

Apocalypse Now

Colonel Klein and the Legitimacy of the Kunduz Air Strike Narratives in German Television Films

AXEL HECK, PhD*

Since the end of the Second World War, Germany has established a culture of military restraint and a strong commitment to multilateral institutions.¹ Hence, Hanns Maull has famously called the role model of German foreign policy “civilian power.”² After German reunification, a debate among scholars and practitioners developed about the question of whether German foreign policy would follow the path of continuity mainly associated with the politics of military restraint and multilateral diplomacy established by Helmut Schmidt, Helmut Kohl, and Hans-Dietrich Genscher—the architects of the “Bonner Republik”—or whether it would be adjusted according to German unification, the transformations of the international system and the ongoing European integration. The latter processes are expected to alter the economic, political, and military position of Germany.³ Although some observers have already questioned whether Germany really acts according to the role model of a civilian power, others have argued that it hasn’t violated the commitment to multilateralism but has become a “normal” civilian power instead.⁴

The deployment of forces in Afghanistan was conducted as a stabilizing mission under the umbrella of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Several resolutions of the UN Security Council turned it into a large-scale counterinsurgency operation over the years and seemed to prove that Germany’s role in world politics has changed fundamentally in the last decade.⁵ Consequently, Afghanistan has strengthened Germany’s way to “nor-

*The author is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Political Science, University of Freiburg, Germany. He is an expert in international relations, visual methodology, and political iconography. Dr. Heck has published in leading journals, such as the *European Journal of International Relations* and *International Studies Perspectives*. He is the principal investigator in the multidisciplinary research network *Visuality and Global Politics*, funded by the German Research Council.

mality,” but civil society remains skeptical regarding the use of force. Therefore, the term *war* has been excluded from political discourse on Afghanistan for a long time.⁶ That Germany was indeed fighting a “war” became most obvious in the early morning hours of 4 September 2009. The day before, two fuel trucks that were supposed to bring their load to the German field camp in Kunduz were hijacked by Taliban fighters. While the thieves tried to escape, the fuel trucks became stuck on a sandbank in the Kunduz River. What then happened has tremendously shaken German foreign policy discourse, and the juridical consequences are still an open issue. That morning, German colonel Georg Klein ordered an air strike to destroy the vehicles and to kill the alleged perpetrators. The strike was launched by US jet fighters on the scene providing close air support. Klein and his military advisers later justified the decision before a parliamentary investigation committee, saying that they were sure that the people on the sandbank were exclusively Taliban fighters preparing an attack on the German camp in Kunduz by using pickup trucks loaded with fuel. According to a NATO report, however, more than 140 people were killed—many civilians among them.⁷

Research Question

The events of 4 September have triggered a heated debate in Germany about the Afghanistan engagement and German responsibilities for the civilian casualties.⁸ Klein was called a murderer by left wing societal groups, and leading newspapers claimed that the air strike was a war crime. But not only newspapers and magazines reported on the strike. It became the subject of two docudramas aired on German television. These films are of further interest for this article because they depict the events in detail but offer two different interpretations of what happened and raise the question of whether the air strike might have been a legitimate action or must be considered a war crime. This article shows how the legitimacy of the Kunduz air strike is represented and negotiated in these films by specific narrative structures. Although both claim to tell a “real” story by referring to the known facts, the filmmakers come to different conclusions. These movies are important artifacts in the discourse on the legitimacy of the strike since they make things visible that have not been seen before. Thus, the article argues that docudramas are important sources for international relations (IR) research for two reasons: (1) television productions reach millions of people and tremendously impact public discourses on the legitimacy of military action, especially in cases where knowledge is incom-

plete, limited, and contested; and (2) documentary films in general and docudramas in particular can contribute to collective memory by rendering audiovisual narratives and interpretations of the represented military operations. With regard to the specific case, the selected films address fundamental questions concerning the legitimacy of the Kunduz air strike by creating different narratives about the political, strategic, social, and individual circumstances under which Colonel Klein and his advisers were acting. Moreover, both films draw a portrait of the colonel as a military leader although hardly any information about his personality is known to the public. Hence, the film not only seems to fill information gaps about the strike but also offers interpretations about the personality and intentions of involved people that go far beyond the known facts. This amplification of factuality is special to the genre of docudramas to which both films belong.

