparent when looking at another widely circulated image meme that adds another element to the heroic persona of the charismatic leader constructed for Trump by himself and his supporters during the election campaign: his unrelenting stance on immigration and the barely concealed racism behind it. The meme (Figure 6.1) shows Trump in the attire of a Founding Father, the

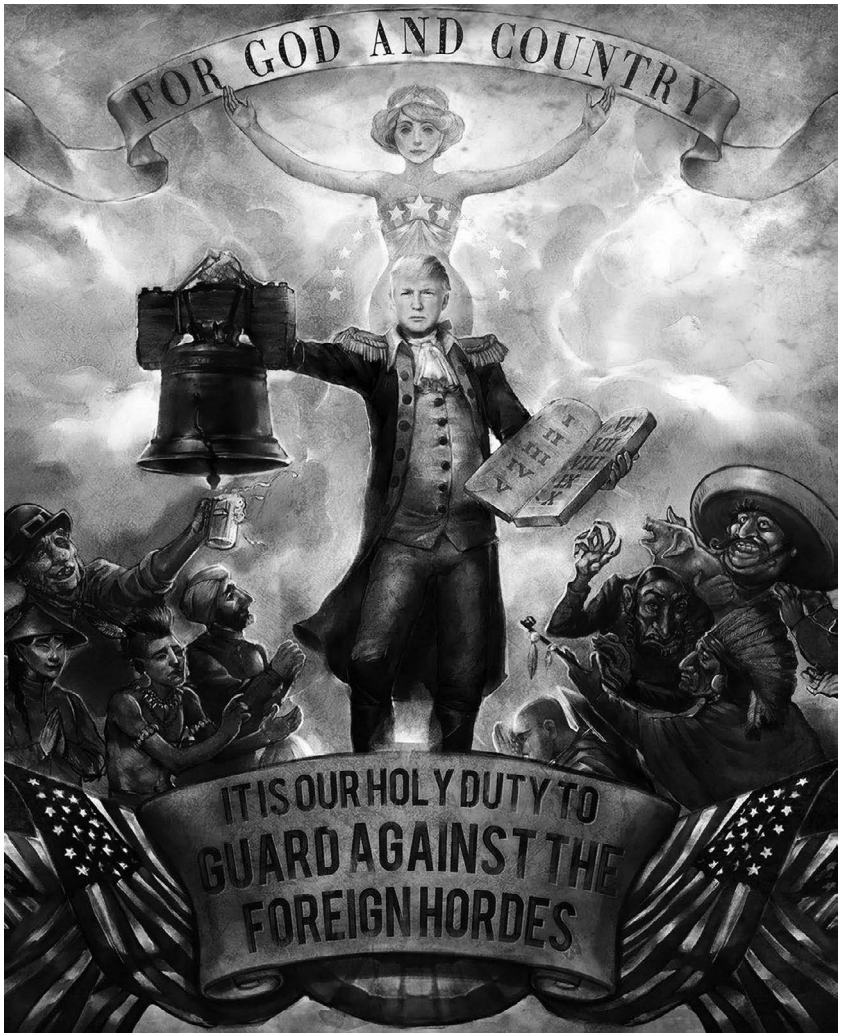

Figure 6.1 Trump's face photoshopped into a still from the video game *Bioshock Infinite* (2013). This meme has been circulated widely online since 2015

bluecoat of the Revolutionary Army, to be exact, which forges a close connection to George Washington, who, until today, remains one of the country's most revered heroes.[16] In fact, the iconography of the image—the light that surrounds Trump casts him at the very least as a divinely inspired leader—evokes associations with representations of Washington: for example, Constantino Brumidi's fresco *The Apotheosis of Washington* in the rotunda of the US Capitol, which imagined him elevated straight to heaven after death.

The Liberty Bell in Trump's right hand and the Ten Commandments in his left suggest that the values on which the country was founded and the Christian religion are inextricably intertwined. This connection is further corroborated by the banner at the top of the image, which declares, 'For God and Country,' and which is held by a female figure who appears to be a curious blend of the goddess Columbia, the allegorical representation of the United States in the nineteenth century, and a participant in a beauty pageant. The banner at the bottom of the image makes clear against which threat Trump must defend the country. 'It is our holy duty to guard against the foreign hordes,' it says, and on the left and the right of the banner representatives of these 'foreign hordes' are depicted in a highly stereotypical and racist manner: among others, a Chinese, an Arab, and a Mexican, all looking up at Trump in a mixture of awe, admiration, and fear. The presence of an Indian chief signals that the United States is defined here as an exclusively white nation whose 'holy duty' it is to dominate other races while preserving the purity of their own.

The fact that there is an Irishman (easily identifiable by his leprechaun face and a jug of beer) among these non-white people might suggest at first sight that the original, into which Trump's face has been inserted, is a product of nineteenth-century nativism since the Irish were not always considered white at that time.[17] This, however, could not be further from the truth, as the image comes from the 2013 computer game *Bioshock Infinite*. As far as it is possible to reconstruct the history of the meme, the image was first used by the Tea Party, which is not deplete of irony, as the game does not at all subscribe to nativism or racism but severely criticizes a nativist party inside the fictional world clearly modelled after the twenty-first-century Tea Party. From 2015 onward, then, Trump's supporters appropriated the image from the Tea Party and used Photoshop to turn the figure in its centre into Trump. As the image travelled first from the game to the Tea Party and then from there to the Trump campaign, its meaning first changed considerably and then again slightly.

All in all, then, the heroization of Donald Trump during the election campaign would have been impossible without popular culture. At times quite independent of the ideology that informed these products in the first place, the widely circulating narratives and characters of film, television, and (graphic) novels provided the material that his supporters could draw on and work with. The meme just discussed is a particularly strong example of how the meanings inscribed into a cultural artefact during the

act of production can be appropriated, subverted, and even negated during the act of reception in order to produce effects that are diametrically opposed to the original intention.[18] The meme employs an image from a computer game with an explicit anti-nativist stance to celebrate Trump for his nativism. Together with the other examples addressed in this section, it participates in the construction of Trump as a populist strongman, a hero who will defend the interests of the people against neglectful elites and immigrants. The meme suggests that only white Americans are real Americans, and this is quite typical of populist discourse, which usually restricts the idea of who the people are in some way or other.[19] An embodiment of traditional masculinity—highlighted in the image from *Bioshock* by his courageous and upright posture, which contrasts markedly with those of the various racial others—Trump was, and still is, widely imagined to be really taking up the 'white man's burden,' with emphasis on both white and man.

'Illegals Are Coming': Trump as the Saviour of Europe

Ever since he announced his candidacy, Donald Trump has been criticized and even ridiculed by most of the European media and large parts of the public. But Trump soon found fervent and vocal supporters on that side of the Atlantic, too. 'I am from Europe and I am disgusted by political correctness and by non-stop apologizing of terrorist attacks and rapes. I feel sad when I am in Paris, Amsterdam, or Prague, and see the changes,' a user wrote in a Reddit thread entirely devoted to the question of why people outside the United States supported Trump. He then went on to call Trump 'very inspiring' and closed by saying that he would 'build a wall and the wall will be a masterpiece.'[20] And when Trump controversially banned citizens of certain Muslim countries from entering the United States, he was applauded by many German Facebook users. One of them wrote, 'That's the only way. They [the refugees] can't be stopped any other way.'[21]

The admiration for Trump that permeates these and many similar posts should not come as a surprise. After all, anti-elitism, xenophobia, and the desire to restore 'proper' gender norms and relations are topics that also resonate with many Europeans, as the success of right-wing populists in countries such as Austria, Poland, and Hungary but also France, Germany, and the United Kingdom shows. Especially the refugee crisis of 2015 and its effects galvanized support for Trump in Europe because his strong anti-immigration stance—symbolized by his plan to build a wall on the border between the United States and Mexico—appeared to a considerable number of Europeans to be the right response to the problem Europe was facing, and the very opposite of what their politicians were doing. This notion was also projected by the alternative media which have emerged online all over Europe in the past decade and which claim

to present the real and objective news, whereas the traditional or, as they refer to them, 'mainstream' media are said to report in a biased fashion, to silence certain topics, to cater to the interests of the elite, and to spread fake news. The German journalist Ken Jebsen, for example, who used to work for public radio but has been running his own YouTube channel for several years now, has praised Trump repeatedly.[22]

For his European supporters, Trump's nationalism is not threatening but rather makes him a kindred spirit: 'I think we can learn a lot from "America First Again",' yet another user wrote on Facebook early in 2017.[23] For her and others, Trump and his campaign are clearly models to be emulated; and like his American supporters, they stress Trump's authenticity and determination to act. Consequently, Trump's European supporters shared and liked the memes produced by his American fans, and, since the products of popular culture so instrumental to the heroization of Trump in the United States are as easily available and as well known in Europe, they have been adding their own share for the past two years. One meme, widely circulated on French Facebook, turned Trump into Jason triumphantly presenting Medusa's cut-off head, only Medusa's face had been replaced with Hillary Clinton's.[24]

However, the Trump adored in Europe is not quite the same as the Trump celebrated in the United States, and there is even a certain tension between the two versions. While both are charismatic strongmen and their heroic personas are characterized in both cases by anti-elitism, nationalism, and traditional masculinity, differences emerge when European supporters of Trump imagine him, as they frequently did during the election campaign, not merely as a role model for their politicians but also as acting on behalf of Europe and defending it against what they see as the Muslim threat to Western civilization. Another meme quite popular on French Facebook, for example, turns Trump into a crusader who conquers the Holy Land. Thus, it ascribes to him exactly the globalist agenda that he explicitly rejected, projecting him as the global policeman embodied by President Marshall in the film *Air Force One*.

A similar tension permeates a short video called 'Donald Trump Emperor of America,' which was produced and uploaded to YouTube in March 2016 by a Swedish user who calls himself Thorstein Memeson.[25] By early 2018, it had been watched more than 900,000 times, and there were more than 3,700 comments from people from all over Europe and the United States below the video. The clip dramatizes the idea of a religious war, a clash of civilizations, between Christian Europe and the Muslim world in drastic fashion, and it casts Trump as a warrior hero and Europe's only hope to escape complete Islamization. By way of its title and certain shots, the video suggests that what European countries need are leaders like Trump who will stop Muslim immigration—for example, a map of Europe filled with the American flag. But the video simultaneously articulates the desire that Trump should conquer Europe

to save its people from their corrupt elites. Such a call for international intervention, however, is at odds with the nationalist agenda that informs the rest of the video, including its soundtrack.

While the image track is a rapid collage of pieces from news reports, photographs, and scenes from computer games into which Trump's head has been copied, the soundtrack consists of only one song, 'The Lion From the North,' by the Swedish power metal band Sabaton. According to Wikipedia, power metal bands 'usually have anthem-like songs with fantasy-based subject matter and strong choruses, thus creating a theatrical, dramatic, and emotionally "powerful" sound.'[26] Like most songs by Sabaton, 'Lion From the North' possesses the qualities of an anthem, but its subject is not 'fantasy-based.' Sabaton's music usually revolves around warfare, historical battles, and traditional acts of military heroism. 'Lion From the North' is from the album *Carolus Rex*, whose title references Charles XII, king of Sweden between 1697 and 1718. The songs on the album are about either the Thirty Years' War and King Gustavus Adolphus, or battles fought under Charles XII at the turn of the eighteenth century. 'Lion From the North,' the second track on the album, belongs to the first category. It celebrates Gustavus Adolphus as Sweden's saviour from the Catholic foe and implicitly hails him as the one who made Sweden a major power in Europe.

By combining this song with an image track that focuses on Donald Trump's alleged battle against Islam in the present, the video heroizes Trump in the tradition of Gustavus Adolphus, implying that he is continuing the fight against an evil religious foe begun by the Swedish king 400 years ago. The video begins with a shot of a map of Europe, Africa, and the Arabian Peninsula, and a caption that says, 'Islamic expansion.' Another caption indicates the year 600; the area that is today Saudi Arabia and Yemen is coloured green, the colour traditionally associated with Islam, while the rest of the map is still white. But as time passes, Islam is seen to be spreading throughout the world, and a few seconds later, when another caption indicates the year 2015, the whole Arab world, large parts of Africa, and all of Europe, except Eastern Europe, have been Islamized. The next shot shows a mass of unidentifiable Muslims at Mecca, circling the Kaaba. This image of conformity and anonymity is then juxtaposed with a close shot of Donald Trump—or rather a figure in a suit onto which the head of Trump has been photoshopped—who gives the finger to an invisible interlocutor, by implication, of course, the Muslim masses. As the rhythm of the guitars accelerates, the next couple of shots show the launching of a nuclear missile and then a mushroom cloud, suggesting that Trump takes action against the Muslim enemy.

At this moment, one minute into the video and the song, the lyrics set in. Calling Gustavus Adolphus a 'lion' and 'a beast in the shape of a man,' the lyrics cast the Swedish king as a mighty warrior who does God's will and destroys his enemies. Although the text is not difficult to understand,

Memeson has added subtitles to the video. This allows him to make one crucial change—the 'Catholics' of the soundtrack become 'socialists' in the subtitles. However, as the image track makes clear, 'socialist' is not to be taken literally but functions as a cipher for all politicians who oppose the ultranationalist and anti-immigration stance that the video promotes. It aligns, among others, Angela Merkel with François Hollande, and Barack Obama with Jeb Bush. The enemies of Christian Europe, then, are not only all Muslims but also the countries' own leaders because they do not act against the 'invasion' but, on the contrary, enable it. Trump and his followers, by contrast, meet the challenge as it must be met: with force and determination.

As the song gets even faster, we see very short clips—never more than a few seconds—of American soldiers fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, and countless images of Trump, both unchanged and photoshopped. We see Trump on the campaign trail and at press conferences, but also a photograph of an ancient Egyptian relief in which Trump's face is imposed on that of the pharaoh and the modified image from *Bioshock Infinite* discussed in the previous section. What dominates, however, are stills or short clips from computer games in which Trump, thanks to image-processing software, becomes a warrior in full armour who slaughters his enemies, mostly orcs and similar creatures but in one case Hillary Clinton, with swords and axes. Most of these clips and images are visible for only a second or even shorter. This may have to do with the poor quality of some of them, but it is also because the individual shots and the sources they come from do not matter. What matters instead is the image of Trump that they create together.

The video casts Trump as a medieval warrior hero and thus as exactly the type of hero that the band Sabaton—whose name is drawn from the word for the iron shoe of a knightly armour—has been interested in throughout its career. Trump is not merely projected as the leader of his troops, as, for example, George Washington was, but also heroized in the tradition of Gustavus Adolphus, who always fought alongside his troops in battle and fell during the Battle of Lützen in 1632. The heroism ascribed to Trump is characterized by bravery, bodily strength, and superior fighting skills. He is represented as a deadly warrior who slaughters his enemies mercilessly, and the video clearly revels in the excess of violence that it projects.

In order to make sure that Trump is not perceived as a fantasy figure completely detached from reality, the video alternates images of him as a warrior with images and short clips of real-life Trump from both the campaign and before. The video thus constructs a metonymic chain between the Trump everybody knows and its own version of Trump. Campaigning is cast in the fashion of a heroic act that continues the work of war done by earlier heroes and by the digitized version of Trump in the excerpts from the computer games. After all, just as in one of the longer passages

of the video, the opponent during the campaign was Hillary Clinton, a figure cast as a demon in this video and countless other images and narratives produced by Trump supporters in 2016. The video further suggests that Trump not only rightfully belongs to the long line of warrior heroes but also is an everyday hero.[27] This is achieved by a shot that remains on screen a little longer than most others and that shows a 1991 article from the *New York Daily News* which reports how Donald Trump interfered in a mugging and scared the bat-wielding attacker away.[28] Finally, the gap between this 'ordinary' heroism and the 'extraordinary' one of a warrior is bridged by a clip that shows Trump participating in a celebrity wrestling match in 2007. This clip achieved some notoriety in 2017 when Trump retweeted an altered version in which the face of the opponent he was battering on stage had been replaced by the CNN logo. Memeson's video includes the original version, and the images of Trump beating up his 'enemy' and then violently shaving his head strongly suggest that Trump truly is a warrior and possesses all the characteristics usually ascribed to sword-wielding knights in full armour.

As my analysis has so far established, the video takes the traditional masculinity Trump was celebrated for by his American supporters completely over the top. This is not at all unusual for heavy-metal songs and videos because, as Deena Weinstein has put it, '[a]t its core, . . . metal is an expression of masculinity.'[29] While recent criticism has challenged the stereotypical image of the 'heavy metal fan as white, male, teenage and alienated,' of somebody whose 'masculinity [is] in crisis' and for whom 'the exercise of aggression' is a way to overcome this crisis, the cliché nevertheless holds true to a certain degree, and the video is a case in point.[30] It exudes a profound sense of anxiety that white men are losing their rightful and privileged position in society to women (embodied by Hillary Clinton) and people of colour (embodied by the Muslim refugees). This threat, the video implies, must be answered with extreme violence and Trump, described by the lyrics at one point as 'this beast in the shape of a man,' is cast as the one capable and willing to exert such violence.

Besides actively fighting those enemies already inside the United States, the video suggests in best Trumpian fashion that closing the borders completely is an equally important step. This notion is conveyed by a shot that lingers a little longer than others on screen and that also serves as the video's thumbnail image on YouTube. Trump is cast here as Jon Snow from HBO's *Game of Thrones*, and this comparison makes a lot of sense, not only because for large parts of the show Snow guards a wall, while Trump wants to build one, but also because on the other side of the wall in *Game of Thrones*, there are uncivilized 'wildlings' and even an army of zombies.[31] As several critics have argued, in the post-9/11 world, the zombie has become, among others, a trope for Islamist terrorism. It represents ultimate otherness, displays complete disregard for its own life and safety, and cannot be negotiated with. Hence, complete annihilation, celebrated throughout the video, is the only way to deal with this threat.[32]

While the different anxieties the video is concerned with—fear of Muslim immigration, distrust of one's own elites, and a crisis of masculinity—seem unconnected at first sight, the video uses the conspiracy theories of the 'great replacement' to tie them all together. This conspiracy theory, which was first articulated by the French philosopher Renaud Camus, has gained a lot of traction in Europe since 2015. It holds that the Christian population of Europe is currently being replaced by Muslims, and that this has been planned and is now carefully orchestrated by a group of conspirators. These evildoers orchestrated the attacks of 9/11 to justify the invasion of Iraq to destabilize the region and eventually trigger the mass migration of refugees. Using the European Union and European politicians like Angela Merkel and François Hollande as its puppets, the conspiracy also orchestrated the Schengen Agreement to allow refugees to move freely within Europe. Moreover, the conspiracy has also been working hard to subvert traditional gender norms to ensure that European women have fewer children and that European men lack the masculinity to effectively resist the Muslim invaders. The masterminds behind the plot remain obscure in some accounts, while other accounts, including the video, focus on the American billionaire and philanthropist George Soros. A montage shot that shows him together with Barack Obama, Jeb Bush, and Angela Merkel before an Israeli flag suggests that he is the representative of a larger Jewish plot against Europe.[33]

Absurd as it may sound, this conspiracy theory is by no means restricted to the radical fringe to which the producer of the video obviously belongs, but enjoys a lot of popularity in the right-wing populist movements that have gained so much traction since 2015 because of the refugee crisis. As several shots towards the end of the video make clear, their leaders—for example, Nigel Farage and Marine Le Pen—are seen as Trump's and the people's allies in the fight against conspiratorial elites and the Muslim Other. This idea, though, leads back directly to the tensions that run through the video. To be sure, the different European populist parties are currently cooperating, forming a somewhat unlikely international alliance of nationalists. They are organized in the fraction 'Europe of Nations and Liberty' in the European Parliament and organized a summit meeting in Koblenz in January 2017 that drew a lot of media attention. However, the idea that Trump might not only inspire a further nationalist turn in Europe but also literally come to the rescue of this continent is absurd, as such an intervention would run against everything he campaigned for.

The Trump, then, that his European supporters celebrated in 2016 had some things in common with the Trump heroized in the United States, but there were also significant differences. Still, as the Reddit thread I referred to earlier and the comments under Memeson's video amply show, there was a lot of exchange and agreement between Trump supporters on both sides of the Atlantic in 2016 and 2017. 'I'm from Sweden. Please, President Trump, save my country,' one comment reads, and another one adds, 'I'm from Poland, Poles are with you Trump,' while an American

declares, 'Europe we love you, but we hate Merkel! We love you, but we hate the EU and NATO!'

The transnational heroization of Donald Trump works because Trump functions in this discourse as what one could call—with reference to Ernesto Laclau's theory of populism—a half-empty signifier. As Laclau demonstrates in his analysis of Juan Perón during his time in exile in the 1960s, Perón was so successful in garnering support from various groups in Argentina because he was absent and thus came to embody contradictory ideas to different parts of the population. He became in effect an 'empty signifier.'[34] To some extent, this is also what happens to Trump, as there is an obvious tension between the nationalist agenda that he is celebrated for by his American supporters (and that he actually pursues) and the role as 'saviour of Europe' that heroizations outside of the United States tend to ascribe to him. Yet, unlike the different versions of Perón in Argentina during the 1960s, the 'European' and the 'American' Trump still have a lot in common: Both display an anti-elite and anti-Islam stance, oppose immigration, and seek to restore an embattled white masculinity to its former hegemonic position. And both are heroes fighting for the common people against neglectful and at times even corrupt elites.

Conclusion: Yet Another Alliance

In *The Other Alliance*, his study of the transnational entanglement of student protests in the United States and Germany, Martin Klimke argues that the movements on both sides of the Atlantic formed an alliance structurally similar to the one of their governments. He demonstrates that they shared 'an international language of dissent,' but also that German and European students did not simply copy everything from their American counterparts but 'selectively adopted, modified, and used American counter-cultural imports, thereby turning them into their own.'[35] The transnational heroization of Donald Trump investigated here could be labelled yet another transatlantic alliance. As this chapter has shown, Trump's American and European admirers agree in many respects but nevertheless see slightly different things in Trump. Most importantly, however, they share an international language of heroism, and their heroizations of Trump depend on and are enabled by a globally circulating popular culture that provides both the narratives and tropes for it.

What is more, in the age of convergence culture where production and consumption increasingly fall together, popular culture provides templates onto which political figures can be grafted not only ideologically but also, quite literally, materially. One can easily cast Donald Trump as Jon Snow because there are countless images of Jon Snow available online that Trump supporters can work with. Amazingly, to turn Trump into Jon Snow one does not even need Jon Snow, as becomes apparent

when one looks closely at the image of Trump guarding the wall in Thorstein Memeson's video. Clearly, the image is supposed to align Trump and Snow, and it succeeds because of the parallels I have outlined earlier. However, the body onto which Trump's face is imposed here is not that of Jon Snow but that of his alleged father, and, as it later emerges, his uncle, Ned Stark. I was unable to verify if Memeson worked with a meme that had already turned Snow into Stark, thereby suggesting that he was the legitimate heir as which he has by now emerged in *Game of Thrones*, or if Memeson simply took an image of Ned Stark, inserted it into a picture of the wall, and then replaced Stark's head with Trump's. At the end of the day, it does not matter. What matters is that Memeson could easily align Trump with Jon Snow and thereby participate in the forty-fifth president's transnational heroization—a heroization that almost entirely depends on a globally available popular culture.

Notes

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10. 'Trump International Supporters Movement,' *Facebook*, August 24, 2017, last accessed April 23, 2018.
11. 'He Beat the Democrats, Republicans and the Media: His Only Ally, the American People!,' last accessed April 23, 2018, https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/51/3d/35/513d350416c8d377163ef5aa75c9352f-trump-train-donald-trump.jpg.
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14. Roger R. Rollin, 'The Lone Ranger and Lenny Skutnik: The Hero as Popular Culture,' in *The Hero in Transition*, eds. Ray B. Browne and Marshall W. Fishwick (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1983), 25–26. Emphasis in the original.
15. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 17.
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29. Deena Weinstein, 'The Empowering Masculinity of British Heavy Metal,' in *Heavy Metal Music in Britain*, ed. Gerd Bayer (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 17–31, 17.
30. Niall Scott, 'The Monstrous Male and Myths of Masculinity in Heavy Metal,' in *Heavy Metal, Gender and Sexuality: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, eds. Florian Heesch and Niall Scott (London: Routledge, 2016), 121–132, 121.
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33. Cf. Michael Butter, *'Nichts ist, wie es scheint': Über Verschwörungstheorien* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018), 21–29, for a detailed analysis of this conspiracy theory.
34. Cf. Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), 216.
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7 Axe and Helmet

The Widening Range of New York Firefighters as (Super-)Heroes

Wolfgang Hochbruck

Building a Heroic Reputation

The Fire Department of the City of New York is a cultural phenomenon beyond the range of an urban fire service. Its reputation had reached international proportions already before the attacks on the World Trade Centre, and it increased to global proportions in the aftermath of 9/11. Travel agencies specialize in booking tours for firefighters from all over the world to travel to New York, visit the Fire Academy on 'The Rock,' the museum, and the famous 'Fire Store,' where hundreds of them have signed the guest books. Volunteers and professionals alike return home with pride, and if they managed to get invited into one of the many New York firehouses, they will be wearing the respective house's t-shirt, which they obtained as a matter of course. Both the national German and the international Conrad Dietrich Magirus awards by the Germany-based Iveco-Magirus fire apparatus company include a visit to the FDNY for the winning teams.[1] Similarly, the acme experience of a junior firefighter's life appears to be a visit to New York. The official FDNY Facebook page has attracted more than half a million followers, most of whom are other firefighters.

The ascendancy of the FDNY, and of American firefighters in general, to their superior status position as the world's number-one model was not a natural phenomenon. As the following pages will show, it depended on a series of social as well as technological factors and decisions, and it was supported by the publication of popular cultural texts at decisive moments in their history. This chapter investigates historical as well as structural and iconographic developments that explain the unmatched global heroic reputation of the New York firefighters. It should not be misread as suggesting that superheroes work for the FDNY, or that FDNY firefighters lay claim to superhero status. As a matter of fact, at the bottom of the cultural history of the FDNY is a strange duality. It pitches a classic, and traditional, heroic narrative—including super-human feats and accomplishments, symbolic objects of medieval chivalry, and the typical transgressive behaviour of the hero—not exactly against

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but side by side with the modesty and humility of ideal members of a republican democracy: Men and women who perceive themselves as doing what their special training and abilities enable them to do as a service to their community. Like most firefighters worldwide, they will tell whoever comments on their heroism that they are just doing their job.

It is against the backdrop of this strangely irreconcilable duality that the 'heroism' of the FDNY as a cultural phenomenon needs to be fathomed. There are several historical steps:

- the ideals of altruism and fame-worthiness as the basis for the construction of a democratic form of heroism in and since the eighteenth century;[2]
- the transition from volunteers to professional firefighters in the mid-nineteenth century without lasting negative effects, even though the volunteers had been vilified in a concerted effort by businessmen and insurance underwriters to terminate the volunteer culture;[3]
- the growing importance of the interrelationship between technology and the heroic in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries;
- the role of the FDNY during and after the Vietnam War years;
- the reputational gain that came with the popular reception of what, in terms of structural hierarchies and personnel situation, was a debilitating blow, with the loss of 343 firefighters, including most of the upper echelon of the department, on September 11, 2001.[4]

This last point is of special interest here since it came at a time when (super-)heroism was generally thought to be in decline. However, there are some aspects, and motifs, that allow the comparison of the FDNY to representations of the superheroic in popular culture. As such, they are subject to the kind of mediated heroization processes that operate through idolatric iconographization and incremental collective as well as individual repetition.

Considering the extreme elevation of what is, after all, a group of reasonably well-trained and well-paid professionals, there is an odd incongruence if one compares the images of firefighters in contemporary Western societies. Judging by statistical figures, the Berlin (Germany) fire department ought to enjoy similar popular status—it is at least as effective and suffers fewer losses in the process. In terms of percentage of the population, there are also far more firefighters in Germany than in the United States. What needs to be considered, however, is the range and scope of cultural representation. All major movies for cinema about firefighters are American, and as for television series, the most popular, starting with the paramedic show *Emergency!* in the 1970s, were also American. The FDNY was featured prominently in the well-made *Rescue Me* (2004–2011) series, which won considerable critical acclaim and, in a variety of ways, accompanied the recovery process of the New

York Fire Department.[5] More recently, and still running, *Chicago Fire* (internationally successful since 2012) indicates a shift to more variety in action. Both series focus not on engine companies and thus the actual firefighting work—in fact, Engine 51, on which the name of the Chicago firehouse is based, is hardly shown at all, and none of the main characters are members of the Engine Company. The various and often hazardous actions are constructed around ladder/truck companies (both series) and squad companies (*Chicago Fire*). The extra ambulance for the Chicago series covers the recipe for success behind the continuing cult status of *Emergency!*.

The cultural representation of firefighters is of course not limited to the United States. There were several (if negligible) German firefighting TV series. The most successful firefighter comics are produced in France (*Les Pompiers*), and there is a manga series in Japan (め組の大吾; *Firefighter! Daigo of Fire Company M*), while the most popular children's TV series about firefighters hails from Great Britain (*Fireman Sam*). However, none of them come close to the transmedial, multilayered, and articulated cultural subfield dominated by US productions. To begin with, none of them partake in the superior powers of the Americans: *Les Pompiers* are all humorously drawn, Daigo is an 18-year-old who still has to learn a lot about firefighting although he is a gifted 'natural' (and the series is also popular in its American edition), and the blue uniforms and cork helmets of the puppet characters in *Fireman Sam* indicate one of many instances in which contemporary British popular culture reconstructs a Disneyfied past where all's well that ends well.[6]

Members of the Fire Department of New York appear like a different kind of profession in comparison to their European or Japanese counterparts, at least judging by their appearance in advertising, toys, figurines, coffee-table books, television series, and, of course, Hollywood movies. Their powers raise them to superior stature. For instance, in the remake of the disaster film *Poseidon* (2006), Kurt Russell is not only the mayor of New York but also a former firefighter—which explains his superb, and superheroic, leadership performance, even though he does without any of the paramagical objects that New York firefighters are endowed with.

An International Model: Heroic Objects and Mythical Figures

When advertisements use a firefighter figure, there is a good chance that in many countries around the world the image will show American firefighters, or at least what is supposed to look like an American and specifically a New York firefighter. Identification is usually achieved via the characteristic helmets with the elongated back and the leather company shield. The turnout gear for the majority of figures in the advertisements will also look similar to the near-black fabric with the characteristic reflector stripes and clasp closures of the FDNY, but it is the traditional

helmet form that establishes recognizability. To apply the inclusionary side of actor-network theory concerning objects, they are the basic clue to the relentless image-creating of the FDNY. As heroic objects, their presence, together with that of the fireman's axe, announces the arrival of the personage most closely related physically to the globally recognizable medieval knight, and his predominant virtue, courage. Emblazoned on its leather front, and thus similar to the emblems a knight carries on his shield, are the company insignia, rank, and status. The axe signals breakthrough power—the American firefighter's axe is about one third heavier than its German counterpart. Together, axe and helmet get as close to attributes of a medieval knight as any professional branch in the modern world can claim, of which the axe has retained more of its original value as a tool: Due to most American building codes permitting wooden structures, the axe is indeed a useful tool for breaking in, or out. Thus, American firefighters regularly carry them, and the firefighter whose function is to wield the 'irons' on the truck or ladder to this day brings a combined axe and Halligan tool set to the scene. Axe and helmet occasionally even serve as secondary sex symbols beyond their practical function—erotic depictions of firefighters often leave on the helmet if little else, and/or place the axe in the picture, too. They are likewise the predominant tokens in children's firefighter toy manikins, and even in extremely reduced format they still serve as identification tags: Stripped quite literally of everything else, Donald Duck, in a 1947 Carl Barks-made comic story, remains identifiable by axe and helmet.[7]

With this emblematic equipment, the epitome of the American fireman is a member of the FDNY—followed by, but at a distance, the Fire Departments of Boston and Chicago. But even within the culture of the helmet as a cult object, there are differentiations. Traditionalists insist to this day on the pre-1970s leather-made helmets; as recently as 2009, the webpage photographs of the members of New York's prestigious Rescue Company No. 1 showed many of them with old leather helmets. And even more recent generations of plastic helmets retain in their exterior design what looks like the welds where their leather ancestors were sewn together. The FDNY helmet not only is a highly coveted collectors' item worldwide but also dominates cultural representation: Even the Japanese manga *Firefighter!* shows its main hero occasionally wearing what looks like New York headgear, rather than the Samurai-inspired standard Japanese helmet.[8]

It is also with the FDNY that the motif of superpowers comes in, and this has a lot to do with the maverick image of American firefighters, whose history is traceable to attempts at maintaining a positive image of increasingly unruly and belligerent volunteers.[9] The powers with which especially the New Yorkers seem to be endowed are, as with the demigod heroes of old, transgressive of the rules that mere mortals have to abide by, like obeying orders, respecting due process, or exercising caution.[10]

New York firefighters have therefore been particularly likely to cater to the American public's adoration of the maverick figure.[11] As a chief of the FDNY stated in 1987,

> You had to keep those firefighters from going into empty burning buildings. It was like charging [controlling] a wild horse. They turned off their handy-talkies. 'My radio wasn't working, Chief.' You knew the sonofabitch was lying. I probably would've done the same thing.[12]

The amount and degree of risk-taking allegedly performed by firefighters as a form of competitive games are, from a present-day view of health and safety concerns, astounding:

> They used to play a game in the firehouse, the leather lung game. They'd fill up a garbage can with wood and cloth, light a fire in it, and let the room fill up with smoke. Then they'd send the firemen in, young and old, and see who could stay in the room the longest. . . . The guy who stayed in the room the longest was looked up to: he had won the game.[13]

These games are likely accountable for a number of cancer-related deaths in the past and present—unfortunately, the transgressive powers of firefighters have so far failed to make them immortal. That includes not only the figure played by Kurt Russell in the *Poseidon* movie but also, with disastrous results, the hundreds of firefighters that rushed into the burning Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. The truculence and lack of obedience, but also the extreme devotion to the task, expressed in this behaviour have their precedent in early popular representations of volunteer firemen from the first half of the nineteenth century—and it should be noted that even then the image of the heroic American fireman crossed the borders of American culture.

Close to the end of the volunteer period in the 1840s, the New York Fire Department generated a larger-than-life folk hero. The figure of Mose the Fire B'hoy was popularized through stage melodrama but was allegedly based on a historical character, a six-foot printer (in other versions a butcher) from the Bowery by the name of Moses Humphreys. The figure was elevated to national fame in a late 1840s and early 1850s series of plays portraying Mose in the stereotypical attire of the period: fireman's shirt and boots, and, in the widely circulated drawing of actor (and firefighter) Frank Chanfrau in one of the plays' leading roles, still with the stovepipe plug hat which preceded the leather fire helmet. The success of this play, written by Benjamin Baker, first performed in 1848 and inconspicuously titled *Glance at New York*, led to a host of other plays, songs, a dance, and stories that made Mose even taller, more truculent, and pugilistic.

The ironic twist to the Mose stories is that, at the time, a conspiracy of businessmen and insurance underwriters was already systematically discrediting the original volunteer fire departments, accusing them of brawling, drunken rioting, and, worst of all, ineffectiveness. To them, the structural independence and the masculinist rowdiness of the volunteers reflected a lack of discipline at a time when the transformation of the labour force into a governed body characterized by (auto-)controlled 'round-the-clock respectability' was the target.[14] The volunteers were not only seen as lacking efficiency in view of modern technologies, like the horse-drawn steam pumper. More importantly, the likeliness of highly skilled employees to run away to a fire because they were also members of one of the numerous volunteer companies meant a loss of profit if machinery came to a standstill and jobs remained unfinished until the firemen deigned to return to their workplaces. The costs for professional firefighters could be socialized;[15] the extra profit to be made from the termination of the volunteer system remained with the business and factory owners. Thus New York's volunteer companies were disbanded.

The drinking, fighting, and the ineffective rowdiness were rendered visible in contemporary newspaper illustrations,[16] and of course the kind of undisciplined and non-civil behaviour depicted there was also performed in the most popular medium of the period, the melodrama stage. From Baker's *Glance at New York*, the character of the Bowery B'hoy epitomized the worst about the volunteers—and the best: Playwrights and producers left no doubt about Mose's general good-heartedness, courage, and spirit of comradery. Consequently, as soon as the volunteers had been disbanded, and reorganized as professionals with stricter discipline and under more direct supervision, the heroification of firefighters could resume. Mose grew from the brawling melodrama type into a figure hero of legendary proportions, until over time he developed into a figure that Richard Mercer Dorson, the doyen of American folklore studies, pronounced on a par with the likes of Paul Bunyan and Davey Crockett.[17] His figure was not yet superheroic, but the larger-than-life qualities were visible. Consequently, in the twenty-first century, and following the loss of so many firefighters in the collapse of the Twin Towers, Mose took on the format of an illustrated children's book superhero whose rowdiness is reduced to eating enormous amounts of food, but who, in case of necessity, lifts streetcars out of the way and runs into burning hotels all night long, rescuing everybody[18]—very much the expression of a desire the historical firefighters of 2001 had not been able to fulfil.

