



DECONSTRUCTION OF VIOLENCE IN CHRISTOPHER NOLAN'S THE DARK KNIGHT

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Abstract

In the 21st century, violence has become so abundant and deeply rooted in the visual medium of storytelling known as cinema that it has compelled film researchers to consider violence as a part of cinema's formal structure. Violence being plentiful and readily available to this increasing degree in cinema, it has become a pertinent subject of deep analysis in film studies to decipher all the different implications embedded in the violent acts depicted on celluloid. Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008) is a film that portrays violent tales revolving around the characters of Batman and the Joker. In fact, both heroic and evil characters perform violent acts in the film. Using Jacques Derrida's post-structuralist idea of deconstruction, binary oppositions revolving around violence in the film - such as violence perpetrated by hero/villain, violence in/out of context, justified/unjustified violence - can be analysed. Such analysis of binary oppositions concerning violence can then lead to the discovery of plurality of meaning. As deconstruction aims to uncover the unconscious voices of a text by identifying internal contradictions, binary oppositions or inconsistencies within a text, it is an effective lens to study such complex implications regarding violence. Thus, a single violent act depicted in the film can be deconstructed in different contexts to strip off its singular meaning intended by the filmmakers.

Keywords: Film studies, violence, deconstruction, post-structuralism, binary oppositions

Introduction

As used in many other literary forms of storytelling, violence is often notably employed in cinema as a means of producing conflict, resolving conflict or as a means of portraying stylized entertainment among other purposes. In this manner, violence has always been an integral part of cinema as a means of storytelling. In the 21st century, abundance of deeply rooted violence in this visual medium of storytelling has compelled film researchers to say, "cinema is thoroughly violent" (Slocum, 2001, p. 4); and to also state that violence has become a "part of its [cinema's] deep formal structure" (Prince, 2003, p. 3). Violence being plentiful and readily available to this degree in cinema, it has become a subject of deep analysis to decipher all of its different implications. Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008) is a film that portrays complex violent tales revolving around the DC Comics (American comic book publisher) characters 'Batman' and 'the Joker'. The film sets up a clear binary opposition of hero vs. villain, good vs. evil, positive forces vs. negative forces etc. Nevertheless, characters from both wings of these oppositions perpetrate violence in the film. On surface level, the label of good/evil or hero/villain associated with violent acts renders the function of them as either justified or unjustified. However, these functions and their implications reside only on the surface level of the film. By digging deep into the violent acts depicted in the film and questioning the associated binary oppositions created by the filmmakers, plurality in terms of functions and implications of those acts can be unmasked. As Derrida (1976) defined deconstruction or deconstructive reading in his *Of Grammatology* as an attempt "to make the not-seen accessible to sight" (p. 163), violent acts depicted in *The Dark Knight* can be deconstructed to uncover the plurality of functions, meanings and implications that are beneath the surface level in the film.

Before proceeding any further, a brief discussion is necessary on the issue of defining the boundary of violence in film. Defining the boundary of violence in films is deeply associated with the multiple functions, and in

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turn, multiple forms of violence. As violence can fulfil multiple functions in a film, it can speak to the audience socially, ideologically, geographically, culturally, linguistically and in many other ways. Depending on the particular context or point of view of analysis, violence can assume different forms to serve different functions (Fraser, 1976, p. 9). To perform such different functions, violence varies in terms of type and level of operation such as physical, psychological or even political. Thus, *In Violence and American Cinema*, Slocum (2001) writes, "Harm can be physical, psychological, or even sociological (countering the bonds of community or the state). Even more, the threat of harm or injury can often be as disturbing as the act itself" (p. 2). In this way, Slocum offers a compelling idea of how the threat of violence can have the same disturbing effect on an individual just as the violent act would have. Therefore, this research paper not only dissects explicit and physical violence in *The Dark Knight*, but it also puts great emphasis and importance on the deconstruction of implicit, sociological or psychological violence and the threat of violence in the film. Moreover, the film earned over a billion dollar at the box office (Mendelson, 2019). Therefore, it is imperative to decipher every intended and unintended meaning of the violent actions of the film. Thus, the paper aims to deconstruct violence in the film to decipher all the hidden implications.

