Deconstructing Hollywood War Cinema: The Construction of the Enemy in Inglorious
Basterds as Postmodern Enemy

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Abstract

This research examines the construction of the enemy in Quentin Tarantino's Inglourious Basterds (2009) as postmodern enemy through the portrayal of the Nazi. Applying Derrida's deconstruction theory to see how Hollywood cinematic convention is being deconstructed, the analysis shows that the Nazi are being deconstructed through the following construction: 1) wearing distinctive outfit, 2) being dehumanized as evil, 3) having different purpose from the hero, 4)being on the losing side, and 5) being racially different. The Nazi shows some qualities of not being stereotypical enemy: they are depicted to show patriotism, loyalty, and compassion. The blurry characteristics between hero and enemy shows postmodernity.

War in Hollywood cinema has become a *recurring* topic that is so often being adapted. The adaptation of war survives through silver screen and always adapt to the era when the movie is produced. Basically, war movies have a constant pattern in creating this genre such as in the aspect of the characters, setting, moral values, and ideology. However, in contemporary movies, the construction of war movies has changed.

As it has been mentioned before, war movies have the same characteristics even though the ideology always changes over time. One of the tradition of World War II movies is that they"usually claim to be historically accurate" (Schaper, 2010, p. 6). This is an essential pointin the making of earlier war movies to create a "realness" that can affect the audience.

Then again, Kornweibel (1981) also explains that the World War II movies typically portray a soldier and or a group of soldiers who are devoted to their job. Most of war movies underlines the realism and tries to give a reality of war as accurate to the actual event as possible, and uses various backdrops, great visual and audio effects to make a perfect combat scene.

The creation of enemy in Hollywood itself changes overtime. The change of the enemy adapted to the screen is affected by the situations in America. The example can be seen from films such as United 93 (2006), Road to Guantanamo (2006), and No End in Sight which promotes war on terror. After terrorist actions in 9/11 incident Hollywood emphasizes on the construction of Iraq as the enemy (Boggs & Pollard, 2006).

Changes in the construction of the enemy can be particularly seen from how Hollywood creates the image of Native Americans in western movies to recall the frontier past. In that era the Indians are represented from their exotic appearance, violent behavior, and spirituality to nature. As the era changes, the image represented by the Indians also shifts. The example can be seen in the 1960s era which is affected by the Cold war. Films like The Searchers (1956) and The Unforgiven (1960) show that the Indians are being brutalized by whites for being untrustworthy because both Native Americans and Russians were equated with red (Rollins, 2011). Next is the era after the Civil Rights Act of 1968 which was extended to protect Native Americans rights. In this era the western films still representing Native Americans as the other, but the identity is different from before. If

earlier films only show Indians as pure evil, in the 1980s era, the films illustrate Indians as the oppressed (Reed, 2001).

However, despite the distinct change of conflicts and eras in modern day cinema, Hollywood still uses the same convention in creating the enemy in war. It still represents the same tone such as the American national identity which is still similar with the earlier movies, it still associates with honor, integrity, military justification, realism, and also aesthetic position such as accuracy, authenticity and truth (Allison, 2010, p. 9). Toplin argues that the construction of the enemy is created to make a common enemy.

Inglorious Basterds is set in France when this country was occupied by Nazi in 1941. It shows an unconventional story of World War II. This movie is seen from two different point of views, one from Shosanna, and the other is from the Basterds. Shosanna is a Jewish French girl whose family is murdered by Colonel Hans Landa that is known as the Jew Hunter. Hans Landa murders Shosanna's family but she can escape and years later manage a theater in Paris. Later she attracts the interest of Fredrick Zoller, a German war hero who stars in an upcoming German "Nation's Pride" movie.

The next point of view is from the Basterds, a group of soldiers who hunt down and murder Nazis. This team is commandeered by Lt. Aldo Raine, some of its members are Donny Donowitz (known as The Bear Jew who beats Nazi to death with baseball bat) and Hugo Stiglitz (an ex German soldier known for murdering several Gestapo officers). The Basterds most distinctive enemy is Colonel Hans Landa. These two teams, The Basterds and Shosanna, having different backgrounds but the same hatred towards Nazi, end up in the same page and happen to have the same intention to kill all Nazi and Hitler who are attending the "Nation's Pride" movie premier in Shosanna's theater.