The image literally drawn in this children's book is paradigmatic of the specific New York situation. The role of the city as one of the world's first megalopolises in the late nineteenth century, the infatuation with new technologies, and those cultural production lines that have been celebrating firefighting since the 1860s all coincide. In the cultural products, but also to an extent in real life, New York firefighters managed to retain

semblances of their rowdy, maverick stature in their behaviour. This seeming unaffectedness by the strongly regulation-based and militarizing structures that became dominant in England and Germany at the same time remade the members of the FDNY into objects of desire and envy for others, and into the Eastern urban equivalent of the Western cowboy.

A decisive factor in the transition was the wave of technologization that came with it. Horse-drawn steam pumpers may be more easily operated by professionals available 24/7, but foremost, and in the eye of the public, they were part of a new era of technology, and their operators were heroes of a new age. With steam pumpers from the 1860s to the early 1900s, and motorized vehicles since then, the engine and ladder companies took over their parts in a quotidian pageant, drawing people to the streets when the fire apparatuses rushed past. Audiences, within the theatres and without, enjoyed the show, even though the demise of the hand-drawn pumpers had literally relegated them to the sidelines.

The FDNY—and, consequently, professional firefighters in other urban American fire departments, where the same process took place within 20 years from ca. 1850 to the late 1860s[19]—thus managed to escape a fundamental contradiction. According to one valid definition, heroes are altruistic individuals with strong, ethically founded motivations. However, at least in modern societies, it is even more important who responds to whose credible construction of a hero, or a heroic group.[20] The reconstruction of the urban American fire service as still heroic yet paid professionals was a concerted effort that proved successful at least for the interested groups behind it. Consequently, US fire departments have not only been paid for their heroism since the mid-nineteenth century but also (re-)gained status dominance as the No. 1 heroic group in America and beyond.

Brian Monahan and Carol Gregory have pointed out how attaining status dominance as a heroic group under the conditions of hegemonic masculinity is a dramaturgical process including both micro- and macro-sociological elements.[21] The concerted effort by economically interested groups to turn what had been volunteer groups from all strata of society, and seeking fame,[22] into paid working-class professionals is one such macro process. It also shows that and how heroic figures are not just reactions to a collective need. If that were the case, firefighters, because of their incorporation of a collective need and public service, should enjoy similar reputations worldwide. However, there are many countries where the fire services were never part of a volunteer structure, but part of the police force, of the military, or, like in ancient Rome, slaves, or otherwise badly paid and ill-reputed professionals.

The dialectic of mythopoiesis and the collective construction of the heroic are more complicated. For instance, in New York, the follow-up of the push for professionalization involved not only the aforementioned shift from fame-worthy volunteers to efficient professionals, and

an increasingly technologized service in the 1870s through the 1890s. It was also accompanied by cultural texts that served up images and myths which tied the professionals back to the more fame-worthy aspects of the volunteer period. From newspaper articles to books, and from plays like Joseph Arthur's *The Still Alarm* (1885) to television documentaries, these texts made sure that the firefighters were portrayed as eminently public figures, linking the spirit of the (retained) volunteers from the days of yore and the heroic efficiency of modern technologies.[23]

Two texts stick out: Augustine E. Costello's *Our Firemen* (1887), a history of the New York fire departments, volunteer and paid (as it states on the cover), glossed over the structural reordering with a plethora of carefully executed illustrations, and a focus on heroic individual as well as collective action, a story of saviours and saves, as well as of tragic loss. Consequently, he subtitled the 'Roll of Merit' chapter of his tome 'Deeds of Self-Sacrifice and Heroism Which Prove That the Age of Chivalry Has Not Passed.'[24] He thus begat a line of stories of historical heroic efforts expanding throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries to Dennis Smith's *Dennis Smith's History of Firefighting in America: 300 Years of Courage* (1978). The same strongly performative stance was taken in several melodramas of the period, the most successful of which was the aforementioned Joseph Arthur's *Still Alarm*. Here, a young professional is aided throughout by Joe Jones, a garrulous former volunteer old-timer who had been retained in the transition.

The heroic narratives that were presented in these plays and publications were disseminated globally, hinting at the roots of American firefighters' transnational acclaim. Whereas the earlier Mose plays had not left the United States, Arthur's play was also an international success, being performed in the British Isles and possibly in Paris.[25] Even more well known internationally were the short 'actuality' movies sold by Edison that showed fire engines and whole battalions racing to fires from 1896, or the famous fire shows on Coney Island, with their daring stunts and displays of recent developments in firefighting technology.[26] The ever-widening reach of the movie industries distributed material not just to Europe but also to Australia and South America. This occasionally affected local fire brigades. For instance, Stephen Crane in a newspaper report from London mocked the size of the British engines, the uniforms with their brass cuirassier-style helmets, and the lack of efficiency of the London Fire Brigade, comparing their race to a fire to a publicity show for *The Still Alarm*.[27] Aided by travelling drama shows and movies, the New Yorkers increasingly set the pace, and the standards, for departments and brigades around the world to follow. More effective than any cultural factors was the readiness of the FDNY to invent new responses to the changing situation after 1900 with the rapid growth of urban industries and populations. For instance, after the disastrous Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in 1911, the FDNY responded with the formation

of the first ever rescue company—a unit whose predominant task was to save and extract people, and who were not primarily concerned with the fighting of fires.[28] This was a novel development, and it spread from here.

The superheroic aspect of firefighters' actions in the constitutive phase of professionalization is largely anticipatory in nature. Superheroes as such had not been invented yet—that would not happen until 1938—and the democratic factors in American society tying back the hero with the man in the streets were still largely in place. With French sociologist Adolphe Quételet, it is possible to see the New York firefighters as a supersize variant of the average person.[29] It should be noted, however, that New York firefighters in both the hetero- and autostereotype format always retained the maverick quality that had contributed to the downfall of their volunteer predecessors, and which comes with an element of transgressive behaviour—thus anticipating the supersize hero and heroine of American disaster movies in the 1950s. Also, magazine readers and the melodrama stage audience, as well as people in the crowded streets and housing quarters of New York with their lack of fire safety and, consequently, numerous fires, were treated to a daily spectacle in which extraordinarily costumed figures provided views of daring exploits, scaling ladders and rushing into burning buildings, to emerge again with victims they snatched from the jaws of a terrible death. The subsequently proliferated stories of seemingly superhuman heroic exploits prepared the ground for the even more extraordinary exploits of the Marvel, DC, and other superheroes whose costume also set them apart from the rest, and whose powers exceeded those of ordinary mortals. In addition, toys, especially toy cars—including kid-size pedal-car fire engines to sit on—and costumes supported imaginary firefighter games especially for the highly impressionable elementary school age group.[30] Because they served an international market, Mattel and others sold these items worldwide—one of the first 'match-box' car models sold by the British Lesney company from 1953 was a British Merryweather Fire Engine, but the next one was already an American Ford Fairlane Fire Chief's Car.[31]

The 'War Years'

The first, more specifically superheroic, generation of firefighters came to the fore in the 1970s, as the US armed forces were losing the war in Vietnam. At that time, several of the, by then, traditional superheroes, like Superman and Batman, had already undergone various permutations, including their portrayal as no longer reliable to the absolute degree that audiences since the 1940s had been used to. Thus, the generation of firefighters that got into the service in the 1960s had been raised on a steady diet of positive superhero comics, and on heroic stories from two world wars that Americans had won, besides the actual stories about heroic firefighters.[32] There had even been attempts at integrating firefighters into

comic book culture in the 1940s and 1950s, like the short-lived *Danny Blaze*, or the first issue of the *New Heroic Comics* series, presenting a fireman's story in September 1946.[33] None of them had been particularly successful, but with their insistence on the events portrayed being taken from 'real life,' and the similarity of drawing and colouring modes, the alignment of firefighter and superhero was not difficult to perform in an impressionable young reader's mind. One of the effects of the continuous immersion in heroic tales may very well have been observable real-life attempts at superheroic feats by firefighters who were of the generations to have grown up with superhero stories:

> In july [*sic*] of 1998, Engine 255 pulled up to a fire where Jack Pritchard would perform the most famous heroics of his career. After learning there was an infant trapped on the fourth floor, Pritchard entered his Superman-mode and fearlessly leaped into the building to locate the baby.[34]

However, the increasingly superheroic stature of firefighters, especially in urban America, during and after the 1970s had less to do with reading comics than with being forced to react to deteriorating political and communal situations. Especially New York, but also other cities, were ravaged by recklessly capital-oriented urban development, absentee landlordism, and racially aggravated class conflicts. On the surface, one expression of these conflicts was the thousands of arson fires, notably in the Bronx. The situation was aggravated by segregation. Firefighters, including professionals, used to hail from the area they served. By the 1960s and 1970s, however, the ethnic situation in places like the Bronx had segregated to the point where mostly Caucasian firehouses served mostly African American and Hispanic neighbourhoods. The stress on the firefighters was enormous, with thousands of alarms per year for the busiest houses. But the firefighters stood their ground—and not only that: They fought back. The key text supporting this legend during its productive phase was Dennis Smith's *Report From Engine Co. 82*, published by *Saturday Review Press* and, in abbreviated version, in the July 1973 issue of *Reader's Digest*. Formally a documentary novel operating as a first-person narrative, the book was a huge success, selling more than a million copies within the first year, and being translated into 12 different languages in those countries where *Reader's Digest* was available. This was a massive boost to the positive image of American, and especially New York, firefighters worldwide.

Smith portrayed the New York firefighters as a brave, bawdy, good-natured lot, dedicated to their job and believing in the essential necessity of serving their community regardless of age, gender, ethnic background, or income level—despite the fact that they were often attacked, even within that community, to whom they represented an otherwise amorphous and

inimical power. Some developed superpowers, even though only in terms of the banter and ribbing by their comrades, as in this scene where the officer of a ladder company and his supposedly super-gifted probationary firefighter encounter a psychologically disturbed man who set fire to his place:

> Nixon [the officer] and the 'super-probie' have followed the man. That's their job—search and rescue. Mike Runyon has begun to open the windows of the other rooms. The man has run into the kitchen, and stands like a cornered animal, with a carving knife in his hands. The 'super-probie' tries to approach him, gently. But the man leaps out at him, and swings the knife. Its edge opens the super-probie's cheek. The man springs back into the corner as John pulls the bleeding super-probie out of the room. 'Go out and get that taken care of,' John says as he pulls the kitchen door shut. 'Have the Chief call the cops. I'll keep this maniac locked in here.'[35]

The injured superhero loses his ironic quotation marks as the helping officer converts from second- to first-name form of address. In the end, the wounded firefighter and his adversary, who has been shot (but only in the leg) by the arriving policemen, are transported off in the same squad car.

In their relentless effort, Smith's firefighters seem to make good on a policy that had not been particularly fruitful during the Vietnam War: the attempt to 'win the hearts and minds' of the local population.[36] With arson fires in decline in the second half of the 1970s, it must have appeared to the public as if the FDNY had weathered the situation successfully—in any case, more so than the American military in Southeast Asia. This perceived success enhanced the position of the FDNY considerably, and since the US army was reduced from its heroic status due to the Vietnam disaster, the FDNY moved up. If they had already enjoyed the status of Eastern urban cowboys before, now they achieved the extra status of civilian marines.

Spreading the Super-Image

Arguably, there was still no superhero imagery outside of the axe and helmet combination, or claim to superheroic effort, or status, connected to the situation in and after the 'war years.' But there are several factors that indicate a shift to a more advanced level of heroism. There had always been a code separating the discourse of firefighters from that of the rest of humanity, but their performance had not been called 'magical' before, or if it happened, it was not a serious scholarly article making the claim. Miriam Lee Kaprow's celebration of the FDNY actually goes even further, pointing out similarities between Arthurian legend and firefighters' narratives,[37] even though it is mainly the seemingly endless string of what

to her were heroic efforts in the interviews she conducted, and which she places opposite a similarly compiled list of achievements in Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* (1889).

The celebrated readiness to fight and to die easily transferred from medieval knights to the marines and to firefighters, notably since all three appeared side by side, so to speak, in the cinematic culture of the 1960s and 1970s. The fire movies of this generation, like *The Towering Inferno* (1974), as well as later ones, like *Backdraft* (1991), indicate where superheroic qualities come in. Chiefs and officers are benign and resourceful along the lines Smith already mapped out, and the firefighters are stoic and reliable, ready to sacrifice their lives unflinchingly in the face of the 'dragon' fire. There are audible and visible Christian overtones: What had been monumentalized as a christophoric saviour gesture already in the nineteenth century[38] is now performed in filmic action when characters like Lt. 'Bull' McCaffrey (Kurt Russell) in *Backdraft* run into the fire without fear—and also without the self-contained breathing apparatus that enables firefighters to mount more aggressive interior attacks on fires. They emerge from the fire miraculously unharmed, with the infant they saved in their arms (on the film poster, and close to the ending of the official trailer, for *Backdraft*, 1991). The fire is depicted as the superhero's enemy. The good shepherd turns into Superman, and the child he—always a he, in this generation—is carrying out of the burning space is saved through the superior effort of somebody for whom physical limits (and likelihood) do not exist.

Against this backdrop, it appears that Brian Monahan's and Carol Gregory's deliberations as to how the FDNY attained the heroic status it has been credited with since 9/11 were based on an incomplete premise.[39] When 9/11 occurred, the FDNY was already in the position reserved for superheroes. And since even the Marvel and DC superheroes could not stop the attacks on the World Trade Center—a theme elaborated on in the Marvel universe[40]—the perceived heroic actions of the firefighters received even more, and specifically global, attention. This was partly due to the situation. The media were on site already as the attacks were still going on, but were locked out immediately after, when the perimeter around the WTC was sealed off by security. In this situation, firefighters (whom Mayor Giuliani had put in charge of what was called for weeks and against better knowledge a 'rescue operation') coming on or leaving the pile of the ruin became the most readily available sources of information, and of striking images.

Tom Franklin's photograph of three firemen raising a flag on the debris of the World Trade Centre echoed both Joe Rosenthal's famous Iwo Jima photograph and the national anthem's question, 'say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave?' Firefighters made good on their image as civilian marines and defenders of American pride. They proved that they help everybody regardless of race, class, gender, or country of origin:

Brooklyn-based Ladder 6 dug themselves out of the stump of staircase B, North Tower, together with the elderly woman they had been carrying and protecting. Firefighters were not able to save many lives that day, but Josephine Harris's was certainly one of them.[41] Following the logic of disaster response, firefighters found themselves celebrated simultaneously as saviours, as survivors, and as the dead. This was not necessarily a natural phenomenon—at least 60 of the 343 honoured dead seem to have died in vain indeed, other than Lincoln stated in the *Gettysburg Address*, which has been read on the site of the Twin Towers on every September 11 since 2002. Off-duty firefighters, and a number of companies who entered the burning buildings rather than report to site command first, ought not to have been inside the World Trade Centre when the towers collapsed.[42] As a result, more firefighters died in terms of percentage of people affected than of any other profession. These details, however, did not feature prominently in reports about the attack until later, and for the time being, the reputation of the New York firefighters attained new record proportions.[43]

Consequently, Superman himself took second place to the heroes of September 11. On the oft-reproduced cover from Marvel's *9–11: The World's Finest Comic Book Writers & Artists Tell Stories to Remember*,[44] Superman's caped figure is dwarfed out by firefighters, policemen, doctors, office workers, and a construction crew.[45] In Volume 2, Issue 36 of *The Amazing Spider-Man*, the differences between superheroes and rescue personnel are likewise levelled—the traditional superheroes are shown working alongside firefighters and construction workers on 'the pile,' and not only do some, like the mighty Thor, take orders from the firefighters but also firefighters themselves appear to have been endowed with superheroic powers: One of them carries what looks like metal plating with only his bare arms.[46]

The connection between firefighters and superheroes was briefly expanded to include a new superhero figure and relation of Clark Kent/Superman by the name of Kal Kent, who, with his female colleague Rita Areallo, served as a fireman in *Superman Beyond*.[47] In a hysterical adaptation of the traditional firefighter image, they wear the typical helmets and carry an axe and even a breathing apparatus—but without the mouthpiece, without which they are depicted as a matter of course in the middle of an equally matter of course smokeless fire so as not to obscure the view of the characters.

Another bridge to the superheroic is formed from the christophoric monuments of the late nineteenth century to 'Billy Blazes' and other Rescue Heroes toy figurines issued as plastic objects by Mattel, but also adorning the 'Fire Zone Safety Kit' cardboard folder handed out to children at the New York fire protection training facility in the Rockefeller Centre. The Mattel figure comes with a supersize drill and other similarly supersized tools that signal ample capacities for superhuman efforts. The

Figure 7.1 Firefighter monument in Austin, TX
Source: Photo courtesy of Gerhard Schneider.

product line is quite in keeping with the observation that contemporary representations—like in the *Chicago Fire* series—shift the focus from the man with the nozzle to the rescue and squad operations with all sorts of competently implemented tools. At the same time, the physical appearance of Billy Blazes, with his somewhat advanced age, moustachioed face, and powerful features, is purposefully reminiscent of the originally late nineteenth-century monument statues, designed by Casper Buberl and produced by the J. W. Fiske Iron Works, adorning some city and town squares throughout the United States (Figure 7.1).[48]

Conclusion

Apparently, the superhero fireman of the early twenty-first century does not have to be a young man any longer—the focus, at least in this instance, seems to have shifted back towards the trustworthy figure, suggesting safety rather than just security, especially for children. The superhero of the early twenty-first century does not have to be the embodiment of physical perfection any longer either: The *Rescue Me* series had already integrated disabled firefighters in wheelchairs, but the graphic novel FDNY character Matt Terwillegar that Mario Candelaria and Karl Slominski created in 2015 not only loses a leg in an on-site accident but also fights his way back into active service, and, on the penultimate page, is even considered a 'super-hero' by his own company for his superb performance.[49]

The iconography of firefighting has been favourable to the New Yorkers. Even though the individual men, and increasingly women, of the FDNY had relatively little say in the dissemination of their increasingly heroic public image, they willingly participated in it, especially after the transition period from volunteers to professionals, and again after 9/11. As with a number of other professions, firefighters play their part in an articulated and concerted cultural performance, which, in the case of the FDNY, was entwined with globally relevant ideas about the heroic. Consequently, symbols and emblems signifying the FDNY have been adopted in other countries—they transferred, for instance, to Japanese manga.

Traditionally, firefighters try to avoid being called 'heroes.' However, especially the New Yorkers, through a variety of successful textual adaptations as stage and theme park melodrama and historical collection, inspired narratives about firefighting that became a heroic model across the globe. In the United States and abroad, the attractiveness of the FDNY in particular is largely attributable to their public image as having retained the maverick qualities of the original volunteers while, at the same time, being the best, the most advanced, and the most able force in the field.

It is this mixture of several much-admired essential qualities that made firefighters from across the nation apply to replenish the ranks

depleted by the 9/11 disaster. It is also why fire departments around the world attempt to adapt FDNY-style badges and symbolism. Especially in nations like Germany, where local traditions are of a more ambiguous nature for historical reasons, American helmets and English slogans are used in advertising, and Maltese crosses appear on informal clothing, like t-shirts, and occasionally even on shoulder badges.

Such adaptations are reflective of transnationally induced attempts to partake in a cultural tradition that is intertwined with traditional notions of hero worship, including references to superheroism, while it retains original, community-oriented ideas about everyday heroism. With figures like Billy Blazes and Matt Terwillegar, the FDNY might be leading the way next to a new 'normality' of firefighters as ordinary people who sometimes do extraordinary things. Which is what firefighters have been claiming all along.

Notes

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13. Interview notes, quoted from Miriam Lee Kaprow, 'The Last, Best Work: Firefighters in the Fire Department of New York,' *Anthropology of Work Review* 19, no. 2 (1999): 5–26 (8).
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15. Greenberg, *Cause for Alarm*; Hochbruck, 'Volunteers and Professionals,' 109–138.
16. Hochbruck, 'Volunteers and Professionals,' 131–133.
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49. Mario Candelaria and Karl Slominski, *Ashes* (New York: Z2 Comics, 2015), n.p. The number of firefighters going back to work even full-time with prosthetic legs has been increasing over the last five years.

8 Unlikely Tragic (Anti-)Heroes

Gangsters Translated into Hindi Films

Sugata Nandi

Gangsters as Anti-Heroes: The Criminal in a Heroic Configuration

Gangsters are a challenging heroic construct because they are obviously criminal and can yet be heroized, especially when they are presented as cinematic fiction. Far from virtuous and exemplary, gangsters can be described as anti-heroes with clear flaws and a tragic dimension because their villainous traits can be interpreted as the outcome of a corrupt and greedy society to which the gangster's criminality responds, and because gangsters, in their own perverted way, try to achieve the economic dreams of their society from within a situation of squalor. Originating in a specific American context of economic crisis, gangsters, along with the globalization of capitalism and Hollywood film, have become a worldwide phenomenon in both reality and the cinema. This chapter deals with the translation of the figure of the gangster into an Indian context in Hindi cinema productions since the 1970s. Anti-heroic figures play an important role as reversals and mirrors of heroic value. In his typology of negations of the heroic, the cultural sociologist Ulrich Bröckling follows Niklas Luhman in his definition that a hero is an individual who surpasses, as a role model, what society can realistically expect of its members. Anti-heroes are figures who do what a hero would never do—not because they would not have heroic potential in the sense that they have the ability to perform extraordinary deeds. They stand in a 'qualitative opposition'[1] to the heroic code of a given society, culture, and time.[2] Negating this code, they use their exceptionality for 'opposing moral ends.'[3] Anti-heroes, Bröckling writes, are the opposites of exemplary individuals: they are scandalous.

The figure of the gangster, inaugurated in movies set in modern American metropolises, can be seen as a typical anti-hero figure of rationalized modernity, defying the code of the good, hard-working man striving to fulfil the American Dream for himself. Simultaneously, the gangster is an integral feature of twentieth-century industrial cities. Like the bandit of the past, the gangster can be considered a social rebel for more modern

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times, and, as such, has inspired the creation of many myths around his persona. Lives and criminal careers of gangsters have been subjects of factual enquiry and fictional creativity. They were introduced to film audiences by Hollywood, the American culture industry, starting at the time of silent movies. From the very beginning, the gangster was a maverick in the world of protagonists: both an irredeemable criminal and a hero the audience could identify with because he resisted a society—or trends in a society—to which the audience also objected. He quickly attained popularity, bringing into existence the genre of gangster films in the 1930s. In India, the Hindi film industry based in Bombay/Mumbai adopted the gangster as a protagonist beginning in the 1970s, and a very large number of gangster movies have been produced in the industry since then. Commercial success enjoyed by many of these films and stardom attained by actors who played gangsters on screen attest to the popularity and viability of the gangster genre in India. This shows that the heroic code of the modern metropolis, and its anti-heroic opposition in the form of the gangster, had become translatable to Indian contexts by the 1970s, mirroring the discontents of an Indian modernization in crisis. Of course, the material conditions which provided the setting for the emergence of the gangster in the United States have no exact match in India, but it will be shown that here too, gangsters respond to situations of crisis with roots in the economy and the failure of society to adequately address them. For India, this chapter will address the reasons behind the emergence of the gangster as protagonist in Hindi feature films, the dominant narratives in these films from the 1970s to date, and how three iconic films of the genre have deployed the figure of the gangster.

The Emergence of Hollywood Gangster Films

The gangster became a screen character in Hollywood silent films as early as 1912. His appearance on the screen was preceded by his high popularity on stage. Early incarnations of the gangster are characterized by an ambiguity between 'old-fashioned melodrama and modern values,' as Fran Mason puts it.[4] While the narrative structure follows melodramatic arcs by focusing on the redemption of the gangster figure, it is the depiction of the gang and criminal subcultures of the city which appears especially modern.

With the arrival of 'talkies,' the gangster became an easily identifiable filmic figure, and, by 1932, the gangster film genre had been well established—not coincidentally at a time when the country was reeling under the effects of economic depression and the prohibition of the manufacture and sale of alcohol. Three films, *Little Caesar* (1930), *Public Enemy* (1931), and *Scarface* (1932), established the gangster film as an important variant of crime movies with an identifiable structure, iconography, and narrative which would be repeated and experimented with

in the decades to come.[5] The genre could be established due to the high popularity of the gangster character. According to Jack Shadoian, American audiences identified with the screen gangster as he was the 'archetypal American dreamer' who lived the American Dream in conflict with society.[6] Mason also stresses the anti-heroic quality of the figure and its entanglement with the ideology of the American Dream and, simultaneously, a seemingly specific American modern economic system working to disable this ideology: 'The gangster transcends existing economic conditions in achieving the American Dream in a perverted form, but is brought down because his inversion of the American Dream is a challenge to official ideology.'[7]

He was necessarily in opposition to the society he belonged to, and his conflicts with it led to violence. He belonged to an advanced urban civilization, violated its system of rules from within to challenge the legitimate social order, and created a world beneath that—namely, the underworld. In the gangster film, the underworld, which is not easily visible, becomes the visual setting of the action. Within it, the gangster becomes the embodiment of the fundamental contradiction in what Shadoian refers to as the 'American ideologies': that is, the first, which takes America to be the land of opportunity for the go-getter to succeed in life, and the second, which casts American society as democratic and classless, and hence egalitarian. At the heart of this is 'the crucial dilemma of capitalist democracy' which urges everyone to attain wealth and power at any cost, and thereby paves the way for moral and ethical dilemmas and the extremities of success and failure.[8]

The plots of gangster films were necessarily set in big cities of the twentieth century—the centres of capitalism and wealth. For the gangster, the big city is the opposite of the site of heroic progress, where spirals of immorality and criminality imprison the protagonist. In this pessimistic setting, the films articulate the journey of the gangster with violence and violent deaths. He is depicted necessarily as a rootless individual in the city where his family or surrogate family (the gang or the crime syndicate) is disintegrated or destroyed. The films always end with the gangster waging a lone battle with the police, who are shown to be as violent and amoral as the gangster himself. The near absence of the police in many acclaimed gangster films and the unassuming lifestyles of policemen vis-à-vis the opulent and flashy ones of gangsters attest to the powerlessness of law-enforcement agencies in the face of the challenge of gangsterism. While, conventionally, the law wins the battle at the end with the death of the gangster, this does not signify a closure of the antagonism of these opposite forces. The fact that the gangster is brought back to life in another film to re-enact the battle against the law alludes to the depth of spectators' identification with the figure of the criminal.[9] According to Jack Shadoian, this is due to the fact that the gangster is a tragic hero like any other self-made man who retains his dignity. Hence,

his death evokes sympathy, unlike the deaths of common criminals, who are depicted merely as harmful people.[10] The anti-heroic gangster signals his heroic potential in these moments, as he can be decoded by an identifying audience as fighting against a government that ignores social problems.

The Emergence of the Gangster Film in Bombay/ Mumbai Commercial Film

In Hindi commercial films produced in Bombay/Mumbai (hereafter Bombay), the gangster appeared as an anti-hero in the 1970s. An all-round crisis in India from the early 1960s presaged his emergence. The 1950s had been a decade of optimism: Under the stewardship of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of newly independent India, 'the hero of the Hindi film was a crusader for the nation and optimistic about its future.'[11] The crisis in the 1960s originated in 1962, with India's defeat in the Sino-Indian war. Two years later, Nehru died and Lal Bahadur Shastri succeeded him. Within a year of his assumption of office, an undeclared war broke out between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. It ended in a military victory for India, but at the time of the signing of a truce between the two countries in Tashkent, then in the USSR, Shastri died of a heart attack. This brought Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter, to power. She took over as prime minister at a time when a food-grain shortage spread across many states of India and the two wars of 1962 and 1965 led to a budget deficit, which paved the way for a host of problems—including that of rising unemployment and corruption among high politicians. This led to violent protests in many parts of the country and a significant decline in support for the Congress Party in the general elections held that year. Opposition parties, led by the rightist Jan Sangh and the Communist Party of India (Marxist), gained popularity, and a section of the educated youth turned to Maoism and armed struggle to bring about a revolution.[12]

These crises left their mark on popular Hindi films. M. Madhava Prasad says this led to the abandoning of feudal romance as the dominant storyline of Hindi films, as well as a segmentation of the country's film audience. Three very different genres of films arose to cater to each of these segments: first, art films financed by the Union (central) government of India; second, middle-class cinema made mainly by Bengali film directors; and, third, popular cinema which brought into being the proletarian hero as opposed to the erstwhile upper-caste aristocrat or the easily identifiable middle-class protagonist.[13] Films of the third kind proved extremely successful with the rise of Amitabh Bachchan, the most popular Indian film star of all time. Bachchan, who had earlier been cast in movies as a highly educated and polished middle-class man, attained stardom when he was cast as a working-class or proletarian hero beginning

in 1973. One of the three films which led to his stardom was *Deewar* (1975).[14] With its success, the Bombay gangster emerged as a protagonist in Hindi commercial films.

The Bombay gangster genre, which thus came into being, was established by three films—*Deewar* (1975), *Shakti* (1982), and *Parinda* (1989). Translating the gangster genre established by Hollywood, the stories of all these movies are set in Bombay, the busy, densely populated financial heart of India. Bombay, like New York, acts as a hostile setting which entraps the protagonist and sends him down a never-ending spiral of crimes. In all these films, the gangster's family disintegrates, and he finds its surrogate in the gang, which, in turn, breaks up, giving way to bloodshed and killings. The films end with the violent and tragic death of the gangster when he is about to give up crime and change willingly into a law-abiding ordinary individual. Beyond this discernible similarity in the basic plot of their storylines, these films follow the narrative strategy typical of Hindi commercial cinema, with lyrical song and dance sequences, contrived dialogues and coincidences, comic breaks, and excessive attention to romantic love. In all these films, the protagonist becomes a criminal because he had been a victim of wrongs during his childhood and joins the gang at a critical conjuncture, when the law either fails to protect him from criminals or allows the latter to frame him as a criminal. The gangster in all the Hindi movies set in Bombay becomes a proletarian hero because his crimes redress some injustice suffered by the masses. In *Deewar*, for example, the iconic and trend-setting gangster film, the protagonist Vijay enters the world of crime when he subdues a gang of extortionists with violence and is celebrated as a hero by the dock labourers of Bombay. In such films, the gangster is a character angry at both the state and society, and secretly remorseful of his crimes, which leads him to cherish the dream of giving up unlawful activities and becoming an ordinary law-abiding citizen. The return to lawful life proves impossible and this results in the death of the gangster at the hands of the police—who are often personified by someone from his family—or at the hands of someone from his gang. Another unique aspect of these films is their encapsulation of the contradiction between lawful and unlawful ways of life within the world of the family. The trend was set in this respect by *Deewar*, where the gangster Vijay's younger brother Ravi is a policeman. Other examples can be seen in *Shakti*, where the tension is between a police officer father, Ashwini Kumar, and a gangster son, Vijay; and in *Parinda*, where the gangster Kishan's younger brother Karan is an educated and law-abiding man who dons the garb of a gangster against his brother's wishes with the sole objective of breaking up the gang.

After the release of these three films, a large number of Hindi gangster movies have enjoyed commercial success and the cinephile's admiration. The most acclaimed among them can be grouped into three types. In the first group, there are biopics of actual gangsters, like *Dayavan* (1988),

based on the life of Vardarajan Mudaliar; *D* (2005), a film on Dawood Ibrahim's criminal career; *Raees* (2017), a fictionalized biopic on Gujarat gangster Abdul Latif; and *Daddy* (2017), based on the criminal career of Arun Gawli. In the second, there are movies with stories adopted from popular Hollywood films, like *Agnipath* (1990, remake 2012), which is a remake of *Scarface* (1983), starring Al Pacino. The third group contains films like *Satya* (1998), *Company* (2002), and *Vastav* (1999), which are based on life-like portrayals of real gangsters. Recent years saw the rise of a new kind of gangster film, like *Apaharan* (2005), *Omkara* (2006), *Gangs of Wasseypur* parts I and II (2012), and *Zila Ghaziabad* (2013), which have their stories set in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand—Indian states plagued with social and economic backwardness and the corruption of institutional politics to an alarming extent.

Indian Gangsters

Given the marked tendency of Indian filmmakers to reconstruct, comment on, and reflect on actual gangsters and their crimes on celluloid, it is necessary to briefly look into the history of gangsterism in India. According to a former director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in India (a rough equivalent of the FBI in the US), since gaining independence, Bombay has witnessed the rise of the most notorious and dangerous crime syndicates in India.[15] The earliest gangsters of Bombay rose to prominence during the 1950s, often emerging from the pool of poor migrants who flocked to the city in search of a living. S. Hussain Zaidi, the acclaimed Indian crime reporter, designates the originary moment for the rise of Bombay gangsters in 1952, when Morarji Desai, chief minister of the then Bombay Presidency, proclaimed a prohibition on liquor in the state. Two Tamil men of migrant origin—namely, Haji Mastan and Vardarajan Mudaliar (alias Varda)—who, until then, had been petty criminals, found an excellent opportunity to reap immense profits by selling hooch and expensive foreign liquor. Soon Mastan joined forces with Abdul Karim Khan (alias Karim Lala)—an Afghan wrestler and one-time supporter of Khan Abdul Gafoor Khan, the Indian nationalist leader of Pathans of the North West Frontier Province—to unload and stash away contraband merchandise from ships anchored in the Bombay port. Lala settled in Bombay and opened gambling dens with his brother Rahim. An unusually tall and well-built man, he commanded a small army of men trained in his wrestling pit. He provided Mastan with manpower, which the latter needed.[16] Mastan's money and muscle power grew through the 1960s. By 1970, he was the richest man in the Bombay underworld. In 1974, his supremacy was challenged by a 19-year-old youth, Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar, who, along with his brother Sabir, carried out a sensational heist. They were sons of a Bombay police constable and lived in a slum where Lala ran his gambling dens. Six years later, at the age of 25,

Dawood posed a formidable challenge to the smuggling empires of Mastan and Lala. With Dawood's rise, Bombay witnessed gory gang-fights in its streets, leaving several dead and many others, including innocent bystanders, injured. After Sabir's murder at the behest of Karim Lala's sons, a spate of killings took place in Bombay. Once it had finished in the mid-1980s, Dawood emerged as the kingpin of the city's underworld.[17] He was declared a global terrorist by the US after 2003, but has adroitly evaded arrest.[18]

Dawood's gang broke up after he allegedly planned and orchestrated a series of bomb blasts in Bombay in 1993, killing over 2,000 people. The blasts were an act of retaliation by Dawood against the killing of Muslims in the Bombay communal riots of January 1993. Chota Rajan, his right-hand man who is a Hindu, parted ways with him because innocent Hindus had been killed in the blasts. Rajan shifted his base to Bangkok, and escaped in the nick of time from the hands of Dawood's hired assassins who hunted him down there. He is now in prison in India.[19]

Located far from Bombay are a different kind of violent criminals who have recently attracted the attention of filmmakers. They hail from the North and East Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand. Their crimes of violence are equally ferocious as those of the Bombay gangsters, who, unlike them, do not enjoy political power. In these states, the criminal underworld is not a realm underneath the lawful world, but rather 'the state itself is seen as an assemblage of dangerous elites, united in their pursuit of capital.'[20] In such a situation, a symbiotic relationship draws together the criminal entrepreneur with corrupt politicians and government officials. In 2007, the *Times of India*, India's leading English daily, coined the term 'Wild West of India' to demarcate Bihar and Jharkhand after the gunning down of Sunil Mahato, a Jharkhand MP, while he was watching a football match in a stadium.[21] The epithet meant that constitutionalism and liberal democracy had failed in the states, and led to a criminalization of politics. A combination of illegal practices by the government, private sponsorship, the use of violence, and patronage to criminals is widely believed to have corrupted politics in these states.[22] The rise of criminality has been attributed to social and economic backwardness, and the persistence of a rigid caste hierarchy, which made the lower castes powerless and vulnerable to socially sanctioned violence by the upper castes. With the rise to power of the lower castes in the early 1990s, a number of strongmen from among the downtrodden asserted their importance, monopolizing the use of violence and de-activating the police with their new-found political influence. Successive elections have shown that these strongmen, referred to as mafia, *bhayia* (i.e., big brother), and *goonda* (i.e., hoodlum) by the middle class, have become indispensable for parties to retain power.

Two such men deserve special mention: namely, Raghuraj Pratap Singh (or Raja Bhaiya), from Awadh in eastern UP; and Rajesh Ranjan (or

Pappu Yadav), of Bihar. Of the two, Raja Bhaiya is a wealthy landlord who belongs to the princely warrior Rajput caste. He has won six successive elections to UP state legislature since 1997. He is the undisputed overlord of his electoral constituency, winning his seat as an independent candidate and never having been a member of any political party. He styles himself the king of Kunda—a small rural town with 35,000 inhabitants—by riding a horse and carrying a double-barrel gun like Rajput princes of yore. Pappu Yadav, on the other hand, belongs to the low cattle-rearing caste, rising to power when Lalu Yadav became Bihar chief minister in 1989. Pappu was a '*bahubali*' or designated strongman of the Rashtriya Janta Dal, Lalu Yadav's party, and took pride in his numerous imprisonments, claiming that he was familiar with the interior of every jail in Bihar.[23] He was a juvenile delinquent in his teens, and, in his youth, he became a self-styled mafia don in Saharsa, Bihar, rising as a champion of the Yadavs, the caste he belongs to. He has won elections five times since 1991, and became an MP when he was only 23. He has been charged with several cases of murder, the most serious one being that of Ajit Sarkar, who helped a Congress politician defeat him in the election of 1998. Local strongmen like Raja and Pappu are essential for the political success of parties primarily because they use their muscle power to bring in the money necessary for organizing campaigns.[24] They are also leaders within their caste or sub-caste, which contributes to their success in winning elections, since they work within a political system where gaining territorial control in turn necessitates taking control of the local economic system/s through violent crime.[25]

Hindi commercial cinema has deployed characters which closely resemble both Bombay gangsters and those found in the economically and socially backward states of India in order to establish gangster films as a genre on a firm footing. Biopics of criminals like those in Bombay, or films with protagonists closely resembling them, portray gangsters as members of the poorer classes pushed into a life of crime to protest against injustice or victimization, or for the sake of sheer survival. These films highlight the failure of the state and society to ensure justice and safety for all, and emphasize strategies of survival and the rise to power of the marginal in the hostile environment of the big city. Such films depict the anti-hero, in spite of his criminality, as a just and upright man, who ensures protection of the poor and the vulnerable from the police, politicians, the wealthy, and other criminals. In films with stories set in the backward areas of interior India, where criminals contend among themselves to usurp functions of the state, heroes are those who emerge victorious in the fight for sheer survival in an already thoroughly criminalized environment. In order to find out how the heroization of the criminal was accomplished, I have selected three iconic films that have enjoyed both critical acclaim and commercial success, attesting to their popularity. These films are *Satya* (1998) and *Gangs of Wasseypur*, parts I and II (2011).

