



This paper is taken from

Innovative Practice and Research Trends in Identity, Citizenship and Education
Selected papers from the sixteenth Conference of the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe Academic Network

London: CiCe 2014

**edited by Peter Cunningham and Nathan Fretwell, published in London by CiCe,
ISBN 978-1-907675-21-8**

Without explicit authorisation from CiCe (the copyright holder)

- only a single copy may be made by any individual or institution for the purposes of private study only
- multiple copies may be made only by
 - members of the CiCe Thematic Network Project or CiCe Association, or
 - a official of the European Commission
 - a member of the European parliament

If this paper is quoted or referred to it must always be acknowledged as:

Baloğlu, U. (2014) 'The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas': Otherness through a child's eyes', in P. Cunningham & N. Fretwell (eds.) *Innovative Practice and Research Trends in Identity, Citizenship and Education*. London: CiCe, pp. 211 – 215.

© CiCe 2014

CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.



Lifelong Learning Programme

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a selection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- The CiCe administrative team at London Metropolitan University
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The Lifelong Learning Programme and the personnel of the Education and Culture DG of the European Commission for their support and encouragement.

‘The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas’: Otherness through a child’s eyes

Uğur Baloğlu
Istanbul University (Turkey)

Abstract

The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas is a fictional tale of the unlikelyst of friends: the son of a Nazi commandant and a Jewish boy held captive in a concentration camp. Written by John Boyne and published in 2006, the book was made into a film in 2008. The main characters in the film are children. Whilst there are many films on the Holocaust, this film is distinctive insofar as it is narrated from a child’s perspective and the human tragedy involved is seen through a child’s eyes.

Keywords: *Holocaust, children, otherness*

Introduction

This study aims to illuminate the concepts of ‘I’ and ‘other’ through the content analysis of a cinema film. In some scenes, the content analysis is also accompanied by a discourse analysis. Throughout the analysis, notions of otherness, civic society, and the opposition between childhood and adulthood are questioned. The film analysed here is important because it concentrates both on general life and on controversies and crisis situations. In the study, the concept of ‘the other’ is questioned from a child’s perspective in a time of war.

Set in Nazi Germany, the film begins when eight year old Bruno and his family have to move from their lovely home in Berlin to a new house in an unfamiliar place. For Bruno, it becomes unbearable for him not have any friends in this new place. So, one day, Bruno ventures into the unknown to explore his new environment by escaping from a small window in the outbuilding. Bruno faces a fence that he follows until he sees a child, Shmuel, sitting on the ‘other’ side of the fence. Despite the fact that the two boys are separated physically by barbed-wire fence, their friendship grows and their lives become inescapably intertwined. Bruno brings him food and plays football with him. While they talk with each other regarding their lives, Shmuel tells Bruno that he is unable to find his father and that he is worried. One baleful day, Bruno takes off his clothes, replaces them with pyjamas to look like the ‘others’ and sneaks onto the ‘other’ side of the fence. While the boys are looking for Shmuel’s father, they are herded into the gas chambers alongside the ‘other’ prisoners.

Other and Otherness

The other is an ideological concept relevant to issues in epistemology, cultural identity problems, and psychoanalysis. As Bauman argues identities are set up as dichotomies: ‘Woman is the other of man, animal is the other of human, stranger is the other of native,

abnormality the other of norm, deviation the other of law abiding, illness the other of health, insanity the other of reason, lay public the other of the expert, foreigner the other of state subject, enemy the other of friend' (Bauman, 1991).

From past to present, all wars, conquests, fights have been directed towards the other; often in an attempt to force others to accept their beliefs. War affects children in all the same ways that it affects adults, but also in different ways. First, children are dependent on the care, empathy, and attention of adults who love them. Second, events in childhood may adversely affect the life trajectory of children far more than adults (Barbara, 2006). From past to present as a result of conflict, millions of civilians have been killed or injured. More than half of these victims were children. The Second World War was a watershed event in which civilian victims were as numerous as combatants. Now, in almost all current conflicts, civilians are the majority of casualties, with children suffering disproportionately (Danziger, 2003).

Social identities reflect the way that individuals and groups internalise established social categories within their societies, such as their cultural identities, gender identities, class identities, and so on. These social categories shape our ideas about who we think we are, how we want to be seen by others, and the groups to which we belong. Ideas of similarity and difference are central to the way in which we achieve a sense of identity and social belonging (Zevallos, 2011).

Methodology and Analysis

The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas is the film adaptation of a fictional tale about the Holocaust in Nazi Germany. It is necessary to analyse Germany's Nazi years in order to be able to connect with historical reality. It can be analysed via several methods such as narrative or technical analysis. In this paper I utilise Vladimir Propp's method of narrative analysis which divides a given tale into a series of sequences; beginning with an initial situation and continuing with the following thirty one functions:

Absenting: A member of a family leaves the security of the home environment. This may be the hero or some other member of the family that the hero will later need to rescue. This division of the cohesive family injects initial tension into the storyline. The hero may also be introduced here, often being shown as an ordinary person.