This article begins with a short review of the literature on films and how they have been used in IR research so far. Then, a theorization of the docudrama follows so that one may understand why this film genre is particularly interesting for IR researchers. Empirical analysis of the two films is guided by methodological considerations drawn from a narrative approach informed by the work of David Bordwell. The motion pictures have been analyzed in terms of how they create narratives that (de)legitimize the air strike. The analysis operates with a concept of legitimation based on the work of Theo van Leeuwen.

Visuality and International Relations: Situating Docudrama Films

Traditionally, IR scholars have paid much more attention to language and verbal articulations.⁹ However, given the success of constructivism, poststructuralism, and postpositivist research in general, more and more IR scholars have begun analyzing images and other visual data—even pop-cultural artifacts.¹⁰ An important strand of literature refers to fictional films and specifically focuses on the relationship between popular culture and international politics.¹¹ More recently, another element of IR literature has emerged that highlights the importance of documentary films.¹² Still missing is the conceptualization of a film genre located in between fictional and nonfictional films: docudramas. This genre raises suspicion because fictional elements are intermingled with historic events.¹³ John Caughie asserts that “one of the defining characteristics of documentary drama is that it has a consistent televisual style,

a visual appearance and a relationship to narrative space which is particular to it, which is recognisable, which circulates its own meanings.”¹⁴ Special about docudramas is that they take in an elucidating position as documentaries usually do, but in style and plot arrangement, they rely very much on genre conventions known from fictional films. The docudrama is a unique blend of fiction and nonfiction wherein common knowledge (or what is taken for it), ideas, and the imagination of script writers, directors, and actors are mixed together in an inextricable interpretation of the events. Thus, docudramas are narrative compositions of fact and fiction.¹⁵ For many reasons, IR scholars should consider films as research material in general and documentary motion pictures in particular. The most important one is that documentary films and other forms of visualized mass media are contributing to the production of common knowledge about society or, indeed, the world in which we live, as Niklas Luhmann has famously put it. We have “heard” about and in part “we do believe it,” but on the other hand, we have “heard” so much about mass media and television that “we are not able to trust these sources.” Luhmann further notes that even if all information in the world carried a warning sign that it is open to doubt, it would still serve as a foundation or starting point.¹⁶ Docudrama films are such starting points because they are not based on a purely fictional or an invented story; rather, they rest on actual facts that are amplified to make the story more comprehensible for the spectator or to fill gaps in common knowledge by offering an interpretation of “how it might have been.”

The empirical part of this article analyzes and compares two films about the Kunduz air strike that fit into the docudrama genre—but why should we care? The selected films are partly based on known facts and journalistic research; interviews with political decision makers, victims, and their relatives; and experts. Much of the dialogue and many quotations are taken from protocols of the parliamentary investigation and original documents to depict the events as realistically as possible. One could object that docudramas in general and the selected films in particular are made for entertainment purposes only. Nevertheless, such a position neglects the fact that these films are products of journalistic filmmaking and, as such, they are not free of moral or rational claims about the depicted incidents. The selected films address essential questions concerning the legitimacy of the Kunduz air strike by creating different narratives about the political, strategic, social, and individual intentions and circumstances under which Bundeswehr Colonel Klein was acting. They create specific narratives of his character and his abilities as a German army com-

mander. Finally, they come to different conclusions in regard to the legitimacy of the attack.

Analyzing Docudrama Films: Methodology

This article considers film a narrative medium. As Edward Branigan observes, “We believe that a narrative is more than a mere description of place or time and more even than events in a logical or causal sequence. . . . Instead, narrative can be seen as an organization of experience which draws together many aspects of our spatial, temporal, and causal perception.”¹⁷

According to film and literature studies, narratives consist of four elements: (1) they require actions (i.e., subjects doing something and subjects telling something); (2) they need to be told by someone (i.e., people use narratives to construe their live world and to make sense of reality); (3) they consist of sequential, relational orders of actions and events, and sometimes the plot is arranged in a chronological order or refers to a cause-effect relationship; and (4) they are always based on stories of specific actors, actions, and events, but they never tell the whole story. Because narratives necessarily conceal a number of things, they reduce complexity by selection; consequently, they create certainty by blurring the contingency of social action.¹⁸

The analysis of narratives in films needs to take the specifics of filmmaking into account. Camera views, cuts, montages, genre conventions, and the production, distribution, and reception of the film are crucial elements as well. One of the most elaborate approaches in narrative film analysis has been developed by the neoformalism of the so-called Wisconsin School, mainly associated with the work of David Bordwell and Noël Carroll.

