

<b>Institution:</b> University of Westminster		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 32 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Advancing Truth, Reconciliation and Justice for the Indonesian Genocide		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2005 – 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Joshua Lincoln Oppenheimer Joram ten Brink	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Professor Professor	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> Mar 2007 to Oct 2011 & Jan 2013 ongoing; May 1989 – July 2017
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> August 2013 – December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> Y/N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Genocide and Genre is an AHRC-funded documentary film research project, exploring performative methods to investigate the 1965-66 genocide in Indonesia and its current ramifications. Responses within and outside of Indonesia to Professor Joshua Oppenheimer's documentary film outputs from the project, <i>The Act of Killing: Director's Cut</i> (2013) and <i>The Look of Silence</i> (2014), along with his direct engagement activities, have resulted in the following impacts: the establishment of the International People's Tribunal 1965, which increased international pressure upon the Indonesian government to address the genocide; accountability from the U.S. Government, through the declassifying of U.S. documents on the genocide; and changes within Indonesian public and political discourse, via, for instance, the countering of government censorship regarding the genocide. This has resulted in official recognition of the killings on the part of the Indonesian government and the first government-sponsored forum for addressing the massacres.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The AHRC-funded Genocide and Genre project, conceived by Prof Joshua Oppenheimer and for which Prof Joram ten Brink was Principal Investigator, examines cinema's unique position in exploring both the routines of violence as well as the rhetoric and imagination that begets violence.</p> <p>The project originates from ten Brink's research interest in re-enactment in documentary film, particularly in the work of Jean Rouch [1], and Oppenheimer's analysis of how filmmaking was used in Indonesia to not only justify the mass killings of 1965-66 but to positively frame the perpetrators of such violence – many of whom would go on to rise through the government – as heroes constitutive of that nation's identity [2].</p> <p>Combining these two strands of interest – documentary re-enactment and the implication of cinematic images within the political violence of Indonesia – Genocide and Genre explores how non-fiction filmmaking communicates the fictions, fantasies, silences, and threats that constitute the social practices of impunity with regard to genocide, in general, and the Indonesian mass killings of 1965-66, in particular. This research is communicated in the form of a 2012 volume of collected essays on the relationship between political violence and cinema, which ten Brink and Oppenheimer co-edited and contributed essays to [3], and two feature-length documentary films – <i>The Act of Killing: Director's Cut</i> (2013) and <i>The Look of Silence</i> (2014) – directed by Oppenheimer [4, 5], with <i>The Act of Killing</i> executively produced by ten Brink.</p> <p>In <i>The Act of Killing</i>, victorious and seemingly unrepentant perpetrators of the Indonesian genocide draw on their cinematic fantasies – often informed by their knowledge of Hollywood cinema – when asked to suggest genres, write scripts, and direct scenes that dramatise their roles in the killings. Through this disturbing dramatic space, the work investigates not only the routines of violence, but also how an entire society has been built on the basis of terror and trauma. The film discovers and presents the conditions for a new form of nonfiction film: a documentary of the imagination. The perpetrators' re-enactments, and observational footage documenting their filmmaking process, communicate the manner in which the perpetrators wish to be seen, and how they imagine themselves and the society they built and rule over. <i>The Act of Killing</i> thus pioneers a new approach to nonfiction filmmaking, historical filmmaking, the investigation of political violence, and the social imagination.</p>		

## Impact case study (REF3)

While *The Act of Killing* exposed the consequences for all of us when we build our everyday reality on terror and lies, *The Look of Silence* explores what it is like to be a survivor in such a reality. It asks what happens to a whole society and its people when they live in fear and silence for fifty years.

*The Look of Silence* focuses on an optometrist who decides to break the suffocating spell of submission and terror by doing something unimaginable in a society where the murderers remain in power: he confronts the men who killed his brother and, while testing their eyesight, asks them to accept responsibility for their actions. Thematically, the documentary film is a cinematic poem about a silence borne of terror, the necessity of breaking that silence, and the trauma that comes when the silence is broken. Such an approach disrupts clichéd modes of filmmaking that present survivors of genocide as saintly, which does nothing to help us understand what it means to survive atrocity, to live a life shattered by mass violence, and to be silenced by terror.