Inglourious Basterds has been discussed from some frameworks such as regarding its violence (Barnes, 2009), its combat sequence (Dercksen, 2015), its hero construction (Allison, 2010), and its significance to the war on terror (Kabiling, 2010). There are several researches discussing the protagonist, but there are few who have discussed the enemy. Only Cook's research (2011) specifically talks about the enemy in Inglourious Basterds as part of Nazisploitation. In the end it can be said that this research is not to disagree with the earlier researches. In some ways, this research is in line with Kabiling's and Tanine's idea of how people are able to use the World War II event as an

object of study, and how movie could be a representation of a cultural phenomenon. Furthermore, this research is also in line to Cook's ideas of seeing the enemy construction in Inglourious Basterds to analyze the film. However, Kabiling's research does not analyze Inglourious Basterds specifically and Tanine's also only analyzes Inglourious Basterds by scrutinizing the protagonist violent acts. Regarding that, this research will fill the gap by analyzing the enemy. This research is closest to Cook's because it analyzes the enemy specifically. However, even though Cook's research indeed talks about the enemy, the analysis is only done using the film aesthetic elements. Thus, because neither Cook nor other researchers above has yet scrutinize it in the context of deconstruction and post-modern perspective, this research will contribute in filling the gap by adding an in depth analysis of the enemies' construction of Inglourious Basterds as postmodern enemy.

When typical war movies depict a soldier and or a group of soldiers who are devoted to their job, Inglourious Basterds does not adapt those traits in war films and instead shows the heroes as people having sadistic and cruel characteristics just like a villain. Not only that, when some researchers like Cook mentions that the enemy in war movie is usually portrayed as evil being, that the enemy is the Nazi, that they are cruel by definition and that they deserved to be killed, Inglourious Basterds does not follow this common convention in creating the enemy. Rejecting that permanent believe, this article attempts to examine how the enemy portrayal in Inglourious Basterds is not just like how people think it is. Thus, this research attempts to reveal how Americans are used to view and portray the enemies in war movies and how that concept is actually challenged in Inglourious Basterds.

As the constructions of war film are affected by postmodernity, Inglourious Basterds portrays the postmodernity not only in the film aesthetic elements but also in the way the characters are constructed. This research wants to scrutinize further regarding Tarantino's construction of the characters, especially the enemy, using Derrida's deconstruction theory.

Method

This research is a descriptive qualitative research, which circulates to find the implication of a phenomenon by scrutinizing them and then describing the data to make an analysis. Qualitative research concerned with meaning and interpretation in analyzing the object of research (Stokes, 2003). What makes this research uses the qualitative research is under the consideration that it focuses in the process of interpreting data and that interpretation is used to create a convincing argument and not only to find definite meaning of a text. Meanwhile descriptive studies able to give a comprehensive summarization of specific topic. Thus, descriptive research is suitable to describe the Hollywood war convention that is essential to analyze the data. In summary it can be said that the use of descriptive qualitative research in this thesis is essential to discover the Hollywood war movie convention in creating enemy which later is used to analyze the deconstruction and postmodernity aspect.

The study uses Barthes's semiotic theory because semiotic theory focuses on the social and cultural meaning of signs and codes (Scholes, 1982). This research uses Barthes's semiotic under the consideration that Barthes offers broader interpretation of the text. Barthes is different compared to other thinker like Saussure for example, who theorized that semiotic is done by dividing first what are the "signs" shown in the text and later finding out what are "signified" by those "signs" and creates "signifier". In Barthes' semiology he develops Saussure's theory that the meaning behind a sign does not only show "signifier" or denotative meaning, but also show connotative meaning. The connotative meaning here is obtained based on social and cultural backgrounds, which can be very broad and complex depending on the interpreter. Thus, the use of Barthes' semiology is more sufficient in regards to postmodernism, in which a text can have various meanings and the interpretation of a text can be fluid.

