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TRAUMA AND THE IMPLICATED SUBJECT

Michael Rothberg

From victims and perpetrators to implicated subjects

Theories of trauma have, until now, focused on the experience of victims and the actions of perpetrators. They have also opened up rich and sometimes controversial discussions of perpetrator trauma and the transmission of trauma to subsequent generations and even to onlookers and bystanders. The categories of victims, perpetrators and bystanders are obvious starting places for accounts of violence and trauma, but are they sufficient? In my book *The Implicated Subject* (Rothberg 2019), I argue that they are not and suggest that we need to supplement those familiar categories with a new figure of historical and political responsibility. The figures I call “implicated subjects” are neither victims nor perpetrators nor passive bystanders. Rather, they occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm. Implicated subjects contribute to, inhabit, inherit or benefit from – in short, are *implicated* in – regimes of violence and domination, but do not originate or control such regimes.

Implicated subjects are participants in histories and social formations that generate trauma and consolidate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles. Less “actively” involved than perpetrators, implicated subjects do not fit the mould of the “passive” bystander, either. Although indirect or belated, their actions and inactions help produce and reproduce the positions of victims and perpetrators. In other words, implicated subjects help propagate the legacies of historical violence and prop up the structures of inequality that mar the present; apparently direct modes of traumatic violence turn out to rely on indirection. Derived from the Latin stem *implicāre*, meaning to entangle, involve and connect closely, *implication*, like the proximate but not identical term *complicity*, draws attention to how we are *folded into* (im-plic-ated in) events that at first seem beyond our agency as individual subjects.

Because the role of implicated subjects in enabling traumatic violence has not generally been on the agenda of trauma theory, I turn here to Michael Haneke’s 2005 film *Caché* (*Hidden*), a concrete example that can help us think through what it means to integrate an account of implication and implicated subjects into our understanding of trauma. Such a contribution lies not in extending the scope of who may be considered a “victim” of trauma, but rather in shifting our focus from the individual, traumatized psyche to the

enabling material conditions of traumatic violence. Read against the backdrop of Fredric Jameson's Marxist account of the three horizons of interpretation, Haneke's film reveals trauma as the effect of the indirect agency of implicated subjects within multiple scales of social life.

***Caché*: portrait of an implicated subject**

Caché offers a portrait of Georges Laurent, the successful host of a literary talk show on French television. Georges lives in a stylish Parisian home with his beautiful wife Anne, an editor, and their moody, adolescent son Pierrot. Georges's comfortable bourgeois life and his apparently liberal values enter into crisis when surveillance videos of his home and the family farmhouse where he grew up appear on his doorstep along with ominous childlike drawings depicting bloody scenes. Brief, enigmatic flashbacks indicate that Georges has quickly developed a suspicion about who is behind the unsettling surveillance, but Georges keeps this information from his wife – and thus from viewers – until developing circumstances force him to reveal his hunch.

Although Haneke deliberately leaves the mystery of the videotapes' origins unresolved, he does encourage viewers to share Georges's intuition that the harassment he experiences derives from an incident in his childhood and its presumed long-term effects. As Georges eventually admits to Anne – at the very centre of the film – he initially believes the videotapes to be the work of Majid, who was the son of Algerian workers on the Laurent family farm and now lives in a depressing flat in a housing development on the impoverished outskirts of Paris. Majid's parents disappeared on the night of 17 October 1961 during the notorious police massacre of Algerians who were peacefully demonstrating in Paris against a racist curfew and in support of the FLN, the Algerian independence movement (on 1961, see House and MacMaster 2006). Georges's parents, we learn in his reluctant and incomplete confession to Anne, wanted to adopt Majid, but the six-year-old Georges conspired through lies and manipulation to undermine their plan. Instead, as we observe in the film's ambiguously coded penultimate shot – is it a dream sequence, a memory or a fantasy? – the young Majid was forcefully removed from the Laurent family estate and taken to some sort of orphanage or hospital. Once taken away, Majid disappeared from Georges's life and consciousness for several decades – until the videos lead Georges to Majid's doorstep.