Jointly placed 4<sup>th</sup> in their 100 best films of the 2010s, prominent film criticism site [Indiewire](#) writes that these films: “resonate not only because they’re important, but also because of how Oppenheimer’s craft activates that importance; how the audacity of his filmmaking dredges that history up from the darkness and injects it directly into our bones”.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. ten Brink, Joram, ed. 2007. *Building Bridges: The Cinema of Jean Rouch*, London: Wallflower Press. (Introduction, essay, and three interviews by ten Brink).
2. Oppenheimer, J. and Uwemedimo, M. 2009. Show of force: a cinema-séance of power and violence in Sumatra’s plantation belt. *Critical Quarterly*. 51 (1), pp. 84-110.
3. ten Brink, Joram and Oppenheimer, Joshua, eds. 2012. *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory and the Performance of Violence*, London: Columbia University Press. (Introduction by ten Brink and Oppenheimer, essays by ten Brink and Oppenheimer).
4. Oppenheimer, Joshua, dir., Christine Cynn and Anonymous, co-dir. 2013. *The Act of Killing: Director’s Cut*. A documentary film of 159 min, also released in alternate versions: 115 min (theatrical) / 95 min (broadcast). *Cinema, television, and home media distribution across 21 countries*. Received [72 international awards](#), including a BAFTA for Best Documentary, and nominated for Best Documentary at Academy Awards in 2014. Named the 14th best film of the 21st Century (the only documentary to make the list) in BBC’s 2016 poll of 177 critics from around the world.
5. Oppenheimer, Joshua, dir., and Anonymous, co-dir. 2014. *The Look of Silence*; a documentary film of 103 min. *Cinema, television, and home media distribution across 35 countries*. Premiered in Competition at the 71st Venice Film Festival, where it won five awards including the Grand Jury Prize. Received a further [74 international awards](#) and an Academy nomination.

### Funding

- Major grants include: AHRC Research Grant ‘Genocide and Genre’: £395,350, 2008-2011; and The [MacArthur Fellowship](#): \$625,000 (£475,000) – 2015-2020.
- Thirty-three other external grants for developing, producing, and instigating Oppenheimer and ten Brink’s filmmaking activities (as above) and outreach activities (described in section 4) from various film / television and academic funders based in the UK, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and the U.S. between 2007 and 2014 amount to a total of £1,494,048.

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The 1965 genocide began as an anti-Communist purge but expanded to encompass many other opposition parties and sympathisers, resulting in an estimated 500,000+ deaths. The period of mass killings ended with the instigation of military leader Suharto’s three-decade authoritarian presidency – the “New Order”. During these thirty years, the perpetrators of the killings – members of the Indonesian military and various death squads facilitated by the U.S. and other states – came to be celebrated in all Indonesian schools and media for their “heroic extermination of the communists”. It is this suppressed trauma of the past, and subsequent generations’ culturally embedded attitude towards it, that the Genocide and Genre project aimed to redress.

### **Informing Domestic Activism**

An important outcome of Oppenheimer's research-based creative practice is **the establishment and undertaking of a formal truth commission for the 1965 mass killings**. The International People's Tribunal (IPT) 1965 was undertaken at the Hague from 10-13 November 2015 and examined evidence in order to develop an accurate historical and scientific record of, and apply principles of International law to, the facts as found.

The IPT's general coordinator, lawyer Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, has testified that he was inspired to act following a screening of *The Act of Killing* at the Movies that Matter Festival in The Hague in 2013: "Oppenheimer said: 'I have done my job as filmmaker. How will you fight for the dignity of your nation?' We were shocked at what he said, I thought it was such a provocative question [...] On that day, March 23, 2013, we really felt it was time to fight for justice. In the end we decided to bring the 1965 case to the International Tribunal in The Hague" [a].

The IPT aimed to **create a climate in which the international community would recognise the killings as crimes against humanity and thus pressure the Indonesian government to take action**. Such international pressure is especially important given that, as noted in the *Asia Literary Review*, "[i]n 2012, the National Human Rights Commission (Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia, known as Komnas HAM) released the results of a four-year investigation into the atrocities of 1965 and declared that the army had carried out gross crimes against humanity. But since 2012, the attorney general has continued to reject Komnas HAM's recommendation for a criminal inquiry" [b]. Leading authority figures within Indonesia were angered by this Tribunal taking place abroad, with the Attorney General stating: "We solve our own issues. There is no need for other parties to be involved in this" [c]. International outlets, including *Al Jazeera* and *Time* magazine, reported on the IPT's final report, with *CNN*'s article headlined: "Tribunal finds Indonesia guilty of 1965 genocide; US, UK complicit", and the academic blog *Indonesia at Melbourne* stating "the IPT 1965 report serves as the single most significant moral statement representing the crimes inflicted against so many" [d]. Oppenheimer would further increase international pressure on this issue through his own activities, as described in the section on "Achieving Accountability" below.

Oppenheimer's work has also led to a partial achievement of the Tribunal members' "hope [that] the verdict will be used as a basis for **changing school history textbooks and 'countering the hate propaganda'** produced by the Suharto regime" [e]. As part of the "Look of Silence Outreach" programme – which involved working with and organising networks of Indonesian civil society organisations, human rights groups, universities, and cinemas to address and challenge fear and silence around the 1965 genocide – the Indonesian History Teachers Association created just such an alternative history curriculum [f]. Unlike the decades-old state education curriculum, which fails to address the genocide of '65, this curriculum directly addresses the killings. The curriculum is built around the two films and has been delivered in high schools throughout the country.