Literature Review and Point of Departure

As this study aims to deconstruct violence in *The Dark Knight*, relevant articles and research works have been reviewed to formulate a better understanding of violence and other related aspects portrayed in the film along with identifying research gap and locating a specific point of departure to carry out the research. Dirk Etizen (2013), in his critical essay "Cultural Effects of Cinematic Violence: *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Dark Knight*" explores the violence in the two titular films to decipher its effect on audience's behaviour. Hence, he begins the essay by stating that violent acts on screen "produce changes in our [audience] mental and physical attitudes and dispositions" (p. 3). Etizen's focus is to identify "causal connection between violent thoughts and violent behaviour" (p. 3). Here, violent thoughts refer to the thoughts generated within the audience's mind as a result of watching on-screen violence. This aspect takes his essay towards a study of how human behaviour is influenced by violence in cinema. The focus of his essay is not on how the violence of the film is intended to be perceived by the audience. As *Saving Private Ryan* is not a part of this research, the focus of the review of Etizen's essay will be solely given on his analysis of the violence in *The Dark Knight*.

In his essay, Etizen never quite penetrates the surface level of the violent acts exhibited in *The Dark Knight* barring one part of his analysis where he masterfully brings out a nuanced meaning of the pencil magic trick done by the Joker. As narrated by Etizen, Joker "grabs the gangster's "boy" by the back of the head and slams the head down on the upright pencil. When the man slides to the floor behind the table, the pencil is gone" (p. 10). The film remains silent for the rest of its runtime about the boy and his murder. Etizen extracts a deeper meaning of this silence. According to him, it is done to show that there is "no consequence to the brutal act" (p. 11). Then, he writes, "There is of course a point: the point is to impress. Violence gets people's attention" (p. 11). Here, he tries to indicate that the "people's attention" in this statement are not merely the attention of the characters on-screen but also the attention of the audience. Thus, he writes, "We do not just soak up ideas of violence from movies. We respond to them, reflect on them, and use them in ways that serve our own interests and needs" (p. 8). These notions about violent acts capturing audience's attention and the audience responding to them are helpful for this research as it can establish the fact that the hidden implications of violence unveiled through deconstruction can also have deep impact on the audience.

Michael Goodrum (2015) studies the relationship between the Batman and the Joker and their unstable identities exhibited in the film *The Dark Knight* in his essay "Joker as Symptom". To explore their relationship, Goodrum suggests that "it is essential to move beyond such categories as "good" and "evil," "hero" and "villain." Both the Joker and Batman conceal their identities, use excessive violence, and—at least in *The Dark Knight*" (p. 229). Even though the essay does not dive deep into the violence shown in *The Dark Knight*, this introduction of Batman and Joker offers an interesting insight for my research purposes. The fact that he introduces the two characters in his essay as users of excessive violence has very deep implication about the acceptance of them in the eyes of the audience. As much as Goodrum tries to move beyond the binary of hero and villain, it is evident that the audience will primarily perceive Batman as the hero and Joker as the villain in *The Dark Knight*. However, the essay never moves forward to analyse the film's violence extensively. Rather, it greatly analyses the unstable identities of the Batman and the Joker in the film created by arbitrary rules of the society. Through the acts of violence, Joker

shows how arbitrary the rules of society are within the walls of Gotham (p. 236). In this manner, the focus of the essay shifts from violence.

In the essay “How Can Satan Cast out Satan? Violence and the Birth of the Sacred in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*”, Nicholas Bott (2013) analyses Batman's self-sacrifice in the film using René Girard's mimetic theory. The focus on the issue of violence here is explored in an interesting way by introducing the notion of good violence and bad violence. These two types of violence are defined by him to address the relationship between Batman and Joker in the film. Bott writes, “Their relationship isn't one of good versus evil; rather, they are two sides of the same coin, good violence and bad violence” (p. 245). The two characters being two sides of the same coin is a concept that is heavily associated with the iconic rivalry between the Batman and the Joker. They both commit violent acts but one is labelled as good and the other as evil. Moreover, the usage of good and bad violence is an interesting concept that resonates with how violent acts are accepted or despised according to the effects or consequence they have.

