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**IMAGES OF CATASTROPHE
IN CONTEMPORARY
NORWEGIAN NARRATIVES**

ABSTRACT: The paper concentrates on visual aspects in narratives that depict catastrophes. Departing from a cultural analytic standpoint and drawing on philosophy of photography and the image, the essay reflects upon the metaphorical function of images that stem from photographs of specific catastrophic events and are used in new catastrophic contexts. At the center of the essay are analyses of three Scandinavian narratives: a graphic novel, a documentary movie and a novel.

KEYWORDS: Catastrophe, Image, July 22, Terror, Concentration Camps.

What happens at the intersection of photography and narrative? Susan Sontag (2003) says, “narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us” (89). But what happens when the haunting quality of photographs is framed in a narrative and used as an aesthetic device? This essay explores the use of images related to catastrophes in new contexts. The core question is: how do photographs depicting a specific catastrophic event shape our understanding of other catastrophes when narratives employ them as an aesthetic and political device? Proceeding from the perspective of cultural analysis and drawing on the philosophy of photography and the image, this essay discusses the effects of images from two historical events in contemporary Norwegian narratives. The first is a set of images connected to the The Second World War; the second is the image of teenagers swimming for their lives after the July 22, 2011 terror attack at Utøya. The images derive from two very different historical events. The horrors of WW2 and the Holocaust are part of a collective global memory and have shaped politics and history worldwide for over 70 years. The 2011 terror attack in Oslo and at Utøya, on the other hand, was a national tragedy with an impact felt mainly on a national level. Furthermore, being much more recent, this event has yet to be fully processed. A close study of these images in three different narratives forms the basis for a reflection on the effect of catastrophe images on our understanding when applied in a

new context. The first narrative is a graphic novel for young adults that can be read as a commentary on the situation of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. The graphic novel's illustrations are reminiscent of photographs taken at concentration camps, thus evoking specific connotations. The other two narratives call to mind the image of the swimming youths at Utøya. One is a film documentary about unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, while the other is a novel about the German battleship Tirpitz, which was stationed in Norway during World War II. The three narratives are very different in both form and content. Though they are not immediately comparable, it is their similar metaphorical use of images that is of interest here. The concept of the image, as defined as something at the intersection of the visible and the narrative and the bearer of connotations, is vital for the discussion of the core questions in this essay. How are photographs of catastrophes aestheticized and used in these narratives? Which effect do these narrative images have on the reader, and how does this effect differ depending on the image in question and its narrative context?

Photograph, Image and Narrative

This essay proceeds from the perspective of cultural analysis, which assumes that our understanding of the world and society is formed by cultural resources in the form of narratives, genres, metaphors, images and so on (cf. Holm and Illner 2016, 52). The narratives are analyzed and discussed on the basis of the philosophy of photography and the image. The analysis of the images draws mainly on the works of the philosophers Susan Sontag and Jaques Rancière. Sontag provides valuable insights on the impact of photography on the viewer, while Rancière creates a theoretical framework for understanding how photographs turn into artistic images with the potential for exerting influence.

When Sontag (2002) writes that photographs haunt us while narratives make us understand, she is referencing photographs' quality of immediacy and singularity. The photograph as a *memento mori*, as she famously called it, documents a person's or object's impermanence by capturing a fleeting moment: "by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt" (15). Walter Benjamin (2011) points out the same phenomenon in "A Short History of Photography," asserting that the spectator will always look for "the tiny spark of chance, of the here and now, [. . .] to find that imperceptible point [. . .] in the immediacy of that long-past moment" (location 182). No other aesthetic device can capture a moment in history—the here and now—the way the camera does. A painter

seeks to represent a moment, but (s)he must always do so by way of reconstruction, never in the immediacy of the moment.¹ In that sense, a photography is singular—as unique as the moment it captures. Also, like all visual arts, photographs have an immediate impact on the spectator. Reading a text takes a measure of both time and active understanding, but photography’s language is immediate, simple and speaks to everyone (Sontag 2003, 20).