The Wisconsin School rejects psychological and ideological approaches—and has been criticized for being “anti-political.”¹⁹ In contrast to more ideologically inspired film theory, the Wisconsin School of Neoformalism has developed scientific methods to reconstruct the norms and conventions of a film, as well as to determine how it is made technically and how it “makes sense” for the spectator through a specific narrative structure of the plot. Bordwell treats “the narrative [not] as a message to be decoded . . . [but as] a representation that offers the occasion for inferential elaboration.”²⁰ To analyze the selected films on the Kunduz air strike, this article draws on a narrative approach of film analysis associated with Bordwell’s work.

Detecting Legitimation Narratives: Category System

Theo van Leeuwen has offered a concept to identify various claims of legitimacy in multimodal discourses.²¹ Accordingly, “legitimation is an answer to the spoken or unspoken ‘why’ question—‘Why should we do this?’ or ‘Why should we do this in this way?’”²² Van Leeuwen’s concept of legitimation serves as the category system in order to identify the legitimation narratives in the films. Three major categories have been used to detect legitimacy claims in the films: authorization, moral evaluation, and rationalization.

Authorization

Van Leeuwen mentions different forms of authority, such as personal authority, expert authority, role model authority, impersonal authority, and the authority of tradition. Personal authority is “vested in a person because of their [*sic*] status or role in a particular institution.”²³ In contrast to personal authority, expert authority rests more on the expertise of a person than on his or her status. Hence, the legitimacy of an action is created by reference to some expert who is probably well known within the specific context and whose judgments are widely accepted.²⁴ Legitimacy could also be provided by the actions of so-called role models or opinion leaders. Referring to symbolic interactionism, van Leeuwen maintains that certain actions might appear legitimate because celebrities and other famous or socially accepted persons perform them.²⁵ In contrast to personal authority, impersonal authority is linked to laws, rules, and regulations. The authority of tradition (“because this is what we have always done”) is rooted in cultural behavior, habit, and social practices that have been performed for a long time. Closely connected to the authority of tradition is the authority of conformity (“because that’s what everybody else does”) since it contains an explicit or implicit expectation of behavior.²⁶

Moral Evaluation

Van Leeuwen’s concept of moral evaluation legitimation “is based on values, rather than imposed by some kind of authority without further justification.”²⁷ Sometimes, moral statements can be expressed by actors using words such as *good*, *bad*, or *evil*. More often, though, legitimation for moral evaluation is linked to specific adjectives such as *useful*, *healthy*, or *natural*.

Rationalization

Rationalization is another form of legitimation opposed to moral evaluation. Theo Van Leeuwen identifies two different types of rationality: “Instrumental rationality legitimizes practices by reference to their goals, uses and effects. [In contrast,] theoretical rationality legitimizes practices by reference to a natural order of things, but much more explicitly than the kinds of naturalizations . . . discussed earlier.”²⁸ Instrumental rationality refers to instances in which legitimation is linked to a specific purpose of an action. The action seems legitimized because the actor claims to achieve his goals: “I do *x* in order to do (or be, or have) *y*” (goal orientation), or because the action is a means to an end (means orientation), or because the action is effective (effect orientation). Theoretical rationalization does not ask whether the action is “purposeful or effective, but . . . whether it is founded on some kind of truth, on ‘the way things are.’”²⁹

In social reality, the mentioned legitimation practices might appear highly interconnected. Using van Leeuwen’s categorization enables the researcher to identify the semantic structures of legitimation narratives in the selected films. Therefore, the categorization serves as a coding guideline for the analysis of written/verbal and visual texts.

Representation of the Kunduz Air Strike in Docudramas— Narrative of (De)legitimation: The ZDF Film

The film *An einem Tag in Kunduz—Ein tödlicher Befehl* (*On a day in Kunduz—a deadly command*) was part of a docudrama series aired on the German television network ZDF. Beside the Kunduz incident, the documentary series was also dedicated to the Love Parade catastrophe in Duisburg and a mining disaster in Chile. The director of the film was Winfried Oelsner, and the research team included Mathis Feldhoff, who is also known for his Afghanistan documentary *The Afghanistan Lie*, which received an award by the reservists association of the German army. The film is based in large part on reports of the parliamentary investigation and classified documents leaked to the film production company. Furthermore, the filmmakers had access to people involved in the parliamentary investigation, and parts of the interviews have been used in the film.