For this paper, Bott's notion of Batman and Joker in *The Dark Knight* being “two sides of the same coin, [who perform] good violence and bad violence” (p. 245) is considered as a point of departure. By disregarding the simplified binary of good versus evil in *The Dark Knight*, he is disrupting the binary oppositions, which is similar to the idea of deconstruction put forth by Derrida. However, he is simultaneously resorting to another binary opposition of good/bad violence. Therefore, in the discussion part of this paper, the researchers have tried to carefully peel off all binary oppositions related to violence to uncover the hidden implications. Bott has demonstrated how surface binary oppositions in the film (such as good vs. evil) can be disrupted. Hence, his idea is taken as a specific point of departure to continue disrupting further binary oppositions to extract more nuanced meaning of violence from *The Dark Knight* through deconstructive reading.

Theoretical Foundation

The notion of deconstruction and some ideas related to violence in film studies constitute the theoretical foundation of this research. The inception of deconstruction as a way of conducting literary analysis is closely associated with the origin of post-structuralism. It was popularized by Derrida during the late 1960s and the early 1970s. In fact, the term was erroneously considered as the first version of post-structuralism in the western world as Hans Bertens (2014) writes, “*deconstruction* . . . was the first version of poststructuralism to reach the United States” (p. 104). However, in a letter to a Japanese Professor, Derrida himself later clarified and created a distance between his notion of deconstruction and post-structuralism (Derrida, 1988, pp. 2-3).

In the same letter, Derrida (1988) also made it clear that for him deconstruction is “not a method” (p. 3). However, from the later part of the 20th century, critics have agreed that deconstruction can be considered as an applicable method by compiling the deconstructive moves Derrida has spread over his many writings and lectures. Norris (1987) writes, “It is not too difficult to come up with a concise formula that would make it [deconstruction] sound like a ‘method’ and yet describe quite accurately some of Derrida's most typical deconstructive moves” (pp. 18-19). Norris proceeds to describe some of Derrida's deconstructive moves by writing, “To “deconstruct” a piece of writing is therefore to operate a kind of strategic reversal, seizing on precisely those unregarded details (casual metaphors, footnotes, incidental turns of argument) which are always, and necessarily, passed over by interpreters of a more orthodox persuasion” (p. 19).

Thus, deconstructive analysis attempts to break the constrained nature of any text in terms of meaning. It considers the text itself to have a conscious and an unconscious part as the preceding extract suggests. It refers to the fact that any text can involuntarily create doubt for what meanings it is meant to convey by hinting at conscious entrapment of those meanings. Hence, Peter Barry (2013) suggests, “deconstructive reading uncovers the unconscious rather than the conscious dimension of the text, all the things which its overt textuality glosses over or fails to recognise” (p. 68). This particular notion can be seen as an extension of one of the related remarks in *Of Grammatology* that deconstructive reading “attempts to make the not-seen accessible to sight” (Derrida, 1976, p. 163). In the same line of thought, Terry Eagleton defines deconstructive reading as “reading against the grain” or “reading the text against itself, with the purpose of “knowing the text as it cannot know itself” (as cited in Barry, 2013, p. 77). In this manner, the violence portrayed in *The Dark Knight* can be a pertinent subject of deconstruction to unveil different implications lying unconsciously within them. It can bring out plurality in terms of significance from those

violent acts at sociological, psychological or political level, which may have been glossed over and smothered by the surface level of analysis.