Both of Sontag’s major works on photography—*On Photography* ([1977] 2002) and *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003)—study photographs’ emotional impact and their ability to shock. In *On Photography*, Sontag argues that photographs shock because they show something novel (19), and that their power to shock wears off. Though Sontag herself finds some fault with this argument in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, she has an indisputable point. The pictures of the planes crashing into the World Trade Center, of the falling man, of the napalm girl, of concentration camps and the youths at Utøya certainly resonate differently after repeated display than when first seen. Furthermore, they also gain connotations through cultural interpretation, turning them into iconic images.

Photography and image are not synonymous. An image can be defined as something that either is visible or makes something visible, and that has an extended meaning. An image can be a painting or a photograph, but can also be composed only of words. Vilém Flusser (2000) defines the image as “connotative’ (ambiguous) complexes of symbols: They provide space for interpretation” (8). Rancière (2007) views it in a similar way. According to him, the image arises at the intersection of verbal language and the visible (7). It is both “raw, material presence and [...] discourse encoding a history” (11), and it is this duality—the interplay between what is present and the otherness of discourse—that turns photography into art. As connotative complexes, images are constantly subject to change. When they spread out in the cultural imagination and are used in new contexts—novels, newspapers, films, theater plays, letters and so on—their connotations change as well. Thus, a photograph’s initial quality of singularity alters,

¹ In his classic essay *Laocoon*—written in 1766, about 50 years before the first printed photographs—Lessing ([1766] 2003) argues that the principal difference between painting and sculpture on the one hand and literature on the other is that the visible arts can only represent objects in space, while literature represents actions in time. When literature represents objects and bodies, it is always through action, and thus in a sequence extended in time. Conversely, when paintings seek to represent a chain of events, they can only do so by placing objects or bodies side by side. It follows that “painting, in her coexisting compositions, can use only one single moment of the action, and must therefore choose the most pregnant, from which what precedes and follows will be most easily apprehended” (81).

giving way to multiple culturally established interpretations. And once images have gained meaning beyond their original singular moment, they also gain the potential to influence our understanding of other events.

Concentration Camps as Metaphor

The pictures taken of the concentration camps in 1945 stand out in the history of photography. Never did photography have more authority over narrative, as Susan Sontag (2003, 24) states. These photographs are an essential part of the collective memory of the genocides committed by the Nazis, especially the Holocaust. It is understood as an event that defies comparison and that, in the words of Rancière (2007), “is generally accepted not to tolerate any other form of presentation” than through such stark photos (23). The question of representation is one of the most debated when it comes to discussions on the Holocaust and is often discussed in connection to films as e.g. Gillo Pontecorvo’s *Kapo* (1960) (cf. Saxton 2008). Within the art of the graphic novel, Art Spiegelmann’s *Maus*, that tells the story of his father, a Jewish survivor, is one of the most prominent examples of aestheticizing images connected to the Holocaust.² *The Day We Dreamed About*, written by Bjørn Arild Ersland and illustrated by Lillian Brøgger, is not a book about the Nazi genocides, but it utilizes images of concentration camps as an artistic form of expression, using them both as an aesthetic tool and a political device.

The book is a dystopian fable about three teenagers living in what is called reception center, where children and adolescents from all over the world are detained while waiting for a final check. Neither the third person limited narrator nor the reader know what that final check is, only that it is necessary in order for the detainees to move on. The graphic novel opens with a double spread depicting the interrogation of a child, without accompanying text. Thus, the book creates an uncanny atmosphere of institutional power from the start, immediately establishing the power relation between children and adults as a central theme. The impression of the reception center as a military-run prison is reinforced throughout the first third of the book, which describes endless and meaningless daily routines that fill the time spent waiting for the final check. The illustrations portray institutional rooms like the dormitory, the showers and the courtyard.

² I will return to this discussion at the end of the essay.

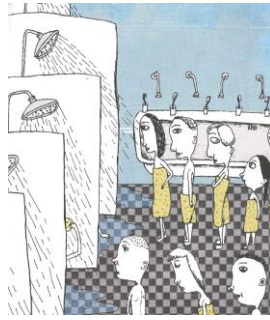


Fig. 1. Ersland and Brøgger (ill.) 2013, 15.