The Marginal Man as the Hero in *Satya* (1998)

Satya is a path-breaking gangster movie in Indian film history. It was directed by Ram Gopal Verma, an engineer from Hyderabad who moved to Bombay in the 1980s. He became famous with his film *Rangeela* (1995), a romantic comedy. *Satya* was his first film about the Bombay underworld, which since then became the subject of several of his films. The film is based on the life of a young man, named Satya, who migrates to Bombay in the mid-1990s. He has no past in the film, and flocks to the city like many migrants in search of work. The timing of the film makes this especially significant. *Satya* was made after the first five years of liberalization—a set of economic policies which marked a sharp break with the policies that had been in place since Nehru's tenure as prime minister. These changes included the government giving up its policy of import substitution in several commodities, making it easier to get a license for setting up a business in India, allowing foreign private companies to carry out business in India, and, in place of state intervention in the economy, fostering rapid growth by aiding a smooth flow of private capital into the country.[26] The economic policy of liberalization had the social consequence of sharpening the distinction between the upper, the middle, and the lower classes. While the upper and middle classes prospered due to the changes in metropolises, studies have shown the lower classes there became further impoverished and marginalized. The first signs of the transition became visible in the Indian metropolises, as an unusually high number of people from small towns started to migrate to them, and a reordering of urban space took place—symbolized by steel and glass high-rises, new highways, flyovers, malls, and markets.[27] According to Gavin Shatkin and Sanjeev Vidyarthi, 'since the 1990s successive national governments (of India) have sought to push through the vision of urban-centred accumulation . . . modelled through examples of "successful" urban transformations in Shanghai, Singapore and elsewhere.'[28] In Bombay, this led to a sudden increase in demand for real estate within the city to support elite and middle-class consumption, and an unusual overpopulation in the de-industrialized and impoverished central part of the city—the area that witnessed the rise of the most feared gangsters. The transformation of the city, however, left behind a new urban space which Ranjani Mazumdar terms the residual city—the decadent and derelict spaces which exist hidden away in the heart of the city, where groups of marginalized men formed gangs in their battle for survival.[29] Satya was a part of one such gang.

The film opens with a brief commentary on Bombay, which says that, on the one hand, it is the proverbial city of dreams, similar to New York, which attracts many to look for opportunities to overcome poverty and namelessness, while, on the other hand, there is an almost unseen city ruled by the underworld. These words presage the arrival of Satya

(played by J. D. Chakravarthy), a working-class youth who comes seeking a living in the city and finds a job as a waiter in a bar. (Structurally, there is an obvious similarity here with the American metropoles of New York and Los Angeles, which were, as elaborated earlier, the sites of subverted American dreamers in the American gangster film classics.) There he is humiliated by Jagga, a local thug who extorts money in the name of Guru Narain, a gangster. Jagga's men try to extort money from him and Satya fights back, slashing one of them on his cheek with a razor. Jagga has him savagely beaten in retaliation, and later humiliates Satya again while he is serving drinks to Jagga and a corrupt police officer in the bar. The figures of the corrupt policeman and the corrupt politician are also staples in the American gangster film, showing how closely this film performs a cultural translation of the narrative anti-hero code from Hollywood to Hindi cinema. Unable to tolerate the humiliation, Satya assaults Jagga, whose policeman friend arrests him and frames him with the false charge of pimping. When sent to jail, Satya meets Bhikhu Mahatre, a gangster (Manoj Vajpayee), who had orchestrated the murder of a rich film producer. Bhikhu and Satya bond exceptionally well; the former arranges for Satya's release from prison and is himself acquitted as his hitman lies in trial to protect him. Being free, Bhikhu takes Satya to his gang, led by Kalu Mama (Saurabh Shukla), who, sitting in a dingy, half-constructed room, masterminds high extortion bids. While trying to extort a large sum of money from a condoville owner, Bhikhu, Satya, and others of their gang are fired on. They make a narrow escape and find out that the assailants were Guru Narain's men—Bhikhu's rival gangster. This marks the beginning of a gang war. Bhikhu and Satya murder Narain in broad daylight on a footbridge in full public view. This compels a gangster turned municipal politician, Bhau Thakurdas Jhawle, who was with Narain, to call for a truce with Bhikhu's gang. While this happens, Bombay Police get a new commissioner, who cracks down on gangs, killing several of Bhikhu's boys. Satya, whose contempt for the police is understandable for the viewer, is infuriated by this, and he masterminds the assassination of the commissioner. Meanwhile, having placated Bhikhu earlier, Bhau wins a seat in the municipal election and he kills Bhikhu when the latter unsuspectingly turns up at Bhau's place to celebrate his victory. Bhikhu, who had been boasting of being virtually the most powerful man in Bombay a little while earlier, falls easy prey to Bhau, which is the turning point in the movie. Satya avenges his friend's death and thereafter learns that the police are after him. He had been leading a double life in Bombay while he took to gangsterism. He lived in a small apartment in a building alongside lower-middle-class families, and carefully concealed the fact that he was a gangster. He fell in love with Vidya (Urmila Matondkar), his next-door neighbour, who tries hard to make ends meet while striving to become a playback singer in the Hindi movies. Satya wants to marry her and he wants to give up crime.

The police interrogate Vidya and shock her by revealing that Satya was a gangster. Then they set her as bait and lie in wait for him to come to meet her at her apartment. Satya, who is about to slip out of India with the help of Kalu Mama in a ship, suddenly decides to see Vidya before leaving and unknowingly walks into the trap. The police gun down both men. The film ends with Satya breathing his last as he visualizes Vidya beckoning to him to go to the terrace of the building where they had romanced each other in happier times.

Satya was a runaway hit in 1998. It was one of the first commercial movies of the 1990s which broke the formulaic pattern of romance and musical melodrama for which the Hindi film industry was known back then.[30] It was the first gangster movie of the Hindi film industry which attained enviable commercial success without relying on stars. The actors who played gangsters in the movie were virtually unknown before the film. It catapulted Manoj Vajpayee to instant stardom and set a new benchmark for gangster movies in India. The gangsters in the film were ordinary looking men, neither menacing nor awe-inspiring, as was the case with the cast of earlier movies. Ram Gopal Varma used the squalor and neglected sites of an apparently opulent Bombay as the place of the gangster's habitation and the streets as the place of his work.[31] The aesthetic excludes beautiful vistas of the city from the opening scene until the end. Dirty railway stations, crowded streets, nondescript footbridges, slums, claustrophobic small apartments, and dusty construction sites appear as locations in the film. He made Satya speak Hindi in an accent which hints that he was a migrant to the city and the dialogue of the film was in a type of Hindi that is spoken in central Bombay. The reality of the gangsters' world was portrayed with a series of murders. In the film, gangsters murder innocent civilians, they kill each other to gain control of disputed turfs, and policemen, if not corrupt and inefficient, are equally unmerciful in hunting down and killing gangsters. The situation is one in which rival groups of men with guns vie for supremacy over Bombay. The gangsters in the film are people who wallow in squalor, while leading a risky and parasitic existence.[32] They try to extort money from the wealthy and the downtrodden alike. They are shadowy characters who amass wealth while striking terror in the hearts of their victims in a city known for wealth creation. Yet these characters fail to rise beyond their low social status, with their lives cut short by sudden deaths.

Ram Gopal Varma chose such an exceptional story for his film because of his actual contact with people from Bombay's underworld.[33] He made Satya both the victim of the underworld and one of its most feared villains. His descent into criminality was due to victimhood which he suffered at the hands of a criminal and his lackeys. The police, instead of protecting him, criminalized him arbitrarily—a fate suffered by the poor all over India from before independence. His joining the gang was largely out of finding a substitute family, in which Bhikhu was like an

elder brother, and Kalu Mama a father. Like a family, the gang gave him protection in a hostile and alienating urban setting; it offered him a roof over his head and a way to survive. Satya's heroic potential—his remarkable intelligence, courage, and clear-headed decision-making ability—found appreciation only within the gang, not within the wider society. As Ranjani Mazumdar says, Satya and his gang represent an excessive logic of survival which drives millions of people who fail at the enrichment and social mobility taking place at a rapid pace in the financial capital of India.[34] Their struggle for survival, which does not evoke the sympathies as that of the honest poor do, constitutes the subject of the film. The element of romance between Satya and Vidya adds a melodramatic twist to this. Their romance, as Satya rightly understands, is based on deception and unrealizable dreams, which becomes starkly visible when Satya dies a few feet away from Vidya, who, once having wanted to be a singer and start a new life with him, is left shattered after the police interrogation.[35] The melodrama of the fate of the gangster is touchingly depicted in a scene where Satya and Bhikhu take a break after eliminating all their enemies. The scene begins with Bhikhu yelling joyfully that he is the king of Mumbai, while Satya looks depressed and tells his friend that he fears for his own life and that of Vidya. He is afraid because he fears that the violence he has unleashed over the city will consume his own life and that of his love. He wants to marry Vidya and lead a normal, law-abiding life. On hearing this, Bhikhu assures him that he will make his dream come true and send him off to Dubai with a lawful business to run. He asks Satya not to reveal his criminal career to Vidya as that would only alienate her from him. The possible happy ending of the film hinted at in the scene is soon shattered by what follows it, underscoring that, however powerful they may seem, gangsters like Satya are unable to escape from the morass of crimes and killings of the Bombay underworld.

Backward Area Bosses in *Gangs of Wasseypur* (I and II) (2011)

Until about 2007, Hindi gangster movies had their stories set in Bombay. From around that time, a number of film directors hailing from Indian provinces of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar made films set in these states. A two-part gangster movie which stands out among such films is *Gangs of Wasseypur* parts I and II. Both the films were directed by Anurag Kashyap, who wrote dialogues for *Satya* and made his name with a docudrama on the bomb blasts in Mumbai of 1993, titled *Black Friday* (2007). Scriptwriter Zeeshan Qadri hails from Wasseypur and he wrote the story with the help of his knowledge and lived experience of the place, writing all dialogues in the local dialect.[36] The first part of the movie begins in the 1940s and ends in the early 1990s. The second part follows the story to the early 2000s. The movies are based on the history of poverty, corruption, and violent crime in a small town in India, fundamentally different from Bombay.

Being shot in a small town, although not in Wasseypur, they effortlessly reveal the blighted landscape in which the saga of gangsterism is set.

Wasseypur is a part of Dhanbad, a coal-mining town located in Jharkhand, one of the poorest and most backward states of India. It was a small village inhabited by poor rice-cultivating peasants in the colonial period; then, after independence, it underwent rapid and unplanned urbanization due to coal mining. The story of the film is a fictionalized account of the rise of criminal gangs in Dhanbad, first under the leadership of B. P. Sinha, who was a leader of coal-mine labourers, Surajdeo Singh, the local MLA who allegedly killed Sinha and took over as the gangster boss of the town, and Fahim Khan, who rivalled him to be the undisputed criminal kingpin of the place. Of the three, B. P. Sinha was reportedly murdered by Surajdeo, his one-time protégé. Surajdeo died mysteriously of poisoning in 1991 at the time of elections and Fahim is now serving a life sentence for culpable homicide. The first part of the film opens with an attack of gunmen on a house in Wasseypur. The attackers are men sent to kill Faisal Khan, modelled partially on Fahim Khan, the most powerful underworld don of the place. His character being based on Surajdeo Singh, Ramadhir Singh, the local MLA and coal mafia boss, has sent these men.[37] The man who led the pack is Ehsaan Qureshi, a butcher by profession and a killer by calling. Ehsaan leads the ambush as planned but he fails to kill Faisal. Then, while beating retreat, he is intercepted by the police, but he evades arrest along with his accomplices after a brief gun battle, which leaves a police constable dead. A voice-over by Nisar, one of the characters of the movie, reveals the roots of the conflict, and a flashback harks back to 1947, when India was months away from independence. Wasseypur was a small village then, and two train robbers, Sultana Qureshi and Shahid Khan, vied for power. Sultana killed almost everyone in Shahid's gang and had him thrown out of the village. Soon after independence, Shahid started working as a labourer in Dhanbad, in a coal mine owned by Ramadhir Singh (Timangshu Dhulia). He became Singh's hitman and supervisor of labourers and was killed by his hired assassin when Singh found out that he had plans to eliminate him and take over his business. The movie goes on to narrate the story of the families' entanglements in crime and corruption over the generations. Shahid's grandson, Danish, finally wants to broker peace between the feuding descendants of Sultana Qureshi and Shahid Khan, and marries a girl from the Qureshi family. After this, it emerges that Danish's father, Sardar, had joined the two families and was all set to launch a final offensive against Ramadhir Singh—but he is suddenly gunned down by the latter's men.

Part I of the movie ends with Sardar's gory death, and the second part begins with his son, Danish, gunning down one of his father's murderers. Soon afterwards, he is killed by Ehsaan Qureshi, who detested the truce made between the families and owed allegiance to Ramadhir Singh. At this point his brother Faisal (Nawazuddin Siddiqui), a marijuana addict

and a weakling who was once tricked by a gun-runner and sent to jail, takes control of the gang. He turns out to be wilier than both his father and brother. He is joined by his stepbrother, Definite Khan, Sardar's son with Durga, played by the scriptwriter of the film, Zeeshan Qadri himself. Later, a university-educated, English-speaking man called Iqbal joined his gang. Definite is an intrepid youth who is feared by all for his ruthlessness, and Iqbal is a tech-savvy man who knows about methods to amass ill-gotten wealth other than illegal business in coal—like controlling government auctions of railway scrap material. With their help, Faisal kills Ehsaan Qureshi and virtually becomes the ruler of Dhanbad. Thereafter further turbulence takes place with scenes of shocking violence and intrigue, which show that the gang is falling apart. Iqbal, whose father was Ramadhir's right-hand man but who was publicly disgraced by Sardar for raping a girl, attempts to kill Faisal. In this situation, Faisal and Definite raid a hospital and kill Ramadhir, who had been hiding there. The police arrive hot on their heels, gun down their gang, and arrest the two men. While under arrest and being transported to prison, Definite suddenly shoots Faisal to death. Ramadhir's greedy son J. P. appears at the crime scene along with policemen, and it becomes clear that he had planned his father's and Faisal's murders with Definite and some corrupt policemen, so that he could take over as the undisputed underworld don of Dhanbad. The movie ends with Faisal's widow, Mohsina, his baby son, and his uncle living in a chawl close to a mosque in Bombay, while Definite is shown taking over as the new mafia boss of Dhanbad.

The remarkable exposition of crime in Wasseypur in Kashyap's two-part film can be read as a history of a struggle for control over the local economy in an area where lawful economic opportunities are almost absent, and bureaucratic institutions of the state have never been sufficiently strong to wield effective authority. The place of the state is taken by what Partha Chatterjee terms 'political society,' which, in Wasseypur's case, is often synonymous with mafia groups that thrive on illegality and criminality.[38] This becomes starkly clear in a scene where Ehsan Qureshi threatens to kill policemen looking for the corpse of a man killed in a feud between him and Sardar Khan. Qureshi holds a chopper at the investigating police inspector's throat and reminds him that he is in Wasseypur, where he can get killed if he tries to enforce the law. Before sending the inspector off, he jokingly hints at the possibility of his being sodomized if he tries to gather evidence of the crime. In this way, state institutions are either depicted as absent or weak in both the films. As a result of this, the railways fall easy prey to robbers, the police fail to detect who Sultana the dacoit was, a bureaucrat is killed in broad daylight in the compound of his bungalow in front of his son, breaking out of jail is rather easy for Sardar Khan, legislative power is usurped for decades by Ramadhir Singh (a mafia leader), and government auctions are controlled by Faisal Khan's gangsters at gunpoint. In such a situation, the gangsters themselves often

resemble the 'state' of a warlord society. They act as arbitrators of disputes and rough and ready law-givers. This is seen in the case of Sardar Khan, who went after revellers who abducted a girl—forcing the man who raped her to divorce his wife and then to marry his victim. Years later, shopkeepers of Dhanbad are seen seeking justice from Ramadhir Singh when they are robbed and harassed daily by Perpendicular, Faisal's youngest brother and a juvenile delinquent.

The gangsters of Wasseypur are in no way rebel-heroes. They inhabit a geographical region where poverty is endemic, lawful means of wealth generation are absent, and employment opportunities are negligible. They are local bosses, as Lucia Michelutti says, who are adept at learning the rules of the existing economic and political system.[39] They are quick to detect economic opportunities, which they take over forcibly as muscular entrepreneurs. They are skilful in running criminal enterprises with the help of other criminals and corrupt politicians and officials, which creates the spectre of Mafia Raj in areas where they operate. It leads to a situation where all kinds of illegalities and criminal activities are normalized to become the order of the day. The bosses, however, remain aware of how shifting a ground they stand on. Their political power originates from their illegal economic monopolies, and this gives rise to competitors, who wait for opportunities to kill them and occupy their positions. This precariousness, paradoxically, is what makes their stories attractive for fictionalizations in an epic, heroic mode. *Gangs of Wasseypur* in this sense is a gory saga of generational war among local bosses and aspirants alike for control over the local economy—whether it is Sultana and Shahid's train robbery, or illegal coal mining by Ramadhir and his rivalry over it with Sardar, or the criminal takeover of scrap auctions by Faisal and Definite.

Conclusion

Hindi gangster movies have, over the years, adopted and indigenized an easily identifiable screen-hero character from Hollywood. This has given rise to real characters similar to both their Hollywood counterparts and those uniquely Indian. The similarities can be seen in the easily identifiable fundamental features of the gangster film established by Hollywood: like the rise and fall of the gangster, the disintegration of the gangster's family, his gang functioning as a surrogate family, and the frequent use of scenes depicting violence and death. In spite of this, the Indian gangster is different from his Hollywood counterpart, mainly due to the absence of an equivalent to the American Dream. The Hindi movie gangster was a victimized rebel-hero in films which established the genre; his rebellion was fuelled by an unfulfilled expectation of justice and support from the state and society. From the late 1990s, the screen gangsters started to closely resemble actual criminals in legally precarious areas of the Indian nation, and this made small rural towns in the interior of India

emerge alongside Bombay as the setting for the gangster films. Here, the movies narrate epic gangster sagas in which the protagonists appear as feuding warlords. The Bombay gangster, who was a rebel in the 1970s and 1980s, became, in the late 1990s, a marginal man locked in never-ending conflicts in the city—as seen in *Satya*. He led a double life to conceal his criminal self, but was inevitably drawn into conflicts, which on the one hand were fatal enmity among criminal gangs operating in the city, and, on the other, battles waged between the gangs and the police. Trapped in this, the gangster was a tragic hero, whose rise to power only made him realize his own vulnerability. His desire to a start a new life signalled the beginning of the end of his criminal career, culminating in his violent death. In sharp contrast, in small towns of India, where the state is weak and the economy offers little or nothing by way of lawful and gainful employment, the gangster is a local boss, with violent means for the forcible takeover of all available economic resources. A sorrowfully weak apparatus for law-keeping allows such men to manipulate democratic political institutions and arrogate state power, as observed in *Gangs of Wasseypur*, parts I and II. He is neither a victim nor a rebel, but a man taking advantage of the weakness or absence of the state, who simultaneously has a high degree of individual agency, but is at the same time entangled in networks of always possible fatal violence. Unlike the Bombay gangster, whose screen life-world is similar to the trajectory drawn up in Hollywood, he meets his violent end not trying to give up the criminal underworld but while trying to retain tight control over it.

Notes

1. Jack Shadoian, *Dreams and Dead Ends: The American Gangster Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 4–5.
2. Ulrich Bröckling, 'Negationen des Heroischen—ein Typologischer Versuch,' *helden.heroes. héros* 3, no. 1 (2015): 9–13, doi:10.6094/helden.heroes.heros/2015/01/02. Translation: Nicole Falkenhayner.
3. Ibid.
4. Fran Mason, *American Gangster Cinema: From Little Caesar to Pulp Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 2.
5. Ibid., 1, 9, 16, 24–25.
6. Jack Shadoain, *Dreams and Dead Ends: The American Gangster/Crime Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4.
7. Mason, *American Gangster Cinema*, 7.
8. Ibid., 5.
9. Ibid., 8–10.
10. Cf. Shadoian, *Dreams and Dead Ends*, 19.
11. Jyotika Virdi, *The Cinematic Imagination: Indian Popular Films as Social History* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2003), 92.
12. Cf. Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee, and Aditya Mukherjee, *India after Independence 1947–2000* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000), 217–231.
13. Cf. M. Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 127–131.
14. Ibid., 140–141.

15. Cf. Madan Lal Sharma, 'Organized Crime in India: Problems and Perspectives,' Visiting Expert's Paper presented at 108th International Conference on Criminology, New Delhi, India, 82–129. United Nations Asia and Far East Institute, accessed October 1, 2018, www.unafei.or.jp/publications/pdf/RS_No54/No54_10VE_Sharma.pdf.
16. Cf. S. Hussain Zaidi, *From Dongri to Dubai: Six Decades of the Mumbai Mafia* (New Delhi: Lotus Roli, 2012), 28–33, 38–39.
17. Ibid., 101–102, 106–108, 124–126.
18. Cf. *Wikipedia*, 'Dawood Ibrahim,' accessed July 19, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dawood_Ibrahim.
19. Cf. Zaidi, *Dongri to Dubai*, 228–231, S. Hussain Zaidi, *Byculla to Bangkok* (Noida: Harper Collins, 2014), 230–231.
20. Andrew Sanchez, 'Capitalism, Violence and the State: Crime, Corruption and Entrepreneurship in an Indian Company Town,' *Journal of Legal Anthropology* 1, no. 2 (2010): 165–188 (171–172).
21. Ibid.
22. Cf. Manish K. Jha and Pushpendra, 'Governing Caste and Managing Conflict: Bihar 1900–2011,' in *Government of Peace: Social Governance, Security and the Problematic of Peace*, ed. Ramdir Sammadar (London: Routledge, 2015), 167–202.
23. Milan Vaishnav, 'India's Democratic Marketplace for Criminality,' *Seminar*, no. 693 (May 2017): 65–69 (65).
24. Cf. Lucia Michelutti, 'The Cult of the Boss,' *Seminar*, no. 693 (May 2017): 59–64.
25. Ibid.
26. Cf. Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Trajectories of the Indian State: Politics and Ideas* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010), 235–238.
27. Cf. Gavin Shatkin and Sanjeev Vidyarthi, 'Introduction: Contesting the Indian City: Global Visions and the Politics of the Local,' in *Contesting the Indian City: Global Visions and the Politics of the Local*, ed. Gavin Shatkin (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 1–38 (6–9).
28. Ibid. (9).
29. Cf. Ranjani Mazumdar, *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007), 173–174.
30. Cf. Giridhar Jha, '20 Years of Satya: RGV's Directorial Venture That Changed the Course of Hindi Cinema,' *Outlook India*, July 3, 2018, accessed July 19, 2018, www.outlookindia.com/blog/story/20-years-of-satya-rgvs-directorial-venture-that-changed-the-course-of-hindi-cine/3906.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 178–179.
33. Ibid., 175.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 183.
36. Cf. 'Anurag Kashyap Wants Zeishan Quadri to Direct "Gangs of Wasseypur 3"?,' accessed July 19, 2018, https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/bollywood/anurag-kashyap-wants-me-to-direct-gangs-of-wasseypur-3-zeishan-quadri/.
37. Cf. Javed Iqbal, 'The Real Gangs of Wasseypur Who Live Their Life on Their Own Terms,' accessed July 19, 2018, http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/gangs-of-wasseypur-anurag-kashyap-brutal-mafia-vengeful-families/1/214585.html.
38. Jeffrey Witsoe, 'Corruption as Power: Caste and the Political Imagination of the Post-Colonial State,' *American Ethnologist* 38, no. 1 (2011): 73–85 (74).
39. Michelutti, 'The Cult of the Boss,' 63.

9 Heroism and the Pleasure and Pain of Mistranslation

The Case of *The Act of Killing*

Ariel Heryanto

The notion of hero versus villain is understood differently across time, nations, and even within a single nation-state. Yet, it is still common in many of these instances that those who disagree on the issue can nonetheless exchange views and engage in some form of debate. This chapter examines a radically different case, where the understanding of heroes and villains in one discursive practice is incommensurate and inverted in another.[1] The internationally acclaimed documentary *The Act of Killing* (2012), by the American filmmaker Joshua Oppenheimer, shows leaders of an Indonesian gang who re-enact their role in the mid-1960s anti-communist killings in their own country. This re-enactment entailed a complex clash of discursive frameworks in which different understandings of heroism and villainy play a central role. The ideas about heroism that are shared by the main characters in the film and their associates are deeply unsettling, puzzling, but also amusing when represented by the discursive practices of the filmmaker and the intended audiences.[2] As the protagonists attempt to impress the viewers by performing what they consider to be the heroic actions of the anti-communist killings they had been responsible for, they appear to be doing precisely the opposite in the eyes of the latter: namely, engaging in serious self-incrimination and obscene self-'villainization.'

It is important to note from the outset, however, that the discursive frameworks that the film evokes and exposes cannot be reduced to simple binaries of West and East, global and local moral values or cultural practices. While both are global and local (glocal), their practices are not of equal standing in the international fora. *The Act of Killing* is the work of an international collaboration of organizations and cinema workers, including many Indonesians, and its reception has differed widely while cutting across national boundaries. The film is an intimate joint cooperation of unlikely agencies, bringing together different and conflicting discourses on moral and political issues via notions of the heroic at both a local and global scale. As will be seen, these notions of the heroic are influenced by both 'Western' and 'Eastern' traditions of hero representation in film (Hollywood and Hong Kong), and the Indian epic of Mahabharata, but also drastic mistranslation of Nazi villainy as heroism.

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The Act of Killing as Historical Re-enactment

Before discussing the two contrasting discourses and their mistranslations, it will be necessary to provide a brief introduction to *The Act of Killing* and the historical context of the 1965–1966 killings for those unfamiliar with Indonesia. From late 1965 to mid-1966, Indonesia was home to 'one of the bloodiest massacres in modern history' in the context of the Cold War.[3] Nearly 1 million lives were lost at the hands of their own fellow nationals. The official pretext for the massacre was the kidnapping of six right-wing senior military officers and one lieutenant during the early hours of October 1, 1965, by middle-ranking military officers. Before long, the then major general Suharto had managed to suppress this revolt, before attributing the killings of the generals to an abortive coup d'état attempt by the Indonesian Communist Party. This allegation helped facilitate Suharto's long-desired plan to eradicate the Communist Party and all its affiliated organizations and sympathizers, as well as bring to an end the government in power under President Sukarno, which the army considered too lenient on the communists. Nationwide killings took place over the next several months, and a witch hunt lasted for the next several decades.

The Act of Killing has been the subject of many well-documented debates from multiple angles and approaches, including its content and its form of presentation. Content-wise, the film is particularly unusual for presenting Anwar Congo—an executor during a killing spree in the mid-1960s—as a main character. He defies common understandings of a protagonist, of either hero or villain. We see him boasting to the camera about his role as leader of local gangsters Pemuda Pancasila (Pancasila Youth) in the city of Medan (North Sumatra), killing many of his fellow nationals in late 1965 and early 1966, mainly for their real or perceived affiliations with the PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia, Indonesian Communist Party), as well as local residents of Chinese descent. Instead of showing remorse, for most of the film Congo and his fellow executioners speak of their 'cruelty' (their own words) with pride. They reconstruct their experience and re-enact their crime joyfully with jokes and laughter, while drinking, singing, and dancing.

Stylistically, the film is remarkably bold, innovative, and controversial. The characters are given free rein to dramatize their stories to a much greater extent than is common. Oppenheimer invites the killers to create a fictive story, based on their personal experiences in the 1965–1966 killings, along with their reflective response to that past. Congo and his friends take part in the design, scripting, casting, and shooting of a film that they wish to produce and star in. Instead of trying to be as accurate, factual, and persuasive as possible, these killers opt to boast and exaggerate their crimes and impunity in a spectacular and occasionally surrealist fashion, borrowing heavily from Western and Eastern traditions

of popular cinema (see ahead). This results in a film which is neither a documentary in the most familiar sense nor purely absurd fantasy or fiction. It is both fascinating and deeply disturbing. Understandably, when the film was released, it prompted a number of questions.[4] Why would these killers be willing to speak about their crimes so openly, and do so in such self-heroizing and self-incriminating ways? Did the filmmaker deceive them? Were they not aware of, and concerned about, the possible consequences of their statements and actions? A quick answer can be gleaned from the film itself: The executioners have enjoyed extraordinary impunity for their crimes, and they are confident that this impunity will continue for the rest of their lives. However, even if their assumption is true—that there would be no serious risk of legal or moral liability from their actions—one is still left wondering why they would do what they did, and in the manner in which they did it. What might have motivated them to participate in the making of *The Act of Killing*? Was there something about contemporary Indonesia which might have motivated them to expect possible gains from their actions? What are the broader and relevant circumstances in which these killers enthusiastically participated in the making of the film and its exposing strategies of self-heroization?

An Intimate Collaboration of Unlikely Allies

In what follows, the chapter elaborates on the foregoing questions. However, instead of simply offering some answers, it will also self-interrogate and re-examine these seemingly 'rational and sensible' questions. As a discursive practice, these questions, like all questions, imply certain assumptions, which remain unstated. These assumptions are often taken for granted and normalized as 'common sense' by those who engage them. By the same token, we must also ask what assumptions underlie the actions and statements of those appearing in *The Act of Killing* as they speak to the camera, to the film director, and to each other among fellow killers. As suggested earlier, the case under study is extraordinary because it is not like some of the familiar instances where disagreements involve those who can nonetheless still exchange views and engage in some form of debate. Rather, this is a case where the understanding of heroes and villains in one discursive practice is incommensurate and inverted in another. Thus, it cannot be debated on a common ground between opposing camps.

Curiously, while the discursive and moral contradictions in *The Act of Killing* are critical to the film's successful reception, they are not immediately and equally transparent to all the parties involved. The characters in *The Act of Killing* do not appear to be cognizant of the other's discursive practice—in this case the filmmaker's—whose framing of their statements and actions renders them extremely repugnant. These Indonesian killers appear to believe the film crew to be a group of naïve

or harmless, easily manipulated outsiders. Conversely, to the filmmaker and their intended audiences, the characters in the documentary appear extremely odd, foolish, and morally disturbing, to say the least. Equally, the filmmaker and the implied audience may be incognizant of, or indifferent to, the discursive framework employed by the main characters in this documentary. Not all discourses are equals, just like the communities that practice them. This imbalance of power relations, however, is not as simple and straightforward as it seems, as will be pointed out later. The powerful impact of the film on international audiences can be considered an index of the dissimilarities, disconnections, or incompatibility between these two sets of discourses, particularly as regards their differing perceptions of hero and villain. The main characters' oddities, repulsiveness, and foolishness are projected onto the worldwide screen to the horror and enjoyment of those who love to hate them.

This analysis shares the discursive framework of the filmmaker and its intended audience in an attempt to acknowledge and make sense of the other's discursive framework in which the main characters of *The Act of Killing* operate. This requires some challenging work on 'translation' and an analysis of potential 'mistranslation' between the two discourses and world views. Bias is inevitable with such an endeavour and places some limits on the efficacy of this analysis.[5] Despite these caveats, it is worthwhile to challenge the easy and strong temptation for viewers to demonize the main characters in the documentary. By no means does this analysis condone their crimes or impunity. It is not their crime from the 1960s itself which is under scrutiny, but their recollection and performance of that crime in the 2000s. Even the main characters in the documentary acknowledge the cruelty of their crimes and can be seen from time to time grappling to come to terms with their past actions. The chapter will also illustrate the slipperiness of terms such as hero and villain when considered as binary oppositions, positing them as distinct categories beyond conceptual analyses.

The Act of Killing has won many international awards and countless accolades, in both English and Indonesian. It has also been the subject of criticism, both politically and ethically. Focusing on the daily life and boastful statements of the perpetrators, some criticize the film for not giving broader and adequate political context to the 1965 killings, and for not giving enough voice to the survivors.[6] One critic suggests that due to this ellipsis, the film is '[m]anipulative and misleading' in the sense that '[t]he killings are presented as the work of civilian criminal psychopaths, not as a campaign of extermination.'[7] Despite their opposing views, those who praise and those who criticize the film belong to more or less the same discursive framework.[8] They may have few things to agree on, but they share common ground to enable an exchange of conflicting views: Each can see the position of the other. These critics live in one discursive universe, while the main characters in the documentary live with the

signifying practices of another universe. Evidence suggests the latter do not—and quite possibly cannot—share the same discursive framework of those commenting on *The Act of Killing* at various international film festivals, or publishing reviews of the films, or providing critical analyses in academic journals. As a result, they are unable to see how an international audience of the film would see them in such negative light, and may not have otherwise participated in the making of the film—certainly not in the fashion they did.

Pointing out the difference between these two sets of discourse, each within its own vernacular universe of meanings, including those of the heroic, is not as difficult as proposing a definition of each and giving them a label. I will make a modest attempt at describing their differences, while refraining from making a broad theorization or providing precise definitions of each practice. It is safe to say that almost all of the published material—essays, discussions, and reviews in English and Indonesian—belong to the same discourse with which *The Act of Killing* was created and widely consumed. Being a dominant discourse in most contemporary societies, it is shared by many modern, humanist, and secular citizens of the world, including human rights advocates, enjoying a certain prestige in the social arena and commanding a moral authority. The dualism of heroes and villains and the distinction between fact and fiction are inherent in this discourse. Even when such a dualism is problematized, as is attempted in this chapter, we realize that such a problematizing itself is a product of the same historical paradigm of thought. It adopts a secular humanistic view of human beings, a universal ethic, and takes a generally negative view of deception and violence.

In contrast, other commentators on *The Act of Killing* belong in an altogether different category. They seem to share a lot with those appearing in the film as main characters. While the first category outlined earlier could easily be attributed to the modern,[9] it would be problematic to refer to the second category as premodern, unmodern, or postmodern. Regardless of the label, the views and comments to be discussed ahead belong to people with no or less legitimate cultural capital in contemporary international fora.[10] Articulations of the second category can be found scattered in small and local settings and are mostly unpublished; or, if they are published, they are situated in settings far less prestigious than those in the first category outlined earlier. Consequently, their existence can be easily overlooked or dismissed by distant observers. Here the distinction between hero and villain or fact and fiction is either irrelevant or fluid.

It is critical to emphasize that neither the first nor the second category of those two distinct discursive communities is homogenous—clearly demarcated by place of residence, period of history, and racial, ideological, cultural, or linguistic differences. For the purpose of analysis, they are presented here as distinct entities, while in reality they coexist and

occasionally overlap. Instead of dismissing the film as 'manipulative' (perhaps all films are guilty of manipulation to varying degrees), or seeing the main characters as a bunch of individual 'psychopaths,' I wish to identify some of the broader social forces shaping the characteristics of this 'other' discursive framework. Each discursive practice produces its own regime of truth, with its gaps of silence and ignorance. Therefore, at best, this study can only hope to be partially successful. In an attempt to translate text from one discursive practice to another, something—perhaps many things—will be lost.

To have an initial glimpse of this 'less legitimate' discursive framework, it would be useful to acknowledge and consider some of the lesser-known reactions to *The Act of Killing* among viewers in Indonesia. Let me stress from the outset that the difference among viewers of *The Act of Killing* varies significantly in Indonesia, as is common elsewhere. We cannot overgeneralize them. Many, perhaps most of them, are middle-class urbanites who share a common discursive framework with their counterparts in English-speaking societies. As reported by Mette Bjerregaard, they agreed and disagreed on aspects of the documentary in similar ways to those widely published in English and Indonesian alike.[11]

It is expected that reactions to the film in Indonesia would differ from those of outside audiences, because many of those in power are directly incriminated, while survivors and their close associates would be hurt in deeply personal ways.[12] Conscious of the potential retribution from the former, Oppenheimer has opted against returning to Indonesia for the foreseeable future, and his Indonesian crew in the production of the film has remained anonymous.[13] The next few paragraphs highlight a few cases where the reaction to the documentary strikes me as surprising and intriguing for reasons other than its personal safety or political implications with regard to Indonesia's past history, and seems to belong to a very different universe. These frictions of value systems and epistemes in different cultural contexts point to the dramatic rifts in moral interpretations, exposing how complex 'glocalizations' of heroisms can exist.