Result

This part explains the analysis of the deconstruction of Hollywood war movie construction in Inglourious Basterds. It discusses how the protagonists are not portrayed as mere "heroes" but as "victimized heroes" and how the conventional enemy becoming the "postmodern enemy" in Inglourious Basterds

Victimized Hero

The hero in Inglourious Basterds is categorized as "the victimized hero" who are able to gain the audience's sympathy, rather than being "hero" in general. Most of all the Basterds is not a group of "soldiers" just like in the usual war movies which gives the visual culture of militarization and offers patriotism such as in *Behind Enemy Lines, Black Hawk Down, Spy Games, We were Soldiers*, and *Wind Talkers*. The Basterds does not fight for their country, they do not fight for honor, they solely want to kill Nazi because they believe Nazi are evils, monsters, and deserve to be killed. Even though both Shosanna and Lieutenant Aldo do not even know each other, their existences support and intertwine with each other in order to burn the Nazis down. The characters in Inglourious Basterds, such as Lt. Aldo and Shosanna, does not have the sufficient characteristics to be called as "hero". However, many people still choose to see the Basterds and Shosanna as the hero despite not having characteristics like virtue and other good traits.

Postmodern Enemy

Postmodern enemy in war cinema is the result of a reconstruction of preceding representation of enemies in war movies and this reconstruction happens to create something new. In this regards, the postmodern enemy is closely related to construction and reconstruction. After analyzing the Hollywood enemy conventions, it can be analyzed that the Nazi are deconstructed through the following perspectives:

1) Wearing distinctive outfit

When portraying the soldier in uniform, Hollywood never seems to get the military uniform right, and many war veterans frown over this fact (Schogol, 2011). When it is not against the American constitution to impersonate military or police officers in the cinema, Hollywood seems to get it wrong so often. The example can be seen in "The Hurt Locker" from how a character's helmet

does not match his uniform camouflage, does not have eye protector, wears fingerless gloves, and all of them are inaccurate. These inaccuracies in portraying even the American soldiers happens because not all movies hire a military adviser.

Indeed, the Germans in Inglourious Basterds still wears uniform. However, the uniform is not used to show the same purpose as the preceding war movies. The purpose of using uniform in earlier war movies is to group the enemy as an opponent to kill, to show how the enemy lacks personalities, to show them as the target so they can be easily remembered. Nonetheless deconstruction theory enables this research to look beyond the conventional way. The use of uniform in Inglourious Basterds does not cover the identity and the characteristic of the enemy. They are individuals, having different concerns, different characteristics, and different personalities.

Furthermore, the uniform used by each German character is different. The wardrobe for the Nazi are very detailed and has many variations, compared to other war movies which usually focus on the detail of American military uniforms such as in *The Hurt Locker* (2008) This shows the construction of the enemy as not being a singular being but showing individuality of the characters. Contrary to how Hollywood tends to present the enemy as faceless and featureless figures, Inglourious Basterds constructs them as people having different rank and status.

2) Being dehumanized as evil

When the enemy is dehumanized as evil they are described as being able to do immoral things without worrying about the consequences. Enemies of different colors has been dehumanized in such a way to create a "guiltless" killing.

Hollywood war cinema is very used to dehumanize their enemy to the point where many does not notice that the construction of the enemies in Inglourious Basterds are different. Seeing how often Hollywood dehumanizes the enemy both in their medias and movies, Inglourious Basterds breaks this convention by constructing enemies who are not being dehumanized. In here the Nazis are not portrayed as pure evil and instead shown to have complex personalities.

Not only that, the killing of the enemies are not portrayed as "justifiable killing" which construct the enemies as "evil" like many other war movies. Aside from the evil deeds done by Colonel Landa, the other Nazis are only "assumed" to be evil. In fact many of them are very human,

their evil deeds are never seen but simply assumed. Here the Nazi such as Sgt. Rachman, Sgt. Wilhelm, and Private Zoller shows human feelings, and each one of them has different personalities.

3) Having different purpose from the hero

Considering that the protagonist's objective is to kill every Nazi they encounter, other German characters does not seem to show the same amount of enthusiasm to kill the Jews (aside from Colonel Landa who enjoys his hunt in exterminating the Jews). Some characters like Sgt. Wilhelm (who only wants to survive the sudden ambush in the bar because he just becomes a father), and Fredrick Zoller (who does not show any interest in anything Jewish related), are the examples of how the Nazis are not all wanting to kill the Jews as their purpose.