The children are uniformed and drawn disproportionately small compared to the huge adults. When the day of the final check arrives, the three teenagers receive a map and are sent away. They walk for a long time. On their way, they meet other youths with blank eyes and blood running from their mouths, returning from what the reader assumes to be the final check's location (fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Ersland and Brøgger (ill.) 2013, 43.

At their destination, the protagonists meet an uncanny dentist using absurdly brutal experimental methods. The narrative culminates in the children's torture and escape, during which one of them disappears and a murder is committed. The book's ending is inconclusive; two of the children return to the center, and a variation of the interrogation scene from the beginning commences. What actually happened that day is never revealed.

The graphic novel can be read as a clear critique of Norwegian immigration policies. Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers are often sent to reception centers, where they lead lives marked by waiting and uncertainty. They live under the threat of being deported once they have reached the age of 18, and they might be immediately deported after a controversial dental exam taken in order to determine their age. However,

while parts of the story and illustrations evoke the situation of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, they also clearly refer to photographs taken at the Nazi death camps. That applies especially to the book's middle section, surrounding the violent climax of the tale. The children's journey from the reception center to the final check is illustrated by several pictures of endless railway tracks (fig. 2, 3, 4 and 5). Railroad tracks appear in altogether thirteen illustrations. They pass by a building reminiscent of watchtowers, as in e.g. Dachau (fig. 4). The tower appears in totally nine illustrations, in three it is dominating the spread and shown in full size. In several illustrations we see close up pictures of barb wire fences and their destination is drawn as a large grey building behind barbwire with barracks in the background (fig. 6). Once the Nazi death camps are established as a reference point, even the dentist becomes reminiscent of Dr. Mengele (fig. 7).



Fig. 3. Ersland and Brøgger (ill.) 2013, 40-41.



Fig. 4. Ersland and Brøgger (ill.) 2013, 49.

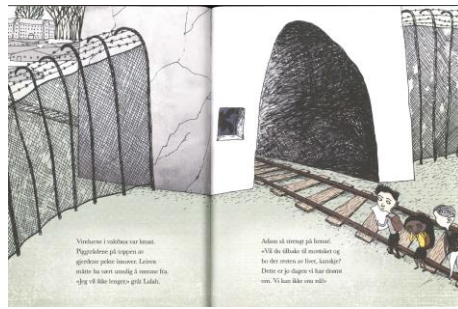


Fig. 5. Ersland and Brøgger (ill.) 2013, 50-51.

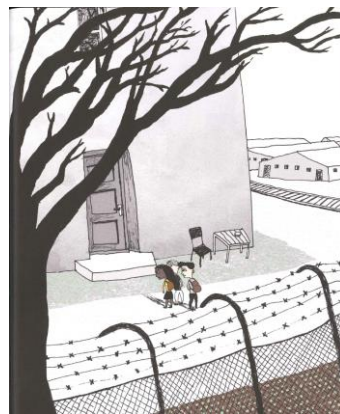


Fig. 6. Ersland and Brøgger (ill.) 2013, 53.



Fig. 7. Ersland and Brøgger (ill.) 2013, 40-41.

As a graphic novel, the book communicates simultaneously through pictures and text, the *iconotext*. When the children first arrive at the tracks, the text informs us that “it was the railways Adam had been looking for, which were now supposed to lead us to the camp marked on the map” (Ersland and Brøgger 2013, 37; translation Kielland Samoilow). While the

institution in the beginning of the novel is consistently called a reception center, the destination is referred to as a camp, allowing the mental leap to a concentration camp. To further strengthen the connotation, the narrator makes an enigmatic remark on the next page: “The trains and endless queues were long gone. The tracks led somewhere that was no longer there” (38; translation Kielland Samoilow). The place the children are walking towards no longer exists, and yet they do arrive. The seeming contradiction connects two points in history—the atrocities of the 1940s and the present. One interpretation might be that even though the concentration camps belong to the past and there are no operational death camps anymore, the dehumanization of the past still goes on today.