Forced to remember and confront his childhood rival after so many decades, Georges responds angrily and decides that Majid – or more likely Majid's unnamed son – is seeking to exact revenge for those long-ago events, even though both Majid and his son deny any involvement in the surveillance. In the midst of his re-acquaintance with Georges, the still-suffering Majid slits his own throat in the film's most visually shocking act of violence. Although disturbed by what he has witnessed, Georges continues to deny any responsibility for the trajectory of Majid's life, and the film ends ambiguously with hints that the surveillance may continue and that Majid's son and Pierrot may be co-conspirators of some sort.

As this summary should make clear, *Caché* is manifestly a film about trauma. Its plot turns, like many trauma narratives, on the haunting return of a violent past long after the event in question. The film depicts that past as not yet worked through: it is an "unclaimed experience", in Cathy Caruth's resonant phrase, that is simultaneously personal and collective (Caruth 1996). At the centre of the film is Majid's suicide, a shocking incident of self-inflicted violence that both re-enacts the originary trauma evoked by the film and transmits a version of that trauma to the viewer in turn. The marketing of the film – in the form of

posters and the DVD cover image – turns that incident into a logo: a bloody slash that suggests the stain of traumatic violence.

Like almost all trauma narratives, *Caché* depicts the experience of a victim, but here things become more complicated. Indeed, the film produces a shift in perspective in which viewers' initial sense of who is being victimized changes as we learn more about the mystery at the heart of the narrative. If, initially, it seems that Georges is being terrorized by an unknown, threatening agent, we come to see that the real victim and traumatized subject is in fact Majid. The depiction of Majid's trauma is elliptical but affecting: we know little of what has happened to him, but we witness the impact of trauma, *après coup*, in his interactions with Georges and ultimately in his suicide. In shifting our attention from Georges's suffering to that of Majid, the film might be seen as enacting a recent turn in trauma theory, in particular the postcolonial critique offered by Stef Craps and others. Craps criticizes Caruth and other "canonical" trauma theorists for sidelining non-European histories and subjects while simultaneously projecting an ethnocentric model of trauma with little purchase outside the centres of power (Craps 2012). The figure of Majid and the repressed history of the 17 October massacre could certainly lead us in this direction and, indeed, in my earlier chapter on *Caché* in *Multidirectional Memory* I sought to "provincialize Europe" (Chakrabarty 2007) by showing how the film productively linked the Algerian War of Independence to the Holocaust (Rothberg 2009: ch. 9). Here I attempt something different: I want to suggest that – while powerful in depicting the long-term impact of traumatic victimization and helpful in decentering Eurocentric trauma theory – the film's most original contribution lies in its exploration of the role of the implicated subject in enabling and benefiting from trauma (for more on narratives of implication, see Meretoja 2018).

Implication: at the margins of injustice

By focalizing the film primarily through Georges, but preventing any kind of easy identification with his perspective, *Caché* opens up an intermediate space for exploring dilemmas of justice and historical responsibility and rethinking trauma. Indeed, the film creates an ambiguous scenario that illuminates the grey areas of responsibility explored in the aftermath of the Holocaust by Primo Levi, Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt, among others. Haneke does not want viewers to feel sympathy for Georges – our sympathies are clearly on the side of the suffering, melancholic Majid and his confident, confrontational son – but he does want us to reflect on Georges's fate: the fate of the implicated subject. Haneke's film unsettles viewers, not just because of its deft use of surveillance and other motifs of the psychological thriller, but especially because it challenges the conventional languages of law, morality and psychology. Indeed, Haneke seems committed to depicting a subject confronted with modes of responsibility and justice that exceed legal frames and with legacies of trauma that unfold beyond the stable categories of victims and perpetrators.