“Binary opposition” is another key subject in Derrida’s idea of deconstructive reading. It denotes a polarity in relationship between two signifiers. Eichner (2001) writes:

For Derrida, the Western “metaphysics of identity,” or the “philosophy of the same,” neutralizes the threat of the Other . . . by structuring Western language around a series of binaries in which one member of the pair is privileged, and the other is fixed in a secondary position. The subordinated item of the pair is inevitably conceived only in opposition to the privileged term; (p. 36)

However, in poststructuralist deconstruction, such polarity is often challenged and reversed in terms of privilege (Barry, 2013, p. 71). Thus, the signifiers offer new meanings. To further emphasize the plurality and instability of meaning, Derrida states, “a meaning can never be completely fixed or determined” (as cited in Ijsseling, 1995, p. 96). Meaning is always fluid and subject to change. It may change with passing of time, change of setting, alteration of political scenario, or transformation of individual’s perspective. Thus, the changes in meaning to produce this plurality are associated with the term context. Hence, Derrida (1979) writes, “no meaning can be determined out of context” (p. 81). During the production of a text, it can produce one meaning but during different points of reception (by readers or viewers), it can assume different meanings altogether. Thus, meaning is as much dependent on “context of production” as it is on “context of reception” (Bennington & Derrida, 1993, p. 86).

Researchers from the field of film studies echo the aforementioned issue of alteration of meaning based on context as well. In *Film Violence: History, Ideology, Genre*, James Kendrick (2009) directly addresses Film Violence as dynamic and evolving in terms of its meaning with the passing of time and change of where the violence is taking place. He writes:

Film violence is best understood as a perception, a label that is affixed to cinematic representations of certain behaviours and actions. Film violence is an elastic, sliding, flexible term, one that shifts and changes throughout history and across various cultures. That which is defined as violent in one time or place may not be labelled as such in the future or in hindsight or in another culture. (13)

The elasticity of film violence creates the opportunity to carry out research on a particular film over and over again as its violence can speak to the audience differently in different eras and different settings. In addition, it creates a converging point between the notion of plurality of a text’s meaning derived from Derrida’s idea of deconstruction and plurality of meaning of violence portrayed on celluloid theorized by researchers in film studies.

Methodology

The research has been carried out utilizing qualitative approach to study violence in *The Dark Knight*. It has been conducted by collecting and analysing non-numerical data to understand the violence exhibited in the film. Hence, qualitative approach is the appropriate one for this study. The design of this research is non-experimental and descriptive as it collects and analyses data by applying content analysis method. The primary source of data in this research is Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight*. Relevant journals, articles, books, online sources and film reviews have been analysed as supporting materials supplying the secondary sources of data in this research.

Discussion

In this section, with the aid of previously analysed theoretical foundation, the researchers aim to identify and deconstruct violent acts in Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight* to extract different implications of those actions. The background score and musical cues related to violence are discussed along with the deconstructive analysis of the film’s significant plot points, lines and actions of the characters.

Violence and Binary Oppositions in Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight*

Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight* can be simply summarised as a piece of cinema that explores violent conflicts between good and evil, order and chaos, light and darkness, hope and desolation. However, a closer look at the violence portrayed in the film will render this simplification of binary oppositions very much deceptive. The on-screen enactment of violence throughout *The Dark Knight* has much deeper and suggestive implications when these

binary oppositions are challenged. There is a clear divide in terms of presentation between the violent acts of the positive forces and the negative forces exhibited in the film.