How should the images in this book be understood? Rancière divides contemporary displays of images into three major categories. The *naked image* seeks to present an event as purely as possible, as displays of photographs of the Nazi death camps do (23). The *ostensive image* turns a picture into art by framing it a certain way, as pop art or Duchamp’s urinal does. Similar to the naked image, the ostensive one also strives for purity, for absolute presence without signification—but: “it claims it in the name of art” (23). Thus, the ostensive image seeks to eliminate any surplus of meaning. Rancière’s third image type is the *metaphorical image*, which requires that an image has spread in the cultural imagination, allowing it to be used in multiple contexts and different mediums (24).

The images in this graphic novel are not photographs and do not attempt to portray actual concentration camps. A viewer who has never seen photographs of the camps, as it may well be the case for the young Norwegian readers of the novel, will not necessarily suspect a historical reference. From this perspective, the images are pure art—ostensive images that do not present the Nazi death camps, but function purely within the graphic novel’s own aesthetic composition. At the same time, however, the pictures draw on images of the camps that have become an established part of a shared cultural imagery and thus also have a metaphorical function.

As has been shown, the novel’s imagery establishes a dichotomy between resemblance and distinctness. The pictures both establish and undermine the correlation between the concentration camps and the children’s destination. The text does the same, also communicating both the camps presence and non-presence. Through this dichotomy in the text, the pictures and the iconotext (the interaction of text and picture), Erslund and Brøgger create continuity between two historical moments. The images not only evoke images we know, but their connotations as well, thus evoking the entire process of Nazi dehumanization and connecting it to the treatment of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers by the Norwegian government. At

the same time, the message remains ambivalent due to the dichotomy of the imagery, leaving the reader both disturbed and uncertain.

Swimming from Utøya

The images central to the analysis of the next two narratives depict a more recent and rather different catastrophe. In the opening scene of the movie *The Others* (2012; original title *De andre*), a documentary by internationally acclaimed Norwegian director Margreth Olin, underwater film sequences of a swimming person are intercut with iconic photographs from the terrorist attacks in Oslo and Utøya on July 22, 2011. In a dreamy voice underscored by mystical background music, a female narrator describes a recurring dream she's had after the attacks: teenagers who escaped from the shooting on the island are reaching the shore. Loving parents, support agencies, state officials and even the king are there to take care of them. A girl carrying the lifeless body of a younger boy appears, and a police officer asks her how old she is. When the girl says she is 18, the man dismisses her, helping only the underaged boy.³

The 2011 terror attacks were the most deadly attacks on Norwegian soil since World War II. On July 22, 32-year-old Norwegian citizen Anders Behring Breivik planted a bomb in Oslo's government district. The bomb killed eight people and injured 200. Breivik escaped by car and changed into a police uniform. Approximately one and a half hours later, he took the ferry to the small island Utøya, where the Norwegian labour party's youth organization was holding its annual summer camp with 564 participants, mostly teenagers. Within 70 minutes, Breivik killed 69 people and injured 33. 32 of the victims were under the age of 18; the two youngest were 14. During the shooting, the camp's participants hid in cupboards, behind bushes and in crevices. Some began to swim to the mainland, 550 meters away, while Breivik was shooting at them. Residents on the mainland took out their boats to rescue them.

The full impact of the attacks on Norwegians can only be understood by bearing in mind that Norwegians had been living in a naïve peaceful state. In Norway—located on the outskirts of Europe, not part of the European Union and in possession of oil wealth—violence of this kind had never happened. Unlike many other countries, Norway has no history of terror organizations, and there are few murders⁴; the Norwegian police is not even

³ The scene can be seen in the movie's trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBhhZTjpvVE>.

⁴ The homicide rate shows under 45 murders per year since the 1990s (Politiet).

permanently armed and the governmental building which houses the offices of among others the prime minister was not secured by police. An event like July 22 was unthinkable. Furthermore, because Norway is a small country, the attacks had direct impact on everyone in the entire nation, sending hundreds of thousands onto the streets, into churches and to funerals. July 22 was a turning point in Norwegian history. One book title named it *The Day Terror Hit Norway*, while headlines proclaimed it the day *Our Little Land* was corrupted, echoing one of many songs that were sung in the catastrophe's aftermath.⁵