The film itself portrays the hearing of Colonel Klein before the investigation committee. Although these scenes are performed by actors, the script is

based on the original documents as much as possible. Reconstruction of the events of 4 September, for example, requires that scenes show how Taliban fighters captured the fuel trucks or depict the situation on the sandbank. The dialogue and Task Force 47's actions in the bunker, which served as the combat headquarters of Colonel Klein during the entire operation, are reenacted as well. Although records of communication between the task force and the pilots exist, much dialogue among soldiers in the headquarters is not verifiable. Beside the fictional scenes, which partly rest on original records, the film is enriched by interviews with high-ranking politicians such as former defense minister Franz Josef Jung; member of Parliament and chairman of the investigation committee Omid Nouripour; former general and supreme commander of NATO Allied Joint Force Command in Brunssum Egon Ramms; Abdul Malek, the truck driver who survived the attack; and Dr. Markus Kaim, an expert in the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.

The film eschews strong visual effects. The scenes in the hearing room of the investigation committee are kept in a cold blue-green, as well as those in the bunker, creating a sterile and concentrated atmosphere. Colonel Klein is portrayed as a thoughtful, cautious, and conscientious commander. Members of the investigation committee are portrayed as professionally distanced from the colonel, not hesitating to ask bold questions. Other characters, such as Sergeant Westphal, who had contacts with an anonymous source, stay in the background. The film offers several legitimation narratives, which can be detected with van Leeuwen's category system.

Narrative Analysis

Legitimation by rationalization—the narrative of an imminent threat. The most important narrative to legitimate the order was a rational one articulated by Colonel Klein during his hearing that is reiterated by Defense Minister Jung in his interview. According to Klein's statement, the Bundeswehr had information that the Taliban were about to plan an attack on a German military base using "rolling bombs," as they had done only two weeks before in the southern part of Afghanistan. On the visual level, the film shows images of the incident, obviously taken from original news footage. Klein explains to the investigation committee that just days prior to the incident on 4 September, a laundry company vehicle loaded with German and Afghan uniforms had been stolen, making him suspicious. He thought that the uniforms could serve as

the perfect cover for an attack. Klein confirmed that this was the reason he ordered a search for the fuel trucks.

Later in the film, Klein was asked by a committee member why he first reported “troops in contact” but later shifted the command to “imminent threat.” Klein states that the insurgents had started to load fuel onto pickup trucks, so he expected an attack and ordered the air strike. The film shows this sequence and the decision-making process in detail. One of his advisers justifies this step, noting “that’s normal; everybody does it.” Here, the film develops a narrative that rationalizes the order of Colonel Klein and gives his action legitimacy based on the argument that no one would seriously doubt that a strike to prevent an attack on the camp would not be a legitimate action.

Delegitimation by moral evaluation—the narrative of fraudulent information. Although the claims of Minister Jung and Colonel Klein about the assumed plans of the Taliban might sound convincing, the film confronts this narrative with a counterarticulation made by members of the investigation committee, who wanted to know how and why Klein was so sure that no civilians were at the scene. The colonel refers to a local informant who provided one of his advisers with the intelligence. Accordingly, only Taliban had been on the sandbank with at least four known leaders among them. He had no reason to distrust the information because the informant had proven skills as a reliable source in the past. Asked whether he had cross-checked the information by using other sources, Klein said he had not. Only the images of the planes and the intelligence from the informant had been available, and he needed to make his decision using the intelligence at hand. While Defense Minister Jung claims that the source had the highest level of credibility, Nouripour says in his interview that much of the information supplied by the source turned out to be wrong. General Ramms questions the credibility of the source in general and puts forward the idea that the Bundeswehr had been played by local forces. According to him, the latter tried to use the Bundeswehr to get rid of competitors. Nouripour concludes that relying on limited information and trusting the informant were serious mistakes that finally led to the wrong decision. The film creates a narrative that delegitimizes the order of Colonel Klein and brands it naïve, arguing that the set of information he trusted was thin and probably fraudulent. To order such a devastating air strike based on the given information is characterized as illegitimate because the potential risk of killing bystanders or civilians was not calculable.