Colonel Landa, the Jew Hunter creates terror by making his reputation of being able to sniff wherever the Jewish people are hiding and exterminate them while the Basterds too creates their reputation by showing their cruelty and menace to many Nazis. This act of acting like a terror to a terror is a fantasy that relates to the American society who loathes terrorist after 9/11 attack. In this movie the Basterds and Colonel Landa shows the same qualities of giving terror but still, they have different purpose because they are standing on different grounds.

4) Being on the losing side

Shosanna's sole purpose in the movie was at first to survive and live under her new identity peacefully, however since she gets to know Fredrick Zoller, suddenly her life is surrounded by many Nazi soldiers which she loathes. When an unexpected opportunity arises she decided to take down all the Nazi who is going to watch movie in her theater. Since her purpose now has changed to take down all the high-ranked Nazi who is watching movie in her theater, it is indeed true that she successfully wins over them. However, Shosanna herself does not meet a happy end.

In the beginning of the movie, the Basterds' main objective is to kill as much Nazi as possible to give terror to the Germans. However, as a possible chance for them to end the war by killing Hitler arise, their aim changes to wanting to kill Hitler. They create their plan, collaborating with Hammersmark, pretending to be Italian movie director and crews, but their plan is already known by Landa and is in danger of failing. So in order to make the plan works, the Basterds have to make a

contract with Landa. The Basterds's mission to kill Nazi works after making a deal with Landa but they choose to betray the contract and capture Landa.

From the two protagonists it can be said that their win denotes something else entirely. They are not virtuous characters; their behaviors are far from being patriotic or honorable and yet their victories are still being celebrated and expected. Their win in this movie signifies the postmodernity that is being accepted by the American. The society is no longer only accepting virtuous characters as heroes in war movies because postmodern era creates broader views of things that used to be exact.

5) Being racially different

The enemies in Inglourious Basterds are indeed racially different from the protagonists, however in this movie the characters are able to interact with each other. The enemy like Colonel Landa is able to speak four different languages. Sergeant Rachtman and Sergeant Wilhelm speak English while Frederick Zoller speaks French. Being racially different does not seclude their position and they are still able to talk with each other because the Germans are deconstructed as being multilingual people.

Discussion

In Hollywood war cinema, the uniform is something crucial in creating the enemy since it serves as a way to differentiate between the good guys and the bad guys. The uniform signifies who are the enemies at first glance so the spectator can differentiate between the good guys and the bad guys. Regarding this, the world in Inglourious Basterds serves as a Utopian world in which the Americans can spot their enemy easily from the use of uniform. Hollywood portrays the enemy's uniform not as detailed as they portray the hero's (and sometimes they even fail to give an accurate representation of the military uniform of their own people) however in this movie the creation of the enemy uniform is very detailed and it shows different characteristics such as badges, insignia, colors and types.

When an audience fails to see the Nazis beyond their uniform, they have been completely hypnotized and dictated by Aldo and Shosanna's point of view. This research looks at the Germans past their uniform, that their identity is not singular, that each German in Inglourious Basterds is not totally evil. Knowing that each German in the movie has different personality, it is an important point

to note and analyze the Nazis. Quentin Tarantino purposely makes the enemy wear uniform and makes sure that each one of the important Germans has a distinctive personality. He reconstructs the enemy in such a way that does not simply portray them as "faceless" punch-bags but as individuals with personalities and human feelings. In this regard, it is essential to see the Nazis from each character and not group them together into one identity.

Next being dehumanized is the creation of people who appears to be less than human, and or morally deformed in order to justify killing (Cook, 2011). Dehumanization can be seen in zombie movies for example, where people who become zombies are considered to be "no longer human". In war cinema dehumanization is something common, it can be seen from movies like *Full Metal Jacket*, *The Green Berets*, and *Platoon* in which show the enemies as barbaric: they kill innocent villagers, rape children, mutilate American bodies and portray to wound, not kill (Pike, 2008).