July 22 is often compared to 9/11, with both events being interpreted as attacks on democracy and liberty. However, while 9/11 was a media event documented by spectacular photographs, the attacks in Oslo and Utøya were mainly documented by Facebook messages and tweets. In addition to the survivors own reports, stories of how civilians took their boats to save the drowning teenagers were shared again and again, as were tales of the support and sympathy the victims received, and photos of roses. A quote spread through social media became one of the most famous messages of the day: "If one man can create so much hate, imagine how much love we can create together."⁶ Among the relatively few pictures of the events on Utøya are photographs and films of the swimming teenagers, taken from the air. They were spread across the media and turned into one of the most heartbreaking images of the attacks. It is even said that the youths were singing a Norwegian song as they swam. As an image, the swimming teenagers connote both the struggle against death and human companionship.

In the opening scene of Olin's film, photographs, the lighting of the water and melancholic music come together in a masterful composition. Olin incorporates twelve photographs into the scene, but only two show the attacks' destruction, both taken in the government district in Oslo. The remaining ten photographs show people mourning, candles and roses. Olin thus emphasizes the reactions of the Norwegian people rather than the attacks themselves. Viewers expect a tale of love; they expect the parents, the support agencies, the state officials and even the king to meet the youth with loving care. In Olin's film, these expectations are violated. The cool rejection of the girl at the shore disrupts the established narrative and destabilizes both the viewer's understanding of July 22, and of the treatment unaccompanied minor asylum seekers receive. As Rancière points out, an image has the power to make something visible that is not yet seen (12). Olin utilizes images to make something visible not about the teenagers escaping

⁵ See Stormark 2011 and Knudsen *et. al.* 2014.

⁶ The quote was first posted by Hanne Ganestad (cf. Espegren 2011).

Utøya, but about teenagers escaping war. By contrasting Norwegians' behavior towards the Norwegian survivors and *The Others*, Olin points out the inhumanity of the dissimilar treatment the latter youths suffer. Like Ersland and Brøgger, Olin uses the established imagery of a catastrophe as a metaphor. Here, too, the image is aestheticized and turned into a political tool, criticizing Norwegian immigration policies through the interplay between resemblance and difference. Unlike the images in *The Day We Dreamed About*, however, this image does not work on its own, uncoupled from the reference.

The same image is used in the novel *Here Lies Tirpitz* by Ingrid Storholmen (2015), now created through words alone. *Tirpitz* was one of Germany's largest battleships in World War II, deeply feared by the Allies. The ship was stationed in several locations in Norway, but never saw battle. In the novel, Storholmen follows multiple characters and plotlines from the day the Nazis launched the ship in 1939 to after the war. She blends the multiple voices: the men on *Tirpitz*, wives and children in Germany, and Norwegians. The reader encounters over 30 people as well as letters, fragments of unattributed dialogue and quotes by politicians. By these means, the author creates a mosaic of lives, experiences, dreams, beliefs, doubts and fears. The fragmented narrative reflects the scattering of lives in war.

When the ship is bombarded and sunk, the crewmen swim for their lives, and residents take out their boats to rescue the drowning young men. For Norwegian readers, the scene evokes the image of the swimming teenagers after the July 22 terror attacks. Readers hear the voice of a swimming man as well as of a drowning one. They hear the voice of a resident, Bjarne, who sails out to rescue the Germans. And they hear the voice of the pilot who drops the bomb on the ship and sees "those moving human dots on camera, no training can remove those images" (152; translation Kielland Samoilow). A photograph of the small human dots swimming in the water was among the few pictures taken during the attack in 2011. Captured by the media's cameras, they created an abiding—though not spectacular—image. In this passage of Storholmen's novel, the raw material that Rancière calls the naked image—the image of the swimming human dots—is turned into a cultural image used in an artistic, metaphorical way. The scene incorporates the perspective of the victims, the lifesavers and the pilot who is both witness and perpetrator, and this composition is vital in the construction of the image, which is created solely through words.

