

CRITICAL RACE THEORY READING OF THE MAIN CHARACTER IN *THE ZONE OF INTEREST* (2023) BY JONATHAN GLAZER

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ABSTRACT. *The Zone of Interest* (2023) is one of director Jonathan Glazer's works that depicts the life of a Nazi family behind the walls of the Auschwitz concentration camp, highlighting the hidden brutality behind the seemingly peaceful routine of a domestic space. Rudolf Höss, the main character in the film, demonstrates how the racist ideology embraced by the National Socialist regime actively shapes the domestic routines, psychological compartmentalization, and complicit moral indifference of both individual perpetrators and their immediate social circles. The purpose of this study is to analyze how this racist ideology is portrayed through the main character and how it impacts the social attitudes that developed within society during the Holocaust. The method used is a qualitative descriptive approach grounded in textual and visual analysis, operationalizing Delgado and Stefancic's Critical Race Theory (CRT). Specifically, the analysis is guided by CRT's core tenets of the "ordinariness" of racism—the concept that white supremacist hegemony is constructed as a normal, everyday reality—and structural embeddedness, which explores how institutions insulate individuals from the moral consequences of systemic oppression. The findings of this study indicate that racism does not always manifest itself in overt, localized forms of spectacle violence, but is sustained through indifference, bureaucratic detachment, and domestic routines that appear deceptively normal. Ultimately, this study affirms that *The Zone of Interest* presents a powerful critique of a racist power system that is deeply embedded in everyday life, demonstrating how ideological violence can be banally normalized and perpetuated across generations.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory, Ordinariness of Racism, Rudolf Höss, Structural Embeddedness, *The Zone of Interest*

PEMBACAAN CRITICAL RACE THEORY TERHADAP KARAKTER UTAMA DALAM *THE ZONE OF INTEREST* (2023) KARYA JONATHAN GLAZER

ABSTRAK. *The Zone of Interest* (2023) merupakan salah satu karya sutradara Jonathan Glazer yang menggambarkan kehidupan keluarga Nazi di balik tembok kamp konsentrasi Auschwitz, menyoroti kebrutalan tersembunyi di balik rutinitas domestik yang tampak damai. Rudolf Höss, tokoh utama dalam film ini, memperlihatkan bagaimana ideologi rasis yang dianut oleh rezim Sosialis Nasional secara aktif membentuk rutinitas domestik, pemisahan psikologis, serta sikap masa bodoh yang mencerminkan keterlibatan moral—baik pada diri pelaku individu maupun lingkungan sosial terdekat mereka. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis bagaimana ideologi rasis tersebut digambarkan melalui tokoh utama dan bagaimana hal itu memengaruhi sikap sosial yang berkembang di masyarakat selama masa Holocaust. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif yang didasarkan pada analisis tekstual dan visual, dengan menerapkan *Critical Race Theory* (CRT) dari Delgado dan Stefancic. Secara khusus, analisis ini berpedoman pada prinsip-prinsip utama CRT mengenai "sifat lumrah" (*ordinariness*) rasisme—konsep bahwa hegemoni supremasi kulit putih dikonstruksi sebagai realitas sehari-hari yang dianggap wajar—serta konsep keterlekatan struktural (*structural embeddedness*), yang mengkaji bagaimana institusi melindungi individu dari konsekuensi moral akibat penindasan sistemik. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa rasisme tidak selalu mewujud dalam bentuk kekerasan spektakuler yang terang-terangan dan terlokalisasi, melainkan dilanggengkan melalui sikap masa

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bodoh yang mendalam, sikap abai yang didorong oleh birokrasi, serta rutinitas domestik yang tampak wajar namun menipu. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa *The Zone of Interest* menyajikan kritik tajam terhadap sistem kekuasaan rasis yang mengakar kuat dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, serta memperlihatkan bagaimana kekerasan ideologis dapat dinormalisasi secara banal dan dilanggengkan lintas generasi.

