

Theorizing Violence as an Essential By-product of the Dialectic of Enlightenment: Reading *Inglourious Basterds* as an Evidence of the Paradox of Modernity

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Abstract

The major ideological debate in the latter half of the previous century was the paradoxical existence between the promises for a better world and the violent means to achieve that end. On one hand, the over-determined textbook dialogue of prosperity through symbolic order and, on the other, the co-existence of evil underground of power through social violence equated the ‘harmonious totality’ of the modern project. If the world is a carefully calculated phenomenon of the enlightened man and the reason is the fundamental driving force, it is paradoxical how evil becomes a by-product in modern post-enlightenment humanity. The bourgeois humanity of the Enlightenment project, therefore, carries the characteristic that educated, cultured, mannered and charming men are fully capable of metamorphosing into monstrous beasts within a second and the ‘dialectic totality’ of both good and evil is the ‘true history’ of the modern world. To exemplify that dual existence, the movie *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) by Quentin Tarantino can be considered as a unique example, where the violence portrayed in the movie displays how the ‘decent’ political space has been taken over by the ‘diabolic evil’ of obscene underground. This paper investigates how the people who immerse in ‘cultivated academic environments’ are capable of justifying violence over fellow human beings, despite whatever said about their conscience. In addition, the dirty function of the fantasy as unconscious Real, aestheticized violence and de-historization (or alternative history) through a plastic reality will also be discussed as brand new ideological developments.

Key words: Dialectic of Enlightenment, theorizing violence, aestheticized violence and obscene, the Real

Preview:

Quoting F.W.J. Schelling, a German idealist, Slavoj Zizek notices that human existence is spilt by nature, since ‘man is simultaneously a living organism (and, as such, part of nature) and a spiritual entity (and, as such, elevated above nature) (Zizek 2007.63). He further observes that ‘man is a predator exploiting other animals and plants posing a fundamental threat to nature and a spiritual being entertaining towards nature a relationship of contemplative comprehension with no need to intervene actively in it for the purpose of material exploitation’ (63). Human civilization entertains peace achieved through violence and maintained through hate and antagonism. According to Zizek, human fantasy comprises of two sides; the beautiful and the ugly and what separates these two is the Real (Zizek: 2004). ‘The gap that separates beauty from ugliness is thus the very gap that separates reality from the Real: the kernel of reality is horror, the horror of the Real’ (22). Former for the purpose of superficial spectral (discourse) and the latter exists in the underground (act) of the human civilization. To maintain the beautiful, harmless, decent and innocent side, man has to compensate from the ugly aspect of his fantasy or, in other words, when he does something according to the ‘accepted side’ of the human world, he essentially has to suppress ‘the unaccepted ugly dream’ (the Real). ‘What constitutes reality is the minimum of idealization the subject needs in order to be able to sustain the Real’ (22). As a creature emerged from nature and struggling, therefore, with natural evil, man has evolved in the history with a dual existence with various religions asking him to be morally good until Enlightenment liberated man from the bondages of belief and advocated that human reason is capable of answering all the questions that previous authorities had answered. With enlightenment, man could master nature and the heritages of enlightenment were the bureaucracy and technology through which man could manage his life world. ‘Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002. 1). Through reason, however, one of the promises made by the post-enlightenment modernism was to create a better social life for man. The ultimate objective of the modern man was progress and it was achieved

through science and technology. It was believed that the technical advancement necessarily led to social advancement.