Not only that the enemy is said to always have the opposing purpose from the hero (Poster, 2001, p. 35). This movie shows the Basterds' motivation as to bring down the Nazi and make revenge against the terror caused by the Nazi. From this it can be inferred that, if the protagonist like the Basterds is willing to do anything to take down Nazi, then the real and worthy enemy for the Basterds is only Colonel Landa, the figure who shows the same amount of passion to kill the Jews. They have a total opposite purpose compared to the hero. Indeed, in this movie the enemies and the heroes has different purposes, the Nazi wanting to kill the Jew while the Basterds wanting to kill Nazi. Yet, they have the same method to attack each other, which is by creating terror.

It is undeniable that the enemy never win over the protagonist, and this construction is not only happens in Hollywood war cinema but in most of popular culture product. In Hollywood war cinema itself the "happy ending" closure is used to offer redemption to the loss in the actual war (Kellner, p. 6). In Hollywood war movie convention, the heroes always win over the enemy. It serves as a mean to stress the "good" wins over the "evil". Not only that, sometimes the "happy ending" is also to promote the ideology that "us" the good guys always win over "evil". In this movie Shosanna and the Basterds are indeed wins over the Nazi since their objective to kill Hitler and the high ranking officer in the theater are a success.

It is a common pattern in American war cinema to show white American soldiers as the protagonist. However, the protagonists in Inglourious Basterds are reconstructed as being not all Americans. In fact almost all the protagonists are racially different. The protagonist like Shosanna is not American, she is French. Lt. Aldo himself is not a pure white, he is half Indians. Then The Bear Jew, and most of the Basterds are racially Germans before they change their nationality into American.

The concept of being racially different in war cinema wants to create a fine line between "us" and "them". The cinema purposely shows different characteristics in the enemy's race to point out the American's position to the other races. Not only that, in many of the war movies the protagonist cannot understand the enemies' language because of their difference in race and nationality, making it impossible for them to interact more than using gestures. However, in Inglourious Basterds being racially different does not mean they cannot talk with each other.

That is why in the Hollywood war convention the theme of patriotism is very strong, and it positions the enemy as people who need to be banished because they are evil. The lack of dialogue and interaction because of different race and nationality creates strong boundary of 'otherness'. Since usual Hollywood war movies barely show any interaction of hero and enemy aside from killing each other, this movie deconstructs it by creating the hero and enemy to be multilingual to point out their interaction and shows that despite being able to interact with each other they still have different belief that is strongly held by each of the opposing side.

Conclusion

To sum up, after analyzing the enemy based on the Hollywood war convention, it can be seen that the enemies in Inglourious Basterds shows a reconstruction of the convention, and they represent the postmodernity of Hollywood war cinema. After comparing the construction of the enemy in war movies before and after postmodern era, it reveals how the Nazi shows postmodern qualities. How the Nazi is portrayed to wear a complex and detailed uniform breaks the traditional convention of war cinema. Not only that, unlike in most of war movie convention which dehumanized and construct the enemy as evil, this film creates an ambiguous moral judgment by creating the Nazi as people with human feelings such as loyalty, love, adoration, and fear. This movie also deconstructs the "hero

always win" trends in American war films by ending it with a non stereotypical winning for both hero and enemy: Shoshanna is able to take her revenge, but dies in the end meanwhile Landa is able to save himself but dies in the end.

Obviously, these components signifiy certain cultural change in American society. The portrayal of war in Hollywood cinema usually signifies the American needs to understand the war, to make sense of any lost from the war, and connects the American society with patriotism and nationality. However, Inglourious Basterds shows antithesis of virtues and offers a violent fantasy. The high acceptance of this movie in war genre shows a shift of American value and ideology because of the postmodernity. They become more tolerant to violence and accept the violence done by the protagonists as a form of fantasy and entertainment. Inglourious Basterds breaks many of Hollywood war movie conventions and yet it is still accepted and welcomed by the American society. Therefore, this point out that American society has embraced the notion of postmodern thinking which lets them accept the fact that the hero in war movies can be cruel too, that the bad guy does not necessarily have to be evil too to be killed. This movie deconstructs what people usually accept from Hollywood war cinema, and gives a broader view of what the society is used to accept or belief.

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