Kata-kata kunci: Critical Race Theory, Ordinariness Rasisme, Rudolf Höss, Structural Embeddedness, *The Zone of Interest*

INTRODUCTION

Racism is a foundational social phenomenon that has long been embedded in human societies, continuously transforming and adapting as it influences various institutional registers, from legal systems and education to the production of cultural artifacts such as cinema. Rather than operating merely as a localized matter of interpersonal prejudice between one person and another, racism functions as a pervasive structure and systemic system of thought embedded in global social, political, and cultural thinking. In the sociology of race and ethnicity, the concept of racism encompasses multifaceted structural dynamics, including systemic inequality, institutional discrimination, internalized stereotypes, and deeply naturalized racial attitudes (Shiao et al., 2021). It manifests both through overt violence and subtle normalizations, embedding itself into the fabric of everyday life so thoroughly that its oppressive outcomes become virtually invisible to dominant social groups.

To interrogate these deeply entrenched structures, scholars utilize Critical Race Theory (CRT). This analytical framework originated in the 1970s and 1980s, developing partly in response to the limitations of Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which mainstream race scholars argued failed to adequately address the unique, pervasive centrality of white supremacy in institutional policies. Critical Race Theory posits that race is not a biological reality but a social construct that is continually reproduced by legal, educational, and cultural institutions. These systems remain highly resistant to reform because they are fundamentally structured to preserve the

socio-political privileges and material dominance of ruling racial hegemonies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

In cinematic analysis, evaluating the ideological trajectory of a primary character provides an essential mechanism for unmasking these embedded systems. In Jonathan Glazer's *The Zone of Interest* (2023), the protagonist, Rudolf Höss, serves as a crucial lens for a Critical Race Theory analysis. Rather than treating the perpetrator as an anomalous monster, centering the narrative around Höss allows researchers to examine how a vehicle of absolute racial hegemony internalizes, enforces, and normalizes state-sanctioned violence through mundane, domestic actions. One of the central issues raised in the film is how the system of racism that underpins the historical atrocities of the Holocaust actively affects the interior lives of individual perpetrators and the broader social structures surrounding them. The Holocaust stands as extreme historical evidence of racial discrimination perpetrated in a highly bureaucratic and industrialized manner by the National Socialist regime.

In *The Zone of Interest*, the audience is forced to witness the impact of racial policies not through the explicit physical suffering of the victims, but through the deep psychological compartmentalization and moral erosion of the perpetrators. The film demonstrates how the violence of racism does not merely dictate state policies, but actively infiltrates the ordinary domestic routines of a nuclear family. By using Rudolf Höss as an illustration of the seamless acceptance and execution of genocidal policies, the film presents a complex view of how ideologies of hatred can become utterly mundane within a

highly structured society. Through this character, the text exposes the psychological processes of moral detachment, showing how a community contributes, both directly and indirectly, to maintaining a system of violence. Therefore, addressing this issue through the lens of the protagonist offers vital insights for contemporary readers and scholars of race and cultural history on how destructive, discriminatory policies can be masked by the veneer of civil, everyday life. Therefore, this study examines how *The Zone of Interest* utilizes its perpetrator-protagonist to illustrate and reinforce the critique of racial ideologies that were structurally embedded during the Holocaust. This research is undertaken to address a critical omission in current film and cultural studies. While traditional Holocaust cinema scholarship focuses heavily on the representation of the victims, trauma, and the explicit visual spectacle of concentration camps (e.g., Hirsch, 2012; Insdorf, 2003), the specific ideological normalization of racism has rarely been evaluated from the domestic perspective of the perpetrator-protagonist within literary and media studies. By exploring the intersection of Critical Race Theory and Holocaust representations, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how systemic racism achieves its ultimate, terrifying expression not through explosive outbursts of hatred, but through its total and routine normalization within the domestic sphere.