Like the other two narratives, Storholmen's novel establishes a connection between two events, but the effect on the reader is somewhat different. As in Olin's film, the image is used for its connotations of

compassion. While the imagery in the first two narratives was utilized to comment on current political issues, in this historical novel it creates empathy—empathy with people who were the enemy during World War II, and who have always been presented in this light in post-war years. The continuing relevance of the depicted events is underlined when Bjarne looks back on the catastrophe years later: “New ones turned up all the time. We struggled to get them into the boat. Eventually, we had to throw them overboard again and prioritize the living, those who were shouting. Those who are shouting still” (197; translation Kielland Samoilow). The last sentence is ambiguous—while it can be interpreted as a sign of trauma, it also creates historical continuity. Who are the people who are still shouting? Is it the Germans, our youths, or others? Does the remark encompass everyone swimming for their lives, including the youth from Utøya and the refugees in the Mediterranean Sea? Is Storholmen playing on the resemblances and differences between all of these?

Images of Catastrophes and Their Effect on the Reader

So, how are photographs of catastrophes aestheticized and used in the analyzed narratives, and how do they shape our understanding of narratives about catastrophes?

All three discussed narratives turn an image that originated in a photograph of a specific catastrophic event—the naked image—into a metaphorical image, using it to compare and contrast two catastrophic events. As an aesthetic device, the images fulfill similar functions in all three narratives, but they are used in three different narrative forms and constructed through different means. The graphic novel creates its reference mainly through illustrations. The film constructs its image through a multimodal configuration of moving pictures, photographs and sounds, particularly voice and music, and connects July 22 and the situation of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers through voice-over narration. Finally, the image in the novel is constructed only through words.

In all three cases, the overall effect is to create continuity between two events. The first two narratives use images to connect Norwegian immigration policies with the Holocaust and July 22, respectively. The third narrative uses an image to connect World War II and July 22. However, while the metaphorical image is used to similar effect in all discussed narratives, there are fundamental differences regarding the images’ impact, their influence on the reader’s or viewer’s interpretation of events, and the nature of the images themselves.

An important factor in the images' impact is their specific aesthetic form. Readers' initial reaction to the graphic novel's illustrations tends to be mostly shock and disgust;⁷ it is the immediacy of the pictures and their historical connotations that evoke these emotions. On the other hand, the image of swimming youths in the film documentary initially evokes sorrow, which turns to shock because of the sudden, contrasting connection with the situation of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. Finally, when constructed from words and framed by the historical event of the sinking of *Tirpitz*, the same image of swimming youths evokes sympathy and invites the reader to reflect on shared human experience. In all three cases, the images of catastrophe influence interpretive choices. They redirect initial interpretations by creating connections between two historical events. But where the first two narratives use an image of a catastrophe to provoke shock as a means of inspiring awareness on a current political issue, the novel's contemplative, thoughtfully drawn parallel carries a more general anti-war message of shared humanity.

As previously mentioned, the nature of the images the narratives employ differs because the two depicted catastrophes are different in scope, temporal distance and whether the resulting trauma was felt on a global or a national level. The nature of the depicted catastrophe is central to *The Day We Dreamed About's* shocking effect. For one thing, adult readers find it repulsive and questionable that a tale of such darkness is directed at a young readership.⁸ For another, the use of the images as such is shocking. In the general cultural interpretation concentration camps are connected to the Holocaust, which is an event that is often perceived as something that defies comparison. The Nazi genocide denotes absolute evil, and no event, no political situation and no genocide can be compared to the dehumanization, torture and murder of more than six million human beings. When the Holocaust is used as a metaphor in political discourse—as it has been in connection with human rights issues, the genocides in Srebrenica and Uganda, or the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine—responses can be expected to be harsh (cf. Webman 2017). These strong reactions are mainly motivated by opposition to the perceived threat to the uniqueness of the horrors of the Nazi death camps, the Holocaust's instrumentalization in

⁷ Discussing the novel at seminars has shown that students always recognize the reference to the Holocaust and tend to react emotionally to the novel's brutality and darkness. However, as will be pointed out later, younger readers do not necessarily see the historical reference.

