

Issue 52, 27 October, 2017

In the Name of Civilization. Sonja Schilling's *Enemies of All Humankind. Fictions of Legitimate Violence*

Ewelina Pepiak
Justus Liebig University Giessen

Contact: ewelina.pepiak@gmail.com

Abstract:

Sonja Schillings' *Enemies of All Humankind. Fictions of Legitimate Violence* was published as part of a Dartmouth Series in American Studies, dedicated to tracing the United States' participation in (as opposed to its domination of/disinterest from) global processes. Hence, Schillings' investigation into the enemy-of-all-humankind set of figures (which she frames as "a constellation") encompasses both transatlantic and interdisciplinary sources. Such a broad perspective allows the author to elucidate the role of the constellation in sustaining the othering discourses in the Anglo-American civilizational narrative. From corsairs of Algiers to G.I.s in Lahore, the author collects and scrutinizes a vast body of literature on the *hostis humani generis* constellation's spatial, narrative, legal, and philosophical formulations. The development of the constellation – from Augustine of Hippo through Frederick James Turner to Giorgio Agamben – provides an opportunity to revisit classical and critical literary narratives of legitimate violence against *hostis humani generis*.

How to cite:

Pepiak, Ewelina: "In the Name of Civilization. Sonja Schilling's *Enemies of All Humankind. Fictions of Legitimate Violence* [Review on: Schillings, Sonja: *Enemies of All Humankind. Fictions of Legitimate Violence*, Dartmouth College Press. Hanover: New Hampshire, 2017.]" In: KULT_online 52 (2017).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22029/ko.2017.163>



Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International

In the Name of Civilization. Sonja Schillings' *Enemies of All Humankind. Fictions of Legitimate Violence*

Ewelina Pepiak

Justus Liebig University Giessen

Schillings, Sonja: *Enemies of All Humankind. Fictions of Legitimate Violence*, Dartmouth College Press. Hanover: New Hampshire, 2017. 287 pages. 40 USD. ISBN 978-1-5126-0016-2.

Abstract:

Sonja Schillings' *Enemies of All Humankind. Fictions of Legitimate Violence* was published as part of a Dartmouth Series in American Studies, dedicated to tracing the United States' participation in (as opposed to its domination of/disinterest from) global processes. Hence, Schillings' investigation into the enemy-of-all-humankind set of figures (which she frames as "a constellation" encompasses both transatlantic and interdisciplinary sources. Such a broad perspective allows the author to elucidate the role of the constellation in sustaining the othering discourses in the Anglo-American civilizational narrative. From corsairs of Algiers to G.I.s in Lahore, the author collects and scrutinizes a vast body of literature on the *hostis humani generis* constellation's spatial, narrative, legal, and philosophical formulations. The development of the constellation – from Augustine of Hippo through Frederick James Turner to Giorgio Agamben – provides an opportunity to revisit classical and critical literary narratives of legitimate violence against *hostis humani generis*.

In her first monograph, *Enemies of All Humankind*, Sonja Schillings studies the legal, philosophical, political, and literary evolution of a *hostis humani generis* constellation. The constellation, as the author creatively and convincingly frames it in her study, has been composed throughout history of various figures (such as pirates, committers of crimes against humanity, international terrorists, etc.). In tracing paraphrases of an Augustinian anecdote that exposes similarities in pirates' and emperors' motivations, the study deconstructs the trials and tribulations of legitimate violence. The author sets

off to analyze how legitimate violence became naturalized. For that purpose, she unearths the figures defined by Hugo Grotius in 1604: *pirata* and *praedo*. While *pirata* acts individually and with the sole aim of enriching himself, *praedo* embodies the inherently flawed system that enables pillage.

Historicizing the *hostis humani generis* constellation leads Sonja Schillings to demonstrate that not only are piratical affairs closely linked to imperial ventures, but also they tend to be periodically disregarded by law for the sake of profit or for political ends. From the Mediterranean to the Atlantic shores, the constellation has been dynamically reformulated with respect to dominant (pseudo-) scientific, legal, and philosophical discourses. The author evokes the nineteenth-century phrenologists who considered famous buccaneers, such as Benito de Soto or Jean Lafitte, piratical by nature. Reconstructing a murderous mind of Thomas Bigger, the protagonist of Richard Wright's *Native Son*, serves to expose the structural violence of Jim Crow America. Ultimately, the human rights discourse that polarizes the ethics of violence itself becomes an object of critical inquiry. Each narration discussed in the study is followed by an extensive argument consequently denying the *hostis humani generis*-fiction any essential value. From classical declarations of the civilization-versus-barbarity dichotomy to emergent debates, such as pirate-terrorist nexus, Schillings insists on legal-historical construction of the constellation.