Before proceeding to the deconstruction of violence in *The Dark Knight*, a brief overview of the plot is included in this sub-section to clearly illustrate the binary oppositions and their supposed disruption in the film. Without pointing out these binary oppositions, the violent acts cannot be subjected to Derrida's way of deconstructive reading. *The Dark Knight* is set in fictional American city named Gotham. Billionaire orphan Bruce Wayne is a resident of Gotham who owns the Wayne Enterprises. He operates as the bat-masked vigilante Batman to fight against crime in Gotham. The city is full of corrupted police and government officials who are in cahoots with the mobsters. As the mobsters can control such officials, it remains impossible for the city to bring them to justice. However, due to the vigilantism of Batman, they have lost some control over the city. Batman has an ally in the form of Lieutenant James Gordon who is one of the few honest police officers left in Gotham. Soon, Batman and Gordon find a new ally with the emergence of the idealist and ruthless District Attorney Harvey Dent. Harvey is also involved in a romantic relationship with Assistant District Attorney Rachel Dawes, a childhood friend and former love interest of Bruce Wayne. With the help of Batman and Gordon, Harvey manages to lock up the entire mob consisting of hundreds of criminals led by Salvatore Maroni. The Joker emerges as an individual with no recorded history in Gotham who wants to bring chaos in the city. He offers the mob a deal that involves him killing Batman and getting half of the mob's money. Initially, the proposal is laughed off but after Harvey locks up the mobsters, they accept it. The Joker starts a killing spree. He murders the judge of the mob's trial and the Police Commissioner. He threatens to kill the Mayor of Gotham as well if Batman does not unmask his true identity. To save Batman's vigilantism, Harvey claims to be Batman. Soon, the Joker is caught by the real Batman as he (J) comes to kill Harvey. However, the Joker is always one step ahead of the curve and manages to kill Rachel and disfigure Harvey's face with the help of his thugs and police officers loyal to the mobsters. An enraged Harvey makes his turn from a heroic figure to a villainous one. He starts killing people responsible for Rachel's death and even kidnaps Gordon's family. However, the Joker is caught by Batman and his (J) plan of destroying order in Gotham is thwarted. Batman also saves the Gordon family. He also takes the blame for the murders committed by Harvey to restore the hope that an honest Gotham official such as Harvey can truly save the city.

The central disruption of the binary opposition between good and evil can be seen in the case of Harvey Dent. Within the course of *The Dark Knight*, Dent's character takes a turn from good towards evil. From being the White Knight of Gotham, he becomes a monster like Joker. Hence, Joker says, "I took Gotham's white knight. And I brought him down to my level" (02:14:53-59). However, Harvey violates law and order to commit crimes during both states. Thus, his violent acts assume different meanings during his heroic stint and his villainous stint. In similar fashion, the violent steps taken by positive forces such as Batman or Gordon is intended to be justified, but those taken by the negative forces are intended to be unjustified and vilified. It is because the binary tail of 'hero' in the opposition 'hero vs. villain' is more privileged. As a result, even the violent actions taken by the heroic forces have a positive meaning on surface level. However, if those actions are viewed outside the binary opposition, a completely new set of meanings can be found which the aim of this paper is. Moreover, such dissection of the binary opposition hero/villain, in turn, challenges the notion of good/bad violence perpetrated by heroes and villains respectively.

A deconstructive study of *The Dark Knight* also shows that violent acts perpetrated by Batman and Joker disrupt the conventional significance of colour associated with good and evil. When Joker blows up Gotham General Hospital, the scene is set with objects in different shades of white only and the Joker is also wearing a white nurse-gown (01:51:55-57). This ties Joker's monstrosity with the colour white which generally represents calm and peace. This disruption is further strengthened by Batman being dressed in black, even though he is intended to be the righteous hero. Another attempt to connect Batman with darkness can be found during the scene showing Bruce and Alfred closing down the secret workspace of Batman. The camera follows them from the back and with every step they take, lights gradually go off and the space becomes gradually darker (01:10:39-48). It signifies that even within the workspace of righteous Batman, darkness resides as he is constantly breaking the rules, as it will be discussed in the following subsection.

Political Implication of Violence in *The Dark Knight*

On surface level, in *The Dark Knight*, Batman and his few yet-to-be corrupted allies in the corrupted law and justice department of Gotham city can be seen as the white knights of Gotham who will put an end to the dark force known as the Joker. However, a closer look at their own violent acts shows how they are not much different from the malevolent Joker in reality. Deconstruction of these violent acts by heroic administrative personnel of Gotham can bring out silent political implications. Batman's vigilantism charms police commissioner James Gordon and the district attorney Harvey Dent so much that they decide to play outside the rulebook of law and justice. In fact, Batman is allowed to trespass into foreign land of Hong Kong to kidnap an accountant named Lau who is working for the Gotham mobsters. As Batman is operating above the law in Gotham, the authority does not question how much he needs to bend the rules to get the job done, as long as he gets the job done. The following conversation between the District Attorney Harvey Dent and Batman highlights this issue:

HARVEY. We need Lau back, but the Chinese won't extradite a national under any circumstances.