⁸ Norwegians—and Scandinavians in general—are known for ambivalent and controversial picture books and graphic novels, and seem eager to infringe taboos (cf. Ommundsen 2015, 71 ff.).

the service of political agendas, and the frequent use of Holocaust terminology and symbols against Jews, particularly against the state of Israel (281). In an often quoted interview with Paula Hayman in *The New York Times* in 1980 Elie Wiesel commented the representation of concentration camps and the Holocaust in popular culture: “They are stealing the Holocaust from us [...] we need to regain ours sense of sacredness” (14.10.1980). More recently Hila Shachar (2014)—Honorary Research Fellow in English and Cultural Studies at the University of Western Australia—harshly criticized the metaphorical use of images from the Holocaust in connection with Australian immigration policies:

Using images of those who were killed by the Nazis to make a point about the Australian government’s policies is demeaning to those who died. It is essentially saying that their deaths are not to be remembered for their own sake, but rather because they are useful tools as points of reference and comparison in contemporary political debate. It turns Holocaust victims and survivors into concepts, decontextualised imagery and generalizations, and erases their individuality as human beings—even when the intentions behind it are sincere and well-meaning.

Shachar considers any use of images of the Holocaust that might generalize its horrors unethical, arguing that it adds to the dehumanization the victims suffered at the hands of the Nazis. She states that “their bodies and lives are not public property,” implying that images and language connected to the Holocaust are not part of the collective cultural imagination the way other images are; they are not freely available for general use.

So, does the graphic novel *The Day We Dreamed About* turn the Holocaust into a concept? Does it decontextualize and generalize it in order to instrumentalize it in contemporary political debate? In a way it does. Erslund and Brøgger transform photographs of concentration camps and other images connected to the genocide into art, utilizing them to criticize Norwegian immigration policies. They indirectly compare the Norwegian government’s treatment of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers to the dehumanization and murder of the Nazi’s victims. Seen from this perspective, the book’s use of Holocaust imagery is outrageous.⁹

In an essay titled “Who Owns Auschwitz” survivor Imre Kertés (2001) argues that instead of stylized representations as seen in popular culture, aestheticized representation’s as e.g. Roberto Begnini’s movie *La vita e bella* (1997), may bring forth a deeper truth about the crimes that were

⁹ Interestingly, the use of references to concentration camps in *The Day We Dreamed About* has not been discussed in a critical light in reviews, only touched upon (cf. Dale 2014, Vold 2015).

committed. So one may argue that the graphic novel's images serve not only to shape the reader's interpretation of the narrative and promote a certain political stance, but also to enhance the reader's awareness of the structural aspects that the genocides and current politics have in common. It might even enhance awareness and knowledge about the crimes of WW2 and thus reinforce the initial *shock* of the images.

When using the image of swimming youths from Utøya, Margrethe Olin pursues the same goal as Ersland and Brøgger; she, too, intends to criticize the treatment of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. Like Ersland and Brøgger's image, Olin's image in *The Others* is also shocking. However, here it is not the use of the image itself that has a shocking effect, but rather its connection to the film's topic—unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. The connotations the image from Utøya carries are completely different. Whereas pictures of concentration camps have been established as symbols of evil over the past 73 years, the image of the swimming teenagers is still fresh in Norwegians' minds and connotes struggling against death, but also compassion and human kindness. In *The Others*, the image creates awareness of the difference between Norwegians' reaction towards Norwegian youths and unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, exposing the hypocrisy and lack of humanity intrinsic to this difference in attitude. In Storholmen's novel, the same image's connotation of compassion creates empathy and transforms people historically perceived as enemies into fellow human beings. The narrative grants the German sailors actual lives with wives, children and parents who love them, and the image makes them equals and draws the historical event closer to the reader's own time.

Not only do the two discussed images carry different connotations regarding good and evil. They also call to mind different parts of their respective catastrophes. The concentration camp imagery draws parallels between the living conditions of the Nazi's victims and unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, but at the same time, the images bring to mind the complete dehumanization and mass murder. The image from Utøya, on the other hand, recalls a single event and reactions to it, but not the historically associated bombing of the government district or even the entire attack on the island.

In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag (2003) states: "A narrative seems likely to be more effective than an image [as an antidote to war]. Partly it is a question of the length of time one is obliged to look, to feel" (122). Perhaps—in combining an image's ability to capture a singular moment with a narrative's thought-inducing capacity to show actions in time—it is the combination of image and narrative that is the most effective antidote of all.

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