### **Achieving Accountability from the U.S.**

Oppenheimer has worked with various NGOs in order to achieve accountability from the U.S. in regard to their role in the Indonesian genocide. This work gained momentum in early 2014 when U.S. Senator Tom Udall, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, encountered *The Act of Killing* following its Oscar nomination and discussed the film with Oppenheimer [g-i]. Of his plans to introduce a Senate Resolution on the matter, Udall stated: "I think what this documentary does is it makes us ask some very tough questions. [...] The United States government should be totally transparent on what it did and what it knew at the time, and they should be disclosing what happened here" [g-i]. Of Indonesia, Udall stated: "The survivors still live in fear, and they're living in this country with the same government [...] There's a whole human rights issue" [g-i]. On 10 December 2014, U.N. Human Rights Day, **Senator Udall introduced the Sense of the Senate Resolution "regarding the need for reconciliation in Indonesia and disclosure by the United States Government of events surrounding the mass killings during 1965–66"** [h-i].

Subsequently, when *The Look of Silence* was nominated at the 2016 Academy Awards, Oppenheimer used "his awards-season megaphone" and traveled to Washington, D.C. with two members of Indonesia's National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM), along with members of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, to request that the U.S. declassify all government documents pertaining to the killings [g-ii]. The party met with officials at the U.S.

State Department, Congress, and The White House (National Security Council), where the Indonesian National Human Rights Commissioners delivered a letter to President Obama formally requesting the declassification.

Having “visit[ed] the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to ask them to support Sen. Tom Udall’s resolution for the United States to recognize its role, release the classified documents, and help Indonesia set up a truth commission to bring closure to the events”, the first two of these requests were met in 17 October 2017 [h-ii, h-iii]. “[N]early **30,000 pages of declassified records from the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta between 1964 and 1968 were published**” [h-ii], and, as *The New York Times* put it, the documents reveal the killings were “an anti-Communist blood bath of at least half a million Indonesians. And American officials watched it happen without raising any public objections, at times even applauding the forces behind the killing” [h-ii]. In a public statement on the release of these documents, Senator Udall wrote: “I am especially grateful to Joshua Oppenheimer for his work to bring this moral outrage into the public view” [h-iv].

In regard to the significance of these documents, *The New York Times* article quotes an academic who states “it’s great to have this information in black and white so it’s not just based on oral interviews with victims” [h-ii]. The publication of the documents has thus **strengthened the nature of the evidence that can be put to the Indonesian government** and strengthens the case of those lobbying for domestic accountability. As Brad Simpson, founder and director of the Indonesia and East Timor Documentation Project, states: “Indonesians can now read for themselves and learn about these important events in Indonesian history as part of a larger struggle for justice and accountability” [h-ii].

### **Changing Domestic Public and Political Discourse**

The Indonesian government continues to be reluctant to redress their historical stance on the events of 1965. However, public and political discourse within Indonesia has demonstrably changed as a result of responses to Oppenheimer’s films.

In response to the public reaction to *The Act of Killing*, on 24 January 2014 **the Indonesian government released the first official statement to recognise the killings**. In the statement the presidential spokesman for foreign affairs, Teuku Faizasyah, criticised *The Act of Killing* for portraying Indonesia as “a cruel and lawless nation” [i]. However, he also compared the killings to that of other countries: “We remember the history of slavery in the United States, Aboriginal discrimination in Australia, the bombing of Vietnam by the US. All of these events are crimes against humanity” [i]. In seeking to highlight hypocrisy elsewhere, Faizasyah affirmed in his reaction to Oppenheimer’s film that the mass killings in Indonesia are on par with such historical violence.

The late-2014 release in Indonesia of *The Look of Silence* gained national news coverage due to attempts at suppression by organised groups of thugs and paramilitaries who threatened to attack screenings of the film, aided by the passivity of the police and, in some instances, their collusion [j]. Also reported was the resistance to such intimidation from activists who went on to screen the film across 2015 [j]. In order to further **counter these attempts at censorship**, “[o]n December 10 [2015], International Human Rights Day, the filmmakers made *The Look of Silence* available on YouTube and as a free download for all Indonesians. Both of the documentaries have been viewed thousands of times in Indonesia, **sparking a national conversation as Jakarta struggles with grafting old-school repression onto the digital age**” [j]. (As of 14/05/20, [The Act of Killing: Director’s Cut](#) has been streamed 2,082,138 times; [The Look of Silence](#) has been streamed 764,599 times [k].)

These responses, in combination with the aforementioned International People’s Tribunal 1965, led the Indonesian government to finally react to calls for redress in a positive manner.