Legitimation by authority—the narrative of Colonel Klein’s integrity. Although the film develops strong narratives that raise doubt about whether

the decision was legitimate under the given circumstances, in the end, the film offers a strong narrative referring to the integrity of the German soldier. Accordingly, Klein appears as a serious, prudent, and faithful soldier who has arrived at a decision after carefully considering the situation, which turned out to be deadly, as the title of the film suggests. Klein is not depicted as a hot-spurred warrior seeking revenge or personal honor. According to his authority as a colonel of the Bundeswehr, he could legitimately issue such an order although the results might be questionable from a moral perspective. But given the war-like circumstances in Afghanistan, the increasing number of attacks against German soldiers, and the situation on the sandbank, where insurgents were about to load pickup trucks with fuel—as the film suggests—the order seems legitimate after all.

Reception of the Film

The reception of the film was limited, probably due to changes by the program planners who rescheduled the broadcast. According to the web page Medienkorrespondenz, only 680,000 viewers watched it when it was finally aired in September 2011. The German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* published a review of the film by Stephan Löwenstein, who praises it for its multidimensional perspective that rejects the notion of a war crime put forward by an article in *Der Spiegel*.³⁰ That article grouped Klein's command together with war atrocities committed by the Wehrmacht. Critical voices were raised among peace activists, who labeled the film war propaganda.

Representation of the Kunduz Air Strike in Docudramas— Narrative of (De)legitimation: The ARD Film

The second film, *Eine mörderische Entscheidung* (*A Murderous Decision*), subject to the analysis has had many more viewers (about 2.6 million) and was aired in 2013 by broadcaster ARD. Although this film falls into the genre of docudrama as well, the story not only covers the events of 4 September and the hearing but also includes Colonel Klein's arrival as new commander in Kunduz. Nevertheless, van Leeuwen's category system identified certain legitimization narratives in this film as well.

Production of the Film

The film is directed by Raymond Ley, a well-known German director who specializes in the genre. Ley casted several prominent German actors such as Matthias Brand as Colonel Klein and Axel Milberg as the fictitious character Henry Diepholz, a representative of the German intelligence agency. In contrast to the ZDF production, which was accused of being biased, the Bundeswehr refused to support the film in any way. As mentioned above, the story begins with Colonel Klein's arrival at the Kunduz camp as new commander of the German troops. The film spends the first 30 minutes reconstructing the circumstances under which the Bundeswehr was acting in Afghanistan. The main plot is complemented by a subplot about the fate of Sergej Motz, the first German soldier killed in a gun battle by enemy forces after the Second World War. Like the former film, the ARD film supplements the main story with interviews. Subjects include Motz's family; Inspector General Wolfgang Schneiderhahn; Omid Nouripour; member of Parliament and of the investigation committee Rainer Arnold; Christian Democratic Union chairman of the investigation committee Ernst-Reinhard Beck; and many eyewitnesses or relatives of victims. Moreover, extracts from news programs such as *Tagesschau* or other direct quotations from media interviews with Colonel Klein or the governor of the province Kunduz Omar are assembled into the main plot. In contrast to the ZDF production, which shies away from strong and powerful imageries, the ARD production contains shocking, original images of burn victims and vividly portrays the impact of the missiles by using powerful visuals of fire, burning, and lurching people. This visualization has effects on the legitimation narratives as well.

Narrative Analysis

Legitimation by rationality—the narrative of increasing violence. Similar to what the ZDF film suggests, the ARD production reiterates the narrative of increasing violence against the German troops in Afghanistan in the first months of 2009. The film spends the first 30 minutes reconstructing the months since Colonel Klein took command in Kunduz. The narrative of increasing violence is stabilized by cut-ins of original media reports about attacks on German soldiers and a direct quotation from the “real” Colonel Klein about the severe situation in Afghanistan, which the film portrays in several sequences. Most important is the one that shows Colonel Klein's first briefing on the situation in Kunduz when he was informed about Abdul Rahman and

his plans to fight the German soldiers with all means at his disposal. A videotape showing an interview that Rahman gave to the German media in which he pledges to kill Germans provides evidence that he is serious about his threat. Later the film takes time to narrate the personal story of Sergej Motz, mentioned above. The narrative of increasing violence bolsters Klein's justification of the order, giving credence to his claims that his only intention had been to save his troops by preventing a deadly attack on the camp in Kunduz—which can be regarded as a rational legitimization.