METHOD

This study utilizes a qualitative descriptive research method. This approach is designed to provide a detailed, systematic, and nuanced analysis of social and ideological phenomena as they are represented within text-based or visual media. As a methodology, the descriptive qualitative framework is uniquely suited for examining scientific and cultural objects in unrestricted, naturalistic settings—unlike experimental designs—allowing for a

comprehensive critique of systemic structures within the text (Furidha, 2023).

The primary data source for this study is the cinematic text *The Zone of Interest* (2023), directed by Jonathan Glazer. To ensure analytical depth, secondary data sources consist of authoritative scholarly texts explicitly situated at the intersection of Critical Race Theory (CRT), film analysis, and Holocaust historiography. These include foundational works such as Delgado and Stefancic's (2017) *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, which establishes the theoretical parameters of systemic hegemony, alongside specialized historical and cultural evaluations of perpetrator behaviors, such as Hannah Arendt's (1963) *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* and Robert Jay Lifton's (1986) *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*.

The data analysis technique consists of identifying and interpreting specific cinematic scenes, visual framing techniques, and audio-dialogue tracks that manifest racial hegemony. Rather than selecting sequences based on random plot progression, the selection and interpretive phases are directly guided by Critical Race Theory's core tenets of the "ordinariness" of racism and structural embeddedness.

Specifically, scenes are isolated and coded based on how they visually construct the domestic environment as a site of normalized white supremacist routine, or how the dialogue demonstrates a total bureaucratic insulation from the genocidal violence occurring across the camp wall. These identified narrative codes are then systematically cross-examined with the secondary theoretical frameworks to construct a rigorous critique of systemic oppression and directly resolve the primary research questions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Jonathan Glazer's *The Zone of Interest* (2023) constructs the horrors of the Holocaust from an indirect and profoundly understated

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perspective. Rather than relying on the explicit visual spectacle of violence within the camp walls, the text builds its narrative tension through a disturbing contrast: the mundane, idyllic comfort of a domestic household existing directly adjacent to industrialized genocide. The film opens by positioning the domestic sphere—a large villa featuring a manicured garden, swimming pool, and servants—as a site of absolute stability. While the Höss family hosts social gatherings and tends to their environment, the cinematic audio track introduces an unrelenting layer of ambient violence. The constant background presence of distant screams, gunfire, and the mechanical rumble of transport trains forces the audience to confront a sonic landscape of mass extermination that the characters systematically and consciously disregard.

To move beyond a superficial reading of this structural contrast, this section utilizes Critical Race Theory (CRT) to analyze how the perpetrator-protagonist embodies the racial ideology of the National Socialist regime. Specifically, the analysis operationalizes the CRT tenets of the "ordinariness" of racism and structural embeddedness to evaluate how systemic white supremacist violence is scrubbed of its moral weight, normalized as a routine bureaucratic task, and insulated within everyday cultural practices.

The Normalization of Racialized Labor and Material Trajectories

The structural embeddedness of racism manifests clearly through the silent tracking of everyday domestic labor within the household. In an early sequence, a male servant washes the leather boots of Rudolf Höss after the commandant returns from overseeing operations within the adjacent concentration camp. As the servant rinses the footwear, the water turns a deep crimson, signaling that the leather is saturated with blood. In this frame, the blood signifies the structural violence routinely inflicted upon prisoners in the camp next door.

The camera deliberately avoids exploring the exact site of physical torture, focusing instead on the fluid mechanics of domestic cleaning. This choice demonstrates how the physical residues of racial violence are seamlessly integrated into the household's maintenance chores. By focusing on the quiet sound of running water rather than explicit violence, the sequence demonstrates the ordinariness of racial terrorism under a dominant hegemony. The violence is treated not as a shocking disruption, but as a routine byproduct of state labor that can be washed away by a subjugated class of servants.