Georges has committed no crimes and cannot be easily thought of as a perpetrator of violence. To the extent that Georges prompted the exclusion of the young Majid from the Laurent household, he did so as a minor with no direct or clear-cut culpability; the decision to send Majid away was made by Georges's parents – a decision that was ungenerous, to be sure, but also not criminal. Nor does Haneke provide us with a chronology that would directly connect the fact of Majid's expulsion from the Laurent home with his obvious suffering and his eventual suicide a half century later, even though there is clearly some sort of connection. With the exception of brief comments by Majid's son about the fate of his father, we know nothing about the intervening decades in Majid's life and thus can

extrapolate only speculatively the links between the events of the past and the situation of the present. In addition, Haneke makes clear that neither Georges nor his parents can be held directly responsible for the massacre that orphaned Majid in the first place; that episode consisted of state-sponsored violence that many French citizens may have approved and most citizens certainly chose to ignore, but that only agents of the state participated in directly.

All the qualifications in the previous paragraph may seem to confirm Paul Gilroy's well-known objections to the film as trivializing the damage of colonial legacies in contemporary Europe and reproducing "the white, bourgeois monopoly on dramatizing the stresses of lived experience in this modernity" (Gilroy 2007: 234). Yet, the distinctions between different forms of responsibility that the film forces us to confront are precisely its productive kernel. For certainly Haneke does not let us think of Georges as removed from the damages that surround his privileged domesticity. Georges is by no means meant to seem as innocent as he himself defensively claims to Majid's son when he uses a phrase – "Je ne suis pas responsable" (I am not responsible) – that echoes the Nazi perpetrators and collaborators depicted on trial in Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog*, as Max Silverman has noted (Silverman 2010: 59). In the same conversation, Georges invokes the multi-layered title of the film and continues echoing the vocabulary of the legal system: "I have nothing to hide [*rien à cacher*]. [...] Young man, your father's death must hurt. But I refuse to be suspected [*soupçonné*] by you." As a psychoanalytic critic might suggest, Georges's repeated denial and relativization of his deeds can be read as negative admissions of a responsibility that, at least unconsciously, he does seem to recognize.

As an implicated subject, Georges is both a participant in and a beneficiary of late colonial and postcolonial histories – as well as the "inheritor" of a longer colonial-national history – but, like most of his fellow citizens, he is something other than a perpetrator of the injustices that litter those histories. That distance from direct perpetration opens up a realm of "deniability" for Georges – in which, as he claims, he has no "bad conscience" – but it also challenges viewers to confront dominant frameworks premised on guilt and liability and to start to conceptualize alternative accounts of responsibility as implication. By telling a story full of gaps and uncertainties, *Caché* opens up a realm where legal and moral discourses seem to falter and where wrongs exist but responsibility for them has been dispersed. If we want to understand the traumatic suffering at the narrative's core, the film suggests, we need to look beyond the guilt of perpetrators who commit crimes that can be tried in courts of law and condemned from a comfortable, normative position of justice. The film wants us instead to reflect on the murkier realms of implication.

Caché's questioning mode puts it into conversation especially with Jaspers's exploration of individual and collective guilt in *The Question of German Guilt* (Jaspers 2000). The film confronts a situation similar in certain ways to the one Jaspers was addressing in early postwar Germany: one in which a majority of citizens does not recognize itself in a charge of *criminal* guilt and thus refuses to acknowledge its *political* responsibility and implication. Needless to say, the character of Georges in *Caché* neither apologizes nor enters into any process resembling self-transformation. Nor, one should add, has France as a polity or collective done much to accept its responsibility for the Paris massacre or the other crimes against humanity committed during the Algerian War of Independence (or, indeed, during the long process of colonization). Not even criminal guilt has been established in the case of the Algerian conflict, since amnesty laws forbid such accounting. Paris police chief Maurice Papon, one of the key responsible parties for the 1961 massacre, was only very belatedly brought to (imperfect) justice – and then for his collaboration in the deportation of Jews during the

Second World War and not for his crimes of the era of decolonization. The latter crimes did, at least, receive an airing during the course of Papon's trial, a form of public recognition that has helped foster limited acts of official commemoration and may have led Haneke to make *Caché* in the first place. By providing a set of diagnostic distinctions – in particular between the individual perpetrator's criminal guilt and the citizen's political guilt – Jaspers helps us to locate different dimensions of “the question of French guilt” addressed by Haneke's film.