Legitimation by moral evaluation—the narrative of the inhuman enemy. Closely connected to this narrative is another one created by a subplot about the recruiting of an Afghan boy trained to commit a suicide attack by steering a car close to a military convoy. The film introduces the boy and his desperate father, who begged the Taliban to release his son. Rather, the father was beaten down by the fighter, and the boy carried out the planned suicide attack. This narrative stabilized the notion of an inhuman enemy who abuses children as suicide bombers. Accordingly, the sharp distinction drawn by international law between civilians and combatants blurs. If even children, who are generally supposed to be innocent in nature, are turned into terrorists, then who actually qualifies as a civilian?

Legitimation by authority—the narrative of pressure from Berlin. The film suggests that Colonel Klein was under immense pressure to succeed. In one scene, Inspector General Schneiderhahn visited Klein in Kunduz, mocking him about the camp's nickname of "Bad Kunduz" (spa town Kunduz). "Easy living" is over, Schneiderhahn tells Klein, "Berlin wants results." Accordingly, the rules of engagement had been adjusted to the new developments and the increasing violence against German troops. Klein informs his soldiers about the new strategy, saying, "If necessary, you will shoot, and not just at their legs!" Klein appears as a scapegoat who was set under pressure by the government to deliver solid results. For Klein, the situation on the sandbank might have been appealing: two stolen fuel trucks that might be used as rolling bombs, the gathering of Taliban fighters—some of them high ranking—and the assumption that there would be no civilians because it was in the middle of the night and far away from the next village, as the secret source has claimed repeatedly. However, after the unfortunate realities of the situation became evident, Klein had to pay for Berlin's greedy desire for quick results.

Legitimation by authority—the narrative of fraudulent information. The film takes time to develop another subplot that follows the story of the informant. The anonymous informant is introduced to the viewer in a scene in

which a German convoy is driving down a street. The informant is sitting nearby but hidden, observing the scene and holding two cell phones in his hand. While he watches the convoy, he uses one cell phone, and suddenly the convoy stops. He has obviously reported a so-called improvised explosive device hidden near the street. Later, it turns out that the anonymous informant has had contact with Mohammed Omar, the governor of Kunduz. The film also shows how Klein is connected to Omar and visited him in his home. Although Omar pretended to feel fortunate that Germans were in Afghanistan, he forced Klein to hunt down the terrorists much more vigorously than his predecessors had done. After Omar's brother is killed by a Taliban attack in Kunduz, his attitude towards Klein changes, and he accuses the weakness of the German army for the death of his brother. Later, the film shows that the informant and Omar stay in contact while he reports to the Bundeswehr what is happening on the sandbank. This narrative suggests that Klein has been played by Omar, who urges the informant to share fraudulent information about the situation on the sandbank, especially regarding the presence of civilians and children. "There are no innocents," the informant tells the Afghan interpreter working for the Bundeswehr. Although this narrative does not legitimize the air strike as such, it refers to legitimation by authority in that sense—that Klein's decision was based upon the information of a trusted source supposed to be nearby the scene, therefore having superior knowledge about what was going on. Hence, it was not Klein's fault that he relied on information shared by a credible source.

Legitimation by moral evaluation—the narrative of the "humanist." If Klein had known that civilians were at the scene, he probably would have stopped the operation, as he had done several hours before in another situation. Klein was informed that a vehicle stolen from the Bundeswehr was spotted, and he was asked whether it should be destroyed. The colonel asked whether or not civilians would be endangered, a fact that could not be confirmed; consequently, Klein refused the order to attack. The whole film develops a narrative about the personality of Colonel Klein—especially his humanity. Right at the beginning of the film, when Klein was introduced to the commanding staff of the camp in Kunduz, some of the soldiers were whispering about him, one telling another that the colonel liked classical music and opera. In another scene, Klein is sitting behind his desk, listening to classical music and conducting with his finger while watching out the window. His humanity appears again in another situation in which he talks to the pastor of the field camp about guilt and forgiveness. As already seen in the ZDF production,

Klein is represented here as a faithful person. This narrative does not legitimize the order in the sense that it was the right thing to do, but it corresponds with van Leeuwen's category of moral evaluation. The film characterizes Klein not as a killer acting cold-bloodedly; rather, he is a devoted, sensitive, faithful, and humanist commander who was acting with good and proper intentions.