In the city of Malang (East Java) in 2013, a group of close male friends in their forties and fifties held a private screening of *The Act of Killing* from a DVD that I supplied. Some of them were members of the local city council, representing a local political party. Others were small traders in a local market, where thugs regularly roamed. In other words, these people lived in a social and political environment not dissimilar to those appearing in the film. Barely half an hour into the show, they decided to stop watching. When I asked for their reasons, some replied the film was boring. Others felt unimpressed by a film which, in their view, championed those from a rival political party that supported the government. For these Malang viewers, they were tired of hearing the kind of boasting from individuals who were already a part of their daily lives.

There was no indication that these viewers had perceived the irony presented in the film. None considered how the film might have 'manipulated' or tricked the characters to self-incriminate or make them look ridiculous. None considered these characters to have mental health issues. They did not see what had previously excited and concerned me or many others who have discussed these similar concerns.[14] Until this instance in Malang, my experience was that the film had either provoked or impressed its viewers, but I had not heard or imagined it could 'bore' anyone. But this is not the only surprising case I found in Indonesia.

Another respondent from North Sumatra, whom I interviewed during my fieldwork in 2013, mentioned that for many of his associates from the same province, watching *The Act of Killing*, and particularly the way Anwar Congo speaks boastfully, made them feel homesick. The documentary that shocked the international audience for its strangeness was at the same time something familiar and intimate to North Sumatran audiences. In screenings of *The Act of Killing* in Jakarta, this respondent told me, many people felt obliged to see it because their friends talked about it and they did not want to miss out. But most of them appeared to be unimpressed by the film. The majority of them left the venue when the screening was over and the post-screening discussion was about to begin.

Yet another respondent (documentary filmmaker) shared with me a story about his trip to North Sumatra with an Australian TV journalist to meet both Anwar Congo and Herman Koto (another main character in *The Act of Killing*) for an interview in 2013. Congo met with them but did not consent to a recorded interview. Koto made himself available for an interview with a fee, which he said he was expected to share with other members of his militia organization. Both visiting interviewers tried to understand how Koto might respond to the international reactions to *The Act of Killing*, the potential risks arising from his appearance in the film, and what his strategy might be in dealing with such risks. Koto did not seem to comprehend the concerns of his visitors. Consequently, his interviewers played back the scenes where he appeared, and they paused at selected scenes and discussed the kinds of risks to which Koto might be liable. Right to the end of the meeting, my respondent said he was certain that Koto remained ignorant of the concerns of his two visitors, or those on the other side of the globe. This respondent was clear that this was not a case of someone experiencing mental health issues, or a ruthless criminal with no remorse. Rather this was an example of a serious communication disconnect and, this respondent added, was not restricted to those former killers in North Sumatra. He had witnessed several other cases of just such a communication disconnect between those behind the making of *The Act of Killing* and some viewers he knew in Jakarta.

In 2012, Benedict Anderson drew a contrast between the 1965 killings and the killers in North Sumatra (as they appear in *The Act of Killing*) with those in Java and Bali, where the death tolls were much higher.

According to Anderson, in Java and Bali there was much 'silence. Nothing to boast about in public or on TV.'[15] Later that year, the local newsmagazine *TEMPO* ran a special double edition on the 1965 killings. Countering Anderson's thesis, and very much in line with their Medan executors, *TEMPO* published gruesome testimonies of many 1965 killers in Java, boasting about their action in taking the lives of the communists.[16]

Some of the characters in *The Act of Killing* might have overdone their boasting in celebrating their crime. However, the examples listed earlier suggest that their behaviour was far from idiosyncratic or confined to just a few individuals in Medan, North Sumatra. Not only does this behaviour have its equivalent in Java and Bali—despite Anderson's argument to the contrary—but also in fact, as will shortly be discussed, such behaviour strongly resembles and is strongly linked to other cases in Indonesia, and in more distant societies around the world via the dissemination of pop culture and the media industry. However, as mentioned earlier, the distinction between the two discourses outlined earlier cannot be reduced to a simplistic dichotomy between West/East, global/local moral or cultural practices. This becomes obvious when we regard the ways in which the killers stylized themselves as 'heroic' in the documentary.

Transnationally Mediated Popular Culture

In *The Act of Killing*, Congo's acting and re-enacting of his killing of perceived communists have obvious international dimensions. Throughout the film, Congo and his friends describe their fascination with Hollywood westerns and gangster films, and how these American pop-cultural products became their primary source for inspiration on methods of killing their victims. They speak very highly of Hollywood stars James Dean, John Wayne, Victor Mature, and Marlon Brando. Congo and his friends acknowledge their gratitude to American pop-cultural products that informed both their style of crime in the 1960s and their re-enactment for Oppenheimer's camera in the 2000s. Hence, the significance of the title *The Act of Killing* and its multiple meanings in Oppenheimer's documentary: 'the film is also about men who are acting out memories of killing, and the feelings they have about killing . . . [F]or Anwar acting was always part of the act of killing.'[17] It was a specifically Hollywood-inspired act.

The transnational flows of the 'heroization' of the killing of the communists come full circle when *The Act of Killing* is presented across the United States and the rest of the world. What came from the West is brought back to the West—except, in a worse version. This is not an act of 'resistance' à la James Scott's *Weapons of the Weak* (1985).[18] Rather, it more resembles Baudrillard's concept of 'hyper-obedience,' where the Other 'accept[s] everything and redirect[s] everything en bloc into the spectacular, without requiring any other code, without . . . resistance.'[19]

The American style of violence as entertainment both on and off screen is not only mirrored, but the degrees of its impacts appear to be dependent on each other, as illustrated by the Abu Ghraib scandal, showing the torture of prisoners in the Iraq War by US Army personnel and the publication of such images in the media. Theorizing more broadly, Achille Mbembe argues that 'elements of the obscene, vulgar, and the grotesque. . . . are intrinsic to all systems of domination,' and such elements are most pronounced in postcolonies which are 'characterized by a . . . tendency to excess and disproportion.'[20]

What makes the 'excess and disproportion' of Congo and his fellow executors more intriguing is the fact that they are prompted by the visit of Oppenheimer, the American filmmaker, and his powerful media equipment for filmmaking, to their home base. *The Act of Killing* is never an innocent record of some pre-existing reality or event in North Sumatra. Rather, the presence of the camera and the American filmmaker (and all the real or perceived import of what this equipment and people might entail) stimulated the idea and desire on the part of the Medan thugs to create the persona of a hero, with all the 'excesses and disproportions.' It is one of several similar cases where Indonesian anti-communist advocates, provocateurs, and executioners are profoundly excited to meet Americans, whom they presume to be the world's best allies in the destruction of local communists and their sympathizers.

The story takes an interesting turn in relation to Oppenheimer. Initially, local police, military, and thugs in Medan made it difficult for Oppenheimer to work on his original project—namely, to make a documentary about a fledgling plantation workers' union in North Sumatra. While preparing another film (*Globalization Tapes*, 2003), the filmmaker learned about the 1965–1966 killings from the plantation workers—some of whom were themselves survivors of the massacre—who always spoke on this subject in whispers. These survivors and those who murdered their family members had been living in the same village for decades. As the filmmaker attempted to record on camera the stories of these survivors, he encountered repeated threats of arrest and interruptions from the local military officers, local vigilante groups, and the police.

In the days that followed, Oppenheimer obeyed the advice of the 1965 survivors, and timidly redirected his camera to the perpetrators. To his surprise, this shift made the latter more than happy. Even the security apparatus in the village did their best to facilitate his filming the self-incriminating testimonies of those claiming proudly to have taken the lives of hundreds of suspected communists in their neighbourhood. As Oppenheimer describes it,

> Local police would offer to escort us to sites of mass killing, saluting or engaging the killers in jocular banter, depending on their relationship and the killer's rank. Military officers would even task soldiers

> with keeping curious onlookers at a distance, so that our sound recording wouldn't be disturbed.[21]

Congo and his friends are not merely people living with impunity for their past crimes but also ageing people who desire documented recognition for what they regard as their heroic deeds in the past—namely, having supported the New Order regime (1966–1998) by liquidating the communists. *The Act of Killing* served their purpose, or so was their understanding.

Thus, here we witness the complicated unequal power relations between the two incompatible discourses outlined in the earlier section of this chapter. *The Act of Killing* is not a simple or straightforward manipulation of the local, the weak, and the subordinated by the global, strong, rich, and powerful. Neither is it a clever recuperation of the European colonial voyeuristic practice of ridiculing the weirdly exotic, primitive, and irrational natives of the tropics.[22] Whatever has happened behind the scenes, the Indonesian killers have significant agency in *The Act of Killing*. Furthermore, the successful completion of the documentary was in part indebted to the remarkable level of support and protection it received from the political elite and local gangsters towards whom the film is fiercely critical.

It is paradoxical then that, having enjoyed this support, the filmmaker felt so apprehensive about his own safety in anticipation of the resulting success of the project. Indeed, the team behind the production was both simultaneously powerful and powerless vis-à-vis the network of gangsters appearing in *The Act of Killing* and the ruling elite in Jakarta. Certainly, the filmmaker and his team can be credited with being the most powerful cinematic narrator of the 1965 massacre by putting the killers in the international spotlight as self-incriminating, self-heroizing criminals. However, the latter also remain as powerful as they were half a century ago, continuing to enjoy full immunity from punishment for their crimes, along with diplomatic, military, and financial protection from the world's strongest advocates of liberal democracy.

Regardless of the power imbalance between the filmmaker and those filmed in *The Act of Killing*, one thing is certain: The media—particularly visually rich media—has immense and seductive power in making celebrity or celebrity-like heroes. This can be exemplified across a spectrum with local thugs in Medan at one end, President Donald Trump at the other, and many others in between. Public figures of note require widespread and high-profile displays of recognition that confirm their status, such as having one's image circulated by a powerful media platform. In the past, all great men and great women had their deeds immortalized in stone inscriptions, temples, or monuments. One hundred years ago, still photographs and radio served a similar purpose. Subsequent decades saw the arrival of print media and television, before smartphones

democratized it all and depreciated the value of such media representations. Selfie photography can be considered a democratizing tool of self-promotion, and, as such, is very appealing to many people. Similarly, for reasons of self-aggrandizement, many people choose their image from a televised appearance as a photo profile on social media—in other words, a mass-mediated image projected on another platform of public media. The selfie-style use of video and photography in the Abu Ghraib case is another instructive incident of interest.[23]

Non-Indonesians are often puzzled by the non-stop smiles on the faces of captured terrorist bombers or top political figures as they appear on television after being caught red-handed and facing serious corruption charges.[24] *The Act of Killing* contains many scenes demonstrating the desire and pride of the former executioners for appearing in the film. The appearance on prestigious media platforms, such as a national newspaper or television channel, can be easily used to raise the status of a criminal to that of celebrity or even self-styled hero. This point is illustrated vividly in the scene where Congo appears on a television talk show and receives orchestrated applause. When preparing for the shooting of the scene of the brutal attacks in Kebun Kolam, Herman Koto told members of Pemuda Pancasila that they should be proud to take part in the film-making directed by someone from the West. The reason, in his words, is '[t]he whole world will see this. I'm talking about London, England. Forget Jakarta. Jakarta is nothing.'[25]

It is hard to imagine that Congo and Koto would have been as enthusiastic as they were in recollecting their crimes from 1965 if Oppenheimer had come with no camera at all, or if he was an Indonesian, instead of a North American white male. Indeed, one decade before Oppenheimer made *The Act of Killing*, American scholar Loren Ryter came to Medan and met with the same group of former executioners to discuss the same topic. But Ryter was conducting academic research for his doctoral dissertation, not a film. The response of the Medan killers was much less flamboyant and boasting.[26]

In *The Look of Silence* (2014), the sequel to *The Act of Killing*, Oppenheimer depicts what purports to be the extraordinary courage of protagonist Adi Rukun. As a survivor of the 1965 massacre, Rukun visits several executioners at their homes, and he confronts them with questions about their actions which resulted in the loss of his brother's life. Unlike *The Act of Killing*, which lays bare the presence of its process of production, *The Look of Silence* is presented in a realist mode, evading the presence of the camera and, for most of the time, the filmmaker. Rukun's courage is admirable, but it should not be understood in isolation from the intervention that is the filming of his action.

It would be fair and reasonable to surmise that his courage and action are inseparable, and indeed heavily contingent on the presence of the camera and the film crew. When the film was completed, Rukun fled

from his original place of residence to an unknown address for safety reasons. As a survivor, Rukun in *The Look of Silence* and executioner Congo in *The Act of Killing* are opposites in the political spectrum of Indonesia's massacre in the mid-1960s, as well as opposite in the moral universe of the viewers of both films. Yet, the courage of both to speak to the international public comes primarily from the encouragement of the same filmmaker, hailing from the world's most virulently anti-communist superpower.

The foregoing discussion shows that the action of those in *The Act of Killing* is not the idiosyncratic behaviour of a handful of individuals from Medan. It has broad resonance, links, and indebtedness to distant places and periods. Unfortunately, it is not easy to draw a precise spatial or temporal boundary around where such practices begin and end. What we can do is to look more closely at the case under discussion and identify some of the various contributing elements. It is necessary to not overgeneralize the case by considering all the 1965 killings in Indonesia in some homogenous fashion. Not all 1965–1966 executioners from the different islands in Indonesia were like Congo: being great fans of Hollywood movies and taking inspiration for killing their 1965 communist captives from Hollywood noir films.

Some additional information about Indonesia and Indonesia's veneration of heroes will be useful for understanding the broader picture. Such information will help identify other significant factors that have helped shape the ethics and aesthetics at work in the production and consumption of *The Act of Killing* in twenty-first-century Indonesia. Thus, the next part will discuss the intersection of three interrelated aspects: the making of heroes in Indonesia in both political institutions and fiction; the ambiguous distinctions between heroes and villains, between facts and fiction, and the blurring of opposites which characterizes *The Act of Killing*; and, finally, the New Order state propaganda film on 1965, titled *Pengkhianatan G 30 September*.

Indonesia's New Order

One thing missing from most analyses of *The Act of Killing* by those unfamiliar with Indonesia is reference to a film by Arifin C. Noer, entitled *Pengkhianatan G 30 September* (The treachery of the 30th September movement), which was released in 1984. It is a state propaganda film that became the single most important and most widely watched film on the 1965 events in Indonesia under the New Order. For decades, the film has been the subject of controversy.[27] *The Act of Killing* is full of references to *Pengkhianatan G 30 September*, with selected scenes from the latter appearing in the former. This section will show why any analysis of heroism in *The Act of Killing*—and in Indonesia more broadly—would be unsatisfactory without adequate attention to *Pengkhianatan G 30*

September and some sense of what life was like in Indonesia under the New Order. Considered in this broader context, *The Act of Killing* is not as weird and shocking as it would be otherwise.

Lack of knowledge of contemporary Indonesia's political culture makes it difficult for many non-Indonesians to understand how Congo and others could behave in such unexpected ways in *The Act of Killing*. Hence the series of questions about the documentary listed earlier in this chapter: Why would these killers speak about their crimes so openly, and in such self-incriminating ways? Were they not aware of, and concerned about, the possible risks? Many reviews of *The Act of Killing* attribute the behaviour of Congo and the other executioners in the documentary to their state-sanctioned impunity. This may be the case, but such a statement remains inadequate for explaining the 'excesses and disproportion' of violence and lifestyle under the New Order off screen.

To justify the 1965–1966 massacre, the New Order blamed the violence largely on the victims. It portrayed the communists as evil, un-Indonesian, and the antithesis of anything Indonesia stood for. As historian John Roosa describes the situation: 'Under Suharto anticommunism became the state religion, complete with sacred sites, rituals, and dates,' with its state propaganda machine using a wide range of platforms: 'textbooks, monuments, street names, films, museums, commemorative rituals, and national holidays.'[28] The most important of these myriad forms of propaganda was undoubtedly *Pengkhianatan G 30 September*. It was the first—and for many Indonesians it remains the only—film accessible to the public, dealing with the most important series of events in contemporary Indonesian history. The film runs for almost four and a half hours, and covers six days from September 30 to October 5, 1965—an event which the New Order officially designated as the abortive coup d'état by the Indonesian Communist Party and the army's subsequent victorious countermovement.

Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI constituted the 'master-narrative' in Indonesia's public consciousness and the quotidian.[29] As soon as it was released, two generations of school children were required to pay to attend screenings at regular cinemas during school hours. The film was broadcast annually on September 30 on the state television network, TVRI, and when several private television stations were established in the mid-1980s, they were coerced to follow suit. On the same date, all buildings were required to fly their flags at half-mast, returning them to full-mast the next day, in order to celebrate the triumph of the military, honour its members as the national heroes, and commemorate the elimination of the Indonesian Communist Party. Two years following the release of *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI*, the master narrative was rewritten as a 'novel' using the same title by the author Arswendo Atmowiloto.[30] Nowhere was there any suggestion that one genre was more or less factual than the other. Indeed, the idea of a strict distinction between empirically based

history and an imaginary work of fiction is either foreign or nonexistent to many people in Indonesia.

We may never know comprehensively how the film was received by Indonesians across the archipelago. But we do know how the film was commented on by characters in *The Act of Killing*. In one scene, as Congo watches *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* on a television set, he remarks, 'the government made this film so that people would hate the communists.' Minutes later he adds, 'I am proud of what I have done [outdoing the brutality of the communists as depicted in the government propaganda film].' Roughly 20 minutes into *The Act of Killing*, another 1965 executioner, Adi Zulkadry, shares his reflection with Congo and others on their past crime: 'About the film *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* we used to say how cruel the communists were. But now it is clear that is not true. It was we who were cruel.' Then Zulkadry remarks, anticipating how the audience would react when viewing their own film (*The Act of Killing*), 'They would say "I have suspected it. It's not true to say PKI was cruel".'

While at home, I witnessed another unexpected reaction to *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI*. In 1992, my 10-year-old son came home from school one afternoon telling me what fun it had been for him and his schoolmates to play the 'game of PKI.' I could not believe what I was hearing and with some concern I demanded an explanation. At school, he explained, children enacted the narrative they heard from *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI*. 'Everyone wanted to play the PKI, hunting down those who played the lousy generals who had to run and hide as far as the school toilets. We conquered them and scolded them. It was great fun.' These children preferred not to play the generals, even though they had been glorified as heroes by the New Order government. This was not simply because those playing the generals had to endure 'torture,' but also because these children were more familiar with films such as *Rambo* or *Rocky*, or the much-loved kung fu movies from Hong Kong, where the heroes always win in battles. It is worth noting that in *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* the Suharto group ultimately wins on October 5, 1965. However, the 1965 master narrative does not emphasize this ultimate triumph, which does not come until four hours after the beginning of the film. In order to provoke public outrage, *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* emphasizes the communists' alleged violence against the six right-wing senior military officers and one lieutenant on the eve of October 1, 1965. Scenes depicting this communist cruelty are foregrounded on and off screen in all state propaganda materials and institutions, such as museums.

Perhaps the authors of the New Order propaganda were attempting to be a little cleverer than the Hollywood and Hong Kong filmmakers by superimposing the violence that it perpetrated on its victims in its narrative. The problem with this narrative strategy for an Indonesian audience is that it goes against the dominant readings of mass-produced stories from Hollywood and Hong Kong with which they are already so familiar.

It also runs counter to the longer oral tradition of watching and listening to the Indian-derived epic stories of *Mahabharata*, particularly the Great War scenes of *Bharata Yudha*. In this light, the children's misreading or misappropriation is not purely accidental. Similarly, we can better understand the ease and confidence with which actors in *The Act of Killing* behaved the way they do, and why this film shocked most international viewers either in awe, in horror, or both, while some viewers in Indonesia found it easier to watch, and some even found it banal or boring.

Victims from the massacres half a century ago continue to be stigmatized, and discrimination against survivors as well as their families and descendants shows no signs of ending. Witnessing the persistence of such practices and their impact in 2003, Oppenheimer remarked that when he came to Indonesia he 'felt as though [he]'d walked into Germany 40 years after the Holocaust and the Nazis were still in power.'[31] While this comparison to Nazi Germany has some truth, it is only part of the story. Unlike the Nazis, Indonesia's New Order enjoyed generous financial and diplomatic support from Western Bloc nations to launch its anti-communist campaign. Brutality proceeded with conviviality and entertainment, as abundantly illustrated in *The Act of Killing*.

By the 1980s, anti-communist stigmatization grew to have a life of its own; it no longer attacked old or new communists or their sympathizers. Rather, it became a useful stigma and a political tool (not unlike the way the designation 'terrorist' is currently deployed in English), and was often used by a wide range of politicians across the globe to attack their political rivals. In the process, the official and popular stories of 1965 unfolded recklessly, full of spectacular fabrications and internal contradictions, not very different from those presented in *The Act of Killing*. For most Indonesians who grew up during the New Order and the early years of the post-New Order, wild fiction, fake news, and fantasies about the danger of communism and the hysterical campaigns for fighting against the potential revival of communism have been a staple consumption, but not without its slippages, contradictions, and absurd ironies. In this environment, references to Hitler slipped in and out quickly in public space, without the specific reference to the horrendous crime associated with the Nazis.

Many Indonesians have heard of the name Hitler, but most lack sufficient knowledge of the man and his political history. Indeed, it is precisely the unfamiliarity and mystery surrounding this, and many other little-known international figures appearing in the mass media and globally circulated advertisements, which generated interest among more than a few Indonesians. Hitler is tantalizing to them, just as a number of fanciful-sounding foreign words (English, Sanskrit, Arabic) have seduced many Indonesians into using them liberally without context, and for no reason other than making their utterances sound different, stylish, or enigmatic. From time to time, the Indonesian security forces caught

and detained Indonesians who innocently used the hammer and sickle as decoration on their property or t-shirts but without the slightest knowledge of what they might represent in party politics and their links to the 1965 massacre.[32]

In November 2017, Adolf Hitler was one of 80 'famous people' featured in wax statues on display in an exhibition in a museum in the city of Yogyakarta, Indonesia.[33] The wax figure of Hitler stood tall against a huge image of the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex of concentration camps. Young visitors came to take selfie photographs with these famous figures, including the incumbent president of Indonesia, Joko Widodo. Hitler's statue did not last a week after becoming the target of criticism and condemnations from various international human rights groups. However, no local visitors complained, explained the officer in charge of the museum. This is the most recent incident in a series of cases in Indonesia wherein a mistranslation of political history goes wrong—not too dissimilar to Congo's joyful re-enactment of his killing 'the communists' for Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing*.

During the 2014 presidential election, Nazi paraphernalia provoked controversy in Indonesia when famous pop musician Ahmad Dhani appeared in a video dressed in a military outfit resembling that of SS officer Heinrich Himmler. This video was for a presidential campaign in support of one of the two candidates. More interestingly, according to Adrian Vickers and Mirela Suciu, 'Dhani is of Jewish descent.'[34] In 2011, a Nazi-themed café called 'Soldatenkaffee' was opened in the city of Bandung. Nazi paraphernalia decorated the café interior and its staff dressed in costumes reminiscent of the SS. They served the favourite Indonesian dish *nasi goreng* (fried rice) but on the menu it was spelled 'Nazi goreng' (fried Nazi). This café did not provoke controversy until two years later when the English media reported on its existence. Soon thereafter, the café was forced to close; owner Henry Mulyana blamed the media for its closure. One year later, and not before the controversy of Ahmad Dhani's video, Soldatenkaffee was reopened.[35]

'The Love of Hitler Leads a Nazi Revival in Indonesia' reads the title of an article by Aaron Akinyemi for *Newsweek*.[36] Similar phenomena can be seen in the neighbouring countries of Malaysia and Thailand.[37] I strongly doubt any of the foregoing suggests anything like a 'love of Hitler.' Vickers and Suciu provide a more nuanced interpretation: 'This fascination with Nazism comes from a complex combination of elements, from poor history teaching, and imported anti-Semitism to a long-standing romanticization of the extreme right.'[38] All these elements do not necessarily or exclusively lead to the 'heroization' of Hitler. Rather, as mentioned earlier, Hitler was one of many, and remarkably diverse, famous, yet little-known figures who have gained prominence in the Indonesian public imagination, particularly in urban cultures among the middle classes. Others include Islamist figures like

Osama Bin Laden, soccer stars like David Beckham, former president Barack Obama, and so on. I have focused on the few cases of Hitler only to indicate how extremely such fantasy-makings and misreadings of cultural icons from overseas can go wrong in Indonesia's public space. From this perspective, Congo's fascination with Hollywood's James Dean, John Wayne, Victor Mature, and Marlon Brando is neither surprising nor remarkably different.

Heroes and Villains

I wish to conclude by highlighting points from the previous sections within a broader consideration of an Indonesian conception of heroes and heroism. This chapter has noted how *The Act of Killing* shocks viewers who are unfamiliar with Indonesia and is seen as something extraordinarily strange, disturbing, or surreal. The documentary actually looks more 'realistic' and familiar to those who have lived in Indonesia under the militarist regime of the New Order, where a wide range of transnational cultures and storytelling traditions intersect—from Hollywood to Hong Kong martial arts films, along with the oral traditions and performing arts of the Indian-derived epics of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. The chapter has offered two related arguments.

First, there is a significant discursive gap between those behind the production of *The Act of Killing* and its implied audience in the West on the one side and those appearing as the main characters in the film on the other side. While these two discursive communities appropriated each other, they did so for very different reasons and with different expectations. While there is an intimate collaboration between the two discourses to produce *The Act of Killing*, their narratives 'pass over' each other. Those involved at the higher levels of making *The Act of Killing*, and most of the international audience who laud the film, share a secular humanistic view which assumes a universal ethics and an essentially negative view on deception and violence. Within the discursive tradition that Congo and his fellow gangsters operate in, the distinctions between fact and fiction, between heroes and villains, are not appreciated as sharply as by those of us who more readily participate in the discursive terrain of *The Act of Killing*. Unfortunately, it is not so easy—and perhaps impossible—to delineate the precise boundaries that separate these two discursive practices and their respective communities. The discursive practice within which Congo and his associates operate is not essentially or inherently 'Indonesian.' Rather, it can be seen as a convergence of transnational flows of political ideas and popular cultures. In Java and Bali, the killers of 1965 and viewers of *The Act of Killing* are intimately familiar with the Indian-derived epics of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, Hong Kong martial arts cinema, and Hollywood film noir, as well as the Indonesian state terror and propaganda during the Cold War.

Second, the two discourses embedded in *The Act of Killing* cannot be considered two distinct practices with equal status. The world views and discursive practices of Congo and other Indonesian viewers of *The Act of Killing* whose response differs to that of the majority of its international viewers do not enjoy a respectable status. Consequently, their existence and life experience could be easily overlooked, misunderstood, or ridiculed by distant observers. To acknowledge their discursive difference is not to condone the crime that Congo and his associates committed. Rather, this is to question why and how they could have participated in the making of *The Act of Killing*, and why there have been significantly different responses to the film.

The imbalance in the relationship between the two communities can be evidenced by the strikingly contrasting sentiments towards each other. Congo's and Koto's fascination with Hollywood films from the 1960s and the contemporary West more generally is not reciprocated. In fact, the contemporary audiences in the West respond to their adoration of American jingoism and anti-communism with disgust and outrage. This can also be read as an embarrassing sign of a continued and high level of the American 'soft power' that has dominated Indonesia and far beyond for the last half century. When Oppenheimer prepared *The Act of Killing*, Joseph Nye Jr was lamenting the decline of US soft power and urged to expand it.[39]

In a discussion of *The Act of Killing*, philosopher Slavoj Žižek argues that the shocking portrayal of Congo and his associates in Medan illustrates what he calls 'a moral vacuum.' He is careful not to attribute this to 'the "ethical primitiveness" of Indonesia,' but rather points his finger at 'the dislocating effects of capitalist globalisation.'[40] Unfortunately, Žižek's argument fails to explain why and how he and most of the international audience for *The Act of Killing* could have largely been exempt from 'the dislocating effects of capitalist globalisation,' while Congo and the others in Indonesia have been subjected to them.

Benedict Anderson's 1972 essay is markedly different from Žižek's perspective. Anderson argues that in a Javanese world view, power is separated from questions of legitimacy or moral values. Given the strong influence of Javanese culture and overrepresentation of the Javanese in national politics, if Anderson's argument is valid, such conceptions of power could have a significant impact on national politics. Anderson also acknowledges that the various elements which compose Javanese culture also exist in many other societies, but just in different configurations.[41] In the same essay, Anderson refers to a public speech by Sukarno (Indonesia's first and most well-known president) in which he discusses Hitler as a person of power without consideration given to the moral qualities of the latter.[42] Anderson explained that he wrote the 1972 article as an attempt to deconstruct the totalizing and often taken-for-granted claims of modern Western 'rationality' and its universalist sense of 'morality.'

Against such a backdrop, Anderson compares and contrasts the familiar modern Western concept of power and rationality with those of the Javanese, arguing that there is also a coherent rationality to Javanese culture and thinking which is yet to be taken seriously in scholarship. In a way, this chapter has some elements similar to Anderson's intent, but with a more modest aim and on a more modest scale.

My own attempt has been restricted to the specific case of the making and viewing of *The Act of Killing*, which leads to a general questioning of the lack of 'normality' or 'humanness' of those appearing in the documentary. I have neither the expertise nor ambition to make a broader generalization, or offer a definition of the two discourses I compared earlier. My aim is simply to argue that there exist at least two radically different modes of thought and discursive practices involved in the production and consumption of *The Act of Killing*. Together, they collaborate to produce the powerful documentary, but not as equal partners and without mutual respect, interest, or the ability to understand each other. Each of these discourses is a complex mixture of images, histories, and meanings of heroes and villains from very diverse sources around the globe. These discourses cannot be described in simplistic binary notions of West and East, or global and local moral values or cultural practices. While both have global and local elements, the term 'glocal' is too homogenizing and it betrays their radical differences and the features and values that are incommensurate with one another.

Notes

1. The term 'discourse' is used here to designate a mode of communicative action, involving particular interlocutors, contingent upon specific underlying assumptions, and taking place in limited domains (social groups or communities) at certain moments and in certain contexts. Strictly speaking, no discursive practice can be repeated unchanged.
2. The intended audience is a conceptual construct implied in the framing of the film and its communicative features. It may or may not share identical features and attributes with the real people who watch the documentary.
3. John Legge, *Sukarno: A Political Biography* (London: Allen Lane, 1972), 399.
4. Cf. Ariel Heryanto, 'The 1965–6 Killings: Facts and Fictions in Dangerous Liaisons,' *IIAS Newsletter* 61 (Autumn 2012): 16–17.
5. Before I obtained Western-style higher education in the United States and Australia, I was born and raised in Indonesia, and, as such, I am deeply familiar with the discourse of those appearing in *The Act of Killing*. My background is far from unique, and, in fact, it is the common experience of most intelligentsia from the former colonies of Europe and the US. While learning a Western academic discourse may involve some unlearning of the previous discourse of the homeland, it does not amount to complete erasure of the latter.
6. Heather McIntosh, 'Reenactments and the Denial of Catharsis in *The Act of Killing*,' *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 34 (2017): 379–394.
7. Robert Cribb, 'The Act of Killing,' *Critical Asian Studies* 46, no. 1 (2014): 147–150 (147, 149).

8. Cf. the special issue of *Critical Asian Studies* 46, no. 1 (2014): 145–207.
9. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 12.
10. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984); Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. R. Nice (London: Sage Publications, 1977).
11. Mette Bjerregaard, 'What Indonesians Really Think About *The Act of Killing*,' *The Guardian*, March 6, 2014, accessed September 19, 2018, www.theguardian.com/film/2014/mar/05/act-of-killing-screening-in-indonesia.
12. Laurie Sears, 'Heroes as Killers or Killers as Heroes?,' *Critical Asian Studies* 46, no. 1 (2014): 204–207.
13. Adam Shatz, 'Joshua Oppenheimer Won't Go Back to Indonesia,' *The New York Times*, July 9, 2015, accessed September 19, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2015/07/12/magazine/joshua-oppenheimer-wont-go-back-to-indonesia.html.
14. Cf. Heryanto, 'The 1965–6 Killings: Facts and Fictions in Dangerous Liaisons' and the special issue of *Critical Asian Studies* 46, no. 1 (2014): 145–207.
15. Benedict Anderson, 'Impunity,' in *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory and the Performance of Violence*, eds. Joram ten Brink and Joshua Oppenheimer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 268–286 (274).
16. It is also worth noting that *The Act of Killing* is not the first documentary to feature 1965 killers or witnesses testifying to the killing of neighbours with ease and without remorse, including the television news report by Ted Yates, 'Indonesia: The Troubled Victory,' *NBC*, 1967, accessed September 19, 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=DI42TlCZcik.
17. Jesse Hicks, 'How Murderers Tell Stories: Director Joshua Oppenheimer on "The Act of Killing",' *The Verge*, July 23, 2013, accessed September 19, 2018, www.theverge.com/2013/7/23/4546638/how-murderers-tell-stories-director-joshua-oppenheimer-on-the-act-of-killing.
18. In a critique of the Gramscian hegemony thesis, Scott argues for the existence of autonomous consciousness and social space for the subordinated groups, such as the peasants he studied, which enables them to reject their subordination if in small, organized, and non-confrontational fashion. James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). Elsewhere, I argue that even if Scott's peasants indeed have the agency to exert small-scale resistance, that does not invalidate the Gramscian hegemony thesis. Cf. Ariel Heryanto, *State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia: Fatally Belonging* (London: Routledge, 2006): 181–184.
19. Jean Baudrillard, *The Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 43.
20. Achille Mbembe, 'The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarity in the Postcolony,' trans. Janet Roitman, *Public Culture* 4 (Spring 1992): 1–30 (1–2).
21. Joshua Oppenheimer, *The Act of Killing* (Denmark: Final Cut for Real, 2012).
22. Susie Protschky, 'Seductive Landscapes: Gender, Race and European Representations of Nature in the Dutch East Indies in the Late Colonial Period,' *Gender & History* 20 (2008): 372–398.
23. Kevin McDonald, 'Grammars of Violence, Modes of Embodiment and Frontiers of the Subject,' in *War and the Body: Militarisation, Practice and Experience*, ed. Kevin McSorley (London: Routledge, 2013), 138–151 (144).
24. For the infamous case of the Bali bomber's smile, cf. Ariel Heryanto, 'Politically Incorrect Smiles: Bali Incident,' *Jakarta Post*, November 25, 2002, accessed September 19, 2018, https://arielheryanto.files.wordpress.

com/2016/03/2002_11_15_tjp-politically-incorrect-smiles_-bali-incident-c.pdf. In another and more recent case of the Lindt Café hostage (December 15–16, 2014), Man Haron Monis held ten customers and eight employees hostage in a Lindt chocolate café in Sydney. Monis demanded that his message be broadcast on radio. When the police declined his request, Monis became extremely agitated and more violent.