But *Caché*, in turn, can also help us think through the limits of Jaspers's approach. While the ultimate horizons of Jaspers's work are non-political notions of moral and metaphysical guilt, the film politicizes implication by suggesting that matters of individual morality are inextricably intertwined with larger historical contexts and structures: not only in the film's brief, but central, reference to 17 October but also in its use of diegetic television news in the background of the Laurents' apartment to allude to ongoing neo- and post-colonial scenarios in Iraq, India and Israel/Palestine. Even more directly, the motif of surveillance undoes the split between the public and private that characterizes Jaspers's philosophy by exposing the realm of the individual to its immersion in an unequal social world: the trail of the videos leads viewers to understand the privilege of Georges's Parisian existence as linked structurally to the impoverished *banlieue* where Majid and his son live. Colonial legacies, in particular, along with their close relations – racialization and economic inequality – seep into all sectors of the everyday. What counts as hidden in *Caché* – and what the film seeks to reveal – are not simply the secrets of the human heart and soul but also especially the material relations of race, class and nation.

The film reveals those relations – and their traumatizing potential – to operate on two intertwined axes: the synchronic and the diachronic. If Georges's denial and aggression unfold in the unequal relations of the present, they equally concern personal and collective events in the past that return as trauma. In highlighting trauma via flashbacks and the centrality of Majid's suicide, *Caché* thus also concerns the problem of diachronic implication that Jaspers could not have fully anticipated at the time he was writing *The Question of German Guilt*. As violent histories recede into the past, they do not stop making claims on the present; rather, such distant pasts continue to haunt the present and pose challenging questions for historical redress, as the Nazi period and Holocaust have come to illustrate over the decades in debates about what kind of responsibility descendants of perpetrators ought to take on. These are the dilemmas, which extend far beyond the Holocaust, that Janna Thompson calls matters of “diachronic justice” (Thompson 2002: 149).

Haneke uses precisely this diachronic axis of implication to structure the plot of *Caché*. In linking the central trauma at the heart of the film to Georges's behaviour as a six-year old child almost a half-century in the past, Haneke forces us to reflect on implication's “statute of limitations”: How long do the claims of the traumatized last? How long does one remain responsible and for which entailments of one's actions? Haneke goes even further by foregrounding inter- and transgenerational questions: not only does the film interrogate the relation of Georges to Majid in dual time frames (past, present), but it also asks about the relation of parents and children, both on the side of the “perpetrators” and that of the “victims”. As we've already observed, Georges's story also reflects badly on his parents, who made the ultimate decision to send Majid away; in her one appearance in the film, Georges's mother appears both to have largely repressed this incident and to harbour resentments against Georges for his childhood actions. But the film also encourages us to think in a future-oriented way about the subsequent generation. The sons of Georges and Majid live out their “inheritance” of the past in unequal and stylistically different modes, but their

silent on-screen meeting at the conclusion of the film suggests the existence of some sort of generation-specific relationship, whether it be marked by cooperation or displaced rivalry.

Despite the centrality of trauma and historical injustice to its plot, however, *Caché*'s narrative discourse unfolds predominantly in the present – with the exception of its brief flashbacks in the form of Georges's dreams, fantasies and involuntary memories. In this manner, its staging of historical dilemmas coexists with its focus on present-day inequities. The film highlights in particular a power constellation shaped by race and class that is embedded in the texture of urban space. It draws attention not only to the obvious contrast between the fortress-like, single-family Laurent home and Majid's apartment in the projects, but also to the conflicts that erupt in public and semi-public realms. After Georges and Anne visit the police station for the first time to complain about the surveillance tapes and threatening drawings, they have a brief but ominous encounter with a young black bicyclist that hovers on the edge of violence. Anne manages to paper over the tension with a discourse of mutual blame, but the sense of something awry in public space persists – and we are also led to wonder about Anne's own "gentler", gendered implication in maintaining the racial and class divisions that Georges polices more sharply. When, in the wake of his father's suicide, Majid's son makes an unannounced visit to Georges's office, the camerawork emphasizes how the transparency of the contemporary office building architecture actually facilitates race- and class-based segregation: the rotating glass doors of the lobby and the glass wall separating the elevators from the work space seem to promise openness, but they can also become the barriers that keep uninvited, but easily identifiable "guests" out. As the glass doors and walls emphasize (and as the presence of a token black woman at one of the Laurents' dinner parties confirms), this fluid form of segregation does not erect absolute barriers but rather creates a sorting mechanism for keeping those considered undesirable at bay. In the profoundly racialized and class-divided world of contemporary Paris depicted in *Caché*, fluid segregation keeps people in their places but renders the agency of that segregation less obvious: the very architecture of public and private spaces contributes to the production of implicated subjects.