This total lack of moral friction is further emphasized by the complete absence of emotional affect in Höss's physical behavior. In a subsequent sequence, Höss stands calmly in his backyard with his back turned to the camp wall while smoking a cigarette. Behind him, thick columns of black smoke billow from the crematoria chimneys, accompanied by the mechanical hum of gas chamber engines and the faint screams of prisoners.

Höss displays a total absence of affect, a blankness of expression that highlights CRT's concept of systemic racial indifference. He does not react to the sensory signs of mass murder; instead, he turns his back on the facility to focus on his cigarette. This posture highlights the deep separation between his comfortable domestic life and the brutal realities of the camp, proving that the destruction of marginalized populations is treated as an ordinary, unproblematic backdrop to everyday life.

This systemic indifference is reinforced when Höss is depicted in full military uniform, standing amidst plumes of dark soot while supervising his subordinates. The audio track overlays his expressionless face with the cries of children, infants, and adults being forced into the gas chambers by guards. Höss maintains a cold, detached gaze, watching the process as if it were a routine organizational task rather than mass slaughter. His flat demeanor demonstrates how

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bureaucratic systems insulate individuals from the moral consequences of state-sanctioned violence, transforming industrialized murder into a regular professional duty.

Environmental Pollution and the Limits of Domestic Segregation

The fragile boundaries separating this domestic paradise from the adjacent violence collapse during a recreational scene where Höss takes his children fishing in a nearby river. While his daughters play in the water behind him, the river current suddenly changes color, carrying a heavy layer of dark ash and human bone fragments from the camp's crematoria. Upon discovering these remains, Höss exhibits sudden surprise and confusion. His reaction, however, stems from an disruption in domestic health rather than moral regret. His main concern is the physical pollution of his children by the material remains of the prisoners, which threatens the sanitary boundaries of his household.

This protective response triggers an immediate retreat to the villa, where Höss orders his wife and servants to scrub his daughters clean. He rushes to the sink, aggressively washing his own skin to remove the ash before even changing out of his clothing. The gray water pooling in the basin emphasizes his deep aversion to the physical remains of the prisoners entering his home.

His rough movements reveal a desire to keep the physical reality of his work separate from his idealized family life. By treating the ashes of the victims as literal contamination, this sequence illustrates how dominant groups use segregation to enjoy the benefits of systematic violence while keeping its messy, physical reminders safely outside their private spaces.

The Normalization of Atrocities within Domestic Spaces

Critical Race Theory (CRT) posits that white supremacist hegemony does not rely solely on overt acts of terror, but is primarily sustained through the "ordinariness" of racism—the process by which systemic violence is

integrated into the mundane routines of daily life until it becomes completely normalized (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In *The Zone of Interest*, this normalization is structurally mapped onto the leisure activities of the perpetrator's family. A prominent example occurs during a sequence where Rudolf Höss takes his eldest son for a horse ride through the pastoral landscape surrounding their villa. On the surface, the frame presents an idyllic portrait of paternal bonding and upper-class domestic tranquility. However, the auditory architecture of the scene immediately undermines this serenity. The rhythmical clapping of horse hooves is overlaid by the harsh friction of metal chains clinking together, punctuated by the distant, aggressive shouts of National Socialist guards.

This acoustic juxtaposition exposes how systemic racial oppression operates as an omnipresent background hum to bourgeois comfort. The ideological friction becomes visually explicit when the camera tracks the son squinting through the overgrown brush. The gaze reveals a line of Jewish prisoners walking in light blue and white striped prison garb, their hands and feet bound by heavy irons.

By framing this encounter without explicit dialogue, the text highlights a stark, naturalized division of space and citizenship. The Höss family occupies a realm of unrestricted spatial mobility and comfort, while the racialized "Other" is reduced to a subhuman labor commodity. The scene demonstrates that racism operates most effectively when its visual markers—the literal shackling of a subjugated population—are treated by the dominant class as nothing more than standard elements of the local topography.