25. Oppenheimer, *The Act of Killing*.
26. I am grateful to Loren Ryter for the privileged access to a copy of his unpublished doctoral thesis. Loren Ryter, *Youth, Gangs, and the State in Indonesia* (PhD diss., University of Washington, Seattle, 2002).
27. In September 2017, the debate was revived by the commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, General Gatot Nurmantyo, who instigated a provocative campaign to have the film screened again, nationwide. While the campaign had the provocative yet familiar appearance of anti-communism, the general public read it as a political attempt by the nearly retiring general to attract public attention in preparation for his ambitious bid for the next presidential election due in 2019.
28. John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 7.
29. I adopted the concept of 'master narrative' from what James Clifford calls 'master script': it functions as a canon, on the basis of which 'a potentially endless exegetical discourse can be generated.' James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 86.
30. Arswendo Atmowiloto, *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1986).
31. Hicks, 'How Murderers Tell Stories: Director Joshua Oppenheimer on "The Act of Killing".'
32. For more details on this aspect, cf. Ariel Heryanto, 'Where Communism Never Dies,' *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, no. 2 (1999): 147–177; Heryanto, *State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia*, chapter 5.
33. Stephen Right, 'Indonesia Selfie Museum Stirs Outrage With Nazi Display,' *Washington Times*, November 10, 2017, accessed September 19, 2018, www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/nov/10/indonesia-selfie-museum-stirs-outrage-with-nazi-di/.
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10 Shaolin Martial Arts Heroes in Industrial Hong Kong

Between Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Globalism

Ricardo K. S. Mak

It is generally assumed that the growing impact of Western, and particularly American, popular culture led to the homogenization of heroes in the era of globalization. Since the 1980s, for instance, Hollywood creations such as John McClane, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and Iron Man, along with the American values they entail, have affected many different regions of the world, including Asia. Once an exporter of martial arts heroes, Hong Kong's market is now entirely dominated by American heroes. In the summer of 2017, *The Fast and Furious 8* and *Wonder Woman*, which premiered in Shanghai on May 15, 2017, more than two weeks before it was shown in the United States, drew huge audiences to Hong Kong's movie theatres.[1] New technologies and globalized marketing strategies helped to develop transcultural and multidimensional narratives for Western heroes that are able to entertain audiences of different cultural backgrounds.[2] At the same time, local and regional heroes have made inroads into the global market by using similar strategies. Although Bruce Lee, who shook the international entertainment world in the 1970s, was from Hong Kong, his films produced as big reverberations in the Western world as in Hong Kong. Jackie Chan, on the other hand, rose to international stardom through his stereotypical Passe-partout/Lau Xing/Tiger#1 role in *Around the World in Eighty Days* (2004) after years of unsuccessful attempts. Yet, this homogenization of hero figures around the globe is countered by many local forces.[3] In the case of India, Bollywood has built up defenders of traditions appealing to the Indian population in the face of the omnipotence of global trends.[4] In general, postcolonial societies that need to fill the cultural void left by the departure of colonial powers tend to construct national heroes to represent new ethics and values.[5]

An analysis of the reinvention of Shaolin martial arts heroes in Hong Kong sheds light on the complex reactions of local cultures to global trends. Martial arts heroes fighting for the common good have a special status among Chinese elites, as well as in Chinese popular culture, although they have lost much of their charm and influence in the face of

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rapid advancement of military technology since the mid-nineteenth century. The popularity of martial arts further declined after the founding of the socialist regime, which strove to remove martial arts clubs because they tended to be closely affiliated with feudal underground societies. For many decades, martial arts were merely a form of exercise and a tool of character building that left little imagination for heroic deeds. Even the Shaolin martial monks, who had long been seen as representatives of the Chinese martial arts traditions, disappeared for quite a while in the everyday life of the people in Mainland China. However, since the late 1970s, the Shaolin legend has re-emerged as a cross-cultural currency that helps reconnect China to the wider world. No matter how little Europeans or Americans may know about China, the image of a Shaolin monk can more or less arouse their imagination about this ancient nation. Unsurprisingly, the world tour of the Shaolin martial monks has been a popular show event for decades. Unintentionally, the Shaolin Monastery has become an economic phenomenon, both globally and in Mainland China. Its base in Dengfeng is

> surrounded by dozens of martial arts schools, where tens of thousands of aspiring athletes vie to become China's martial arts champions. The tourists and the students have transformed the Dengfeng County economy, establishing the temple as its most important financial asset.[6]

In post-industrial Hong Kong, by contrast, the Shaolin legends, whose authenticity and credibility had been strongly disputed by historians in Republican China, evolved into a cultural phenomenon that helped local people to cope with instability and uncertainty arising from the global trend of industrialization and reunification with China. Exploring these complex developments, this chapter will focus on two key questions through a case study of Shaolin figure Huang Feihong: First, what cultural and psychological functions did an imagined martial arts community serve in post-war Hong Kong? Second, how was this cultural import from China reinvented and reimagined to fit Hong Kong's political reality during its late colonial phase and increasing globalization? By addressing these questions, this chapter sheds light on the role of the Shaolin as markers of stability and security in the face of global and local changes. In the context of the increasingly globalized nature of heroic narratives, the case study of Hong Kong shows that local heroic figures and the symbolic meanings they embody continue to be a stabilizing force during actual and perceived periods of crisis. While globalization has affected societies around the world, the significance of local notions of the heroic in Hong Kong hints at the limitations of its cultural impact.

Heroism, Chinese Martial Arts, and the Mystery of the Shaolin Monastery

Nowadays, consumerism dictates almost all aspects of our everyday lives. Apart from this, education, the Internet, and law and order compete to shape our actions and thoughts. Despite all these influences, heroes, regardless of whether they are fictional or living persons, continue to stand for higher values and serve as role models for many. In fact, although men and women of the twenty-first century may no longer need heroes to give meaning to their existence through 'undisciplined squads of emotion,'[7] the tremendous commercial success of Rambo, Superman, and the Avengers, assisted by sophisticated industrial design and market strategies, suggests that fictional figures fighting against injustice can still touch the hearts of millions. In some ways, it is the extraordinariness of heroes that fulfils our hidden desires. Whoever we are, there is a yearning for experience beyond normality that exists deep in our souls. While each of us might strive or become socialized to be 'normal,' we create and/or worship extraordinary heroes or heroines because it is their extraordinariness that seizes our attention.[8] We sometimes derive energy from that extraordinariness because it promises 'not only achievement, but even greatness' out of 'weakness or absence or loss.'[9]

We talk a lot about particular heroic qualities, such as courage, helpfulness, and moral excellence, but, regardless of which specific qualities one emphasizes, heroes tend to be regarded as role models who 'point the way toward doing the right things and doing them well.'[10] Different times call for different types of heroes, and a hero from a specific era can be another's villain. Long perceived as a powerful, successful, and charismatic military leader who created a mighty transcontinental empire in a world of 'widespread warfare, scarce foodstuff and rudimentary health care,'[11] Alexander the Great now appears to peace-loving people of our time as a 'murderer, and in his battles a mass murderer, a lifelong criminal whose crime was the supreme one of war.'[12] On the other hand, in times of unrest, deviants who overturn the existing order, like Eric Hobsbawm's social bandits, are seen 'as heroes, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped, and supported.'[13] Once defenders of national interests, today's war heroes find themselves overshadowed by those 'ingenious men on the home front,'[14] such as inventors, successful manufacturers, and city builders, who stand for the creation of wealth, challengers of premodern social order, and men of peaceful conquest.

How, then, did Chinese martial arts and its cultural legacies compare to Western traditions of heroism? Although great minds in ancient times found in martial arts tremendous cultural value,[15] it was primarily a practical value that sustained the continuous growth of martial arts in China.

Aiming to kill, to incapacitate, or to intimidate opponents, Chinese martial arts were closely related to the military and a range of professions in traditional China. Before the mid-nineteenth century, all members of the Chinese military were trained in the traditional martial arts. It became even more popular when violence enveloped Chinese politics, as was the case in the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368–1644 and 1644–1912).[16] During the sixteenth century and thereafter, battles became a common occurrence in Southeast China, which was plagued by banditry and piracy.[17] As organized crime led to the emergence of professionals such as escorts, bodyguards, and mercenaries, local and guild leaders rushed to hire martial artists to organize self-defence paramilitary groups.[18] In what Peter Lorge called an 'economy of violence,' martial artists attained greater political power and social status.[19]

Although martial arts were primarily a practical means of self-defence, their cultural significance had long been apparent. This is visible in the stage plays and historical fiction created on the basis of heroic deeds of Chinese martial artists. Thanks to the emergence of a prominent print culture since the Ming Dynasty,[20] *wuxia xiaoshuo* (武俠小說; martial arts novels), which told the stories of using *wu* (武; force, violence, or martial arts) to express *xia* (俠; a righteous consciousness and moral quality),[21] grew tremendously in popularity. This new trend gained momentum in Republican China from the reinvention of traditional martial arts, which aimed to create a modern physical culture for the Chinese people. For a while, martial arts seemed to be everywhere, being taught in schools, in the army, and in numerous study groups.[22]

Until today, most martial arts schools in South China trace their roots to the Shaolin Monastery, which is arguably the most famous Buddhist monastery in the world.[23] The saying that 'all types of martial arts originated from Shaolin天下武功出少林' has been widely assumed by the martial arts community. However, records about the monastery remain inconsistent, and there is little evidence to corroborate its stories, particularly those about Shaolin martial arts. According to historical sources, the Shaolin Monastery was built at Mount Song, Henan Province, during the reign of Emperor Xiaowen (467–499) of the Late Wei Dynasty (386–534), when Buddhism gained popularity.[24] In the following centuries, the myth of Bodhidharma grew along with the fame of the Shaolin Monastery. Widely known as an Indian patriarch who came to China at the age of 100, Dharma was said to have shared his Buddhist wisdom with Emperor Wudi (464–549) of the Liang Dynasty (502–587). There were also accounts about his long residence in the Shaolin Monastery, where he left two exercise manuals, *Yijin jing* (易筋經; Sinews changing classic) and *Xisui jing* (洗髓經; Marrow-cleansing classic). These two works, however, were proved to be fabricated in the seventeenth century.[25]

Japanese martial arts historian Ryuchi Matsuda has argued that the Shaolin Monastery was the meeting point, rather than the origin, of

different Chinese martial arts traditions. Violence was always a part of monastic life. To protect their properties, wealthier monasteries usually kept regiments of monk soldiers. Besides, monasteries offered shelter for outlaws, refugees, vagabonds, and bandits, many of whom were well versed in martial arts.[26] Naturally, monasteries thus grew into hubs for collecting and disseminating knowledge about martial arts. For different reasons, monk soldiers occasionally provided military services for the state. The most prominent among them were the monk soldiers of Wutai Shan, in Shanxi Province, who joined forces with the army of the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127) to resist the Jurchen invaders—these mysterious monks also having played a crucial role in the Ming Dynasty's century-long campaign against Japanese pirates. Such achievements propelled the Shaolin Monastery to prominence as a leading representative of Chinese martial arts and defenders of unrest.

Putting aside legends and stories delivered orally by great martial arts masters, the foregoing stories are probably all we know about the relationship between the Shaolin Monastery and Chinese martial arts before the late Ming Dynasty. In the mid-seventeenth century, Cao Huandou authored *Quanjing quanfa beiyao* (拳經拳法備要; Hand combat classic, a collection of hand combat methods), which, for the first time, attributed, albeit without substantial evidence, all hand combat forms to the Shaolin Monastery.[27] *Tiandihui* (天地會; Society of Heaven and Earth), an anti-Manchu secret society founded in the Fujian Province around 1762, expanded the myth of Shaolin martial arts by creating a new legend about the Fujian Shaolin Monastery. According to a document from *Tiandihui*, monk soldiers of the Fujian Shaolin Monastery helped the Qing government to punish a rebellious vassal on the western frontier, only to arouse the suspicion of Emperor Kangxi (1654–1722), who later sent a large army to burn Fujian Shaolin Monastery to the ground. The only five secular Shaolin disciples, Chua Teck Tiong (蔡德忠), Hong Dai Ang (方大洪), Ma Chew Heng (馬超興), Ho Teck Deh (胡德帝), and Lee Si Kai (李式開), who survived the disaster swore to throw themselves into the mission of overthrowing the Qing Dynasty and restoring the Ming Dynasty. Widely acclaimed as the 'Five Ancestors of Shaolin,' they were seen not only as the founders of *Tiandihui* but also as the grandmasters of Shaolin martial arts in South China.[28]

However, not every serious martial artist believes this story to be true. For instance, Tang Hao (唐豪;1887–1959) questioned the authenticity of the Fujian Shaolin Monastery. He went on to criticize martial artists in late Qing for claiming themselves to be heirs of the Shaolin tradition in order to gain prestige and to attract more students.[29] Qin Baoqi (秦寶琦), an expert in Chinese secret societies, concluded after years of research that the founders of *Tiandihui*, most of whom were men of humble origin, forged the story of the 'Five Ancestors' by mixing fictional tales, anti-Manchu sentiments, and Shaolin legends to gain wider

support.[30] Nonetheless, the story of the 'Five Ancestors,' enriched by characters and details provided by an eighteenth-century popular novel entitled *Shengchao dingsheng wannianqing* (聖朝鼎盛萬年青; Long live the Holy Dynasty), continued to evolve in the following centuries. In that novel, fictional Shaolin martial artists Zen master Zhishan (至善), Hong Xiguan (洪熙官), Fang Shiyu (方世玉), and Hu Huiqian (胡惠乾) appeared for the first time, albeit as villains. At the turn of the twentieth century, when the anti-Manchu revolutionary movement gained support, these Shaolin martial artists were reinvented as folk heroes struggling for the restoration of a Han-led state.[31] The novel's impact was considerable, since its account of the lives and the genealogy of Shaolin martial artists, as well as the types and characteristics of Shaolin martial arts, provides ingredients for martial arts novels and films until today. Exceptionally, although diverse elements are incorporated into every new interpretation, references to the Shaolin as heroic defenders of the weak and guardians against unrest have remained consistent.

Shaolin Martial Arts Heroes Between Tradition and Industrialization

Many martial arts schools in South China trace their origin to the dubious Southern Shaolin Monastery in Fujian, but only the Hunggar Kuen (洪家拳; Hong Family Fist) presents a clear and direct line of descendants from the Southern Shaolin Monastery. Of the Hunggar Kuen lineage, created out of details from *Shengchao dingsheng wannianqing*, Huang Feihong (黃飛鴻; 1856–1925) and Lin Shirong (林世榮; 1861–1943) have been proven to be authentic figures.[32] Partly deviating from the story provided by *Tiandihui*, the Hunggar Kuen legend stated that after the demolition of the Southern Shaolin Monastery, Zen master Zhishan fled with a group of secular disciples to Guangdong, where they continued their resistance against the Qing government and spread Shaolin martial arts. The death of Zen master Zhishan and most Shaolin secular disciples left Hong Xiguan to continue the lone battle and to redesign Shaolin martial arts into Hunggar Kuen. Regardless of the story's validity, the popularity of Hunggar Kuen grew tremendously in South China in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, with Huang Feihong as its representative. Huang's disciple Lin Shirong moved in the first decade of the twentieth century to Hong Kong, where he made Hunggar Kuen a world-renowned martial arts style.[33]

In Hong Kong, Hong Xiguan and Huang Feihong, who have been generally regarded as the founder and the great grand master of Hunggar Kuen respectively, stood out among Shaolin martial arts heroes for over half a century. Two interrelated questions deserve our attention: First, why did traditional martial arts heroes remain popular in post-war Hong Kong, which, for many, was or was becoming a Westernized

industrial metropolis? Second, why did the fame of Huang Feihong, who became the subject of numerous films that were produced after 1949, outlast that of other Shaolin martial arts heroes? It is true that under British rule, post-war Hong Kong slowly became an integral part of the global economic system. However, the claim that in the post-war era 'a stiff cultural boundary was formed, differentiating Mainland China and colonial Hong Kong'[34] overlooks Hong Kong's strong traditions and its cultural ties with South China. Globalization, as Anthony Giddens maintains, gradually transforms rather than homogenizes different traditions. Post-war Hong Kong, therefore, saw the persistence of Chinese values, customs, and ways of life, which were reinforced by various factors.[35] Demographically, despite the socialist regime's isolation policy in its first two decades, over 1 million people in South China moved to Hong Kong during this period.[36] Many of these new immigrants shared with the local people a 'heritage of shared doctrines and varied beliefs, social and economic practices, and well-ordered local organization,'[37] which was particularly visible in rural Hong Kong. Moreover, economic historians are now quite convinced that the industriousness and traditional ethos of the Chinese population, rather than the colonial rule, were the moving force of Hong Kong's successful economic take-off.[38] The colonial government left the cultural and everyday life of the Hong Kong Chinese untouched as long as law and order were maintained. [39]Unsurprisingly, despite the arrival of Western celebrities, such as Elvis Presley and Elisabeth Taylor, and heroic figures, such as the characters played by John Wayne or Batman, traditional figures, such as Shaolin martial arts heroes, stayed in the hearts of many Hong Kong people.

Ultimately, it was post-war Hong Kong's popular culture that further consolidated the mythical fame of the Shaolin martial art heroes. Reproducing the fictional materials about Shaolin legends and heroes, a number of writers in the Guangdong Province and Hong Kong, including Deng Yugong (鄧羽公; 192?–196?), Dai Zhaoyu (戴昭宇; ?–196?), Yang Daming (楊大名; ?–?), Chen Jing (陳勁; ?–?), and Xu Kairu (許凱如; ?–?), created the 'Guangdong school of martial arts novels' during the interwar years. After the founding of the new socialist regime, Zhu Yuzhai (朱愚齋; 1892–1984) and some of the writers mentioned earlier continued this literary tradition in Hong Kong. Zhu Yuzai, being a disciple of Lin Shirong and a grand-disciple of Huang Feihong, was probably the person who most strongly emphasized the relationship between the Southern Shaolin Monastery and Hunggar Kuen in his works. Primarily because of Zhu's writings and his connection with the Hong Kong film industry, Huang Feihong became a leading character in over 80 films, many of them blockbusters, and a large number of radio shows and comics.[40]

It is to be emphasized that the stories of heroes live on when they meet cultural and psychological needs of their admirers and worshippers, and this is probably the reason why Huang Feihong could have

more sustainable influence than Hong Xiguan and other Shaolin martial artists. Obviously, even if Hong Xiguan and his company were real historical figures, they stood for a mythical past and anti-Manchu sentiments which were far too remote from mid-twentieth-century Hong Kong citizens, particularly the post-war generations experiencing Hong Kong's transformation into an industrial and well-governed metropolis.[41] Apart from honouring him as the founder of their martial arts school, it was hard for even the staunchest practitioners of Hunggar Kuen in post-war Hong Kong to find modern-day meaning in the life stories of Hong Xiguan. Similarly, monk soldiers were distant figures, and monks, regardless of whether they were martial artists, were never respectable figures in Chinese society.[42] For this reason, films like *How Shaolin Monastery Was Reduced to Ashes* (1950) and *Fang Shiyu Rescues Hong Xiguan* (1956) could not repeat the success of the Huang Feihong series.

By contrast, Huang Feihong, whose stories were told in bits and pieces not only by Zhu Yuzhai but also by Lin Zu (1910–2012), the nephew of Lin Shirong, and Li Canwo (李燦窩), godson of Huang Feihong's last wife, was a flesh-and-blood protagonist. Impressionistic and fragmented though these records were, they contained details about Huang Feihong's different phases of life. As far as historical sources can tell, Huang Feihong was a boxer of obscure origin who started his martial arts career as a street performer and martial arts instructor. He made his name during the Sino-French War, in 1885, when he was recruited to train the Chinese army in Taiwan. He returned to Canton to run his own clinic, only to see it being burnt to the ground during a political crisis in 1924. Huang Feihong passed away penniless the following year, leaving behind a wife, who continued to teach Hunggar Kuen in Hong Kong.[43] The popularity of the Huang Feihong story in the post-war era showed that Hong Kong residents, many of whom continued to maintain emotional and cultural attachment to the life in the Pearl River Region,[44] still yearned for a folk hero fighting different kinds of injustices and providing peace, order, and security in a rapidly changing world.[45]

Director Hu Peng (胡鵬; 1910–2000), who produced 59 Huang Feihong films between 1949 and 1967, and broadcaster Zhong Weiming (鍾偉明; 1931–2009) used fictional and historical sources to create an ordinary hero with extraordinary qualities. The new Huang Feihong was no longer a mid-Qing Shaolin martial arts hero who strove to restore the Ming Dynasty, but rather a paternalistic local elder advocating down-to-earth virtues, such as fairness, kindliness, and humility, in late nineteenth-century rural Guangdong. There, modernity was slow to make any impact, which spurred struggles among different martial arts clubs for material interests, while leaving intact firmly rooted social problems, such as the tyranny of bureaucrats, social and sexual inequality, prostitution, gambling, and opium-smoking. With great gentleness, Huang Feihong tolerated these evils as long as common people could

earn a living. Sometimes, he retreated in the face of threats and humiliations in order to avoid conflicts in his community. It was only as a last resort that he made use of his superb martial arts skills to resolve local disputes, to protect the weak, and to restore the social equilibrium upset by the villains.[46] His benevolence even moved him to forgive his enemies if they showed remorse and repented. As 'a proud exemplar of both China's national traditions and Guangdong's provincial culture,'[47] Huang Feihong remained an iconic hero in industrializing Hong Kong for more than three decades. He encapsulated these traditional values of justice and humility that Chinese migrants yearned for in an increasingly industrial world, and mirrored the desires of these people for a society guarded by such traditional-minded men.

Shaolin Martial Arts Heroes as Rebels Against Modernity

After the 1960s, however, Shaolin martial arts heroes lost much of their relevance in Hong Kong. The country's gradual build-up of capital and industrial capacity since the 1950s, the growing global demand for cost-effective 'made in Hong Kong' manufactured products, the social reforms launched by its government after the riots of 1967,[48] and the assiduous contributions of Hong Kong's entrepreneurs and its workforce led to an industrial take-off in the 1970s that drastically transformed the way of life there. Hong Kong people found themselves living in a modern city in which traces of traditional culture were either marginalized or commercialized. Local-born generations knew the Rolling Stones and King Kong much better than communist China, which was depicted by international media, particularly during the Cultural Revolution, as a place to stay away from. The sun never set in Hong Kong, where all the types of entertainment one could dream of kept running around the clock. For instance, in the 1980s, the Hong Kong film industry annually produced 200 films, with comedy, action, and gangster films as its signature genres.[49] In addition to entertaining overseas Chinese communities, they drew the attention of audiences from different countries, such as Thailand, Singapore, Australia, and, above all, Japan and Hollywood,[50] making Hong Kong 'the world's third largest film producer (behind India and the United States of America) and the second largest film exporter.'[51] In the last quarter of the twentieth century, Hong Kong television production and Canto pop swept over all Chinese-speaking areas.

Against the backdrop of such fundamental changes, it was difficult to imagine that Hong Kong's younger residents would care about Shaolin martial arts heroes at all. Ironically, it was Bruce Lee who, while creating the worldwide 'kung fu' craze in the 1970s, simultaneously demythicized traditional Chinese martial arts and their legends, thus also helping to turn them into a global commodity. Under his influence, martial arts

reached unprecedented heights in the early 1970s. When 'everybody was kung fu fighting,'[52] several dozens of Shaolin films were produced during this period, but few of them, overshadowed by Bruce Lee's gigantic impact, could claim real market success. Although trained in his earlier years in various forms of Chinese martial arts, Bruce Lee, who joined the University of Washington as a drama major in 1962,[53] 'had become dissatisfied with its set patterns and lack of practical training' during his times in the United States.[54] The encounter with a range of Chinese, East Asian, and Western martial arts[55] inspired him to develop his own Jeet Kune Do, as he sought to find a form of martial arts that could transcend the boundaries between the different schools.[56] Legends of martial arts heroes meant little to him because what he needed were skills, training methods, and other means that could make him faster, more agile, more confident, and more powerful.[57] As Bruce Thomas has argued, Lee challenged in real life the old guards of traditional martial arts who were 'lazy,' had 'big fat guts,' and talked 'about chi power things.'[58] As early as in the American-produced *Green Hornet* television series in the 1960s, Lee's character Kato easily beat up traditional martial artists.[59] His movies were 'not set in fifteenth century China' and 'did not involve Shaolin monks or noble warriors on their quests to defend the honors of the emperor.'[60] Instead, the films created a global martial arts arena in which Hong Kong judo expert Feng Yi, American karate champions Chuck Norris and Robert Wall, and Korean hapkido grandmasters Hwang Insik and Ji Han-jae demonstrated their skills and power. American and Korean audiences chanted Bruce Lee's name when he demolished martial artists of their own countries.

Chinese martial arts never rose as high as Bruce Lee did. In a way, Hong Kong loved Bruce Lee as much as foreign audiences did, but his local cultural impact began to unfold only much later on.[61] The kung fu craze faded quietly after his tragic death, and martial arts clubs and schools in Hong Kong, which had experienced a short-lived boom, soon closed down one after another.[62] Gone were radio dramas and martial arts novels about the Shaolin martial arts heroes, and kung fu comics were believed to be for children and had quite a negative image.[63] It is not an exaggeration to say that Shaolin legends were remade in the 1970s single-handedly by director Liu Jialiang (Lau Kar-leung), who himself was a Hunggar master. From 1974 to 1975, he cooperated as choreographer and martial arts expert with director Chang Che to produce seven Shaolin films, four of which were among the yearly top 20 movies. He later parted ways with Chang Che to direct his own Shaolin films, through which he revitalized the outworn legends. Po Fung, a researcher of Hong Kong martial arts films, said, 'Bruce Lee brought kung fu cinema to the world's attention with its own school of modernized and mixed martial arts, but Lau's films show the authentic roots and his true lineage of kung fu.'[64]

In fact, Liu was fighting an uphill battle, striving to use the Shaolin martial heroes to reemphasize the inner essence of Chinese martial arts, including their heritage, skills, power, training methods, spiritual cultivation, and the traditional master-apprentice relationship, all of which gradually faded in industrial Hong Kong. Although his films rehashed the old stories of Shaolin martial arts heroes' armed confrontations with the Qing government and their mission of restoring the Ming Dynasty, Liu, in each of his early collaborations with director Chang Che, strove to highlight characteristics and training methods of different schools of Chinese martial arts. In the *Five Shaolin Ancestors* (1974), the training methods and practicality of the Shaolin long pole, the three-sectional chain whip, and the tiger-and-crane style were vividly demonstrated. Similarly, *Hung Kuen and Wing Tsun* (1974) featured not only these two types of martial arts styles but also eagle claws, iron shirt, and other styles. Indeed, the signature of Liu's films soon became a prelude where different martial arts styles were demonstrated. Moreover, his heartfelt appreciation of and nostalgia for the traditional master-disciple relationship thrilled thousands of fans—in the Chinese-speaking world as well as overseas.[65] Traditional masters, as Liu's films showed, were not only teachers of martial arts but also mentors and role models who represented order, wisdom, and authority.[66] While it was incumbent upon the masters to initiate disciples into the secrets of martial arts and the mysteries of life, disciples felt obliged to obey, support, and maintain the masters.[67]

In addition to elaborating on the themes discussed earlier, Liu went further in his own films produced after 1975 to show how martial arts helped its practitioners to cultivate such qualities as kindliness, humility, self-knowledge, and forgiveness, which were core elements of traditional Chinese culture but gradually disappeared in modern society.[68] In two films, *Challenge of the Masters* (1976) and *Martial Club* (1981), which focused on the early life of Huang Feihong, Liu depicted a restless young man who grew through tough training and self-enlightenment into an ideal martial artist with great combative skills and the aforementioned virtues. Being a confident, self-disciplined man with a deep sense of honour and integrity, Huang Feihong resolved difficult situations with his superior martial arts skills, and educated his friends as well as enemies with his heart of forgiveness. Although being remade in 1978 with the traditional plot of the Shaolin legend, *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin*, which made the main actor Gordon Liu an international star, echoed the foregoing two films by emphasizing the major character Monk San De's spiritual transformation during his long and tough martial arts training.

Taken together, Liu's Shaolin martial arts heroes stood up for traditional norms and values at a time when many, particularly young people, believed these values to be obsolete.[69] These films continued to appeal to Chinese communities who saw China as their home: Not only did the familiar scenes of Southern China life bring a sense of ease but also, most

importantly, knowing that Huang Feihong held onto and stayed true to old values that seemed to be disappearing in reality provided temporary reassurance. The widening gap between their rural pasts and urban present, as well as between the older and younger generations, which was intensified by Hong Kong's financial advancement in the 1970s and 1980s, had caused much social unease. This would be further exacerbated by Hong Kong's uncertain future in view of the 1997 handover.

Shaolin Martial Arts Heroes as Defenders of Local Values in Late Colonial Hong Kong

In a sense, the global trend of decolonization reached its final phase in the last decades of the twentieth century, when most Western powers abandoned direct rule over their territories in Asia, Africa, and South America. The postcolonial nations seized the opportunity to create new forms of self-government and 'postcolonial culture which radically revised the ethos and ideologies of the colonial state.'[70] Possessing an implicit self-identity built upon economic achievement, a pragmatic mindset, and a sophisticated lifestyle, the people of Hong Kong, which was one of the most prosperous cities in Asia in the 1980s, had no such luck.[71] The signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, which decided on Hong Kong's eventual unification with China on July 1, 1997, under the 'one country, two systems' principle, promised only 'a high degree' of autonomy under China, causing many Hong Kong people to distance themselves from the agreement because of China's economic backwardness, social collectivism, and totalitarian governance. While some were so optimistic as to believe that 'horse racing and night life will go on as usual'[72] after 1997, others rushed to seek safe havens in Canada, Australia, Singapore, and even lesser-known island countries in the Pacific, particularly after the Chinese leadership brutally suppressed the democratic movement in China in the summer of 1989. If the task of building a democratic system to preserve political autonomy and to resist intervention from Beijing was an unrealistic one, some turned to the so-called *mo lei tau* (nonsensical) culture that penetrated films, comics, and popular literature to laugh away their anxiety.[73] Many others were caught between hedonism and nostalgic imagination of the good old days. Chinese martial arts, along with their legends, whose long-acclaimed lethality was destroyed in the modern ring dominated by Muay Thai boxers, lost its relevance in this political context. But it was in this time that Jet Li and Vincent Zhao, both of whom acted in a range of Shaolin films, turned these martial arts heroes into political symbols that not only represented the confusion and uncertainty among Hong Kong people but also fought, probably in vain, to defend Hong Kong's local values.

Jet Li became the new Huang Feihong in the first three sequels of the *Once Upon a Time in China* series, which was produced by the

American-educated director Tsui Hark. Being fond of Chinese culture and history, Tsui Hark strove to create for his films a 'national style' that appealed to foreign audiences. But what impressed film critic Stephen Teo most was the confrontation between nationalism and local interests in Tsui Hark's films.[74] In fact, reflected in *Once Upon a Time in China* was the interpenetration of events in modern Chinese history and the sentiments of the Hong Kong people in the 1990s. In the first sequel (1991), equating Hong Kong during the last phase of British rule with the declining Chinese Empire in the late nineteenth century, Tsui Hark kept lamenting the end of an era. In his telling, it was a good time and a bad time, the best of times and the worst of times, depending on who you were. It was a good time for opportunists to seize power and public authority. It was probably the best time for Western business sharks and their Chinese collaborators to grab the last bits of profit before packing up and moving somewhere else. However, it was a bad time for able politicians, no matter whether conservative or reform-minded, to find ways to rebuild the political order. It was, of course, the worst time for the common people, who stood hopelessly watching in awe and astonishment as all kinds of tremendous changes swirled around them. Tsui Hark's Huang Feihong loved his country, stood up to defeat local as well as foreign villains, helped responsible officials to carry out their duties, and saved lives using his superior martial arts skills—but, like most Hong Kong people during the pre-unification era, he felt lost in a familiar yet strange new world.

Two groups in the second sequel (1992), in which Huang Feihong fought the extreme xenophobic White Lotus sect, represented Hong Kong people's polarized attitudes towards the year 1997, which was coming closer and closer. On the one side were the followers of the White Lotus sect, who found escape in fanaticism in a time of confusion and disorder. On the other side stood a group of Westernized and well-educated Chinese who were ready to contribute their visions and knowledge to the development of China. In two scenes respectively, Huang Feihong fought hard against bands of the White Lotus sect to protect medical students of the University of Hong Kong and a group of schoolboys from *Tongwen Guan*, which was China's first official Western learning institute. He did so because he was told that these Western-educated people, probably symbolizing Hong Kong, were the future of China. Tsui Hark's confidence in Hong Kong was shown in the last scene after the myths of the White Lotus sect were fully exposed. By telling people who had gathered around to help themselves instead of relying on God, Huang Feihong reaffirmed the once overwhelming faith that Hong Kong people could withstand every sort of hardship and difficulty all by themselves.

Jason Ingrain believes that the *Once Upon a Time in China* series constructs a Chinese community which 'emphasizes the value of tradition while also remaining open to other cultures,'[75] and thus welcomes Hong

Kong people's return. However, his observation is valid for the first two sequels only. Tsui Hark's confidence in Hong Kong was overshadowed by a sense of uncertainty in the third (1993) and fifth sequels (1994), in which the 1997 agenda echoed stronger than ever. In the third sequel, Huang Feihong symbolized the anxiety and embarrassing situations endured by Hong Kong people in the 1990s. He led a Cantonese team to participate in a lion dance competition in Beijing, only to be brushed aside by rich Mandarin-speaking people. He fought hard, but in vain, to interfere with secret negotiations (about Hong Kong?) between Chinese officials and Western diplomats. The fifth sequel, starring Vincent Zhao, depicted Hong Kong on the eve of the unification with China. Huang Feihong, his disciples, and a small group of local people succeeded in defending a small and isolated island (Hong Kong?) against invading pirates after its magistrate had fled, only to see it become an arena for new power struggles after his departure.[76] Huang Feihong's tragic story, as that of Hong Kong's, continued.

Reaching its extreme form at the turn of the twenty-first century, *mo lei tau* culture mocked everything and created nonsense and absurdity out of nothing, only to provoke laughter into which many Hong Kong people escaped.[77] 'Respect' meant little and everyone and everything could be made fun of. Hong Xiguan, Fang Shiyu, and Huang Feihong had once stood for collective hopes and values, but now they were ridiculed. The Shaolin martial artists in Hong Kong's film industry, which was good at producing and repackaging heroes, had gone from celebrated villain-fighting heroes to ridiculed characters in productions like *Once Upon a Time a Hero in China* (1992) and *The Legend* (1992). Did Hong Kong no longer need heroes by this time? The answer is no, because Hollywood heroes were popular and Shaolin characters were seen fighting supernatural creatures in 1994's *The New Legend of Shaolin*. The rising popularity of *mo lei tau* culture, however, had seeped into the mentality of Hong Kong locals; absurdity, nonsense, and a comical way of approaching life had become the desired 'abnormalities' of the day. Perhaps in the face of an uncontrollable future, the increasing despair of Hong Kong people had gradually swallowed all signs of hope and justice. Heroes were no longer as convincing as they had once been—their function of countering feelings of hopelessness now replaced by a sense of dark humour.

Conclusion

Through time, the 'story' of the Shaolin martial arts heroes evolved across different temporal and geographical spaces, and grown with various communities. The global emergence and rise of industrialization and consumption lifestyles during the post-war era helped shape different heroes, but it is the reinvention of Shaolin martial artists as highly 'local'

heroes that reflects the significance of heroism, regardless of a particular historical development. This is especially true in times of uncertainty and change, both of which Hong Kong consistently experienced from the 1960s onwards. Hong Kong's Shaolin martial arts heroes fought the global trend of homogeneity and decline of local culture. Particularly before the 1997 handover, they continued to fight for justice and expressed the grievances of Hong Kong people about the prospect of an uncertain future.

As the case of Huang Feihong shows, heroes can change through the passing of time. Globalization has not only created a new platform for heroism where on-screen heroes have thousands of supporters from around the world off-screen but also revealed that human desires for heroic figures have always transcended geographical and temporal borders. From a psychological perspective, heroes represent strength and hope, and, as mirrored by martial arts heroes, they symbolize traditional values and stability. Since the late twentieth century, the emergence of the Internet and the rate of information flow have made heroes all the more important. People and communities need cultural anchors to feel secure, stable, and in control. As in the case of the Shaolin martial arts heroes, their undying determination to defend against evil and to uphold traditional values has been well received by Chinese audiences in a turbulent Hong Kong.

Globalization has brought about a tide of homogeneity in terms of cultural production. Huang Feihong was certainly neither anti-global nor anti-change. Bruce Lee, although highly innovative and 'international,' was, however, too out of touch with Hong Kong's developments to create resonance. Huang Feihong, like most Hong Kong people, strived to move forward in a world of unfamiliarity and transition. It was this mix of courage and vulnerability, strength and humbleness—all rooted in Chinese tradition—that elevated Huang to such prominence. In this process, traditional values remain but new ideas have been incorporated. Although not without conflicts, Huang Feihong worked well together with his Western-educated disciple 'Bucktooth' Su, and his lover Aunt 13. While he stood firmly in the Chinese medical tradition, he slowly realized the importance of its Western counterpart (sequel 2 of Tsui Hark's *Once Upon a Time in China*). He eventually learned how to use modern firearms to defend a small island against pirate raids (sequel 5 of *Once Upon a Time in China*). Traditions and local interests remained his core values, but he was receptive to change.

Notes

1. 'The Top 10 Hong Kong Box Office Hits of the First Half of 2017, From Beauty and the Beast to Love Off the Cuff,' *South China Morning Post*, July 4, 2017, last accessed February 3, 2018, www.scmp.com/culture/film-tv/article/2101216/top-10-hong-kong-box-office-hits-first-half-2017-beauty-and-beast.

2. Mariam Butt and Kyle Wohlmut, 'The Thousand Faces of Xena: Transculturality through Multi-Identity,' in *Globalization, Cultural Identities and Media Representations*, eds. Natascha Gentz and Stefan Kramer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 81.
3. Peter Burke, *What Is Cultural History?*, 2nd ed. (London: Polity Press, 2008), 25.
4. Rini Bhattacharya Mehta, 'Bollywood, Nation, Globalization: An Incomplete Introduction,' in *Bollywood and Globalization: Indian Popular Cinema, Nation, and Diaspora*, eds. Rini Bhattacharya Mehta, Rajeshwari V. Pandharipande, and Rajeshwari Pandharipande (London: Anthem Press, 2011), 7.
5. Cf., for instance, Ian Fairweather, 'Missionaries and Colonialism in a Postcolonial Museum: Or, How a Finnish Peasant Can Become an African Folk Hero,' *Social Analysis* 48 (Spring 2004): 16–32; Maria Theresa Valenzuela, 'Constructing National Heroes: Postcolonial Philippines and Cuban Biographies of Jose Rizal and Jose Marti,' *Biography* 37 (2014): 745–761.
6. Meir Shahar, *The Shaolin Monastery: History, Religion, and the Chinese Martial Arts* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 195.
7. Gerald M. Pomper, *Ordinary Heroes and American Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 13.
8. Judith A. Schwartz and Richard B. Schwartz, *The Wounds That Heal: Heroism and Human Development* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2010), 4.
9. Ibid.
10. Scott T. Allison and George R. Goethals, *Heroes: What They Do and Why We Need Them* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 207.
11. M. Gregory Kendrick, *Western Archetypes from the Greeks to the Present: The Heroic Ideal* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 13.
12. Paul Johnson, *Heroes: From Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar to Churchill and De Gaulle* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 39.
13. Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York: New Press, 2000), 20.
14. Christine MacLeod, *Heroes of Invention: Technology, Liberalism and British Identity, 1750–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3.
15. Thomas A. Green, ed., *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1 (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2001), xvi; Graham Priest and Damon Young, *Martial Arts and Philosophy: Beating and Nothingness* (Chicago: Open Court, 2010), x; C. A. Simpkins and A. M. Simpkins, 'Confucianism and Martial Traditions,' *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* 16 (2007): 51–57.
16. Peter Allan Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts: From Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 164.
17. There seems to exist a consensus among historians that the so-called *wokou* (Japanese pirates), who regularly raided the Fujian and Zhejiang and Guangdong provinces in the sixteenth century, were a mixture of Japanese soldiers and ronin, European merchants and inhabitants of coastal China who were impoverished by the Ming's government's sea ban policy. Cf. Kwan-wai So, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China during the 16th Century* (East Lansing: Michigan University Press, 1975).
18. On the rise of *tuanlian* (local militia) in Guangdong, cf. Anthony Robert, 'State, Community, and Pirate Suppression in Guangdong Province, 1809–1910,' *Late Imperial China* 27 (June 2006): 1–30. On the participation of martial groups in the Chinese underworld, cf. Qin Baoqi, *Jianghu sanbainian: Ccong banghui dao hei shehui* (Three Hundred Years of Underworld: From Bands to Triads) (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Limited, 2012).
19. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*, 164.
20. In Lucille Chia and Hilde de Weerdt, *Knowledge and Text Production in an Age of Print: China 900–1400* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), the authors highlight

how the improvement in printing technology and in the book production process and shipping helped create a new print culture facilitating knowledge transfer.