This present-tense production of implication only "works" however because it builds on and refunctions the racialized legacies of colonialism. The film links the anachronism of Georges and Majid's childhood rivalry – figured in the film as the haunting return of a past that took place in a distant, rural world – to the business world of contemporary Paris. It thus suggests the need to locate the traumatic modality of time Berber Bevernage calls the "irrevocable" within the "irreversible" progress of capitalist modernity (Bevernage 2011). Implication, *Caché* suggests, lodges at the intersection of the irrevocable and the irreversible and demands a new confrontation with space and time.

Mapping the horizons of implication

Haneke's film is valuable less because it provides clear answers to the conundrums of distant and indirect responsibility for trauma than because it opens up a space of reflection in which we find stories of intimate trauma lodged within a larger historical frame and contemporary social space. It thus directs us toward a materialist approach to the conjunction of trauma and implication that I explore here via the work of Fredric Jameson. Writing within the Marxist tradition, Jameson offers useful tools for thinking trauma and implication between situated subjects and large-scale structures.

In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson develops a theory of interpretation that situates works of literature and art in relation to "three concentric frameworks" that offer ascending scales of analysis. He calls for:

a widening out of the social ground [of interpretation] through the notions, first, of political history, in the narrow sense of punctual event and a chronicle-like sequence of happenings in time; then of society, in the now already less diachronic and time-bound sense of a constitutive tension and struggle between social classes; and ultimately, of history now conceived in its vastest sense of the sequence of modes of production and the succession and destiny of the various human social formations, from prehistoric life to whatever far future history has in store for us.

(Jameson 1981: 75)

As Jameson points out in his more recent *Valences of the Dialectic*, he adapted these different scales or horizons of interpretation from the three “*durées*” in Fernand Braudel’s book on the Mediterranean (Jameson 2009: 532; see also the exposition in Wegner 2014).

Framed by a narrative of traumatic return, *Caché* explores implication at these three levels of event, social group and mode of production. The deep structure of its plot begins with a punctual event from political history – the massacre of 17 October 1961 – which it explores allegorically through another punctual event: the exiling of Majid from the Laurent family estate. As allegory, this event opens up onto the second horizon of society: the film depicts class struggle (understood broadly) as unfolding both in the context of an anticolonial war (the implied but absent Algerian Revolution) and as an intra-French, postcolonial conflict contoured by race and ethnicity (as we see both in the main plot that pits Georges against Majid and his son and in such ephemeral occurrences as the encounter with the black bicyclist). But finally, at a third level, the film depicts these events and conflicts as taking place within the present-day mode of production: that of a hyper-modern, media- and spectacle-based capitalism in an age of war and globalization. This third level – whose particularities correspond in this case rather precisely to Jameson’s characterization of post-modernism as the “cultural logic” of the late capitalist mode of production (Jameson 1990) – appears in the film primarily as its setting and backdrop: in the architecture in which the characters move (including the simulacrum that constitutes Georges’s talk-show set), in the conflicts that flicker across the television screens, and in casually mentioned details such as the fact that the book Anne has been editing is a study of globalization. The film also sets this dominant postmodern mode of information-capitalism against a residual agricultural mode that remains just visible in the farm owned by Georges’s family and once worked by Majid’s parents. In depicting the overlap and tension between these two modes of production (depicted allegorically as the city and the country), the film simultaneously spatializes history and shows that place is deeply historical.