In 2016, Indonesia’s Presidential Advisory Council organised **the first government-sponsored forum for addressing the massacres**: “National Symposium on the 1965 Tragedy”, Jakarta, 18-19 April [l]. As historian Jess Melvin put it, this two-day symposium “test[ed] the ground for a national process of reconciliation. This unprecedented gathering, which included government officials, survivors and perpetrators of the genocide, and which was broadcast live around the world, should be understood as a hard-won victory for all those engaged in advocating for truth and justice for 1965” [l]. *The Look of Silence* was specifically discussed at the forum as providing a warning of the dangers of propaganda that incites or legitimates mass violence, and Melvin argues that the forum happened due to attention “generated in large part by the international

success of Joshua Oppenheimer's two Academy Award nominated documentary films", as well as the pressure brought to bear through their associated activities [l]. Following the forum, on 25 April 2016 the president instructed his security minister to begin a **formal investigation into the killings**, though domestic political pressure from factions associated with the perpetrators has so far hindered momentum on this.

Despite government resistance, Oppenheimer's research-based creative practice has demonstrably **helped to create the social and cultural conditions for future political impacts** in this area. The UK Ambassador to Indonesia states: "*The Act of Killing* and *Look of Silence* have had a major impact on raising much-needed debate in Indonesia on the political events and violence that took place in 1965. [...] Joshua Oppenheimer and his brave Indonesian collaborators can take great credit for stimulating this debate with this excellent pair of documentaries" [m]. In this connection, Jakarta-based journalist Prodi Sabarini explains how: "Those born after 1965 are now discovering that modern Indonesia is built on horrendous violence. We are asking questions of our elders, and the answers reveal not only that we were lied to by the state, but that we have also been deprived of our families' histories" [b]. The domestic popularity of Oppenheimer's films has also played a significant role in **normalising the use of the term "genocide" to describe the mass killings within Indonesian discourse** [n, p.34]. As Melvin writes: "Since 2013, the use of the term genocide to describe the killings has become increasingly popular in Indonesia. The adoption of the term has coincided with the ballooning success of Joshua Oppenheimer's documentary film *The Act of Killing*" and "the media-hype surrounding the film and its partner, *The Look of Silence*", with "Oppenheimer [...] openly describ[ing] the killings as a genocide in his public statements" [n, p.34]. According to the Deputy Director of the Asia Division of Human Rights Watch, Phelim Kine, the films have thus **"substantially aided" attempts to end the "decades-long official taboo on public discussions of the massacre"**, imposed "by successive governments to absolve those responsible" [o]. As such, Oppenheimer's impact on public discourse within Indonesia has created the ground for further political change and for accountability and redress.

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [a] Topsfield, J. "Remembering Bloody October", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, [2 Oct 2015](#)
- [b] Sabarini, P. "Let Bygones Be Bygones," *Asia Literary Review*, Issue 28, [Summer 2015](#)
- [c] Santoso, A. & van Klinken, G. (2017) Genocide Finally Enters Public Discourse: The International People's Tribunal 1965, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 19:4, 594-608
- [d] Portfolio of international media coverage of IPT report
- [e] International People's Tribunal, "[Preamble](#)"; see also §A1 of the Tribunal's [Final Report](#)
- [f] *Demi Masa Depan* 2016 [Indonesia Alternate History Curriculum; Indonesian language]
- [g] (i) Sneed, T. "Between Indonesia and the Oscars, 'The Act of Killing' Makes a Stop in D.C.", *U.S. News*, [18 Feb 2014](#) (ii) Daunt, T. "Angling for Political Action, Joshua Oppenheimer Takes His Latest Film to Washington", *GOOD*, [16 Feb 2016](#).
- [h] Portfolio for the declassification of documents from the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta. Includes (i) Senator Tom Udall's Senate Resolution DAV14F37 (ii) Media Coverage (iii) Abstracts of the declassified documents (iv) Udall statement on the release of the documents 17 Oct 2017
- [i] "Film 'The Act of Killing' Bisa Perburuk Citra Indonesia", *Kompas.com*, [24/01/2014](#) [Indonesian language; translated on supplied PDF]
- [j] Combined PDF of press coverage of Indonesian release of *The Look of Silence*
- [k] YouTube viewing figures for Indonesian open access uploads of the two films
- [l] Melvin, J. "Symposium on Indonesia's 1965 genocide opens Pandora's box", *New Mandala: New Perspectives on Southeast Asia*. [9 May 2016](#)
- [m] Testimony from Moazzam Malik, UK Ambassador to Indonesia (2014-19)
- [n] Melvin, J. *The Army and the Indonesian Genocide: Mechanics of Mass Murder*. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018.
- [o] Kine, P. "Indonesia Again Silences 1965 Massacre Victims", *Human Rights Watch*, [7 Aug 2017](#)