21. Chen Pingyuan, *The Development of Chinese Martial Arts Fictions*, trans. Victor Peterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 8.
22. Luo Shiming, *Aoyun laidao zhongguo* (Olympism Comes to China) (Beijing: Qinghua University Press, 2005), 175–176.
23. The prominent schools among them include Hungkuen, Wing Tsun, Northern and Southern Mantis, Choy-Lee-Fat, Lungying (dragon style), and Choi-Mok.
24. Wu Gu and Liu Zhixue, eds., *Shaolin Si ziliao ji* (Collection of Sources About the Shaolin Monastery) (Beijing: Xinhua Book Store, 1982), 1–15.
25. For a summary of the major arguments, see Gong Pengcheng, *Wuyi: xia de wushu gongfa congtan* (Martial Arts: Essays on Knights-Errant and Their Training and Fighting Skills) (Taibei: Eastbooks, 2013), 13–45.
26. Ryuchi Matsuda, *Zhongguo wushu shi lüe* (A Brief History of Chinese Martial Arts), trans. Lü Yan (Chengdu: Sichuan Science and Technology Press, 1984).
27. Cao Huandou, *Quanjing quanfa beiyao* (Hand Combat Classic, Collection of Hand Combat Methods), Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books (Beijing: Erudition, since 1998), retrieved on October 25, 2017.
28. Lam Chun Fai, *Hung Kuen Fundamentals: Gung Gee Fok Fu Kuen* (Hong Kong: International Guoshu Association, 2013), 19. Since the founding of the Qing Dynasty, Ming loyalists who continued their struggle against the Manchu rulers used the slogan 'overthrowing the Qing Dynasty and restoring the Ming Dynasty' to gain support. The Ming loyalists' movement soon died down, but this slogan has been used widely in martial arts novels, comics, and movies until the present day.
29. Tang Hao, *Shaolin quanshu miju kaozheng* (A Critical Study of the Secret of Shaolin Hand Combat) (Shanghai: Shanghai Society for the Advancement of Chinese Martial Arts, 1941), 90–138.
30. Qin Baoqi, *Jianghu sanbai nian: cong banghui dao heishehui* (Three Hundred Years of Jianghu: From Secret Societies to Triads) (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Limited, 2012), 10–13.
31. From 2011 to 2014, Huang Zhongming penned a series of articles in *Wenhuibao* (Hong Kong), in which he analysed the changing images of Shaolin martial heroes in novels.
32. The complete lineage runs as follows: Zhishan Zen master (Shaolin Monk), Hong Xiguan (a secular Shaolin disciple), Lu Acai (junior fellow of Hong Xiguan and the master of Huang Qiying), Huang Qiying (the father of Huang Feihong), Huang Feihong (1856–1925), and Lin Shirong (1861–1943).
33. Fai, *Hung Kuen Fundamentals*, 30.
34. Eric Kit-wai Ma, *Desiring Hong Kong, Consuming South China: Transborder Cultural Politics, 1970–2010* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 2012), 1.
35. Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalization Is Reshaping Our Lives* (New York: Routledge, 2000), chapter 3.
36. Pauline H. M. Tse and George C. S. Lin, 'Flexible Sojourners: The Cross-Border Flow of People from Hong Kong to Guangdong Province, China,' in *Developing a Competitive Pearl River Delta in South China under One Country, Two Systems*, eds. Anthony G. O. Yeh et al. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 175–200, 177.
37. James Hayes, *South China Village Culture* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2001), back cover.

38. Mark Hampton, *Hong Kong and British Culture 1945–1997* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 42–43.
39. Steve Tsang, 'Government and Politics in Hong Kong: A Colonial Paradox,' in *Hong Kong's Transitions, 1842–1997*, eds. Judith M. Brown and Rosemary Foot (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 62–83, 65.
40. Martial artist Guan Dexing alone starred in 75 Huang Feihong films from 1949 to 1970, according to the *Hong Kong Movie Database*, http://hkmdb.com/db/search/results/jsec5F5gixotbMZAKQsZMQ-1.mhtml, last accessed October 30, 2017. Zhong Weiming, who was known to be the 'the King of Broadcasting' in Hong Kong, made his name by producing a range of radio dramas about the Shaolin martial arts heroes; cf. 'Chung Wai-ming,' *Wikipedia*, last accessed October 1, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chung_Wai-ming. Wendy Siuyi Wong has extensively studied Hong Kong martial arts comics in Part 3 of her *Hong Kong Comics: A History of Manhua* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002).
41. Recent studies on Hong Kong identity emphasize Hong Kong baby boomers' emotional and cultural detachment from China. Benefitting from economic growth but having been educated in an ahistorical and apolitical manner, they 'had a vague or fragmented understanding of China's past and present and little real experience in China.' Law Wing Sang, 'Decolonisation Deferred: Hong Kong Identity in Historical Perspective,' in *Citizenship, Identity and Social Movements in the New Hong Kong: Localism After the Umbrella Movement*, eds. Wai-man Lam and Luke Cooper (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 13–33, 19.
42. Pan Guangdan (1899–1967), the father of Chinese eugenics, maintained in a number of social research projects that the Chinese monk communities were composed of people of 'low quality,' such as the poor, the sick, outlaws, and vagabonds. *Yousheng yuanli* (优生原理; principles of eugenics) (Tianjin: Xinhua Book Shop, 1981), 227.
43. Fuchuan Deng (鄧富泉), who is a Hunggar Kuen practitioner and a history graduate, has produced a comprehensive biography of Huang Feihong entitled *Huang Feihong Zhuanlüe* (黃飛鴻傳略; A concise biography of Huang Feihong) (Yinchuan Shi: Ningxia Renmin Chuban She, 2007). He relies, nevertheless, on sources mentioned earlier.
44. Cf. also Zian You 游子安and Yongjian Bu 卜永堅eds., *Wensu Guanfen: Xianggang ji Huanan Lishi yu Wenhua* 問俗觀風：香港及華南歷史與文化 (Customs and Trends: History and Culture of Hong Kong and South China) (Hong Kong: Huanan Yanjiuhui, 2009).
45. Chunguang Wang王春光 and Jingjing Li 李貞晶, 'Lingnan Renwu Huang Feihong Tanjiu 嶺南人物黃飛鴻探究' (A Study of the Lingnan Native Huang Feihong), *Shandong Tiyu Xueyuan Xuebao*山東體育學院學報 (Journal of Shandong Institute of Sport) 8 (2011): 44–45.
46. Ricardo K. S. Mak, 'Reinventing the Myth of a Traditional Chinese Martial Arts Hero in Industrial Society: The Story of Wong Fei Hung (1847–1925),' *International Journal of Literary Humanities* 13 (September 2015): 36–37.
47. Hector Rodriguez, 'Hong Kong Popular Culture as an Interpretive Arena: The Huang Feihong Film Series,' *Screen* 38 (1997): 1–24 (2).
48. Fuelled by the Cultural Revolution in China and supported by local leftist groups, a strike at an artificial flower factory in Kowloon in May 1967 turned into an anti-colonial movement that left 51 dead and over 5,000 arrested. Instead of weakening the colonial rule, the one-year unrest plagued by incessant strikes, demonstrations, bomb attacks, and police crackdowns compelled, on the one hand, many Hong Kong people to put aside their emotional attachment with China in favour of stable alien rule, and, on the other

hand, the Hong Kong government to launch in the post-riot era welfare, housing, education, and administration reforms that won the support of the Hong Kong people. Cf., for instance, Robert Bickers and Ray Yep, eds., *May Days in Hong Kong: Riot and Emergency in 1967* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009); and Gary Ka-wai Cheung, *Hong Kong's Watershed: The 1967 Riots* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009).

49. Studies on Hong Kong's cinema in its golden age are so numerous that I can introduce here only Lisa Odham Stokes and Michael Hoover, *City on Fire: Hong Kong Cinema* (London: Verso, 1999); Poshek Fu and David Desser, eds., *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Law Kar, Frank Bren, and Sam Ho, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2004); and Lisa Odham Stokes and Michael Hoover, *City on Fire: Hong Kong Cinema* (London: Verso, 1999).
50. Yingchi Chu, *Hong Kong Cinema: Coloniser, Motherland and Self* (London: Routledge, 2003), 56–59.
51. Tiong Guan Saw, *Film Censorship in the Asia-Pacific Region Malaysia, Hong Kong and Australia Compared* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 24.
52. 'Kung Fu Fighting,' performed by Carl Douglas, a successful disco song of 1974 that highlights the 'Kung Fu Fever,' begins with the line 'everybody was kung fu fighting.'
53. Recent findings show that Bruce Lee majored in drama, not philosophy, as many believed; cf. '100 Alumni of the Century: Bruce Lee,' *University of Washington Alumni Association*, last accessed October 1, 2018, www.washington.edu/alumni/columns/dec99/j_o.html.
54. Bruce Thomas, *Bruce Lee: Fighting Spirit* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 2007), 80.
55. Rachel A. Koestler-Grack, Rachel K. Brown, and Linda Davis, *Bruce Lee* (New York: Chelsea House, 2007), 42–49.
56. Bruce Lee, *Jeet Kune Do: Bruce Lee Commentaries on the Martial Ways*, ed. John Little (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 1997), 21.
57. Ibid.
58. Thomas, *Bruce Lee*, 82.
59. Cf., for instance, 'Bruce Lee: The Green Hornet: Kato Fight Scene (Best),' *YouTube*, last accessed October 1, 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=gG1Z02Szev0.
60. Barna Willliam Donovan, *The Asian Influence on Hollywood Action Films* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2008), 83.
61. For example, it was only in recent years that Hong Kong began to honour Bruce Lee as a symbol of Hong Kong locality and culture. Cf. Yonden Lhatoo, 'Why Does Hong Kong Treat Bruce Lee Like an Outcast and Refuse to Honour Its Greatest Son?,' *South China Morning Post*, July 31, 2015, last accessed September 25, 2018, www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1845229/why-does-hong-kong-treat-bruce-lee-outcast-and-refuse-honour; Zach Coleman, 'Hong Kong Finally Embracing Martial Artist Bruce Lee,' *USA Today*, August 8, 2013, last accessed September 25, 2018, https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/08/08/bruce-lee-home-hong-kong/2623205/.
62. 'Kung Fu Fighter—Oh, Where Have All the Students Gone?,' *Star*, May 13, 1976.
63. In 1974 the Hong Kong government proposed but eventually did not take tough action to ban violent comics. Cf. Hong Kong Legislative Council, *Official Report of Proceedings*, October 31 (Hong Kong: The Legislative Council, 1974), 107–108.

64. 'Grandmaster Lau Kar-Leung Remembered for Redefining Kung Fu Cinema,' *South China Morning Post*, June 27, 2013, last accessed September 22, 2018, www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1269655/grandmaster-lau-kar-leung-real-deal.
65. Most of Liu's films in the 1980s were popular in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. The re-release of his earlier films 'into the mainstream UK video market on the Made in Hong Kong label' soon created a transnational fan community that included the director Quentin Tarantino. Bey Logan, *Hong Kong Action Cinema* (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 1995), 45.
66. Su Tao, 'Lun Liu Jialiang zai zaoshi de gungfu chuangzuo pian 論劉家良在"邵氏"的功夫片創作 (On Liu Jialiang's Kungfu Films during His Times at Shaw Brothers Co.),' *Dianying Yishu*電影藝術 (Film Art) 4 (2007): 78.
67. Tik-sang Liu, 'Intangible Cultural Heritage: New Concept, New Expectations,' in *Intangible Cultural Heritage and Local Communities in East Asia*, ed. Tik-sang Liu (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, 2011), 1–10, 7; Mak, 'Reinventing the Myth of a Traditional Chinese Martial Arts Hero in Industrial Society,' 41.
68. Zhuota Li, *Xiang Dongzuo Zhidao Zhijing* (A Tribute to Action Choreographers) (Hong Kong: Hong Kong International Film Festival, 2006), 55.
69. According to a quantitative analysis, Hong Kong people aged between 15 and 20 rose from 0.62 million to 1.3 million in 1976. People in this age group, who made up about 25 to 30 per cent of the Hong Kong population in 1976, were generally more receptive to Western ideas and cultural tastes and more critical of traditional Chinese values and practices. Cf. Man-Fung Yip, *Martial Arts Cinema and Hong Kong Modernity: Aesthetic, Representation, Circulation* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017), 90.
70. Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (New Jersey: Wiley, 2016), 57.
71. Steve Tsang, 'The Rise of a Hong Kong Identity,' in *China Today: Economic Reforms, Social Cohesion and National Identities*, eds. Taciana Fisac and Leila Fernandez-Stembridge (London: Routledge, 2003), 222–239.
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74. Stephen Teo, 'Tsui Hark: National Style and Polemic,' in *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*, ed. Esther C. M. Yau (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 148–150.
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11 Interhuman. Interspecies. Global.

Heroism in Wes Anderson's *Isle of Dogs* (2018)

Ulrike Zimmermann

Introduction: More Than a Hero's Journey

As a US-American/German co-production which tells a story set in a dystopian version of Japan in the near future, Wes Anderson's *Isle of Dogs* (2018) is an ideal starting point for thoughts on globalized versions of the heroic. There are manifold ways to read the film in today's world of global markets and global cultural exchange. *Isle of Dogs* appeals in different parts of the world and for different reasons: to children who like animals, to adults looking for intelligent entertainment, and to cultural critics because, for its deceptive lightness, it is extraordinarily rich in allusions and intertextual (i.e., inter-cinematic) play.[1] Indeed, Anderson's stop-motion animated film was an instant success with audiences and critics alike.[2] In particular, reviewers were taken with the film's loving, detailed, and quirky animation, and with its humour, which provides enough exaggeration, caricature, and comic misunderstanding to be acceptable for (and understandable by) children. At the same time, it is often tongue-in-cheek and has dark undertones. The latter is also true for the riveting adventures and happy ending, which yet do not cover up the darker threads. At first glance, *Isle of Dogs* is a traditional tale of heroic adventure and survival, with engaging protagonists finally saving the day after many trials and tribulations. The film's main plotline employs Joseph Campbell's monomyth quite straightforwardly. According to Campbell, a hero needs to go on a paradigmatic journey in which he confronts his shortcomings and flaws, and thereby attain self-realization. The hero's journey has various stages: from his departure, which often happens unwillingly, via trials and initiation experiences, and finally his return to the starting point as a fundamentally changed character.[3]

The young hero of *Isle of Dogs* is Atari, a 12-year-old Japanese boy from fictional Megasaki City. Atari goes on a quest to find his beloved dog, Spots, who, like all other dogs in Megasaki, has been banned to Trash Island, where canines lead a miserable existence as scavengers in the midst of huge piles of civilization's garbage. The ban on dogs was ordered by Megasaki's mayor, Kobayashi, Atari's uncle, with whom the

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boy lives ever since his parents died in an accident—quite in accordance with the formula that mythical heroes are often orphans. Spots was once given to the boy as his personal guard dog but, as a member of the mayor's household, is made an example of and becomes the first dog to be deported. Atari refuses to accept the loss of his beloved Spots and goes in search of his companion—a journey which leads him beyond the borders of his home city and beyond the borders of civilization as he knows it. In a small plane he has stolen, Atari secretly takes off to find Spots again, only to have the engine give out over Trash Island and crash-land in view of a gang of surprised dogs. Despite his injuries, which are shown in graphic detail with '[a] detached section of the plane's broken propeller-clutch sticking out of the side of his helmet,'[4] he rallies soon enough and tries to make himself understood to the dogs, who suspiciously surround him. With the Japanese setting, a viewer could make a connection to the famed Japanese kamikaze pilots, who flew suicide attacks against Allied warships in the late stages of the Pacific Campaign of World War II. Atari has no intention of getting himself killed, and his spirit and determination in the face of danger speak for themselves.[5] Comic relief is found in the huffing and puffing little plane and its comic book cloud-shaped exhaust fumes. Atari's courage and indomitable spirit help him to convince the gang of island dogs of his mission, and to establish his trustworthiness with the wary animals. In the further course of the narrative, Atari and his canine companions become involved in a resistance movement that will lead to the evil mayor's downfall and restore the dogs to Megasaki City and to liberty.

There is not much space for grey tones in the film's world of good and evil, as most characters are rather clear-cut. What makes a variation of readings possible, and opens the film to a range of interpretations, is its refusal to stay with its human hero, Atari, alone. Without his equally lovable and heroic canine sidekicks (who turn out to be much more than just that), the film's happy ending would not be possible. Atari reprises the heroism of a legendary precedent: The film's prologue moves back centuries and narrates how a boy Samurai defends the dog population against the forces of the clan of Kobayashi, who are friends of cats and have, therefore, always hated dogs. The legend is firmly placed in traditionally Japanese contexts by its use of aesthetic conventions, reminiscent of block woodcuts, and the Taiko soundtrack with children as animated drum performers. Moeko Fujii, a reviewer with a Japanese background, adds another dimension to the prologue when she notes that the Japanese title of the film, 'Inu-ga-shima,' is reminiscent of 'Oni-ga-shima,' a legendary island of demons where the folklore hero Peach Boy fights against evil together with a group of animals, including a dog.[6] This folk narrative is as close to the film's plot as you can get. The image of the island on which heroic struggles take place is woven into the film's plot fabric:

It is, of course, prominently placed in the title. Furthermore, Megasaki City seems strangely isolated as a city within the country of Japan; Trash Island is an ever-present *locus horribilis*. It is cut off from Megasaki but still connected to it as it consists of the garbage and the leftovers of Megasaki's civilization.

While the monomyth is very obviously behind the main plot of *Isle of Dogs*, the film adopts a more complex approach towards heroism, in which issues of cultural translation are essential. The film literally displays its concern with translation, its location in and dependence on sociocultural systems, and its impossibilities and inadequacies. What strikes the viewer from the first moment is the film's playful oscillation between the refusal and the eagerness to translate. As an opening title card points out, 'Note to viewer: The humans in this story speak only in their native tongue (occasionally translated via bilingual interpreter, foreign-exchange-student, and electronic device). All barks have been rendered into English.'[7] This announcement is followed through with great earnest: Throughout the film, the Japanese characters speak (mostly unsubtitled) Japanese, while the dogs bark in American English. This strategy, which probably received the most comments of all the tricks and quirks of the film as a whole, has a strangely unsettling and alienating effect that cuts across language cultures, but arguably also cuts across borderlines between species at the same time. Human language, perfectly translatable, remains untranslated and, hence, incomprehensible to those members of the film's audiences who do not speak Japanese (presumably the majority). The language of the dogs, however, is a world language. This shift of focus brings the dogs linguistically closer to most Western audiences than the Japanese characters, who remain incomprehensible strangers in a strange world.[8]

In contrast to other examples discussed in the present volume, the translations of, and in, Anderson's film occur not only between Western and Eastern cultures but also between humans and dogs, and thus the film also offers itself to be read as a treatise on the prevalence of heroic behaviour across species. It includes its canine, as well as human, protagonists in discourses of the heroic, showing a variety of possibilities of action deemed heroic but not restricted to a human actor. It also confronts its audiences explicitly with issues of translation per se: of languages, social contexts, and behaviour. Essentially, *Isle of Dogs* runs ideas of heroism past its human, as well as its animal, characters in front of its audience's eyes, and, ultimately, all characters are shown to be capable of heroic behaviour, with only outright villainy reserved for humans. The complex engagement of Anderson's film, not only with globalized but also with cross-species heroism, is enabled by the kind of animation used in *Isle of Dogs*. Before this chapter continues to discuss the film's approach to the heroic, it is therefore necessary to look at some basic assumptions not only of animal studies but also of animation studies.

Animated Heroism, Animated Animals

For the overall impression of the film, next to the unsettling sense of understanding animal language but *not* human language, the distinctive stop-motion animation aesthetics are an equally defining characteristic. They unmistakably bear Anderson's handwriting but arguably reach further than his preceding stop-motion film, *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009). In their recent collection on animation, Julia Eckel, Erwin Feyersinger, and Meike Uhrig argue that animation has, by its very nature, its particular strengths in highlighting processes of becoming and change. Animation is nothing but a quick series of single still images, producing the illusion of movement, and it is able to include animated (i.e. living) and non-animated entities and blur the lines between the two.[9] According to Eckel, Feyersinger, and Uhrig, the figuration of animation comprises four principles: (1) Animation itself is a medium of change, as it consists of the amalgamation of single, individuated images. (2) Animation topicalizes and reflects processes of change (transformation) and of becoming in its themes and stories.[10] Eckel et al. furthermore suggest that it is not only principles of change which are enacted through animation. They note that animation consciously blurs the lines between the factual and the fantastic:

> Through animation, wooden dolls transform into children and princes into beasts; animals who became extinct long ago are brought back to life, and humans and avatars unite. This potential for transformation is not only acted out on the figural level. In animation, the fundamental borders between figure, thing, and background are endangered in a productive fashion.[11]

This is a fitting description of the paradigms along which *Isle of Dogs* is working. *Everything* is animated, but the luminous and beautifully made humans come across as visually somewhat less realistic than the dogs; fur, being blown about by the wind, prevails over skin as far as the fascination of the viewer is concerned. (3) Animation tends to keep up with technical progress, and quickly manages to embrace the possibilities of digital media.[12] (4) The final point made by Eckel et al. centres on the topicality of animation and its relevance for cultural and media studies: 'The increasing omnipresence of animated images in film, television, and computer-generated media points to an increased relevance of animation in the context of the so-called "digital change." Hence, animation becomes more and more a meta-phenomenon of the medial as such.'[13]

With all this in view, it is important to note that animation highlights transformations, throwing into relief the becoming and unmaking of characters, and, indeed, whole worlds. Also, animation has the capacity to emphasize the constructed quality, the artifice of its storyworld and its

contents. Thinking further along these lines, any object—a dog, a person, a landscape—is not necessarily hierarchically privileged in an aesthetic world in which anything becomes possible through technology and craftsmanship. This is what shapes *Isle of Dogs*—a perfect, fully fledged world (or rather, two, if one counts Megasaki City and Trash Island separately) steeped in bright, modern colours, built in shifting layers upon layers, which often remind the viewer of theatrical decor. These are the aesthetic conditions where the adventurous plot unfolds, and heroes come into being. The fact that the film's characters are beautiful and painstakingly crafted figurines of both dogs and humans gives them a highly impressive presence, which does not rely on purely digitized, smooth perfection. *Isle of Dogs*, with its animated fictional dogs among its cast, can possibly achieve heroic behaviour in these dogs more easily than in realistic representations of animals.[14] From the very beginning, it becomes apparent in the film's visual language that human heroes and dog heroes are equally important, and that they are products of their cultures, which, in turn, are lively, shape-shifting, and permanently transforming.

Human and Animal Heroism in Isle of Dogs

As mentioned earlier, the prologue of *Isle of Dogs* not only introduces a heroic precedent for its young protagonist but also narrates a legend in which a boy Samurai defends the dog population against the forces of the clan of Kobayashi. The framing of this episode around the young Samurai is decidedly warlike, and it explains how the close relationship between people and dogs came about: the result of having to band together against opposing forces. The prologue thus already invokes Donna Haraway's concept of companion species.[15] Companion species are animals which do not merely have a pragmatic function within a society of human beings (like being used as a source of food) but live *together* with humans in a historically evolved, culturally circumscribed relationship that cannot be sufficiently explained by the criterion 'useful for man's basic needs.' Watching *Isle of Dogs* with Haraway's *Manifesto* in mind, the film at times seems to be a straight emplotment of Haraway's approach. '[Dogs] are not a projection,' she writes,

> nor the realization of an intention, nor the telos of anything. They are dogs; i.e. a species in obligatory, constitutive, historical, protean relationship with human beings. The relationship is not especially nice; it is full of waste, indifference, cruelty, ignorance, and loss, as well as of joy, invention, labor, intelligence, and play.[16]

Haraway places great emphasis on a relationship in which the animal can remain an animal, with its natural behaviour and cognitive capacity, and nonetheless form a relationship with humankind which is not exhausted

in soulless exploitation without any emotional points of contact.[17] The animal, here, is an independent entity which comes to be culturally bound to, and involved with, human existence. Haraway cites dogs as a particularly pertinent case in point, as their coevolution with humans is rather well researched.[18]

Dogs become domesticated and turn into companions and friends of humankind in a variety of roles. 'Human life ways changed significantly in association with dogs. Flexibility and opportunism are the name of the game for both species, who shape each other through the still ongoing story of coevolution.'[19] In the fictional Japan of Anderson's film, a descendant of the Kobayashis now rules the huge urban conglomerate Megasaki City as an authoritarian mayor. He is by tradition inimical to dogs, who happily roam the city, are kept as pets, and fulfil a variety of roles. Spots is assigned as personal guard dog to the protagonist Atari while he is still in hospital recovering from the accident which killed his parents. When the dog is brought in, Atari shows the first signs of recovery, even joy, and Spots takes to him from the beginning. However, as Atari tries to make contact and strike up acquaintance with Spots in a rather knowledgeable way, holding out the back of his hand to Spots for a first sniff, it turns out that friendship between the two is strictly prohibited. Spots is supposed to protect Atari with his life if need be (and thus in a heroic spirit), but certainly not to become his friend and confidant in any way; their relationship is planned as a strictly professional one. As it can only be expected, both dog and boy cleverly circumnavigate all restrictions and become inseparable friends. One of the most touching scenes of the film is the moment when Atari starts talking to Spots over a special headset at their first meeting. While the audience cannot hear Atari's voice, the dog listens intently. 'His eyes light-up. He blurts eagerly, moved: "I can hear you, Master Atari-san!"' and then keeps repeating 'I can hear you. I can hear you.'[20] Their quiet if confined life is brought to an abrupt end by Kobayashi's increasingly intense and vicious campaign to purge Megasaki City of all dogs, as they ostensibly carry parasites and above all spread the canine flu ('snout fever'). It is clear to the audience from the beginning that Kobayashi and his minions have grossly exaggerated the issue (although canine flu does plague the dogs in the film). Dogs are made into scapegoats for all sorts of evils. The political propaganda against the dogs and for the re-election of Kobayashi has deliberate allusions to fascist campaigning. Indeed, the huge posters with the portrait of Mayor Kobayashi are an explicit, easy-to-spot allusion to Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941).[21]

Kobayashi, the film's villain figure, who is shown from the start as dictatorial in his bearing, his style, and his dealings with Atari, has brought practically all media channels under his influence, and they relentlessly spout fake evidence against dogs. The sense of threat, which eventually calls for heroic action, is spreading from the beginning of the film and

can be seen to inform public opinion in Megasaki City. Again, it would be hard to miss allusions to the populist, black-and-white, undifferentiated, and anti-intellectual rhetoric of exclusion present in so many countries' current everyday politics on both sides of the Atlantic.[22] Kobayashi's campaign manages to sow the seeds of distrust between people and those who, by tradition, have been their friends, companions, and supporters: the dogs. Even in the context of a light-hearted animated tale of animals (which *Isle of Dogs* also purports to be), it is chilling to watch how quickly a long-standing relationship can turn completely sour, and how the dogs—even potentially heroic guard dogs—become convenient scapegoats. Although this is not stated explicitly, as Kobayashi's spin is essentially about issues of health and safety that are supposedly threatened by the dogs' illness, we can safely assume that all sorts of societal ills and grievances are projected onto the dogs in the process. The human population of Megasaki City initially does not show great reluctance to part with their animal companions, but rather takes Kobayashi's public insinuations in their stride. As it will turn out, it is mostly the young—Atari and a group of students—who resist the irrational ousting of the dogs.

The dogs on Trash Island lead a miserable existence, which the film represents in stark detail. Food is scarce and potentially poisonous, as is, indeed, almost everything on the island. The first sequence of Trash Island shows the discovery of a package of rotting food, with maggot-infested meat over which the starved mongrels nonetheless fight. Where Megasaki City is vaguely futuristic and dystopian, Trash Island is downright apocalyptic. Essentially, Trash Island is all material residue a civilization leaves behind or pushes to the margins.[23] As all unsettling backdrops in *Isle of Dogs*, Trash Island comes with a fair amount of comic relief. The main group of dogs, whose members join Atari on his journey to discover Spots, go on to save all the dogs of Trash Island, and free Megasaki City from Kobayashi's regime, consists of Chief, Rex, Duke, King, and Boss. Their telling names rather heavily hint at their origins as alpha dogs (and alpha males, for that matter). They are a closely knit little group who have come to rely on each other in their struggle for survival—a struggle which has turned them into heroes already. The screenplay names them the 'Hero Pack' at the outset of the fight for the garbage sack.[24] At some point in the course of their common history, they have developed a system of taking a vote on anything and everything. The weird democratic processes going on every time they have to make a decision as a team make for a lot of the comic effects in front of the utterly depressing background of Trash Island. Despite the ridiculous note struck here, the dogs' voting system also shows that they (unlike many human characters) have understood, at least in principle, the necessity to reach decisions together.[25]

The grubby, fiercely independent Chief develops into another protagonist in his own right in the course of the twists and turns of the plot. Initially, he is highly suspicious of Atari, and time and again refuses to

help him. Chief is the only one among the dogs who did not have a stable and comfortable role in canine-human society—be it as a pet, or 'working' as mascot, or in advertisements, as most dogs on Trash Island can fondly remember. Chief, as he reluctantly admits, was a stray. He does not want to be petted. He distrusts all humans (and, most of all, also himself, which makes him the most complex canine of the film). He bites.[26] Chief only reluctantly gives in to Atari's charms but is after all unwilling to let the boy go on his quest without protection, and slowly starts to listen to Atari and his commands (after showing his canine independence of spirit). One of the best quietly touching moments of the film occurs when the former show-dog, Nutmeg, one of the film's very few female characters, challenges Chief to support Atari in his quest. 'Will you help him? The little pilot,' she says, and when Chief wants to know why he should, she adds, '(surprised at the question) Because he is a twelve-year-old boy. Dogs love those.'[27] Chief has flaws, and before the action of the film sets in, he was a potentially dangerous dog. But he becomes a hero in his unwavering protection of Atari[28] and by putting his sharp wit and his physical prowess to use in defence rather than to attack. After Mayor Kobayashi has found out to where Atari has vanished, and sends his dog-catchers to get him and his helpers, the gang of Trash Island comes together to help. In the melee, alienation and strangeness between the dogs, and between the dogs and humans, are overcome by communal striving for one goal. Ultimately, it is freedom—of movement, expression, and speech, to choose one's lifestyle and one's associates—for all. They enter into heroic behaviour without great enthusiasm, however: without Atari's instigation, the fight would not have begun. But all are willing to make enormous sacrifices; putting their lives on the line, and having their endurance tested to the limit. This is a highly conventional approach to the heroic, which, in the film, nonetheless produces fresh resonances in two respects: Firstly, with the background of current populist politics in the United States as well as in Europe, the goals of Atari, the students, and the dogs can no longer be taken for granted. Secondly, heroism is played out within different cultures, which allows for questions on issues of cultural translation and translatability.

Tossed in Translation? Heroism and the Problem of Cultural Appropriation

One might expect *Isle of Dogs*, with its references to global modernity and pronounced concern with translation, to contrast various national heroic cultures with each other, institute comparisons, or propose hybrid models of heroism. This is, however, not quite what happens in *Isle of Dogs*. The film is strong on interspecies heroics, and animal studies would (or rather, hopefully will) have a field day with it. Concerning

global heroism, the film arguably does not quite live up to the expectations one may have. Still, there is food for thought. A number of critics have maintained that Wes Anderson's presentation of Japanese life and culture is flat and clichéd, serving only as a decorative background to his story. Certainly Anderson is not the only director to fall for exoticist decor in his work, and the film's exuberance can alternatively be read as a celebration of Japan and its culture (albeit not a particularly profound one). Among others, Tobias Kniepe finds fault with the choice of Japan as a setting, as it seems arbitrary to him, proposing a view of Japan as if constructed from a box of bricks. He goes on to ask,

> Did [Anderson] seek to create an effect of particular threat, when the mayor and his vassals look grim and bark orders in Japanese, which are not translated? Did he want to invoke a police state . . .? Did he need a strange culture to re-furnish his doll's house . . .?[29]

These questions remain, indeed, unanswered. Artistic freedom, the joy of pillaging, and the wish to create a sense of alienation and being (linguistically and culturally) unsettled may all be part of the reasons for Anderson's choices. Peter Bradshaw, in his review, decides that there are issues but that they are not so problematic as to mar the film as a whole:

> Anderson's post-modern *japonaiserie*, its filmic references to Japanese movies, art and music are all presented in what seems to me joyous good faith. But the heroic dogs speak in American English, and the mostly villainous, dramatically subordinate humans speak in often unsubtitled Japanese, leading to suggestions of insensitivity.[30]

Bradshaw astutely remarks that the discussion about the film so far does not seem to have included the opinions of Japanese viewers to a significant extent. The question of cultural linguistics noticeably encompasses other questions—for example, in which language and culture there are heroes to be found in the film. As it turns out, in both Japanese and American, but not exclusively in human beings. Moeko Fujii, as a Japanese critic who now lives in the United States, admits she had lots of fun watching the film, in particular as she was able to catch jokes that her American co-watchers did not. She suggests that the film's language politics work quite well on a meta-level, exposing the light, humorous effects of translation, and also its unreliability.[31]

Beyond criticism that the film uses Japan merely as theatrical backdrop,[32] there are more questions raised about a white saviour-narrative, introduced into the plot by the character of US-American exchange student and female hero Tracy Walker. She is one of the very few female characters in the film, a young woman who is straightforward and outspoken, and stands out glaringly in her Japanese surroundings

with its atmosphere of polite indirectness. Tracy soon detects the lies in Kobayashi's anti-dog propaganda and stops trusting official declarations on the purge of dogs. She is firmly convinced that man and dog are meant to live together as before, and that somebody has to put a stop to Kobayashi and his authoritarian government. As she refuses to 'let sleeping dogs lie,' she becomes the leader of a student resistance group (essentially the editorial team of the student paper *The Daily Manifesto*, and one hacker) intent on disseminating undistorted facts on the canine flu. She is also among those who correctly surmise that Professor Watanabe, the scientist who had found an antidote against the flu and hence been placed under house arrest, was poisoned at Kobayashi's behest. Tracy's temperament and her squeaky loudness seem to tap into and play with cultural stereotypes of US-Americans abroad. As the character of Tracy is used within the plot as an instigator of the student rebellion, one could wonder why this instigator needs to be an outsider, while the Japanese students in Tracy's class are usually depicted listening to her diatribes in wide-eyed amazement. At times, Tracy is almost unbearably clichéd. Nevertheless, her caricatured qualities also add to the comic relief, and in keeping with the film as a whole, there are darker, near-hidden undertones in her character. When Tracy dramatically pronounces that 'somebody is up to something,'[33] this can be read as a rather heavy-handed nod to the American predilection for conspiracy theories. At the same time, Tracy proves to be right, and her worst assumptions turn out to be true: Mayor Kobayashi and his helpers are up to quite a lot, and certainly to no good. Particularly dangerous is Kobayashi's irrational anti-science stance, which leads him to ignore the best and most obvious solution (finding an antidote to canine flu) and to actively persecute scientists (even having them killed). Most reviewers are left discontented with Tracy Walker, whose nationality is seen as an unnecessary appendix to a plotline that would have worked perfectly well with a Japanese character.

Jonathan Romney's remarks are typical of this reading when he surmises that the character of Tracy was introduced for the benefit of Western viewers. However, he notes, 'the film doesn't do much with her status as an outsider discovering Japan, and in any case the theme of mutual discovery is taken care of by the interplay between Atari and the dogs.'[34] This is a recurrent phenomenon in *Isle of Dogs*: What Romney calls 'mutual discovery' takes place more between species than between (human) cultures. Again, Moeko Fujii's reactions to the film put much more emphasis on the Japanese side of things. She also detects reasons why Tracy appears relatively weak despite her role in the plot. Fujii analyses the stand-off between Tracy and Mayor Kobayashi at a rally. She confronts him directly and shouts at him in front of a huge crowd. He reacts immediately and withdraws her visa and her student identity card, reducing her to tears. Fujii suggests that if the role of the white

saviour can be ascribed to her in the first place, it is invalidated at this very moment.