In situating its narrative of trauma within these three horizons of history – the event, social groups and modes of production – the film presents a complex map of implication. The film’s protagonist, Georges, is implicated at all these levels, albeit in different ways: he is a (not yet fully responsible) actor at the level of the punctual event; the beneficiary of a privileged class and race position as white Parisian “bobo” (bourgeois-bohemian) at the level of society; and an agent of an information-based mode of production as well as the heir apparent of the presumably no longer active family farm. While Jameson’s schema presupposes an ascending hermeneutical salience in the move from events to modes of production, *Caché* offers a less clear vision of where the central interpretive instance lies: the three levels of implication mediate each other and none can be said to subsume the others. In tracking Georges’s implication across these three levels, the film also suggests the significance of both synchronic and diachronic forms of implication: the long-past events of 17 October and Majid’s expulsion – and the continued, if residual presence of the farm and the

agricultural mode of production – signal the need for historical consciousness, even as the unfolding of the film in a present of racial and class conflict and postmodern capitalism reasserts the shaping force of synchrony.

Despite his multi-layered implication in the production and reproduction of trauma and injustice, Georges lacks the ability to understand his own position, to grasp his own situatedness in the horizons of analysis we as viewers glimpse. Here is where a further contribution from Jameson proves useful: his hypothesis of *cognitive mapping* as a necessary tool for understanding subjects' location in a global system characterized by "social confusion" (Jameson 1990: 54). In Wegner's useful formulation, cognitive mapping is a *narrative* activity that has "the effect of coordinating [...] two poles, the existential and phenomenological *experience* of people in their daily lives and the *abstract* global economic, political, and social totalities we always already inhabit" (Wegner 2014: 70). It is, "a *process*, a way of *making* connections, of *drawing* networks, and of *situating* ourselves as both individual and collective subjects within a particular spatial system" (71–2). To put this in my own categories: coming to terms with situatedness means mapping implication between subjects and structures.

Mapping implication requires a form of cognition that works across scales and *durées*. Narrated within the genre of the psychological-political thriller, *Caché* follows Georges as he attempts to make sense of clues and connections that could reveal the source of the surveillance and harassment under which his family suffers. Yet he never really does the work of coordinating and situating that cognitive mapping requires because he lacks the self-reflexivity to enquire after his own location in the spatio-temporal system in which he finds himself (postcolonial France, globalized Europe). It is precisely Georges's inability (or refusal) to connect past and present – as well as here and there – that constitutes the source of his "social confusion" and the stakes of the film's dilemmas. A process of mapping that only seeks to draw connections between the dispersed spatial locations of contemporary capitalism (significant as they are to the film's concerns) fails to address the unfinished business of history: here, the racialized legacies of colonialism that intertwine with the divisions of the present. Trauma, in *Caché*, is the effect of that intertwining.

Yet the film is less interested in providing viewers with a completed "map" of postcolonial France than it is in encouraging viewers to occupy the position of the implicated subject. Such a completed map would surely give greater presence to the long-repressed events of 17 October 1961 than does *Caché*, just as it would probably probe the positions of victims (like Majid's parents) and perpetrators (like Papon and the Paris police). But *Caché* does neither and instead dwells primarily on the morally ambiguous situation of the implicated subject in the distant aftermath of the events while still registering the damage of the events in relation to different scales and durations. This focus on implication manifests itself at the level of form. In its famous opening shot, the film draws us into Georges's point of view: what looks like an objective long shot of a house turns out to be a subjective close-up of the Laurent television seen through Georges's eyes. Although focalization shifts quickly after this opening, viewers' positioning in proximity to Georges remains throughout – and focalization through his gaze re-emerges forcefully in moments such as Majid's suicide. *Caché* is not just a film about implication, in other words, it is a film that seeks to produce the viewer as implicated subject.