This domestic socialization is further elaborated in a highly disturbing sequence where Höss's youngest son sits in his bedroom, casually examining a collection of teeth harvested from a Holocaust victim. The film treats these teeth not as a shocking intrusion of death, but as part of the random

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"found objects" that a child collects in his daily environment. The boy handles the human remains with quiet, innocent curiosity, turning them over in his hands as if inspecting ordinary gemstones or unique seashells.

Analyzed through a CRT lens, the child's reaction exposes how structural embeddedness conditions the psychological development of the next generation. The younger characters are not shielded from the material realities of genocide; rather, they are raised within an ideological ecosystem that strips those realities of their human weight. By teaching children to view the physical remnants of a murdered demographic as playthings, the fascist state systematically erases historical empathy. The neat fences of the villa do not hide the crime; instead, they serve as boundaries within which the barbarism of the state is repackaged as a secure childhood landscape. This silent education forms a generation of subjects who are structurally incapable of recognizing the violence that funds their social privilege.

The distinction between literal ignorance (a lack of awareness) and racial indifference (a conscious refusal to grant moral value to a marginalized group) represents a foundational tenet of Critical Race Theory. While ignorance implies that a subject lacks the data required to understand an unjust structure, indifference describes a state wherein the subject is fully aware of the ongoing violence but actively chooses to ignore it to preserve their material comfort. This dynamic is illustrated in the sequence where Hedwig Höss tours her manicured flower garden with her visiting mother. While showcasing the lush flora of the estate, Hedwig casually remarks on the proximity of the concentration camp, explicitly noting, *"The Jews are on the other side of the wall"* (41:10–41:46).

Hedwig delivers this line with a complete absence of anxiety, fear, or moral hesitation. Her flat, matter-of-fact delivery demonstrates that she is not ignorant of the industrialized slaughter occurring mere yards

away; rather, she is profoundly indifferent to it. The high concrete wall of the camp functions simultaneously as a physical barrier and an ideological screen that allows her to decouple her luxurious lifestyle from the suffering that enables it.

From a CRT perspective, Hedwig represents the vital role that domestic complicity plays in sustaining white supremacist systems. Industrialized oppression cannot be maintained exclusively by the state actors who pull triggers or operate gas chambers; it requires a broader civilian network willing to trade human empathy for property value, social status, and personal luxury. By depicting ordinary domestic gossip against a backdrop of mass murder, the film proves that the most dangerous weapon of systemic racism is not always overt hatred, but the cold, calculated indifference that transforms human catastrophe into a tolerable background condition of daily life.

The Aesthetics of Erasure: Hedwig Höss and the Concealment of the Wall

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emphasizes that structural oppression is maintained not only by explicit acts of institutional terror, but also through deliberate strategies of aesthetic concealment and denial implemented by the dominant class. In an extension of the previously analyzed garden sequence, Hedwig Höss further cements her active role in the normalization of genocide when she remarks to her mother, *"I planted climbing plants so they would grow and cover the wall"* (41:10–41:46). Her statement, delivered as a mundane observation regarding domestic landscape design, carries an ideological function. The concrete wall is not merely a geometric border for her private backyard; it is the physical partition separating her family's luxury from the industrialized murder of Jewish prisoners.

By planting climbing vines to intentionally obscure the brickwork, Hedwig attempts to physically and symbolically mask the material reality of the Holocaust. This act constitutes a literal manifestation of what

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CRT defines as willful blindness—a conscious choice to alter one's immediate environment to avoid witnessing the violent exploitation upon which one's social status depends. Her primary concern is not the mass execution occurring yards away, but the threat that the unadorned wall poses to her domestic illusion of beauty. This passive apathy acts as a vital pillar of systemic racism; by choosing to cover the wall rather than confront the horror it contains, the domestic observer actively participates in validating and sustaining the oppressive regime.