Interdiction: An interdiction is addressed to the hero. The hero is warned against some action.

Violation of interdiction: The interdiction is violated. This generally proves to be a bad move and the villain enters the story, although not necessarily confronting the hero. Perhaps they are just a lurking presence or perhaps they attack the family whilst the hero is away.

Reconnaissance: The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance. The villain makes an active attempt at seeking information, for example searching for

something valuable or trying to actively capture someone. They may speak with a member of the family who innocently divulges information. They may also seek to meet the hero, perhaps knowing already the hero is special in some way.

Delivery: The villain gains information about the victim. The villain's seeking now pays off and he or she now acquires some form of information, often about the hero or victim. Other information can be gained, for example about a map or treasure location.

Trickery: The villain attempts to deceive the victim to take possession of victim or victim's belongings. The villain now presses further, often using the information gained in seeking to deceive the hero or victim in some way, perhaps appearing in disguise. This may include capture of the victim, getting the hero to give the villain something or persuading them that the villain is actually a friend and thereby gaining collaboration.

Complicity: Victim taken in by deception, unwittingly helping the enemy. The trickery of the villain now works and the hero or victim naively acts in a way that helps the villain. This may range from providing the villain with something (perhaps a map or magical weapon) to actively working against good

Villainy: Villain causes harm/injury to family member. There are two options for this function, either or both of which may appear in the story. In the first option, the villain causes some kind of harm, for example carrying away a victim or the desired magical object. In the second option, a sense of lack is identified, for example in the hero's family or within a community, whereby something is identified as lost or something becomes desirable for some reason, for example a magical object that will save people in some way.

Mediation: Misfortune or lack is made known. The hero now discovers the act of villainy or lack, perhaps finding their family or community devastated or caught up in a state of anguish and woe.

Beginning counter action: Seeker agrees to, or decides upon counter-action. The hero now decides to act in a way that will resolve the lack, for example finding a needed magical item, rescuing those who are captured or otherwise defeating the villain. This is a defining moment for the hero as this is the decision that sets the course of future actions and by which a previously ordinary person takes on the mantle of heroism.

Departure: Hero leaves home;

First function of the donor: Hero is tested, interrogated, attacked etc., preparing the way for his/her receiving magical agent or helper (donor);

Hero's reaction: Hero reacts to actions of future donor;

Receipt of magical agent: Hero acquires use of a magical agent;

Guidance: Hero is transferred, delivered or led to whereabouts of an object of the search;

Struggle: Hero and villain join in direct combat;

Branding: Hero is branded;

Victory: Villain is defeated;

Liquidation: Initial misfortune or lack is resolved (object of search distributed, spell broken, slain person revived, captive freed);

Return: Hero returns;

Pursuit: Hero is pursued;

Rescue: Hero is rescued from pursuit;

Unrecognised arrival: Hero unrecognised, arrives home or in another country;

Unfounded claims: False hero presents unfounded claims;

Difficult task: Difficult task proposed to the hero;

Solution: Task is resolved;

Recognition: Hero is recognised;

Exposure: False hero or villain is exposed;

Tranfiguration: Hero is given a new appearance;

Punishment: Villain is punished;

Wedding: Hero marries and ascends the throne (Propp, 1968)

Analysis

In the first scene of the film, Nazi flags are seen hanging on the front of a building. This figures as an important indicator of the setting of the film, situating its time and place as the period of the Second World War.

After moving from Berlin to Auschwitz, Bruno doesn't feel as happy as he had previously. He has no friends and no area in which to play. During the first few days, whilst Bruno is feeling unhappy, he begins to explore the area in which he now lives. One day, Bruno comes upon a fence and sees a young boy sitting on the 'other' side.

This coeval boy is wearing striped pyjamas and a cloth cap. The boys begin to get to know each other. Bruno continues to explore the woods near his house and often finds himself at the fence spending time with Shmuel and bringing him food. They play games with one another and quickly become friends. Play is simultaneously a source of relaxation and stimulation for the brain and the body. Toys are not only fun, but also tools that help children learn about themselves and the world around them. Some of the reasons children play is to learn, to create, to focus and to get rid of problems. Some of the outcomes of children's play include the following: language skills, thinking skills, small muscle skills, large muscle skills, creative skills and social skills. One fateful day, Bruno changes his clothes to become 'other' and pass to the 'other' side of the fence in order to fulfil his promise of helping Shmuel find his father. As the boys search for Shmuel's father, the soldiers herd the prisoners, Bruno amongst them, into the gas chambers where they meet their untimely death hand in hand.

References

- Barbara, J. S. (2006) Impact of War on Children and Imperative to End War. *Croat Med J*, 47(6).
- Bauman, Z. (1991) *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Danziger, N. (2003) Children and War. *The Magazine of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*.
- Propp, V. (1968) *Morphology of the Folk Tale*.
- Zevallos, Z. (2011) *What is Otherness? The Other Sociologist*.