BATMAN. If I get him to you, can you get him to talk?

HARVEY. I'll get him to sing. (00:26:54-00:27:04)

Here, it is not a concern of the DA to know how Batman will manage to bring Lau from Hong Kong. Even as a holder of a significant position in the world of law and order, he wants to overlook such violent action of Batman as it will supposedly bring greater good. It becomes a heroic mission to extract Lau from China. From Harvey's perspective the mission involves reconnaissance and espionage. Now, is this trespassing by the supposed American heroic figure into Hong Kong not a political statement? Moreover, the political implication is bolstered by the fact that the tension between the USA and China has been at an all-time high in the 21st century. It certainly becomes such a political statement if the layers of such violent acts are peeled off to extract the political implication. In this way, if geopolitical scenarios are brought to the forefront in order to deconstruct such violent acts, they start to assume new meaning altogether being charged by such geopolitical implications. Moreover, this particular act of Batman is intended to be cheered by the audience as Batman's triumphant theme plays in the background when he flies off with the accountant from Hong Kong (00:37:21-40). During one of the earlier scenes showing Bruce and Alfred planning this mission, it is revealed that the members of flight crew of the plane used to escape from Hong Kong are South Korean smugglers (00:28:44-46). This suggests that taking help from the racket of international smugglers to invade foreign land is also permissible if the intended consequence of such action is good. In this manner, if such violent act of Batman is looked through the lens of geo-politics, it can bring out sensitive and dangerous political implication on a global level. Thus, for this particular violent act, under the surface layer meaning associated with words and phrases such as 'heroic mission', 'espionage', and 'reconnaissance'; there are dormant associations with more sinister words such as 'kidnaping' or 'invasion'.

Social and Psychological Implications of Violence in *The Dark Knight*

Throughout *The Dark Knight*, a common thread runs through statements made by different characters that human beings are inherently violent. During the first meeting between Bruce Wayne and Harvey Dent at a restaurant along with their respective partners, Harvey says, "You either die a hero or you live long enough to see yourself become the villain" (00:20:52-58). Therefore, he implies that the heroes either die a violent death or they themselves resort to violence to become the villain. The line foreshadows the ultimate villainous turn of Harvey Dent in his quest of revenge for the murder of Rachel. In addition, it is a call back to how most of the police officers and members of administration in Gotham have become corrupted individuals far away from their sacred duties. However, a much deeper meaning can be deciphered from the line. That is if the heroes cannot save themselves from being violent after a point, then how the ordinary people can do so as members of the audience.

Moreover, one would assume as it is a film centred around the righteous superhero Batman, it will eventually show that people are inherently good and civilised – not violent. The film does prove the Joker wrong but only partially. Initially, the Joker threatens to keep killing people until Batman reveals his true identity. By doing so, the Joker wants to put an end to Batman's vigilantism as completion of his promise to the mobsters. During the final act of the film, an accountant of Wayne Enterprise named Coleman Reese goes on TV to reveal the true identity of Batman as he had deduced it by looking into Bruce Wayne's expenditure earlier in the film. The Joker perceives that

if Reese reveals the identity, he cannot continue his killing spree by using his initial demand of unmasking Batman. Hence, by calling the same TV show, he announces the following message:

THE JOKER. I had a vision of a world without Batman. [Where] The Mob ground out a little profit and the police tried to shut them down one block at a time. And it was so boring. I've had a change of heart. I don't want Mr. Reese spoiling everything but why should I have all the fun? Let's give someone else a chance. If Coleman Reese isn't dead in 60 minutes then I blow up a hospital. (01:44:11-41)