Delegitimation by “moral evaluation”—the narrative of “civilian casualties.” The first sequence of the film shows a badly wounded boy, his head bandaged and his face burned, who tells the camera and people gathering around his hospital bed that he was supposed to collect fuel and that he stood right next to the tankers when the missile came. Then traditional music solemnly sets in and apocalyptic images of fire and lurching, burning people appear on the screen. The narrative of the civilian casualties is reiterated throughout the entire film, especially by the interviews with relatives of the victims or the eyewitnesses. The people mourn their losses, and the film indicates that most of them lost children, brothers, or nephews. The relatives express their desperation and helplessness, talking about how they are trying to move on. Some express anger and cry for revenge while others expect at least compensation for their losses. At the end of the film, another scene shocks the viewer by showing a man lying in a hospital bed almost completely bandaged and hardly able to move. Wordlessly, the film seems to ask whether destroying the tankers and killing a couple of Taliban fighters were worth all of the death and injury. This narrative clearly and undoubtedly delegitimizes Klein's order with regard to the consequences it caused in terms of a moral judgment.

Delegitimation by authority—the narrative of the weak commander. Although one might reject this moral delegitimation, arguing that Colonel Klein could not have foreseen such catastrophic consequences, the film fosters another narrative that delegitimizes the attack. This narrative is connected to the already-mentioned pattern regarding the personality of Colonel Klein. Despite the fact that he is represented as a sensitive and faithful commander, the film also points to the flip side that these character skills might carry: naïveté and weakness in the eyes of others. On several occasions, the film suggests that Colonel Klein had an “authority problem.” After Motz was killed and the dead body returned to the camp, the film shows how Klein failed to express his condolences to comrades who survived the attack. His lack of authority is more vividly represented in the scenes of the Task Force 47 bunker. The colonel is surrounded by high-ranking commanders who served him as advisers, but according to the film, it seems obvious that they seek revenge, whispering behind his back and denouncing Klein as a “do-gooder.” The film

represents Klein's doubts about what to do in the forefront of the attack and suggests that his commanders might have taken advantage of this situation and urged him towards the decision. As the pilots of the bombers expressed their concerns that an attack on the tankers might not be covered by the rules of engagement, Klein was advised to shift the situation from "troops in contact" to "imminent threat" so he could release the order to attack, although this was obviously not the case.

What seems striking about this incident is that Klein, as a German army commander, does not seem to be in charge of this critical situation. In fact, this sequence suggests that he is a "weak" and easily influenced commander, not qualified for the job because he cannot cope with the responsibilities.

Delegitimation by moral evaluation—the narrative of vengeance. The narrative of the weak commander is connected to another one that delegitimizes Klein's order. This narrative is deeply rooted in the film and expressed by one journalist directly in an interview. Schneiderhahn claims that because of the increasing violence against the German soldiers, a kind of frustration has spread among the troops. Accordingly, the most important subplot of the film concerns the tragic death of the German soldier Sergej Motz. The directors of the film weave his personal fate into the main plot on two different levels. First, the film introduces him and his squadron comrades, showing how they work and hang out together in the camp, joking and mocking each other until they go off for a routine patrol that ends up in a deadly ambush. During the exchange of fire, Motz is hit, and the film shows how he dies in the arms of his comrades. Second, the filmmakers interview Motz's parents. His mother appears to be a warmhearted, caring woman full of sorrow over her lost son, and his father is portrayed as a veteran of the Russian army who had served in Afghanistan as well. In one scene, his father meets Inspector General Schneiderhahn at Sergej's grave. Schneiderhahn, obviously struggling for words, attempts to explain to the father why his son had to die. The film continues showing images of attacks against German soldiers taken from German television news in order to foster the already-mentioned narrative of increasing violence.

In the critical situation shortly before Klein ordered the attack, his close secret service adviser Diepholz appears as a "diabolic" figure associated with Mephisto in Goethe's drama *Faust*. The character of Diepholz was invented by the filmmakers. He perfidiously leads the doubting and struggling colonel into the decision, whispering to him, "Of, course, I can't make the decision for you." Diepholz's suggestions are tacitly supported by the other soldiers involved.