> [Tracy] speaks to the crowd in English. Both Kobayashi and the crowd understand her words, but respond in Japanese. This was a revelation: In the world of Megasaki City, the Japanese can speak and understand English but *choose* to speak in their native tongue.[35]

Obviously, the linguistic slant of the film can also be interpreted as favouring the Japanese over the English-speaking world. This then would connect Tracy, who does not understand Japanese, and the dogs as the originally powerless figures of the narrative.

Another instance of the apparently powerless figures getting together and trying to gain agency is an episode which does not focus on language, but on women's behaviour: a clash between Tracy and the Japanese scientist Yoko-ono (spoken by Yoko Ono). In a desperate bid to stop the ultimate killing of all the dogs currently living on Trash Island, Tracy manages to corner Yoko-ono, left bereft and in despair after her boss's death, in a bar, and to persuade her to hand over the last remaining bottle of the antidote. The scene does not turn into a shouting match as there is, in fact, only one party who shouts: Tracy, who energetically hammers her point home to a passive Yoko-ono. 'Tracy grabs her shoulders and shakes her forcefully. "Pull yourself together and act like a scientist!"'[36] Tracy's loud voice and energetic body language contrast starkly with Yoko-ono's passivity. While the two women finally agree that the use of the antidote is the only feasible action to take, and Yoko-ono's passivity can be explained by the fact that she is mourning, there is an undercurrent contrasting the loud and active American with the silent and passive Asian woman.

In general, women in *Isle of Dogs* tend to play—and it is impossible to resist this phrase—the underdog role. Tracy Walker starts the student rebellion which will finally lead to the overthrow of Mayor Kobayashi's regime, but, ultimately, Atari's actions are far more decisive—and, as Tracy admits, she has got 'a crush' on the little pilot anyway,[37] which places her actions in a different light. Does she become the leader of the rebellion only out of personal considerations; a typical heteronormative rendering of subversive behaviour in women? Yoko-ono is the pretty and silent sidekick of an admittedly equally stereotyped male scientist; she is plunged in despair after the murder of her boss and would certainly never have acted alone in defence of the dogs, although she is still in possession of the all-decisive antidote.

Alliances in *Isle of Dogs* seem rather clear-cut. The good and the evil are easily distinguished: The good can be found in both species, man and dog; the bad are purely human. Granted, there are some shady characters among the dogs: The pug Oracle (strikingly, a female dog), who, as the dogs maintain, can see the future, gains her wisdom simply from

understanding TV and watching it all the time. Rumours about cannibalism among the first canine inhabitants of Trash Island turn out to be largely exaggerated; the dogs insist there has been one case when a nearly starved pack leader was eaten in despair.[38] The battle robots in dog shape are also purely evil—they are the invention of Kobayashi's regime, supposedly to replace the infested dogs with clean and hygienic pets, but truly invented for advanced warfare. The military dogs are essentially fighting machines, but, as it turns out, they can also be manipulated into typical dog behaviour when Atari manages to take over their controls. They bring to mind the viral videos of Boston Dynamics, the American robotics design company known for their quadrupeds.[39] Occasionally, cyborg elements are also found on the good side. The bionic tooth of Spots, a secret information storage device and weapon, is a case in point. Nonetheless, beings of flesh and blood are still represented as superior in the film.

Some Heroes Speak, Some Heroes Bark: Animal Heroism Gone Global

Isle of Dogs brings a variety of views on heroic behaviour into a conversation; what is maybe most notable about the film is that concepts of being a hero travel not only across cultures but also across species. Generally, all characters who refuse to budge when Mayor Kobayashi puts his evil plans into practice have the potential to be heroes of resistance. Dogs and humans, each in their own way, play a role in defeating Kobayashi and saving democracy in Megasaki City. There are virtually all shades of the spectrum of what can constitute heroic behaviour. In particular, as the film insists, to be heroic can mean sheer survival by enduring hardship. Heroes become heroes only in the face of adversity—how this adversity comes into being may be secondary here. It can be an opponent, but it can also be dangerous nature, or, in the context of the film, dangerous man-made landscapes—trash-scapes, if you will. Trash Island, as an inimical habitat, ultimately proclaims that man is wolf to man,[40] which has a particularly rich resonance in a film about the coexistence of man and dog. Richard Brody brings the sense of endurance, of refusing to remain a victim, to the foreground. He argues that *Isle of Dogs* explicitly and consciously focuses on the victims of a dictator, and the seemingly hopeless conditions under which they manage to turn the tables: '[T]hese victims unite in resisting the forces that would destroy them and, in the process, tap into a latent sensibility and forge a sublime style of their own.'[41] Possible victims refuse to play their role and to remain victims—this may be one of the main dictums of the film. It is of no importance whether these victims are human or animal.

Together with the heroism of endurance, heroic bravery to the point of self-sacrifice is crucial in *Isle of Dogs*. There is a variety of worthwhile causes shown in the film. The characters act courageously, whether man

or dog, for the purpose of toppling a tyrannical regime, and for the tenets and advancements of scientific progress. These causes cross cultures: American and Japanese, as well as those of man and dog. Misunderstandings are always present and often comical. When Atari helps to clean the dogs' wounds after the first fight with the dog-catchers, he talks at length in Japanese (trying to proclaim that the dogs are his dogs now), and Duke sighs: 'I wish somebody spoke his language.'[42] Once again, this directorial sleight of hand crosses lines of species and cultures, here in a playful manner. The sense of the alien which is present throughout the film is not restricted to human beings.

The concept of the hero is astonishingly successful in *Isle of Dogs*. It is never up for debate as to who the hero is and who the villain is. This naturally has to do with the lightness of the film, but it is still remarkable that the Japanese and American protagonists (and the dogs) agree without further ado what must be done and against whom they must fight. Ideas of democracy, fairness, and participation, which are worth fighting for, are shared by all. Of at least as much interest as potential differences between Japanese and American notions of the heroic is the idea of heroism as a phenomenon crossing lines between species. In fact, animals' heroic behaviour in general has been seen as an array of purely anthropomorphic projections rather than negotiations of actual heroism in animals, which would be possible only in fiction. Current animal studies (often termed human-animal studies to bring the culturally defined relationship between mankind and other animals into focus), however, look at the potential for animals to behave heroically *as animals*. Particularly the agency of animals, next to their cognitive and emotional abilities, comes into focus here. If they are perceived as part of a network to which human culture and history also belong, animals can be agents in a variety of contexts.[43] The dogs in question are not particularly or self-consciously anthropomorphized in the artificial world of the film, but remain dogs, acting as dogs would. As the whole world of the film is animation, the sense of travelling heroism is ever-present.

The language issue remains pertinent throughout *Isle of Dogs*. Among its many echoes, the film certainly counts *Lost in Translation* (Sofia Coppola, 2003), with the latent alienation foreigners may encounter in Japan, and, at the same time, the exhilaration at the unknown colours, structures, and textures assaulting the senses. Losing yourself in the feeling of strangeness and unfamiliarity can be a threatening and lonely experience when meaning gets lost, but it can also be liberating—when characters give up on decoding meaning all the time and just immerse themselves in their surroundings without necessarily being able to read them. *Isle of Dogs* playfully subjects its Western audiences to a sense of wonder through encountering Japan, but it also subjects its human audience to the sense of wonder encountering animals—and, more often than not, the animals in question find the humans exceedingly strange in turn. Heroic

behaviour can work, and characters can function as heroes, only if communication works and if the community in question has agreed-upon values that need to be upheld. As this communication need not take place in *human* language, men and dogs can agree on common heroes (and villains) in the context of the film. To return to Haraway's *Companion Species Manifesto*, in its own way, as a film, *Isle of Dogs*, too, makes a case for 'the implosion of nature and culture in the relentlessly historical specific, joint lives of dogs and people, who are bonded in significant otherness.'[44] The notion of the heroic would be responsible here for the breaking of the nature-culture dichotomy, binding man and animal together in their historic efforts.

The heroic also helps to emphasize the film's main concern, translation, as it is one of the means to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps. Moeko Fujii suggests that at its core, the film insists on the fact that there is no ultimate translation. Translation means interpretation, and it is always involved in structures of power.[45] Heroes and heroic action are also part of these structures, and heroic figures are projection screens which are by no means politically blank but have an agenda. *Isle of Dogs* highlights and problematizes heroism in translation: across generations, cultures, nations, and—maybe most importantly—across species. Perhaps all too predictably (but then, the film also serves as light entertainment, after all), it turns out that heroes are needed everywhere, and that they seem to function along similar lines. It has to be noted, though, that the sense of self-sacrifice and endurance seems to be most pronounced in the Japanese characters, thus recalling Japanese traditions, but also clichéd views of these traditions from an outsider's perspective.

Isle of Dogs also illustrates, in Haraway's sense, that dogs and people cannot, and should not, try to exist without each other. The film insists from its very beginning that dogs were, from a mythical starting point onwards, destined to live and work with humankind and enter into a relationship of mutual profit and protection. One species is not meant to exist without relating to the other species. Generally, interspecies companionship enables interspecies heroism in the first place. In the film, humans of course save each other: Doctors help Atari recover several times, and Tracy and the editors of the student paper, together with an unnamed hacker, take considerable risks to save the community of Megasaki City from a despot. Finally, Atari becomes the saviour of his democratic community. Interestingly, the very ending of the film strikes yet another dark note. Atari, having saved the day, now as new mayor of Megasaki City, is being interviewed on suitable punishment for people who hurt dogs. He spontaneously suggests the death penalty, only to withdraw this in the next minute and go for community service, when his interviewers object, 'That seems excessive to us.'[46] There is, in a split second, an uneasy sense that Atari also has the potential for fanaticism and dictatorial rule. No one seems immune—which comes somewhat as a surprise after the film's black-and-white ethics.[47]

Heroic bravery in this world includes the willingness to make sacrifices for members of the other species, including potentially the ultimate sacrifice of one's own life. Atari's foolhardy flight to Trash Island in a rickety plane is a case in point—all in a bid to find a beloved dog, no matter the personal cost. In turn, the dogs are ready to fight to the death if they deem the cause worthwhile. The complementing abilities of dog and man play a role here as well. It needs to be noted that the rebellion against Mayor Kobayashi starts out in an instance of individuality: the friendship between boy and dog, which then starts to set the further events in motion, implicating the municipality of Megasaki and the canine community. The prologue of the film shows exactly this cohabitation within the framework of cultural traditions, which happen to work for a US-American and a Japanese context. As Marc Kermode has perceptively noted, 'On one level, *Isle of Dogs* can be read as a parable of disenfranchisement, a story of people (rather than pets) being pushed to the margins. On another it's a simple tale of a boy and his dog.'[48] Heroes, then, are characters who fight disenfranchisement on all levels; and, actually, you need not speak a particular language or even be human to be able to do that. *Isle of Dogs* draws largely on the Campbellian monomyth of the hero, and the universal appeal of a hero's values. Nonetheless, the film gives its material and its plot additional layers of complexity by embedding the heroic journey into reflections on cultural translation, and the pitfalls and perplexities of it in a globalized world. The advantages of this world, from which humans and dogs can be seen to profit, should not be taken for granted. If these advantages come under threat, it needs heroes who are undaunted by, and able to navigate through, cultural differences.

Notes

1. Cf. Cameron Woo, 'Isle of Dogs: A Masterpiece of Imagination,' *Bark*, March 2018, accessed September 30, 2018, https://thebark.com/content/isle-dogs-masterpiece-imagination. Woo identifies staples of cinema that range from film noir, classic science fiction, and action movies to manga epics.
2. A choice of reviews can only be selective; the focus here is on English-language reviews. Cf., for example, Jonathan Romney, 'Film of the Week: Isle of Dogs,' *Film Comment*, March 23, 2018, accessed September 30, 2018, www.filmcomment.com/blog/film-week-isle-dogs/; Peter Bradshaw, 'Isle of Dogs Review: Wes Anderson Unleashes a Cracking Canine Caper,' *The Guardian*, March 29, 2018, accessed September 30, 2018, www.theguardian.com/film/2018/mar/29/isle-of-dogs-review-wes-anderson-bryan-cranston-animation; Marc Kermode, 'Isle of Dogs Review: A Canine Tale of Strange Beauty,' *The Guardian*, April 1, 2018, accessed September 30, 2018, www.theguardian.com/film/2018/apr/01/isle-of-dogs-review-wes-anderson; Tobias Kniepe, 'Isle of Dogs im Kino: Zerzauste Hunde proben den Aufstand gegen den Faschismus,' *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 11, 2018, accessed September 30, 2018, www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/isle-of-dogs-wes-anderson-kritik-1.3972065; Richard Brody, '"Isle of Dogs" Is a Stylish Revolt

Against (American) Political Madness,' *The New Yorker*, March 23, 2018, accessed September 30, 2018, www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/isle-of-dogs-is-a-stylish-revolt-against-american-political-madness.

3. Cf. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971 [1949]). It is telling that the film in its German (dubbed) version is called *Isle of Dogs: Ataris Reise* (Atari's journey), hence explicitly expanding the title's focus to include the human protagonist and alluding to the hero's journey as well as the film's coming-of-age story, in which an immature character has to go out and find a place in the world, reaching maturity and gaining a deeper self-understanding and independence in the process.
4. Wes Anderson, *Isle of Dogs: Screenplay* (London: Faber, 2018), Kindle edition. Kindle Location 415 of 1991.
5. For an overview of the basics, cf. 'Kamikaze' on *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamikaze. The comparison may be a slightly macabre one but in view of the fact that the film, for a Western audience, consciously and playfully evokes clichés of Japan, the association may not be far-fetched. While frequently stylized as fearsome fanatics and embodiments of the Japanese culture of self-sacrifice in Western culture at the same time, more recent approaches to kamikaze fighters in Japan itself also seem to show a more differentiated picture: Kaori Shoji reports about new documentaries on kamikaze. The focus here is on a re-evaluation and a more neutral view of the pilots. Their youth, and the indoctrination they have been subjected to, is repeatedly stressed. They were mere teenage boys, as Risa Morimoto, the director of the reviewed documentary *Tokko*, is quoted as saying. Cf. Kaori Shoji, 'Neither Heroes nor Villains,' *The Japan Times* (July 12, 2007), accessed September 30, 2018, www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2007/07/12/films/neither-heroes-nor-villains/#.W4hnw2b5yRs. Youth in connection with heroic action is actually crucial for *Isle of Dogs*.
6. Moeko Fujii, 'What "Isle of Dogs" Gets Right About Japan,' *The New Yorker*, April 13, 2018, accessed September 30, 2018, www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/what-isle-of-dogs-gets-right-about-japan.
7. Transcribed from the film: Wes Anderson, *Isle of Dogs* (Germany, USA: American Empirical Pictures, Indian Paintbrush, Studio Babelsberg, Twentieth-Century Fox Animation, 2018). The screenplay has a note saying 'the humans in this story are, by and large, Japanese citizens, and speak primarily in their native tongue. The dogs bark in English.' Anderson, *Isle of Dogs*.
8. It is striking that German reviewer Tobias Kniepe ('Zerzauste Hunde proben den Aufstand'), who in general finds the film's rendering of Japan clichéd and problematic, notes that Mayor Kobayashi and his underlings 'bark' orders, pointing to a tendency of othering the Japanese. One could argue that the dogs have been made intelligible at the expense of the Japanese characters, which would, however, to my mind, place the film in too negative a light—although its representations certainly need to be questioned.
9. Cf. particularly the introduction to the essay collection: Julia Eckel, Erwin Feyersinger, and Meike Uhrig, 'Einleitung,' in *Im Wandel . . . Metamorphosen der Animation*, ed. Julia Eckel et al. (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2018), 1–10.
10. Eckel et al., *Animation* (4). All translations of German material in this chapter by Ulrike Zimmermann.
11. Ibid. (4–5).
12. Ibid. (5).
13. Ibid.
14. Conversely, heroic animals in live-action films tend to come across as jarringly artificial at times. Well-trained animal actors often seem too good and polished to be true.

15. Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).
16. Ibid., 11–12.
17. On the website *Cyborg Anthropology*, there is an explanation of the term 'companion species' which makes explicit what they are not: 'She [Haraway] used the term as an exploration into the historical emergence of animals who are not meat animals, lab animals, wilderness animals, war dogs, vermin or pariah dogs, but who are part of a very particular historical relationship.' 'Companion Species,' *Cyborg Anthropology*, November 28, 2011, accessed September 30, 2018, http://cyborganthropology.com/Companion_Species. It is striking that *Isle of Dogs* can be read like the ticking of boxes from this very list. For example, the film has a rather gruesome sequence in which sushi is freshly prepared from seafood: animals (fish and octopus) which are still very much alive as they land on the chopping board. The desolate existence of lab animals is invoked when Professor Watanabe tries out his anti-flu serum, and later on Trash Island. The dogs roaming Trash Island seem like wild animals to bemused Atari, but they never actually wanted to be wild. 'War dogs' appear in the guise of the four-legged military fighting machines invented by Kobayashi's regime, ostensibly built as a hygienic replacement for real dogs, and the peaceful and useful pets of Megasaki City become 'vermin or pariah dogs' (actually both) in Kobayashi's anti-dog propaganda.
18. A brief synopsis of a Japanese study which looked at oxytocin levels in dogs and their keepers can be found here: Sedeer el-Showk, 'How Dogs and Humans Grew Together,' 'Accumulating Glitches: Exploring the Grandeur of Evolution,' *Scitable*, May 18, 2015, accessed September 30, 2018, www.nature.com/scitable/blog/accumulating-glitches/how_dogs_and_humans_grew. Or, for a popularized account, cf. Brian Hare and Vanessa Woods, 'Opinion: We Didn't Domesticate Dogs. They Domesticated Us,' *National Geographic*, March 13, 2013, accessed September 30, 2018, https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/03/130302-dog-domestic-evolution-science-wolf-wolves-human/.
19. Haraway, *Companion Species*, 29.
20. Anderson, *Isle of Dogs*. Kindle Location 511 of 1991.
21. For a brief list of references in the film, cf., for example, 'Connections' on *IMDb*, accessed September 30, 2018, www.imdb.com/title/tt5104604/movieconnections.
22. A number of reviewers read Kobayashi's politics as an even more specific allusion to Nazi propaganda—for example, Susanne Mayer in German weekly *Die Zeit*, who felt reminded by the announcement of the dogs' deportation of the atmosphere at a Nuremberg Rally: 'Kein Ort für zarte Nasen,' *Die Zeit*, May 2, 2018, accessed September 30, 2018, www.zeit.de/2018/19/isle-of-dog-wes-anderson-kinofilm. Parts of Trash Island clearly remind one of the layout of death camps, so the reading is not far-fetched.
23. There are distinct echoes from *WALL-E* (Andrew Stanton, 2008), an animated film which has a lonely robot protagonist that has been left behind to clean up a deserted and ruined Earth.
24. Anderson, *Isle of Dogs*.
25. On the designing of Trash Island, cf., for example, the official featurette 'Making a World: Megasaki City & Trash Island,' *YouTube*, April 11, 2018, accessed September 30, 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=6j_28ddl-Rw.
26. 'I bite' is Chief's 'sharp warning' as Atari first approaches and pets him. Anderson, *Isle of Dogs*.
27. Anderson, *Isle of Dogs*. Kindle Location 774 of 1991.
28. One may wonder whether Chief could be read as an anti-hero, but this reading does not do him justice. The fact that he is invested in the value system of the other (man and dog) heroes, and supports their moral and social goals,

makes him a hero rather than an ethically dubious and morally reprobate anti-hero. For an introduction to the term, cf., for example, Ann-Christin Bolay and Andreas Schlüter, 'Faszinosum Antiheld,' *helden. heroes. héros*. 3, no. 1 (2015): 5–8, doi:10.6094/helden.heroes.heros/2015/01/01.

29. Kniepe, 'Isle of Dogs im Kino.'
30. Bradshaw, 'Isle of Dogs Review.'
31. Fujii, 'What "Isle of Dogs" Gets Right.'
32. On cultural appropriation, cf., for example, Pascal Nicklas and Oliver Lindner's introduction to their edited volume *Adaptation and Cultural Appropriation: Literature, Film, and the Arts* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 1–13. They read appropriation as part of adaptation and hence belonging to the creativity brought to the source material. This approach may be in keeping with the use of Japanese culture in *Isle of Dogs*.
33. Anderson, *Isle of Dogs*. Kindle Location 829 of 1991.
34. Romney, 'Film of the Week.'
35. Fujii, 'What "Isle of Dogs" Gets Right.'
36. Anderson, *Isle of Dogs*. Kindle Location 1603 of 1991.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. For the history and products of Boston Dynamics, cf. *Wikipedia*, 'Boston Dynamics,' accessed September 30, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boston_Dynamics. Notably, the small quadruped robot which the company plans to put on sale in 2019 will be called SpotMini: 'Boston Dynamics will Roboter-Hund 2019 zum Verkauf anbieten,' *Handelsblatt*, May 12, 2018, accessed September 30, 2018, www.handelsblatt.com/unternehmen/industrie/spotmini-boston-dynamics-will-roboter-hund-2019-zum-verkauf-anbieten/21493056.html?ticket=ST-319164-vFwWCDpiaNzBDbgVxcZX-ap4. Also, the military dogs and Kobayashi's pretence to have come up with these more hygienic pets bring to mind Aibo, Sony's robot pet dog, which first came on the market in 1999 and has just been relaunched.
40. *Homo homini lupus*, Hobbes's slightly changed quotation of Plautus, refers primarily to the relationship between states, so Plautus's original may be closer to the film here. Man will be hostile to man as long as they do not know each other and are strangers.
41. Brody, '"Isle of Dogs" Is a Stylish Revolt.'
42. Anderson, *Isle of Dogs*. Kindle Location 679 of 1991.
43. On animals as agents, cf. in particular the work of Mieke Roscher—for example, 'Zwischen Wirkungsmacht und Handlungsmacht: Sozialgeschichtliche Perspektiven auf tierliche Agency,' in *Das Handeln der Tiere: Tierliche Agency im Fokus der Human-Animal Studies*, ed. Sven Wirth, et al. (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016), 43–66. On heroic animals, cf., for example, Marie-Luise Egbert and Ulrike Zimmermann, eds., *Animals: Projecting the Heroic across Species*, Special Issue 3 (2018), helden. heroes. héros. doi:10.6094/helden.heroes.heros./2018/A.
44. Haraway, *Companion Species*, 16.
45. Fujii, 'What "Isle of Dogs" Gets Right.'
46. Anderson, *Isle of Dogs*. Kindle Location 1872 of 1991.
47. This is an extremely brief moment in the last part of the film, which does not change the pervasive sense of happiness in the ending. Still, it points, flash-like, to the fact that in single-minded persuasion, there is latent extremism.
48. Kermode, 'Isle of Dogs Review.'

12 Global Heroism as a Discursive Tradition

A Critical Response

Ken Chitwood

Many contributions to the volume *Heroism as a Global Phenomenon in Contemporary Culture* (sometimes inadvertently) address the question of whether there is such a thing as a 'global hero' or a 'global superhero.' Given the tension between various local hero/superhero traditions and the concept in and of itself, such questions harbour the potential of essentializing the idea of what, or who, a hero/superhero could be, and they ignore the transformations, negotiations, development, and diversity that mark heroism as a global phenomenon. At the same time, scholars need to understand how local hero/superhero traditions draw on supralocal concepts and characters.

As I have shown elsewhere, the comic series 'The 99'—a series from entrepreneur and psychologist Naif Al-Mutawa, which debuted in 2006 and features a predominately Muslim cast of characters whose gifts and superhero powers embody the 99 attributes of Allah from the Qur'an—can serve as a case study through which to consider essentialized representations of Islam and Muslims in comics and beyond.[1] Specifically 'The 99' is, for me, a situational case study within which to muse on how Islam is apperceived and appreciated in popular culture and public opinion, as both a real object of study and a socially constructed and politically imagined classification.[2] With that said, I also present 'The 99' as a pertinent case through which to understand not only how religion and popular culture are hybrid entities but also that this melange nature is an inherent feature of global Islam and perhaps also the global hero.[3]

Part of my discussion references the work of Talal Asad, who questioned prevailing notions about the anthropological study of Islam to posit instead that Islam is a discursive tradition defined by various discourses, which seek to guide and shape the why, what, and how of global Islamic ideas and practices.[4] These discourses are inherently related to contestations and relations of power. Furthermore, these discourses constantly address themselves to conceptualizations of the Islamic past and potential futures in order to shape and influence a particular Islamic teaching and practice in the present.

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This chapter intends to explain and explore the concept of discursive traditions and apply it to the conversation concerning heroism as a global phenomenon. I will argue that, instead of trying to find a global hero and/or superhero 'type' or 'essence' on the one hand, or identifying specific traditions within local contexts on the other, it would behove scholars to think of heroism/superheroism as a kind of discursive tradition. Seeing it this way will make it more clear that, while we are not simply dealing with global tropes and types of the 'McHero,'[5] or an American global product, Western and American representations of the hero are still the norm against which most other representations of the hero and the heroic in popular culture are still measured in the production, consumption, and critique of heroism around the globe. Recognizing this, what we are often missing in our work on the heroic is a more thorough consideration of the power at play in this process. Further, treating heroism as a global phenomenon as a discursive tradition helps us avoid the mistake of assuming that the idea of the hero can be essentially conceived as one thing. At the same time, we cannot make the mistake that there is no concept of the heroic that in some sense transcends cultures and draws on past and present conceptualizations and frames of the hero or the heroic in order to shape future projects, casts, and characters.

In order to make this argument I will first explore the concept of discursive tradition as first introduced by Talal Asad, drawing heavily on Michel Foucault, in relation to the anthropological study of Islam. Then, I will attempt to apply that framework to the study of global heroism. To undergird that application, I will turn to some contributions to the present volume to highlight the discursive interactions between the local and the supralocal in the realm of global heroism.

What Are We Studying?

In studying contemporary movements and trends in global heroism, recent scholarship has been asking how to conceptualize the idea of the 'global hero' itself. To be able to speak of a global hero is to enter discussions about the authenticity, continuity, and legitimacy of such a concept or its attendant expressions, characteristics, and manifestations in myriad cultural settings. Other fields of study, such as anthropology, religious studies, and the broader humanities, have struggled with the same questions of definition and the delineation of their fields.

For example, as an ethnographer of religion, with a focus in the study of global Islam, my research is grounded in a stream of literature that has long debated what it means to study 'Islam.' As sociologist Ronald A. Lukens-Bull wrote,

> The anthropological study of Islam is one that has been plagued by problems of definition. What exactly are we studying? Local practices,

> universal texts, and standards of practice, or something else entirely. At the heart of the question is how anthropologists define 'Islam'.[6]

Talal Asad's essay 'The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam' has proved highly influential and continually relevant in the field. Originally published in 1986 as part of the Occasional Paper Series sponsored by the Centre for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University, it has since been republished and commented on multiple times in literature from across many disciplines. It is my hope that by overviewing his basic argument and some of the analysis of it, scholars might able to see the parallels between this struggle and discussions concerning the study of 'Islam' and the 'global hero.'

Essentially, what is at stake in Asad's essay—and the discussion swirling around it—is what are the possible questions that can be asked in this field of study, and what are the conditions in which it is possible and appropriate to ask them? At the heart of this is the question of what it is that anthropologists of Islam are studying. What is Islam? At the same time, it must be clearly stated that Asad's argument is 'not against the attempt to generalize about Islam, but against the manner in which that generalization is undertaken.'[7] And thus, Asad questions the questioners and the questions they are asking about 'Islam.'

Asad contends that there are basically three ways to answer the question of what Islam is and/or is not. The first is that there is no theoretical object such as 'Islam.' The second is that of the anthropologist's designation for a heterogeneous collection of data, impressions, ideas, and artefacts of culture which have been labelled 'Islamic' by their informants. The third is that Islam is an exceptional and distinct historical entity that organizes various aspects of sociocultural life for its many interlocutors. While Asad briefly examines the first two ways of approaching the social data of 'Islam,' his focus is with the final category. In his final estimation, anthropologists should not go looking for Islamic societies that singularly shape the social structures, religious beliefs, and the political behaviours of their constituents. Instead, in an obvious nod to Foucault, he proposes that anthropologists should turn to examine 'the institutional conditions for the production of various social knowledge. What was regarded as worth recording about "other" beliefs and customs? By whom was it recorded? In which social project were the records used?'[8] Again, it is not that Asad is against generalizing about the topic of study (Islam), but he is against the means of description, the way the questions about the subject are asked, and what kinds of questions these frames keep us from considering—particularly those concerned with differences and variations in forms across 'Islamic' polities, societies, cultures, or religious entities.

Beyond this postulation, the most important interlude of Asad's that is relevant to our discussion contains the following interconnected points.

First, any discussion of culturally distinctive actors (or, in our case, also artefacts and cultural constructions) must attempt to 'translate and represent the historically situated discourses of such actors as responses to the discourse of others, instead of schematizing and de-historicizing their actions.'[9] Second, this analysis should not focus on typical actors, artefacts, or constructions, but on changing patterns. Third, just as scholars cannot presume to conflate Islam with any particular geography or type of social structure, so too researchers should not confuse representations of heroes with any implicit superstructure, space, or social base. Although heroes have specific meanings in specific contexts, we must consider global superstructures within which heroes make sense and through which flow currents of power that shape the production and reception of the seemingly geographically confined or culturally defined hero. Finally, and perhaps most relevant to this consideration, as an object of understanding and study, Islam—and for our deliberation, the global hero—'should be approached as a discursive tradition' that connects variously with the formation of moral selves, the manipulation of populations or resistance to it, and the production of appropriate knowledges.[10] These points are salient for various fields of study ranging from the study of Christian traditions to ideas about anthropologies in Latin America or, as we are thinking about here, the idea of the global hero and/or superhero.

In particular, the idea of a discursive tradition can help us reflect on how we can simultaneously take historically, contextually, and culturally defined representations and discourses surrounding the idea of the hero seriously, while also coming together to consider the '*thing* behind the *thing*' of this idea of the hero in the first place, which at times seems to be shared across geographic space and political, cultural, economic, religious, and other boundaries. Specifically, when Asad said that Islam is a discursive tradition, he posited that it is a set of religious symbols that take on meaning, value, and expression in various social and political situations where multiple processes, discussions, and negotiations are involved. Often, these processes, discussions, and negotiations produce complex and, at times, chaotic and contradictory conceptualizations of what Islam *is* or *is not*, or what Muslims *do* or *do not do*. Thus, the main challenge in interpreting Islam is coming to terms with the considerable diversity of beliefs, practices, and postures of global Islam, while simultaneously appreciating that there are shared principles which act as a *cri de coeur* for Muslims across the world. Such is the case, I argue, for trying to understand the global hero as well.

The Idea of the Global Hero as Discursive Tradition

To put it in words that we might consider for the remainder of this chapter, to view the idea of the global hero as a type of discursive tradition is to see the concept of the hero as a set of symbols that take on meaning,

value, and expression in various social and political situations where multiple processes, discussions, and negotiations of power are involved. Often, these processes, discussions, and negotiations produce complex, hybrid, and, at times, chaotic and contradictory conceptualizations of what a hero *is* or *is not*, or what a hero *does* or *does not do*. Thus, the main challenge in interpreting the idea of the hero is coming to terms with the considerable diversity of beliefs, practices, and postures it takes on in particular contexts, while simultaneously appreciating that there are shared principles which act as a *unifying* force to understand individuals, stories, and actions as heroic (or not) across the world.

The relevance of approaching the hero and the heroic in this way became particularly evident when, in preparation for writing this chapter, I read the contributions to this volume from the perspective of the critical premises outlined earlier. Specifically, the editors' introduction claims that the understanding of heroism needs to be expanded beyond centres such as the United States to include a more global frame of analysis. This is particularly poignant because heroism *can be so context specific*. This call to globalize the study of heroism parallels the desire by those in Islamic studies over the last 50-odd years who have attempted to push the study of Islam beyond the frame of Middle East studies or Orientalism. Further, Korte and Wendt propose that these transcultural perspectives can challenge and contribute to perceptions of heroism and the hero. In particular, we might think of the ways in which—as a discursive tradition—perceptions of heroism and the hero take on meaning, value, and expression in various social and political situations where multiple processes, discussions, and negotiations are involved. On this note, Korte and Wendt also discuss how imaginaries and images of the hero are always in flux. Popular culture produces, consumes, and plays a part in multilayered 'hero systems' that overlap with, and influence, one another. In so doing, these 'hero systems' draw on narratives, and idea(l)s, of heroes and heroism in the past—both real and imagined—to produce a popular cultural product for consumption, and to shape the concept of the heroic in the present and for the foreseeable future. This flux of what is popular and what is not, of what takes hold in which culture or does not, of what image of the hero holds sway and what image is discarded, is also part of the processes of power and orthodoxy, which are well noted in Asad's conception of a discursive tradition.

We might think of popular or, even better yet, official or institutional imaginaries and images of the hero as a form of orthodoxy. Speaking of Islam, Asad notes how orthodoxy is not necessarily a body of stated, enacted, and eternal opinion and tradition but a relationship to power.[11] Korte and Wendt raised the point, first posited by Drucker and Gumpert, that individuals and characters can be globally famous, but not necessarily globally heroic.[12] This could be seen as an example of a particular orthodox tradition. For our purposes, let us consider the example of

Superman, who is globally famous, but who may not be globally appreciated as heroic.

While Superman's heroism may be produced, promoted, and consumed as orthodox by some—or even most—there may be pockets of resistance in particular corners of pop culture or the global landscape. These minority opinions may be viewed as heterodox in some, but that does not mean they are necessarily blasphemous. Because they dissent does not mean they are bad or even inaccurate. It instead shows that they have a different tradition of heroism/the hero from which they draw and against which they judge Superman. They may also have a different present for which Superman does not serve them in any heroic manner. For that matter, Superman may have been heroic for them in the past, but is no longer because of changing political, social, religious, or economic circumstances. Or, perhaps, they have a vision of the future in which Superman-as-hero has no part to play. Further, there could be internal tension in the 'Superman is not heroic' camp, with various traditions (heterodoxies) jockeying for influence and ascendancy even within the resistance to the status quo orthodoxy that takes Superman as heroic. Or, someone could translate Superman into a local idiom in some form, only then to be noticed by the powers that be at DC Comics that they are entering into legal action in order to reclaim the rights to representations of their global hero. No matter the case, those who support the idea of Superman as heroic and those who oppose Superman as heroic—for various reasons—all try to debate with one another and, in so doing, will turn to a corpus of previous texts, traditions, and the like to make their case. Even in the miscellany of opinion about Superman's potential heroic status, there will be some coherent notion of hero at play and a historical body of texts and traditions to which the various interlocutors appeal as they debate one another.

This extended hypothetical all goes to show that it behoves the scholar to pay attention to how 'orthodoxy' and its discursive tradition in a particular place are historically produced and consumed, and how it influences other systems and notions of orthodoxy/heterodoxy in other localities and vice versa. Or, perhaps, we might say it is good for scholars to pay attention to the way an orthodoxy that has ascended to global influence is produced and reproduced, consumed and resisted, is influencing and is influenced by other systems.[13] This applies to the study of heroes and heroism as much as it does to that of Islam. If we hope to understand the hero, whether global, or local, or somewhere in between, in its hybrid manifestations produced in the borderlands between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, the global and the local, the so-called greater and little traditions,[14] it would be best to concern ourselves with the transformation of discursive traditions at multiple levels, while also paying attention to how various interlocutors also try to achieve some semblance of coherence in producing, consuming, and shaping the idea of heroism/the hero.[15]

To more fully flesh out *how* we can do this or *what* it might tell us, I want to look at a few case studies in what remains of this chapter. These case studies will tell us a little more about how we might operationalize the idea of a discursive tradition specifically in relation to ideas about heroism and the hero across the globe.

One Hero With a Thousand Faces? A Thousand Faces With No Hero?

At the close of their introduction, Korte and Wendt mention *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell (1949). They remark that while influential, this seminal work was severely limited in its critique of difference. Although I agree with Korte and Wendt on this point, I believe it is worthwhile revisiting Campbell's work and its discontents in light of my suggestion that the idea of the global hero be analysed as a discursive tradition. Doing so will help us better apprehend how, in seeking to study global heroes/heroism, we cannot settle with focusing on either the global *or* the local, similarity *or* difference, but have to look at the discursive dynamics at work between various traditions that are all vying for authenticity and authority at multiple registers in a global world.

In his formative work, Campbell proffered the theory that prominent myths from around the world that had staying power all shared a fundamental structure. Drawing on Freudian analysis, Jungian archetype theory, and anthropological work on global rites of passage, Campbell cited the narratives of Osiris, Prometheus, the Buddha, Moses, Muhammad, and Jesus—a structure which he called the 'monomyth.' He wrote of the monomyth,

> A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.[16]

This hero is said to start in the ordinary world, to receive a call to a strange adventure, to accept the call, and, to face tasks and trials along the way either alone or in cooperation with an assistant. If the hero survives, he receives a gift (tantamount to important self-or world-knowledge) and then returns to the world, overcoming more challenges along the way, until said hero is able to improve the world with his boon of newly found knowledge. While Campbell did not claim that *every* myth contains *all* the stages and elements, he did posit that all of these myths included the rhythm of departure, initiation, and return. This became known as the 'hero's journey' and has proved influential in diverse fields, such as theology, film, literature, gaming, comics, and academia.