The Joker knows that his threat of blowing up any hospital in Gotham will create chaos. People who have their loved ones in the hospital will try to resort to violence to kill Reese just as he told Batman earlier that people would lose their civility in such situations. This becomes true as one of the scenes shows a mob of people gathering to kill Reese and one person actually shooting him with a revolver as Reese is being escorted by the police (01:45:39-50). This scene ultimately shows the words of Joker to be true. The civilized people of this world are merely one trouble away from being violent to one another. Moreover, the police officer escorting Reese also tries to kill him as he (p) also has a relative at one of the hospitals at that moment. This psychological implication of mankind's eventual turn to violence is explored on the surface level through this event orchestrated by Joker and also by Harvey Dent's remark during his dinner with Bruce Wayne. However, the climax explores this issue on a deeper and wider level.

The climax is setup by the Joker's remark on the violent tendency of civilized people when he is interrogated by Batman. He says, "When the chips are down, these – these civilized people, they'll eat each other" (01:28:47-56). The film does prove the Joker to be wrong but only partially. The Joker uses a violent tactic during the climax of the film. He threatens to take control of Gotham which creates chaos as people try to leave the city. Meanwhile, he takes control of two ferries running in the middle of the river which he had already rigged with explosives. One of the ferries has civilians of Gotham. The other is transporting the prisoners Harvey Dent prosecuted. The Joker pits the civilians against the prisoners by sending the following message to the ferries:

THE JOKER. Each of you has a remote to blow up the other boat . . . At midnight, I blow you all up. If, however, one of you presses the button, I'll let that boat live. So who's it gonna be? Harvey Dent's most-wanted scumbag collection, or the sweet and innocent civilians? You choose. Oh, and you might wanna decide quickly because the people on the other boat may not be quite so noble. (02:01:01-02:02:21)

The Joker taps into the psychological level of violence. He does not explicitly do anything violent; rather, he creates the threat of violence. He wants the people from the two boats to blow each other up. He wants to bring out the ugliest side of the people of Gotham and prove his point that human beings would gladly start an ugly battle against one another when it comes to their survival. Gotham's civilians decide to practice democracy in their ferry to determine whether they will blow the other boat or not. The pilot of the passenger ferry declares the results, "The tally is 140 against, 396 for" (02:07:32-35). 396 civilians wanted to blow the other ferry up. This is a subtle nod from the film itself that the manifestation of people's violent side during distress is indeed true. It echoes the statement of Joker on how humanity is just one problem away from shedding any sign of humanity left in their soul. However, the film balances this out by showing that none of the civilians on the boat actually has the courage to press the button. On the other ferry, an intimidating prisoner takes the detonator and says, "Give it to me, and I'll do what you should've did [sic] 10 minutes ago" before throwing the detonator into the river (02:11:20-36).

Thus, ultimately the film shows that the Joker's plan of bringing out the ugliness of human beings amidst chaos fails due to the goodness left in human beings. However, the film does leave a seed of violence behind to promote it. It is embedded in the voting tally. 73% of people on the ferry thought it was alright to blow up a boat full of prisoners. A woman on the civilian boat says, "We don't all have to die. Those men had their chance" (02:02:34-37). She is trying to suggest that her social position triumphs over that of a prisoner and this is what would justify

the violent action of killing a ferry full of prisoners. This is how the sociological implication can be extracted from the deconstruction of this violent climactic event in *The Dark Knight*.

Conclusion

As films, such as *The Dark Knight*, that include violence on a large scale, are becoming massively popular among cinemagoers, it is a pertinent issue to analyse the violent acts portrayed in the films from every angular position. The mass circulation of such films is compelling enough to look into the abundance of violence exhibited in them and how different violent acts are functioning differently within the modern society. Through a deconstructive study of the violent acts of the film *The Dark Knight*, the paper has decoded the hidden implications of the violent acts. As illustrated in the discussion section, the violent acts depicted in the film have much deeper significance and function at different levels of operation such as sociological, psychological, or political. At different points of time, when audience consumes the film in a different context, the violence will speak to them with different implications. As a result, future research can be conducted to evaluate how meanings of the film's actions are charged and challenged when the context of production of the film is replaced by the context of audience's reception.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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