Enlightenment was always connected to the scientific method and there was a complete break away from tradition and myth. However, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, what was promised to us in the age of enlightenment was not an honest one, but a nightmare. 'Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity. Enlightenment's programs were the disenchantment of the world. It wanted to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002. 1). Man has reverted back to violence and barbarism by sustaining unheard of violence in the second half of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, the circumstances in the recent history, for an example anti-Semitism, prove that from an elevated level of intellectuality and wisdom as well as complex aesthetic sensibility, man could turn into irrational animals. Though enlightenment expected man to rise from the animalistic existence or from the evil of nature, paradoxically, man reversed back to his natural existence of evil. In this regard, Giorgio Agamben defines the twentieth century concentration camps as the 'truth' of the entire Western political project (Agamben 1999). Zizek also mentions that 'Heinrich Heydrich, who directed the Nazi terror in occupied Bohemia played with his friend Beethoven's string quartets perhaps the supreme achievement of German culture' (Zizek 2002. 225). In contrast to the Frankfurt School's observation how the cultured man could engage in violence, Zizek (2002) points out that 'culture and barbarism do not exclude each other; the opposite of barbarism is not culture but civilization (i.e. "non-civilized" equals "barbaric")' (p. 225). Zizek's formula appears to solve one of the most fundamental questions asked in the twentieth century humanity and is, therefore, worth to be further reviewed in the context of this paper.

As explained earlier, man's potential to yield to the evil aspect of his fantasy, in the wider socio-political contexts, determines the nature and outcomes of his actions and, as a result, the

opportunistic political discourse can also find way to exploit the communities to achieve petty goals. However, the evidence of history of the modern project proves that massive wars, millions of deaths, departures, displacements and human mobilizations and catastrophes are necessary in its highway to progress. The dream for the 'paradise of progress' is compensated through the cost of millions of deaths. In other words, a segment of the population becomes prosperous in the cost of the pauperization of others. However, in defense of modernity, Jurgen Habermas claims that it is 'an unfinished project' (Habermas: 2007) and it keeps on further evolving and there is still a chance for our hope for the future better world. Therefore, we must not be too pessimistic to find anti-reason, fundamentalism and terrorism which result violence, hate and antagonism.

In the above light, the violence depicted in the movie *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) by Quentin Tarantino evidences how the bourgeois political project moved forward in the twentieth century, and how the history was made through violence, vengeance, hate and mutual exclusion of the ethnic Other (e.g. Jew: or in a Sri Lankan context, the Tamils). In the film, the true history has been converted to one of fantasy in the same way modernity changed tradition and history into something secular and anti- historical. The concealed side of the human fantasy is traumatically 'aestheticized' in the movie for displaying the 'un-signified Real'. The antagonism, hate and violence have been explicitly detailed and displayed throughout the movie without giving the chance for the bourgeoisie discursive dialogue to filter in. The barbaric violence and torture, inhumanity, carefree hate and blood in *Inglourious Bastards* are symbolic of the type of 'civilization' the modernity has produced and the obscenity shown in the movie is the 'unconscious Real' that Tarantino uses as a vehicle to disturb the kind of enjoyment of obscenity that we engage in.

Objectives:

(i). Using the movie *Inglourious Basterds* as an example, this paper discovers how the obscene, violence and terror function as the real underground of the modern project, while reviewing the ideological developments of the Frankfurt school.

(ii). The paper will pragmatically re-articulate how the decent outlook of the dialectic process of the discourse was used to justify terror through theorizing violence (ugly existence of the Real) during and after the fourth Eelam war in 2010, as philosophically witnessed in the dialogues of the movie (co-incidentally made in 2009).

(iii). The Discussion will also articulate that though there is a dialectic existence for modernity, it is only the modern project that will bring enlightenment and emancipation for humanity. As viewed by Herbamas, it is because the modern project should be brought to an end. Hence, the movie will be reviewed as an example that convinces us to revisit the mistakes committed in the history in order to correct them for a better future.

(iv). Possibilities of creating an alternative imaginary history (thereby an alternative future) for humanity will also be viewed through the theatrical techniques used by Tarantino.