The film offers a highly disturbing exploration of structural complicity by demonstrating how the material remains of state violence are repurposed to nurture bourgeois luxury. The total silence in this sequence amplifies the sense of moral absence, replacing conventional narrative exposition with a chilling display of institutionalized indifference. A key visual in this scene shows a local servant calmly sprinkling gray ash into Hedwig Höss's flower beds as part of his daily maintenance routine.

The substance being distributed is not natural fertilizer, but the cremated remains of Holocaust victims harvested from the adjacent gas chambers. The vibrant, multi-colored flower garden is literally fertilized by the ashes of a destroyed demographic. This dynamic demonstrates a profound level of willful ignorance and institutional complicity; the dominant class chooses to repress their analytical awareness of the soil's origins to enjoy the aesthetic fruits of the genocide. The servant's mechanical, unexpressive execution of this task underscores how thoroughly state-sponsored racial terror has been integrated into the domestic routine. By reducing the physical vestiges of human lives to agricultural input, the text illustrates how a racist architecture converts mass death into a permanent, unchallenged backdrop for the ruling class's everyday comfort.

In its concluding movements, *The Zone of Interest* shifts away from the

historical domestic sphere to present an understated look at the contemporary remnants of the tragedy. The cinematic frame transitions into a silent, modern-day museum setting where the personal belongings of the victims are curated behind vast panes of clear glass. Piles of worn leather shoes, old suitcases, personal combs, and discarded spectacles are arranged in sterile, quiet exhibition rooms. The presence of the glass partitions creates an intentional historical and critical distance, transforming active human trauma into structured material artifacts.

From a Critical Race Theory perspective, this sequence illustrates the complete erasure of minority identity and life history by a dominant state apparatus. The objects are no longer mere property; they stand as silent witnesses to a highly organized system of racialized dispossession and extermination. By stripping away all dialogue and musical score, the film relies entirely on the stark materiality of these items to communicate the scale of the destruction. The scene demonstrates that even after the active perpetrators have vanished, the physical remnants of state violence carry a permanent historical burden. The preservation of these artifacts serves as an enduring warning, forcing contemporary viewers to recognize that institutionalized racism leaves behind deep societal scars that can never be fully repaired by the mere passage of time.

The Manifestation of Structural Supremacy: Individual Affect and Societal Behavior

The analysis examines the fluid interaction between Rudolf Höss's domestic behavior and the surrounding socio-political landscape, demonstrating that his routine choices are not merely isolated personal decisions but are deeply driven by an encompassing white supremacist structure. Critical Race Theory (CRT) reveals how systemic frameworks shape individual consciousness, training subjects to perceive industrialized brutality not as a moral transgression, but as a

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legitimate bureaucratic duty that is socially and legally sanctioned by the state apparatus.

This psychological normalization is made explicit during a sequence where subordinates arrive at the villa to celebrate the commandant's birthday:

Subordinate: "*Happy Birthday, Commander.*"
Rudolf Höss: "*Thank you.*" (20:29 – 20:49)

The scene presents a striking moral contrast, illustrating how deeply entrenched racist systems shape everyday habits and interpersonal affect. The soldiers arrive in immaculate uniforms, presenting gifts and sharing laughter, mimicking the social behavior of standard corporate employees. This performance of civil harmony occurs directly adjacent to active mass slaughter, separated only by the estate's concrete wall.

Through a CRT framework, this sequence illustrates how structural racism functions to erase individual moral friction. The dominant community successfully coexists with systematic cruelty because their social space has been carefully designed to reward compliance and insulate them from guilt. On one side of the wall lies property ownership, luxury, and social celebration; on the other, state-sanctioned starvation and mass death.

CRT identifies this dynamic as a manifestation of interest convergence and institutionalized racial comfort, where the dominant group remains intentionally blind to structural injustice because the ongoing oppression directly secures their material privileges (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The guests refuse to question the horrors taking place behind the wall because their social positioning has trained them to view the destruction of the marginalized "Other" as a necessary condition for their own advancement. Consequently, institutionalized systems enable individuals to execute absolute cruelty without experiencing psychological dissonance, anchoring state

terror within the secure traditions of domestic life.