A focus on the philosophical and legal sources in the first two parts of the book is crucial for dismantling the fiction of *hostis humani generis*. For that purpose, Sonja Schillings's study breaks away from Daniel Heller-Roazen's conceptualization of the enemy-of-all as a figure. Instead, she investigates a constellation, composed of a *praedo*, a *pirata* and their counter-figures: innocent victim and a legitimate ruler. The legitimate violence, apparently indispensable in protecting the innocent (Western citizens) is exposed here as infallibly harboring the loci of essentialist civilization. In two latter parts of her argument Sonja Schillings moves entirely to the core territory of her analysis – inland United States. Simultaneously, literary analysis becomes henceforth a salient nexus of the study. The insistence on interpreting *hostis humani generis* as a constellation leads the author to interesting findings in the analyzed prose. She marks a figurative function of space in the novels, where renegades from the civilized world (be it corrupt frontiersman, white middle-class family or opportunistic Holocaust survivor) blend into an ahistorical emptiness of romantic ruins, "faceless and unnarrated" towns (p. 158), urban outskirts, and the Third World.

Consequently, the author considers whiteness an ulterior motive sustaining the legal fiction. She develops her argument of the racialized nature of legitimate violence by interpreting James Fenimore Cooper's *The Deerslayer*, or the *First Warpath* (1841) and Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940). Whether in the discourse of the European imperial, Frontier (Dashiehl Hammett's *Red Harvest*), Cold War or

the War on Terror, Schillings tirelessly traces the epitomes of *pirata* and *praedo*. These, in turn, tend to become one, as illustrated by Gutman and Campbell in Kurt Vonnegut's *Mother Night* (1962), the parallel between the US "terror state" and "international terrorist" drawn by Noam Chomsky, and the terminological duplicity of fundamentalism in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

Sonja Schillings' original and multi-layered study is characterized by a myriad of arguments. It allows the reader to follow the clearly inspired author through dense waters of texts intertwined in a bold albeit perfectly consistent stratification. Apart from swiftly and elegantly moving across centuries, the author reaches out to theoretical sources from starkly remote disciplines, such as maritime research, literary critique, international law, and postcolonial studies. With excellent mastery of her subject, she critically analyses early modern formulations of civilizational discourse, as well as taking part in very recent discussions with scholars from varied backgrounds.

German Abstract:

Im Namen der Zivilisation. Sonja Schillings *Enemies of All Humankind. Fictions of Legitimate Violence*

Sonja Schillings *Enemies of All Humankind. Fictions of Legitimate Violence* erscheint als Teil der Dartmouth Buchreihe zu American Studies, die sich der Analyse der US-amerikanischen Rolle innerhalb globaler Verflechtungen widmet. Nichtsdestotrotz bezieht Schillings Studie der „enemy of all humankind constellation“ sowohl transatlantische wie auch interdisziplinäre Diskurse mit ein. Ihr gelingt es auf diese Weise, die Bedeutung der „constellation“ für die Erhaltung der Othering-Diskurse in dem anglo-amerikanischen Zivilisationsnarrativ näher zu erläutern. Von den Korsaren Algeriens bis hin zu den G.I.s in Lahore: Schillings sammelt und untersucht einen umfassenden Literaturkorpus zu der *hostis humani generis constellation* hinsichtlich deren räumlichen, narrativen, juristischen und philosophischen Formulierungen. Die Entwicklung der „constellation“ insgesamt – von Augustinus Hippo über Frederick James Turner bis zu Giorgio Agamben – bietet die Chance, klassische und kritische literarische Narrative von „legitimate violence“ gegen *hostis humani generis* zu lesen.

Ewelina Pepiak

Justus Liebig University Giessen

Contact: ewelina.pepiak@gmail.com

How to cite:

Pepiak, Ewelina: “In the Name of Civilization. Sonja Schilling’s *Enemies of All Humankind. Fictions of Legitimate Violence* [Review on: Schillings, Sonja: *Enemies of All Humankind. Fictions of Legitimate Violence*, Dartmouth College Press. Hanover: New Hampshire, 2017.]”. In: KULT_online 52 (2017).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22029/ko.2017.163>