Persistent focalization through the anti-hero Georges – a cinematic version of the unreliable narrator – creates an asymmetry in the film: even as we have an intimate, if still somewhat "empty" sense of Georges's consciousness, the perspectives of Majid and his son remain mostly absent. As we have seen, Gilroy (2007) laments that such a narrative set-up mimics the racial hierarchy in which the colonizer (or, here, the post-imperial subject)

possesses a level of interiority denied to the colonized (or postcolonial subject). Gilroy's diagnosis is, of course, correct, but this asymmetry also proves productive for developing the theory of the implicated subject. Indeed, the structure of focalization in *Caché* draws attention to the fundamental asymmetry between differentially positioned subjects in the wake of trauma and in the midst of structural inequality. The film reveals the grasping of asymmetrical relations as critical to the process of cognitively mapping implication in the past and present.

Although the theory of the implicated subject seeks to shed light on a position beyond the victim/perpetrator binary, it does not presume a homogeneous space of implication, just as it does not suppose the disappearance of victims and perpetrators. Rather, the non-binary terrain of implication refracts subjects differentially. Crucially, Majid remains a victim who was presumably orphaned through actions of the French state, even if we cannot easily name Georges a perpetrator; this asymmetry probably generates a significant portion of the unease that accompanies the film. The asymmetry between the victim and perpetrator in experiences of violence is fundamental and obvious, but attention to implication brings to light a less obvious asymmetry: the fact that certain, ultimately very common scenarios of violence do not seem to require the binary categories of victims and perpetrators at all. This latter asymmetry may be *Caché*'s most disturbing insight: operations of power and violence produce traumatized victims without always requiring morally unambiguous, criminally indictable perpetrators. It is also the source of its most productive engagement: the positing of the implicated subject as central to the functioning of violence at the levels of historical events, social groups and social structures, even when perpetrators seem to be distant from the scene of the crime(s).

Far from evading an indictment of the "real" perpetrators of 17 October, Haneke instead directs our attention to the enabling figures of the routine violence of the colonial and post-colonial worlds: those implicated subjects who would never understand themselves as "criminally" or even "politically" guilty; who might not even register or remember the events in which they were implicated; and yet whose responsibility is not merely moral or metaphysical. The implication of Georges and his parents derives not from conscious perpetration but from the material ways they have enabled and benefited from – without actively perpetrating – the very histories and social relations that traumatized Majid and murdered his parents.

Conclusion

Caché helps us to see that the categories of victims and perpetrators cannot tell us everything we need to know about trauma, especially when traumatic events lie at a historical and spatial distance from the subjects implicated in them. Even as it powerfully evokes the intimate and haunting experience of psychic trauma, Haneke's film also opens up an unsettling, yet all too familiar world: the world of implicated subjects. In opening up that world, it reveals that our understanding of trauma has much to gain from a materialist turn that understands violence as embedded in the circuits of the social and the structures of the everyday. According to the theory of implication and implicated subjects, intimate and isolating experiences such as psychic trauma are entangled with diffuse social forces at a multiplicity of scales, from dramatic events to global systems. Traumatic experiences, the theory also suggests, frequently bear the residues of both historical violence and contemporary inequality. Nothing should distract us from the suffering of traumatized victims or from the need to hold perpetrators accountable. But if we want to understand the sources of violence in our world, we also need to start attending to implicated subjects.

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Further reading

- Bevernage, B. (2011) *History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence*, New York: Routledge. (An exploration of the politics of time in the wake of traumatic political violence.)
- Craps, S. (2012) *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan. (An influential critique of classical concepts of trauma and a proposal for a non-Eurocentric trauma theory.)
- Meretoja, H. (2018) *The Ethics of Storytelling: Narrative Hermeneutics, History, and the Possible*, New York: Oxford University Press. (A sophisticated account of the ethics of storytelling with significant attention to the narratives of implicated subjects.)
- Rothberg, M. (2019) *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*, Stanford: Stanford University Press. (A new theory of historical and political responsibility beyond the categories of victims, perpetrators and bystanders.)