Generational Intermediation and Internalized Dominance

This normalization of structural supremacy is not confined to the adult perpetrators; it actively dictates the socialization of the household's children. In a telling visual sequence, Höss's eldest son is depicted wearing a Hitler Youth uniform complete with a distinct Nazi armband. He displays the symbol not with hesitation or fear, but with an expression of quiet pride and confidence. Beside him, his younger brother remains entirely unbothered, accepting the presence of this emblem as an ordinary element of his daily environment. This scene provides a clear visual demonstration of generational ideological reproduction, illustrating how systemic white supremacy deliberately shapes the consciousness of the young to ensure the long-term continuity of its power structures.

In Rudolf's household, there is no structural opening for moral reflection or critical questioning. The children are raised within a singular, state-approved narrative that frames their father's administrative work as honorable and necessary. They are not taught to understand the violence funding their lifestyle; instead, they are given social identities and material privileges defined entirely by an ideology that values Aryan dominance and enforces the complete eradication of the Jewish population.

This represents the deepest, most insidious form of internalized racism—a process wherein the values of a dominant, oppressive system are absorbed not through explicit political debate, but through the quiet, unreflective habits of everyday family life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

As the head of the household and a key agent of state violence, Rudolf operates as the vital link between state terror and domestic socialization. He does not need to deliver political lectures; his silent, administrative presence and unyielding domestic comfort serve as an effective tool

for political indoctrination. Through these intimate family portraits, *The Zone of Interest* offers a profound critique of how systemic oppression reproduces itself across generations, proving that the habits of a society are never ideologically neutral, but are continuously structured to sustain the dominance of those in power.

Linguistic Displacement and the Naturalization of State Terror

Critical Race Theory (CRT) posits that systemic racism maintains its societal dominance not only through explicit legal structures or overt physical terror, but also through the continuous reproduction of ideological scripts within the domestic sphere (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This generational socialization is clearly demonstrated in a sequence where Rudolf Höss and his son are walking near the perimeter of the villa. When the son questions his father about a series of muffled, distressed noises echoing from the adjacent concentration camp, Höss deliberately shifts the conversation away from human suffering: Eldest Son: "*Do you hear it, Dad?*" Rudolf Höss: "*It is a bittern. A heron. A Eurasian grey heron.*" (21:21 – 21:38).

From a CRT perspective, this interaction represents a calculated act of linguistic displacement designed to ensure the structural reproduction of racial supremacy. Rather than acknowledging the violent exploitation funding their domestic comfort, Höss redefines the acoustic signifiers of human torment as neutral, biological phenomena. This distortion does not merely pacify the child's curiosity; it establishes a racialized cognitive filter that trains the next generation to disregard the suffering of marginalized populations. By embedding these subtle lies within standard parenting practices, the dominant class systematically immunizes its children against empathy, ensuring they grow up to accept a violent, unequal hierarchy as a natural, unquestionable reality.

The persistence of systemic inequality relies heavily on the ability of dominant groups to sanitize historical atrocities through institutional and bureaucratic language. This discursive normalization becomes explicit during a serious conversation between the commandant and his wife regarding their domestic displacement:

Rudolf Höss: "*This is a political problem.*" (50:51)

By characterizing industrialized mass murder and ethnic cleansing as a mere "political problem" or administrative situation, the text illustrates how language is weaponized to strip violence of its moral dimensions. CRT emphasizes that institutionalized racism operates most effectively through discourses that frame oppression as reasonable, organized, and politically necessary (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

This conceptual framework explains Hedwig's passive compliance; she does not challenge the ethics of her husband's office because she views his work as a routine civic duty that directly secures her high social status and property value. Their ordinary discussion in the villa reveals that domestic spaces are not neutral sanctuaries, but are actively used to legitimize state terrorism, proving that systemic racism relies heavily on the complicity of families who accept institutionalized cruelty as a normal condition of daily life.

