

Comments on 'Condolence and Commemoration: *A Daughter's Song*'

Never Again July 22?

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Ronald's film and presentation articulate beautifully some of the fraught and complex questions raised for this conference. Depicting an event to commemorate a young woman and offer condolences for her death, they reveal a means that allows her bereaved relatives to walk on in life. At the same time, they offer a notable example for contemporary life, as the event demonstrates how differences may be transcended, yet also respected and retained. It does so by retrieving a centuries-old form that framed the engagement and aligned the existence of the Mohawk and the early colonialists. An event that in one sense remembers the past is revealed to enable continued life. Meanwhile, the ideal it provides for contemporary life proves a reactivation of practices from the past. The result is an event that looks simultaneously in different directions to constitute the present as a particular moment that gathers a past and anticipates a future.

One could argue that the film and the ceremony provide a 'model of' and a 'model for' social and political forms and practices (cf. Geertz 1973). However, both the film and the ceremony supersede this dominant conception of ritual. They rather allow those involved to regard the world and engage what it contains. Thus, the Mohawk elder wipes the tears and dusts the ears of the bereaved to let them to see the world and hear the voices of its inhabitants. In a related way, Ronald describes how the film emerged from accidental footage and test shots, whose true subject and recipient he discovered through its editing process. Rather than

representations of that which has been or ought to come, the ceremony and the film are modes of discovery that admit us into other social worlds.

As forms of disclosure, the ceremony and the film recall the philosopher Martin Heidegger's ([1927] 1962) notion of *Lichtung* or 'clearing', where something shows itself or is unconcealed. The notion of 'clearing' - or *lysning* in Norwegian - is also the name for the memorial that opened this past July 22 at Utøya. Like the Mohawk ceremony, it too entails a position at the edge of the woods, where something or someone may emerge to join those present. Meanwhile, light filters through the names of the deceased, which are cut from a circle of steel suspended from the surrounding trees. This clearing is not an enclosure, but an opening towards the past and the future that allows for the emergence of beings and questions we do not yet know. In the midst of grief and from a confluence of difference, it carves a space of common purpose that enables renewed engagement.

The point I try to make is that the Mohawk ceremony, Ronald's film, and the Utøya clearing share a resemblance with the aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* atrocities, which in Bruce Kapferer's (2015:107) words, "...assert the value of life - indeed, the continuity of life - in the midst of the grimmest circumstances". However, they do not take the form of this life for granted, but deploy ritual means for its exploration and explication. Commemoration and memorialisation are thus not only acts of remembering, but also modes of 'membering' or processes where people mention and become mindful of their relationships (Myhre 2013:126). They are events where people feel their way through the world to investigate what is at stake in a certain situation. This shifts the concept of ritual away from a means for providing solutions toward a mechanism for posing problems. Such a shift is particularly significant in the context of July 22, where the perpetrator attempted to justify his crimes as

solutions to what he perceived as problems pertaining to contemporary social life. The risk of complicity requires that we too member and remember our relationships, and expunge the ideas we unwittingly share with him. As I see it, Ronald's contributions provide this opportunity, as they expose us to events that open up and extend beyond familiar conceptions.

References

Geertz, Clifford 1973 *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Heidegger, Martin 1962 *Being and Time*. New York: Harper & Row.

Kapferer, Bruce 2015 Afterword: When is a Joke Not a Joke? The Paradox of Egalitarianism. Pp. 95-116 in Alessandro Zagato (ed.): *The Event of Charlie Hebdo: Imaginaries of Freedom and Control*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Myhre, Knut Christian 2013 Membering and Dismembering: The Poetry and Relationality of Animal Bodies in Kilimanjaro, *Social Analysis* 57 (3): 114-131.