Connected to the narrative of increasing violence and that of Klein's weak authority, the decision-making process enables the interpretation that the situation on the sandbank appeared as a window of opportunity to take revenge and restore the honor of the German army, which had been damaged by the insidious attacks of the Taliban to which Sergej Motz fell victim. Thus, the film puts forward the narrative that "vengeance" among his advisers might have been a central motive and that Klein, as a man of honor, was either too naïve to recognize it or too weak to stop it. From a moral perspective, however, vengeance can never serve as a legitimate justification for such a military order; therefore, the decision was in fact "murderous," as the title of the film suggests.

Reception of the Film

In contrast to the ZDF production, which had disappointing audience figures and was nearly ignored by reviewers, the ARD film enjoyed an audience of more than 2 million the day it was aired. It produced disappointing figures in terms of market share but enough to indicate that it had been recognized by a larger public. The film also won the prestigious Grimme Award in 2013, thus triggering the controversy about the movie in German newspapers. Reviewer opinions were divided, especially with regard to the representation of Georg Klein. The newspaper *Die Welt* observed that Klein is shown as a frightened person, intimidated "if only a chicken is slaughtered on the street."³¹ The reviewer is referring to a scene in which Klein is driven through Kunduz and passes by a market stall where a butcher is obviously slaughtering an animal, producing a terrified expression on Klein's face. This sequence lasts less than two seconds, and it is not quite clear exactly what happens at the stall, but the scene insinuates that Klein is cowardly. In another review, director Raymond Ley self-critically remarks that he might have drawn the character of Klein as too friendly, admitting that he even started to like him. In the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Stephan Löwenstein, who also has reviewed the ZDF film, concludes that it offers a misleading pattern of interpretation.³² According to him, the decision was wrong but not murderous, as the film's title suggests.

The film has inspired comments on the Internet as well. Some of the reviewers express their empathy with Klein and his decision. They accuse members of the German public of acting cowardly because they denounce Klein instead of praising his courage, which ultimately protected German soldiers. Others reject these notions and call Klein and the Bundeswehr murderers. Another group of viewers, especially those writing in soldier blogs, remains

critical about the film, expressing reservations that too many details are not represented correctly—details such as vehicles, clothing, badges, ranks, and social practices like reporting procedures and the usage of technical terms. The film itself, the question of how order is represented, and its legitimacy play a subordinate role in these comments.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated how and why docudramas can be used in IR as primary material for analysis. The film analysis, based on a category system developed by Theo van Leeuwen that identifies legitimation claims in discourses, reveals that different narratives of legitimation and delegitimation arise from the television productions. The ZDF film *An einem Tag in Kunduz* tends to legitimize the order by referring to an imminent threat and establishes Klein's integrity as an honorable, faithful commander who probably misjudged the situation but cannot be regarded as a killer or criminal. In contrast, the ARD film *Eine mörderische Entscheidung*, which attracted greater public attention, establishes strong narratives that delegitimize the order on the grounds of intentions such as vengeance. Klein appears as a weak commander who was probably cheated by the Kunduz governor and forced into the decision by his military advisers. Both films refer to the same event and are based on similar documents, such as the protocols of the parliamentary investigation. Nevertheless, the arrangement of the plot differs completely, as do style, aesthetics, enactment, and the creation of legitimacy narratives. Although the ZDF production keeps close to the assured knowledge and visualized reality, fictionalizations are used only to simulate reality that cannot be precisely known, such as the events in the command center or the situations on the sandbank. Hence, the ZDF film comes closer to being a documentary than does the ARD production, which adds entirely fictional sequences.

One might argue that both films are *only* films and therefore the fictional products of scriptwriters, directors, and actors. Both films, however, create strong reality constructions that immunize them against this kind of general denouncement. Hence, as the analysis has shown, these films, containing narratives of legitimation and delegitimation, contribute to a larger discourse and, as such, they qualify as discursive articulations that cannot be ignored. By bringing apocalyptic images of the missile impact and the dramatic circumstances and consequences of Colonel Klein's order to the screen and to the German public, both films destabilize the notion that Germany was engaged

in Afghanistan only in terms of a “civilian power.” Instead, they foster the narrative that the Federal Republic of Germany was waging a “real war” for the first time in its history.

Notes

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