The ultimate success of a structural white supremacist system lies in its capacity to construct obedient subjects who execute mass violence with professional pride and zero moral ambivalence. This dynamic is illustrated following Höss's return from a high-level administrative conference in Berlin, where he receives orders to accelerate execution rates to approximately 5,000 victims per session:

Rudolf Höss: "*I appreciate the mandate you have given me, sir.*" (01:23:33)

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Höss's unyielding compliance emphasizes that racism within a structured hegemony is not merely an expression of personal prejudice, but a deeply institutionalized professional identity. He experiences no psychological conflict because the dominant legal, cultural, and political systems frame his genocidal labor as an honorable civic service to the state.

Through a CRT lens, his gratitude for this murderous mandate demonstrates the execution of symbolic violence—where language, professional titles, and institutional rewards make profound injustice appear noble and legitimate. Höss operates as a crucial link in this network, using his administrative authority to transform mass extermination into an efficient corporate task, proving that systemic oppression thrives when state officials perceive the organized destruction of human lives as a normal measure of career advancement.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Jonathan Glazer's *The Zone of Interest* serves as a cinematic critique of systemic oppression, shifting the traditional paradigm of Holocaust representation away from the visual spectacle of violence and toward the domestic sphere of the perpetrator. Viewed through the analytical framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT), the film reveals that white supremacist hegemony does not rely solely on overt acts of localized terror, but is fundamentally sustained through the "ordinariness" of racism and structural embeddedness. By centering the narrative on the domestic routines of Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss and his family, the text exposes how industrialized mass murder can be seamlessly integrated into everyday life, scrubbed of its moral weight, and treated as a normalized bureaucratic duty.

The findings of this analysis indicate that the depiction of racism in the film occurs through calculated symbolic actions and

domestic habits that enforce a state of willful blindness and profound racial indifference. This structural matrix is made manifest through specific narrative devices:

1. Linguistic and Acoustic Displacement: The systematic redefinition of the cries of the oppressed into neutral, non-human natural phenomena (*the "Eurasian grey heron"*), which shields the domestic space from moral friction.
2. Aesthetic Camouflage: The intentional cultivation of climbing vines to obscure the concrete camp wall, demonstrating how the dominant class prioritizes personal comfort and visual beauty over the recognition of human catastrophe.
3. Material Exploitation: The routine utilization of human ash from the camp's crematoria to fertilize the family's vibrant flower garden, visually illustrating how bourgeois luxury is literally nurtured by systemic violence.

Furthermore, this research highlights the mechanics of generational ideological reproduction within the household. The uncritical acceptance of fascist symbols by the Höss children and their lack of emotional affect toward the ongoing genocide prove that racism is an ongoing process of social education. By experiencing state-sanctioned violence as an unquestioned backdrop to a secure childhood, the next generation internalizes racial dominance not through formal political debate, but through daily habituation. Rudolf Höss operates not merely as an anomalous agent of cruelty, but as a vital conduit of state power, demonstrating how an institutional system successfully manufactures obedient subjects who experience no moral ambivalence while executing mass slaughter.

Ultimately, this study contributes to media and cultural studies by affirming that cinema functions as a vital mechanism for reflecting on complex, historical realities

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rather than as a medium for passive entertainment. By positioning an "ordinary" administrative figure as the protagonist, *The Zone of Interest* delivers a chilling warning regarding the insidious nature of structured injustice. The film demonstrates that the greatest atrocities are often executed not through erratic outbursts of hatred, but through the calm, systematic, and legally protected operations of everyday institutions. This analysis provides contemporary scholars with a vital lesson in how power works silently within seemingly innocuous social structures, urging an ongoing, critical vigilance against the systems that seek to normalize inequality and dehumanize marginalized populations in both past and present contexts.

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