At the same time, this theory has met with stiff opposition over the last few decades. Some critique Campbell for analysing only a 'masculine monomyth'[17] and others believe that it is too focused on the predominately Western ideal of the individual hero. For example, Maya Zuckerman critiques the fact that 'women-centric stories are less than half of the narratives in the mainstream mass media channels.'[18] Women are breaking through proverbial ceilings in many areas of society, politics, and religion, and Zuckerman feels that this should also be the case in the stories of heroes. The fact that they are not, I would surmise, has something to do with the imposition of power in the realm of producing, consuming, and critiquing the idea of the global hero by predominately Western and masculine actors. However, the strongest critique has been in the general shift in the field of comparative mythology or heroisms towards studying difference, rather than similarities. As Donald J. Consentino famously quipped, the goal of most modern scholarship on mythology and global heroism emphasizes difference so as 'to avoid creating a (Joseph) Campbell soup of myths that loses all local flavour.'[19] Granted, it is vital to pay attention to diversity and the contrasts between various local heroes. However, we cannot settle with a dichotomy that posits that the only two choices are between monomyth and multiple myths. We cannot make the mistake of Campbell and see stories of the hero as all essentially the same. Nonetheless, we cannot swing to the other side and make the mistake in thinking that all stories are essentially different and must be understood according to their contexts. These individual stories do have parallels and similarities. They are all drawing on some*thing* that is shared between various notions of the hero/heroic. Furthermore, focusing too much on difference neglects the networks and nodes that transmit ideas, materials, and more across global webs of interconnectivity when it comes to producing, consuming, and analysing heroes today.

This brings us back to the questions we are asking and whether the idea of the global hero can be treated as a discursive tradition. The anthropological study of Islam has benefited by not settling with simplistic dichotomies that posit either 'one Islam' or 'multiple Islams' or even 'great' and 'little' traditions of Islam. Instead, prompted by Asad, we have sought 'to translate and represent the historically situated discourses' to that of others, while also not 'schematizing or de-historicizing' those discourses. We have also tried to focus not on 'types' but rather on changing patterns and conditions. As a result, we now attempt to approach Islam as a discursive tradition that connects variously with individuals, populations, and knowledges that circulate in its name.[20] Thus, the anthropological study of Islam starts with difference, but loops back to coherence—or at least the attempt at it.

Likewise, I surmise that the study of global heroes/heroism as a discursive tradition must start with studying differences, but it should not

discard exploring how concepts achieve, or even approach, coherence. Instead, it should systematically interrogate both and draw out the interplay between notions of monomyths, types, and global categories with the changing patterns and conditions that impact the way individuals, populations, and institutions produce, consume, and analyse the hero/heroic in this day and age. Doing so will help us pay attention to structures of power and the multivalent dynamics of globalization in ways that are currently underemphasized in the study of the hero/heroic and in search of the global, local, or even hybrid hero/heroic. I believe that the field is headed in this direction, but perhaps could benefit from the terminology and framework put forth by Asad and put into practice by anthropologists of Islam (when we are at our best). This point will be made further as we take a look at three chapters of this book and revisit their material from Asad's critical perspective. These chapters already evince the scope and sequence of a discursive-tradition approach to the study of the global hero/heroic, if not in name then in function. Emphasizing the particular theoretical accents of Asad's theory in these cases can perhaps extend their already sound reflections and analyses.

One Hero Fits All? Doctor Strange and 'Cultural Translation'

In 2016, Marvel studios released its fourteenth film in its cinematic universe, *Doctor Strange*, starring international superstars. The story follows the heroic journey of a surgeon who learns the ways of mystical arts after a serious, career-ending accident. As is pointed out in the chapter by Nicole Falkenhayner and Maria-Xenia Hardt, in its sets, casting, and costumes, the globally successful superhero movie also betrayed certain frictions inherent in the globalization of heroes and the popularization of cultural memes and touch points from different parts of the world.

The authors critique the sanitization and bastardization of Eastern beliefs, characters, and practices in the film. They opine that the Nepalese character in the comic books—the 'Ancient One'—had been cast as Tilda Swinton, a shockingly white British actor. Likewise, they call out how Eastern mysticism had been boiled down from its religious form and instead sanitized into a secular 'mystical art' full of spirituality and yet devoid of the traditions that had created it. Furthermore, they critique how Tibetan and Celtic traditions were apparently fused as inter-posable elements in a broad mystical tradition. Basically, the chapter concludes that for all their colour and intrigue, the cities, characters, and practices that are featured in the film merely become backdrops for the drama of the main character—our hero, Dr Strange. In the end, it seems that in trying to appeal to a global audience, the film collapsed, deconstructed, and remade its many cosmopolitan constituent parts into a culturally amorphous and ambiguous narrative and set of characters. For a hero to be global, Nicole

Falkenhayner and her co-authors ask, must it also be abstruse in acknowledging its origins and imprecise in representing its cultural influences?

What is tantalizing about this chapter from the point of view of my observations are these frictions, and the fact that there are always going to be frictions in translating and transforming certain cultural traditions for a global audience. It is also noted that the cultural translation works both ways—in the case of *Doctor Strange*, Eastern elements and traditions were 'Westernized' and Western ideals and tropes were 'Easternized.' This friction is at the heart of the contestation of power that is evident in treating the idea of a global hero as a discursive tradition. In this instance, the Western hero becomes the orthodoxy to which Eastern elements are made to conform. There is most certainly a hybridization occurring, but asking critical questions about power helps draw our attention to the fact that, in the end, *Doctor Strange* is a Western character. For all the film's and the character's exotic Orientalization, it is still a product of the colonial imaginary. Looking to the historical conditions around Doctor Strange's original production in pulp fiction and as part of the *Strange Tales* series, we can see that Doctor Strange was produced and maintained as part of American pop culture's process of appropriating the so-framed 'dark,' 'strange,' and 'exotic' elements of other cultures and belief systems amidst one of the greatest periods of American imperial expansion in the 1960s.[21] At the same time, Doctor Strange is also a product of the discourse between 'East' and 'West' (as if these can be accepted as hermetically sealed and non-hybrid categories). The creation of characters like Doctor Strange speaks to how comic book artists and their reading public were attempting to construct shared meaning with other cultures—particularly those of Asia—in the 1960s amidst American wars in the region and the influx of immigrants from Asia.

While discourse often occurs face to face, it can also occur in texts or pop-culture artefacts. No matter its medium, it is always political. And the power relations between the American audience for which *Doctor Strange* was created and the largely non-American traditions from which Dr Strange's mystical powers were appropriated were most certainly tilted in the American direction. This, of course, shaped the nature of the discourse—what is represented, how it is represented, and how audiences reacted to this representation. And so, the film could not help but take this discourse further. What we are seeing in *Doctor Strange* is not a global character stripped of its cultural distinctiveness but a caricature of the 'global' made in the American colonial imaginary and reproduced for a global audience, framed as a hybrid, but really an appropriated bastardization of multiple cosmopolitan influences. Paying attention to where the power lies, and who the actors are who produce, consume, and interact with this hero's story, helps us better understand the discursive processes at play and the influences that truly make *Doctor Strange* into what it is.

Reinventing Superheroes in Russia

That script is flipped a bit in Dietmar Neutatz's chapter on the Russian superhero movie *Guardians*. In his seminal *Weapons of the Weak*, James C. Scott discusses how the ideological superstructure emerges as a product of struggle in the everyday world, not as some pre-existing entity.[22] It is produced in the friction between multiple actors, by slight tweaks to the familiar and through reconstructing the commonplace. As such, hegemonic ideas or concepts such as the hero are always the subject of conflict and are constantly in a process of reconstruction at multiple levels by various actors. Resistance to the ideological superstructure and its hegemony are rooted in the everyday world. There is no grand revolution, but the shuffling of feet, the scuffle of the quotidian, and the routinized struggle in a seeming dullsville. This point comes to the fore when considering *Guardians*, a Russian production featuring a pantheon of cultural heroes from the nation's past. As Neutatz points out, this film was an example of heroism taking the form of renewed patriotism under Russian president Vladimir Putin. Reflecting a broader Russian desire that their cinema should mirror their philosophy, the film reintroduced these characters to the Russian audience. Nonetheless, although the film takes place in Russia—and is very Russian in its songs, setting, and sayings—the chapter makes it clear that the storyline, visuals, and general outline of the film were oriented towards Hollywood tropes and techniques. Again, as with the foregoing example, this film was trying to tell a Russian story and turned to Russian symbols, cultural touch points, and regional themes. Still, the creators felt that to tell the Russian story to a mass audience they must mimic Hollywood in some shape or form. To the audience, however, the entire effort came off as superficial; critics and the general public in Russia shunned the movie and it was largely given bad press. Not only were there discontinuities between expectations and realities with this film and its ability to thread the needle between Russian stories and settings and American methods and craftsmanship, but also audiences found that it was shallow. Plus, how can a movie that seems to want to glorify Russia—even in its Soviet varieties with Stalinesque music and design motifs—use capitalist American themes and tactics to do so?

This is a critical question as we approach the idea of the global hero as a discursive tradition. If we place emphasis on the issue of power, as well we should, we must also consider how subaltern voices can take part in the discussion. Again, with this example, what we notice is that the critical non-American voice—attempting to tell a Russian story for a Russian audience and push against Western European and American capitalist culture and hegemony—still opts for American themes and temperament even as it tries to resist the culture they come from. As Johnny Cash once sang, kicking against pricks is a hard thing to do. And yet, as I will

explore in the conclusion, they *are* kicking against the pricks; and paying attention to power helps us see this in full view.

Conclusion

One of the stated aims of the present volume is to explore the transnational interface of heroes and interrogate the possibility of a global heroic. Of course, this begins with wondering if there is such a thing in the first place. While the idea of a global hero or global heroism is diffuse and diverse in its many local manifestations across the globe, treating the idea of global heroism as a discursive tradition helps us to see that American heroism—particularly in its superhero form, but also in its political, social, and other cultural expressions—is dominant in terms of power on the global scene. I do not venture to say that the global hero is equivalent to the American hero (and this is also contested in some of the chapters earlier). However, there is a sense wherein many local understandings of the hero are still interpreted, viewed, reimagined, or constructed using American ideal frames and functions. This is what I have tried to argue in the previous sections.

Let me again reiterate that I am not arguing for another version of the 'McDonaldization' thesis or some other form of worldwide homogenization through impact of multinational heroes and superheroes from the United States.[23] While the power of American media in the realm of heroes and superheroes is dominant, it is by no means synchronous across the globe. In fact, along with critiques from scholars such as Pieterse, I would emphasize that the global presence and power of American superheroes have also ushered in a profusion of difference and variety in new, mixed, and hybrid imaginaries of the heroic.[24] As Engelke wrote, 'for all the effects of colonialism and power, there is a lot of difference left in the world. We should pay attention to it.'[25]

To that end, there is a wealth of literature on the notion of the hybrid, and this terminology is quite helpful when considering ideas of the hero and heroism on a global scale. Yet, it too suffers from a lack of recognition of power and how even hybrid flows of information, media, ideas, material products, and cultural artefacts are channelled through contours of power moulded and shaped by state and non-state actors.[26] Suffice it to say that, while noting the hybridity of heroes and heroism (as I did with my own discussion of 'The 99')[27] goes a long way in counteracting racist and nationalist conceptions of cultures and ideas about central and peripheral nations,[28] the concept of 'hybridity' suffers from a lack of understanding that power still tends to push and pull in largely one direction. When it comes to concepts of the hero and the heroic on a global scale, we are still viewing a largely Western game (vis-à-vis current American dominance, but noting past Western European traditions of the hero and heroic). This is, in part, what the foregoing attempted to explain.

However, it would be a mistake to say that power comes from only one direction or is at play only when there is an imposition from a hegemonic power. The dominance of American forms, ideas, characters, and so forth in the realm of the global hero is not the only expression of power. Indeed, it might be helpful to think of the Spanish term for power—*poder*. Or, perhaps, the Greek term—δύναμις. Both terms carry with them not only the sense of influencing the behaviour of others or certain events, or exerting physical force, but also an ability or capacity for dynamism and progress. Thus, power in these terms is about not only imposition but also the potential and ability to create. In this sense, the examples of hybridity from non-American actors (e.g., with Russian 'guardians') are not only testaments to the power of American cultural norms in this field but also evidence of the creative capacity of empowered agents across the globe. In this sense, then, our attention to power in the study of the idea of the global hero or heroism also becomes one about agency, self-creation, and self-presentation. Thus, our analysis should pay attention to the flow of ideas, images, and material aspects of global culture in circular relations of power where power is not a one-way arrow but an arrow that shoots back.

My discussion of 'The 99' was presented as an example of hybridity, loaded in the borderlands between religion and popular culture. However, as A. David Lewis and Martin Lund have asked, prompted by my chapter in their collection, 'to what degree are all superhero characters and all superhero creators "hybrid"?'[29] We might ask the same of the idea of the hero as a global phenomenon. As Lewis and Lund do well to point out, hybrid heroic storytelling is a way for the 'subaltern to speak through a language belonging to the dominant culture and, in turn, more familiar to the cultural "mainstream," in order to intervene in prevailing ways of understanding.'[30] In their analysis, this concerned Islam and Muslims, but in broader terms this also applies to any way that subaltern voices from around the globe use the Western and American power imbued in the idea of the hero and of heroism to destabilize these norms and challenge those idioms deeply embedded within the genre. We might call this a form of explorative authority, wherein global actors are engaging in experimental moves to test the limits of American and Western hegemony, and exert their own creative agency and power.

To be sure, the global hero is not solely a Western, American one, but this is still the text against which the story of most heroes is now produced, consumed, and critiqued. Paying attention to power, the orthodoxy of the American superhero genre, and the fact that the idea of the global hero is a discursive tradition helps us see this better. For that, we must thank the likes of Asad or Foucault for helping us better pay attention to these dynamics of power at play in the idea of the global hero. However, as we seek to understand the historical conditions that enable the production and maintenance of specific discursive traditions

of the hero/heroism and their transformation and hybrid formations, we will have to see where these various active agents and actors are finding coherence or shared meaning, or further debating what is normative in the genre.

If understanding power always depends on the idioms through which people perceive it, and I believe it does (*à la* Asad and Foucault), we must pay attention to those idioms and the discourses that surround them. And, yet, we must humbly admit that when it comes to the heroic, there are multiple idioms at play and which ones come off as 'louder' or more 'coherent' has to do with power. Thus, our reading of global heroes and hybrid creations and conversations will require what Edward Said has called a 'contrapuntal reading'[31] of representations of the hero, where scholars do not pay attention to only one voice but multiple voices in concert together. It may be that local conceptions of the hero/heroic will one day be able to resist American orthodoxies of heroism and tell their own story and create their own characters. It is important that we listen to this conversation as it occurs. The present collection of chapters is a step in this direction, and it may take us further forward in dialogue and understanding of what it is we talk about when we talk about the idea of global heroes and heroism.

Notes

1. Ken Chitwood, 'Hero and/or Villain? *The 99* and the Hybrid Nature of Popular Culture's Production of Islam,' in *Muslim Superheroes: Comics, Islam, and Representation*, eds. A. David Lewis and Martin Lund (Boston: ILEX Foundation, 2017), 165–186.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Talal Asad, 'The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,' originally published in 1986 as part of the Occasional Paper Series sponsored by the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University. Republished by the journal *Qui Parle* 17 (Spring/Summer 2009): 1–30.
5. Cf. George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press, 2009).
6. Ronald A. Lukens-Bull, 'Between Text and Practice: Considerations in the Anthropological Study of Islam,' *Marburg Journal of Religion* 4 (December 1999): 1–21 (1).
7. Asad, 'The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam' (7).
8. Ibid. (6).
9. Ibid. (10)
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid. (15).
12. Susan J. Drucker and Gary Gumpert, eds., *Heroes in a Global World* (New York: Hampton Press, 2008), 15.
13. One might think of Saudi Wahhabism on the one hand or American notions of the hero on the other.
14. Cf. Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

15. Asad, 'The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam' (17).
16. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 3rd ed. (Novato: New World Library, 2008), 23.
17. Cf. Maureen Murdock, *The Heroine's Journey: Woman's Quest for Wholeness* (Boulder: Shambhala Press, 1990); Valerie Estelle Frankel, *From Girl to Goddess: The Heroine's Journey through Myth and Legend* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2010).
18. Maya Zuckerman, 'The Gendered Journey,' *The Huffington Post*, October 9, 2015, last accessed September 24, 2018, www.huffingtonpost.com/maya-zuckerman/the-gendered-journey_b_8270528.html.
19. Donald J. Consentino, ed., *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Museum of Cultural History, 1995); David Adams Leeming, *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); and Donald J. Cosentino, 'African Oral Narrative Traditions,' in *Teaching Oral Traditions*, ed. John Miles Foley (New York: Modern Language Association, 1998), 174–188 (183).
20. Asad, 'The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam' (10).
21. Abraham Riesman, 'The Creator of Doctor Strange Will Not See You Now,' *Vulture*, n.d., last accessed September 24, 2018, www.vulture.com/2016/11/steve-ditko-doctor-strange-c-v-r.html.
22. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
23. Cf. Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*.
24. Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Melange* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 52.
25. Matthew Engelke, *How to Think Like an Anthropologist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 279.
26. Manuel Vásquez, *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.
27. Chitwood, 'Hero and/or Villain?,' 165–186.
28. For example, 'world systems' theory.
29. A. David Lewis and Martin Lund, 'From Book to Tool: Editorial Remarks,' in *Muslim Superheroes: Comics, Islam, and Representation*, eds. A. David Lewis and Martin Lund (Boston: ILEX Foundation, 2017), 235–254 (238–239).
30. Ibid. (239–240).
31. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 2012).

Contributors

Michael Butter is Professor of American Studies at the University of Tübingen. He is the author of *Plots, Designs, and Schemes: American Conspiracy Theories from the Puritans to the Present* (2014), and, together with Peter Knight, edits a book series on conspiracy theories for Routledge.

Ken Chitwood is a PhD candidate with the University of Florida's Department of Religion and Center for Global Islamic Studies. His research interests include global Islam, American religion, Islam in the Americas, and the interplay of religion and popular culture. He is the author of *Between Al-Andalus and the Americas: Introducing the Story of Latinx Muslims* (2019).

Nicole Falkenhayner is Senior Lecturer in British Literary and Cultural Studies and principal investigator at the Collaborative Research Center on Heroes, Heroizations, and Heroisms at the University of Freiburg. She has published on the representation of British Muslims, cultural theory, and cultures of surveillance, including *Media, Surveillance and Affect: Narrating Feeling-States* (2019).

Michael Goodrum is Senior Lecturer in Modern History at Canterbury Christ Church University. His research interests include representations of heroism, gender, and national identity in American history. He is the author of *Superheroes and American Self Image: From War to Watergate* (2016) and the editor of *Gender and the Superhero Narrative* (2018).

Maria-Xenia Hardt is a PhD candidate at the English Department and member of the Collaborative Research Center on Heroes, Heroizations, and Heroisms at the University of Freiburg. Her doctoral thesis investigates heroism in the television series *Doctor Who*.

Ariel Heryanto is Herb Feith Professor for the Study of Indonesia at Monash University, Melbourne. His research interests include the everyday politics of identity and a search for innovative dialogues

between area studies and the 'new humanities.' His books include *Identity and Pleasure: The Politics of Indonesian Screen Culture* (2014).

Wolfgang Hochbruck is Professor of North American Cultural Studies at the University of Freiburg and widely published in various areas of popular culture as well as disaster and security studies. Firefighting as a cultural system is the topic of a recent monograph.

Barbara Korte is Professor of English Literature at the University of Freiburg and Principal Investigator in the Freiburg Collaborative Research Center on Heroes, Heroizations, and Heroisms. She co-edited the volume *Heroes and Heroism in British Fiction since 1800: Case Studies* (2017).

Ricardo K. S. Mak is Professor at the Department of History, Hong Kong Baptist University, and Director of the Advanced Institute for Contemporary China Studies. His research interests include Sino-Western cultural exchange and Sino-German relations. His study on Chinese martial arts in Hong Kong (Zhige weiwu: zhonghua wushu zai xiangjiang) appeared in 2016.

Sotirios Mouzakis is a PhD candidate in Scandinavian Studies and member of the Collaborative Research Center on Heroes, Heroizations, and Heroisms at the University of Freiburg. His doctoral thesis investigates negotiations of the heroic in Scandinavian young adult fiction of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Sugata Nandi is Assistant Professor at the Department of History, West Bengal State University, Barasat, Kolkata. His PhD thesis was a study of the violent criminals called the Goondas, their role in city politics, and police surveillance in colonial Calcutta during the period 1918–1947.

Dietmar Neutatz is Professor of Modern and Eastern European History and Investigator in the Collaborative Research Center on Heroes, Heroizations, and Heroisms at Freiburg University. His research interests include the history of Russia and the Soviet Union since the eighteenth century and the social, everyday, and cultural history of Stalinism.

Konstanze N'Guessan is Lecturer in Social Anthropology and African Studies at the University of Mainz and Investigator in the research group 'Un/doing Differences: Practices in Human Differentiation.' Her research focuses on West Africa, with particular interest in issues of nationality, ethnicity, kinship, and religion as fields of human differentiation.

Mareike Späth is Researcher at the Museum am Rothenbaum, Hamburg. Her research focuses on East Africa and Madagascar, where she has

studied forms and practices of commemoration and celebration. Other interests concern the entangled histories of Africa and Europe and their (non-)representation in public history.

Simon Wendt is Professor of American Studies at the University of Frankfurt. His research interests include African American history, American gender history, memory, nationalism, and the history of the heroic. He is the editor of two volumes concerned with aspects of heroism: *Extraordinary Ordinariness* (2016) and *Warring over Valor* (2019).

Ulrike Zimmermann is a postdoc in British Literature and Culture at the University of Freiburg. Her research deals with popularizations of the eighteenth century. She is a member of the Collaborative Research Center on Heroes, Heroizations, and Heroisms and has recently co-edited a special e-journal issue on animals as heroes (2018).

Index

9/11 115, 127, 132, 134, 143, 146
99, The 227

Abu Ghraib 175, 177
adaptation *see* film, adaptation
adventure 70–73; *see also* hero, heroism; heroic
Althusser, Louis 21, 23
America, American 61, 63–68, 73–75, 81–82, 87, 89–90, 92–93, 96, 114–131, 132–149, 228, 236–240; civil rights movement 1; cultural norms 239; cultural product 150, 152, 164 (*see also* cultural product dream); English 211, 217; hegemony 12, 237, 239; model 101, 107, 110; popular culture (*see* popular culture); soldiers 125; wars 236; *see also* United States, US
America First 64, 116, 123
Americanization 66, 69
Anderson, Benedict 29, 173–174, 184–185
animal 212–214, 220–222
animation 74, 209, 211–212
anti-colonialism, anti-colonial 39, 41, 43, 49, 53; *see also* colonialism, colonial
anti-communism, anti-communist *see* communism, communist
anti-hero, anti-heroic 150–151, 153, 157, 159
anti-racism, anti-racist 39, 53
anti-Western 100; *see also* West, Western
Apaharan (2005) *see* film, Hindi
Appadurai, Arjun 3, 92
appropriation, cultural 65, 74–75, 88–90, 216
archetype 63, 68, 233
Armenian 102, 104
Around the World in Eighty Days (2004) 189
Asad, Talal 227–241
authenticity 66, 68–69, 74–75, 190, 193
authoritative narration 21–22, 26, 29–30, 32

Backdraft (1991) 143
Bal, Mieke 42
Banania 38–60
bastardization 35–36
Batman 82, 101–102, 104
Bengali film 153
Bhabha, Homi K. 6, 25, 92
Biggles 8, 19–37
Biopic 154–155, 157
Bioshock Infinite (2013) 116, 120, 121–122, 125
Black Friday (2007) *see* film
Black Panther (2018) 1–4, 7, 14
Black Skin, White Masks (1952) 39, 49
Bollywood 189
Bombay 12, 153–157
Britain, British 19–37, 43, 48, 56, 134, 139–140, 195, 201
Buddha, Buddhist, Buddhism 82, 87–88, 90, 93, 97, 192

Campbell, Joseph 3, 5, 13, 61, 69, 71, 82–83, 86–87, 89, 91, 94, 96–97, 209, 211, 223, 233–235; *see also Hero with a Thousand Faces*
capitalism, capitalist 7, 14, 86, 94, 96, 150, 152, 237
Captain America 82, 88, 93, 116, 119
casting 82, 90–91, 93, 97

China, Chinese 65–70, 82, 86, 90–93, 97, 189–208; *see also* popular culture
Christian 121, 123, 125, 127, 143, 230
cinema: Hindi 150, 159; Russian 108–109; *see also* film; movie
civilization 26–27, 46–47, 49, 123, 152, 210–211, 215
class 23–24, 153, 156, 158–159
Clifford, James 3
colonialism, colonial 2, 6, 8, 20, 22, 24–26, 28, 30, 32, 38–60, 189–190, 195, 200; *see also* anti-colonialism, anticolonial; colonization; decolonization; neo-colonial, postcolonial
colonization 1, 49; *see also* colonialism, colonial; decolonization
comic book 44, 46–47, 49, 51, 87–89, 91, 93, 96, 134–135, 140–141, 227, 232–233, 235–236; *see also* DC Comics
communism, communist 12, 22, 31, 101, 167–168, 174–176, 178–182, 184
community, communal 119, 133, 141, 147, 216, 222–223
Company (2002) *see* film
computer games *see Bioshock Infinite* (2013)
Congo, Anwar 167–188
consumerism, consumer 99–101
convergence culture 119, 128
counter-culture 82, 87–88, 92–93, 97
crime 154–157, 159, 161–163, 168–170, 174, 179
crisis 68, 72, 122, 126–127, 150–151, 153
cultural power 7, 13
cultural product, production 4, 81, 87, 94, 96, 137, 174
cultural revolution 197
cultural text 132, 139
cultural translation 4–7, 81–82, 88–89, 91, 93, 96–97, 211, 216, 223, 235–236

Daddy (2017) *see* film
Dayavan (1988) *see* film
DC Comics 232; *see also* comic book
decolonization 7, 14, 19, 23, 28, 41, 50, 57, 200; *see also* colonialism, colonial
Deewar (1975) *see* film
democratic, democracy 30, 117, 119, 133, 140, 152, 156, 165, 176–177, 200, 215, 220–222
Dennis Smith (1978) 139
dictatorial, dictatorship 24, 214, 220, 222
disaster 103, 140, 144, 147
discrimination 33, 91, 181
discursive, discourse 2–3, 7–8, 13–14, 23, 25, 43, 50, 72, 122, 128, 167–169, 170–172, 174, 176, 183–185, 211, 227–240
Disney 61–80
diversity 62, 64, 91–92, 227, 230–231, 324
Doctor Strange (2016) 81–98, 235–236

East, Eastern 75, 82, 86, 93–94, 96
Emergency (1972–1977) 133–134
Empire 2, 30, 32–34, 102–103, 110
England, English 108, 182, 211, 217, 219; *see also* Britain, British
epic 83, 164
ethnic, ethnicity 5, 38, 62–64, 75, 81–82, 85, 90, 92–93, 95
ethnoscape *see* Appadurai, Arjun
Europe, European 44, 46, 51, 52–53, 55–56, 116–117, 122–125, 127–128

family 65, 67, 152, 154, 160–161, 164
fan 93, 126
Fanon, Frantz 39, 49; *see also Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)
fantasy 66, 75, 89
femininity, feminine 22, 62, 65, 69
film: adaptation 2, 6–7, 14, 65, 82–83, 99, 101, 110, 144, 146–147; American 63, 65–66, 92, 101, 105, 107; animated 209; filmmaker 155–156, 167, 169–170, 173, 175–178; filmmaking 2, 7, 175, 177; gangster 150–166; Hindi 150–166; industry 64, 91–92, 101, 151, 160, 195, 197, 202; market 63, 66, 82, 86, 90–94; production 82–83; Russian 99, 101, 104, 106; Shaolin 198, 200; superhero 96, 101–102, 107–110, 235, 237 (*see also* Hollywood; superhero); Western 90, 100 (*see also* West)
finanscape *see* Appadurai, Arjun
firefighter, firefighting 132–149
Foucault, Michel 228–229, 239–240

France, French 21, 26, 38–60
Franco-African 41, 19, 55, 56

Gangs of Wasseypur (2012) *see* film
gangster 150–166
gender 65, 67, 69, 72, 75
Glance at New York (1848) 136–137
global, globalization, globalism 2–4, 6–7, 38, 62–64, 81–83, 86–90, 92–95, 97, 167, 184–185, 189–190, 195, 203, 211, 232–233, 235
global city 1, 94
global hero, heroism 2, 5, 14, 19, 62, 81–82, 92, 132, 209, 217, 227–230, 232, 234–240
glocalization, glocal 6, 81–82, 99, 110, 167, 172, 185; *see also* Robertson, Roland
graphic novel *see* comic book
grobalization *see* Ritzer, George
Guardians see Zashchitniki (Guardians) (2017)

Hall, Stuart 6
hero, heroism: adventure 22; black 2; definition of 3, 20–22, 28, 115, 150; everyday 126, 147; exceptionality 2–3, 68, 72, 150; exemplarity 19, 61, 150; folk 136, 194, 196, 210; functions of 4–5, 28, 72; girl 62, 65, 73, 75; and hybridity 7, 86–87, 216, 231–232, 235–236, 238–239; journey (*see* Campbell, Joseph); and masculinity 22, 123; medieval 125, 135; and memory 41, 53; military 110, 124, 179; pride 72; proletarian 153–154; and race 5, 38–60; of resistance 6, 46, 220; soldier 23; system 4, 9, 11–12, 81–82, 231; and villains 5, 167, 169, 171, 178, 183, 185; war 41, 46, 191; warrior 44, 65, 69, 117, 123, 125–126; worship 14, 147, 191, 195
heroic: adventure 209; behavior 211, 213, 216, 220–221; firefighter 132–149; group 138; individual 29, 139; narrative 4, 6–7, 38–39, 41–43, 50–51, 53, 55, 57, 83, 132, 139, 190; princess 61–80; quest 69, 96
Hero with a Thousand Faces, The 3, 83, 89, 233
Hitler, Adolf 81–84
Hollywood: film 12, 81, 83, 91, 134, 150, 155, 178, 183–184; gangster films (*see* film); heroes 202; imitation of 108; inspired 174; representation of Asian characters 92
homogeneity, homogenization 198, 203, 238
Hong Kong 1, 86, 90, 94–96, 167, 180, 183, 189–208; *see also* global city
hybrid, hybridity, hybridization 6, 12, 66, 74, 81, 85–87, 90, 92–93, 227; *see also* hero

icon, iconic, iconization, iconography 38–39, 42–43, 49–51, 53, 55–57, 89, 121, 132–133, 146, 197
identity 68–69, 73, 83–86, 88, 93, 96, 200
imaginary 39, 43, 46–47, 49, 92–93, 236
immigration, immigrants 117, 120, 122–123, 125, 127–128, 195, 236
imperial, imperialism 6–7, 19–37, 38, 56, 61, 63–65, 74–75
India, Indian 21, 27–29, 150–166, 167, 191, 183, 189, 197
Indonesia, Indonesian 167–168
international: audience 66, 170–171, 173, 183–184; language 11, 128; law 26, 31; media 91, 197; star 91, 189, 199
interspecies 209, 216, 222
irony, ironic 95–96, 105, 109, 137, 142, 173, 181
Islam, Islamic, Islamization 123–124, 128, 227–241; *see also* Muslim, Muslims
Isle of Dogs (2017) 209–226

Japan, Japanese 134–135, 146, 209–226
Java, Javanese 172–174, 183–185
Jones, Max 3, 20, 28, 117

Kung Fu 180, 197–198

Laclau, Ernesto 128
language 5, 211–213, 217, 219, 221–223
Little Caesar (1930) 151
Little Mermaid, The (1989) 61–62
local, localization 2–4, 6–8, 63–64, 73, 81, 84, 96, 167, 174, 185, 189–190, 202–203, 227–228, 232–235, 238, 240
Look of Silence, The (2014) 177–178

martial arts 4, 90, 183, 189–208
Marvel: cinema 92; comic serial 82, 87, 91; film 81–98; studios 82, 235; super-hero 96; universe 88, 91, 143
masculinity, masculine 22–23, 28, 72, 74, 114–131, 137–138, 234
master narrative 179–180
mediascape *see* Appadurai, Arjun
melodrama, melodramatic 136–137, 139–140, 146, 151, 60–61
meme 116, 118, *120*, 121–123, 129
Merlin 89–90
Mickey Mouse 61
Middle East 231
minority, minorities 81, 87, 90, 92
mistranslation 110, 167–188; *see also* translation
Moana (2016) 61–80
modernity, modern 3, 6, 92, 150–151, 171, 185, 196–198; *see also* postmodern
monomyth *see* Campbell, Joseph
moral, morality 22, 56, 83–84, 100, 150, 152, 167, 169–172, 174, 178, 184–185, 191–192, 230
movie *see* film
Mulan (1998) 61–80
multicentred 2
multicultural, multiculturalism 63, 73, 81
multiethnic 63, 102
multinational 103, 107, 238
Muslim, Muslims 115, 122–127, 227, 230, 239; *see also* Islam, Islamic, Islamization
mystic, mysticism 82–83, 85–91, 95, 97, 235–236
myth, mythical, mythology 3, 6, 44, 46, 68, 70–71, 74, 134, 139, 192–193, 195–197, 201, 210, 222, 233–234
mythopoeisis 138

narrative *see* heroic; master narrative
nation, national, nationality, nationalism 7, 2–25, 29, 31, 41, 43, 46, 50, 97, 99–105, 114, 116, 123–124, 127–128, 167, 177, 179, 184, 189, 191, 197, 201, 238
Nazi 32, 41, 88, 167, 181–182
neo-colonial 43, 49–50, 53, 55; *see also* colonialism, colonial
New York Fire Department (FDNY) 132–149
non-Western 7, 12, 62, 65, 70; *see also* West, Western

Odyssée de Mongou, Le (2017) *44*, 46
Omkara (2006) *see* film
Once Upon a Time in China (1991–1997) 200–203
origin story 82–83
orthodox, orthodoxy 231–232, 236, 239–240
other, otherness 39, 66, 87, 93, 97, 122, 126, 222
Our Firemen (1887) 138

Parinda (1989) *see* film
patriarchal 68
patriotism, patriotic 99–100, 104, 106–108, 237
political correctness 32, 97, 118, 122
Polynesia, Polynesian 70–71, 73–75
pop culture *see* popular culture
popular culture: American 2, 61, 81, 87, 89–90, 92–93, 96, 189, 236; Chinese 189; globalized 81, 90, 93; heroes 4, 55, 119; products of 116, 123; transnational flows of 183
populism, populist 114, 128
postcolonial 4, 6, 21, 38, 41–43, 49–50, 53, 56, 189, 200; *see also* colonialism, colonial
postmodern 171; *see also* modernity, modern
princess: movies *see* Disney
propaganda, propagandistic 38–39, 43, 46–47, 49–50, 101, 178–180, 214, 218
Public Enemy (1931) 151

race, racism, racist, racial, racialization 1–2, 5, 7, 19, 21, 30, 32, 39, 42–43, 49, 53, 63, 81, 88–90, 120–122
Ramayana 183
realism, realist 177
representation 42–43, 50, 55–56, 87, 89–92, 236
Ritzer, George 6, 64
Robertson, Roland 6, 81
Russia, Russian 99–113, 237; *see also* USSR

Said, Edward 6, 240
September 11, 2011 *see* 9/11
Shaolin: legends 190, 193, 195, 198; martial arts 90, 189–208
slavery 1–2, 55
soldier 3, 23, 38–60, 193, 196
Soviet Union, Soviet *see* USSR
Star Wars 83, 89–90, 115
stereotype, stereotypical 25, 38–39, 41–43, 49, 51, 74–75, 89–90, 102, 109–110, 121, 136, 218
storyworld 89, 91, 94, 212
superhero, super-heroine, super-heroism, superheroic 2, 81–82, 85, 87, 96, 99, 101, 105, 107–110, 133, 140–144, 146, 227–228, 238
superhuman 103–104, 132, 140, 144
Superman 101, 116, 119, 144, 231–232
superpower 1, 83, 86, 101–102, 104–105, 135
syncretism 6–7

television, TV 62, 176–177
terrorism, terrorist 115, 126
tiralleur 38–60
transcultural 2, 4, 38, 189, 231
translation *see* cultural translation
translation studies 4
transmedial 91, 134
transnational 2–3, 114, 128, 174, 238
Trump, Donald 64, 114–131
Twin Towers *see* 9/11

United States, US 1–2, 26, 33, 63, 81, 105–106, 114–131, 134, 238; army 142, 175; *see also* America, American
USSR 99–113

villain 5, 24–25, 33, 104–105, 167, 169–171, 178, 183, 191; *see also* hero

West, Western 4, 7, 22, 27–28, 62, 67–68, 72, 75, 85–86, 92–93, 96, 99–101, 115, 123, 167, 174, 184–185, 189, 191, 228, 234, 236–239; *see also* anti-Western, non-Western
westernization, westernized 82, 96, 194, 201, 236
white man's burden 122
white supremacy 7, 117
whitewashing 82, 90–92, 96
Williams, Raymond 5
World War I 19, 38, 51
World War II 51
worldwide *see* global, globalization, globalism

youth culture 53, 101

Zashchitniki (Guardians) (2017) 99–113
Žižek, Slavoj 184