Methodology:

This paper is basically structured as a literary essay. The 2009 Universal Picture release *Inglourious Basterds* will theoretically be reviewed and its events, dialogues and the characters will be compared with the historical background from which they emerge so that they can be comprehended, re-contextualized and redefined with an analysis through psychoanalytical, structural and post-Marxist theories. They will be applied to discover the manifestation of antagonism and obscene in the modern project against the bourgeoisie over-determination in the superficial discourse. The dialogues in the movie will semiotically and psychoanalytically be

discussed in support of the content analysis of the hypothesis. Some of the dialogues that appear in the original film transcript by Tarantino will also be compared in the contextual analysis of the paper.

Discussion:

As mentioned in the preview of this paper, human civilization is built on a dualistic background where peace and antagonism function simultaneously. Slavoj Žižek defines that human fantasy comprises of two sides; the beautiful side and the ugly (Žižek: 2007). Former for the superficial sight and the latter is the true underground. To maintain the beautiful, harmless, decent and innocent side, man has to compensate from his ugly fantasy or, in other words, when he does something according to the 'accepted side' of the human world, he essentially has to suppress 'the unaccepted ugly dream'. When something is suppressed, that becomes the unconscious; according to Freud, the unconscious is the true drive in man. Therefore, as long as he suppresses his ugly fantasy, it is the ugly fantasy which becomes the true fabric in human existence on which his entire life actions are made. When this is applied to the wider socio-political contexts, the ugly side of fantasy determines the true force of its identity as well as actions and, as a result, the politics easily find way to exploit the dirt in the macro discourse and to manipulate the communities to create immense de-humanization, violence and cruelty. Since the ugly side of the fantasy is not properly studied and brought to public until Lacanian psychoanalysis in the second half of the twentieth century, how significant and dangerous it can become has not been much attended to in the bourgeoisie educational discourse. Inhumanity is understood as an endemic feature of modernity by the Frankfurt School, which believed that the 'modern project' did not produce evidence to its Enlightenment promise for a better world through science and reason. First, the existentialists doubted the promises made by modernism. Afterwards, postmodernists theorized the skepticism about the meta-narratives and established their decisive breakaway from modernism. Thereafter, man found himself disintegrated in a world devoid of linear continuity and dialectic polarity (Baudrillard:1998: 13), which legitimated collective political action towards progress. Instead there is simulation and all determination evaporated (Ibid: 13).

However, in defense of modernity, Jurgen Herbamas claims that it is ‘an unfinished project’ (Herbamas: 2007) and it keeps on evolving and there is still a chance for our hope for the future better world. We must not be too pessimistic to find anti-reason, fundamentalism and terrorism which result violence, hate and antagonism. Anyway, the evidence of history of the modern project proves millions of deaths, wars, human mobilization and catastrophes in its highway to progress. Then we are driven to believe that though there is a promise for progress and prosperity, the dream for the paradise of fortune is made through a cost of millions of deaths. In other words, a segment of the population becomes prosperous in the cost of the pauperization of others. The ‘civilized other’ (beauty) in one polar is not natural or heavenly but an inevitable compensation of another who, at the other end of the other polar, sacrifices and the homage paid for that success as the dirty or ‘uncivilized’. In this case, when one becomes the civilized master, there is another uncivilized slave in the other end. The entire human history, in that case, rotates around for the ownership of the mastership of discourse and wealth. In other words, to be ‘beautiful’ and ‘civilized’ by excluding what is obscene and ugly. To be so, societies have made us of extensive violence and inhumanity over those who are not considered ‘human’. So, this is the ugly side of the axis that is hidden in the bourgeoisie discourse.

The true history has been converted to one of fantasy in the same way modernity changes tradition and history into something secular and anti- historical and the concealed side of the human fantasy is ‘aestheticized’ in the movie *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) by Tarantino. The antagonism, hate and violence have been explicitly detailed and displayed throughout the movie without giving the chance for the bourgeoisie dialogue to filter in. The immaculate violence, inhumanity, carefree hate and blood in *Inglourious Busters* are symbolic of the type of the world the modernity has produced and the obscenity shown in the movie is the ‘unconscious real’ that Tarantino uses as a vehicle to enter and disturb the world of obscenity that we enjoy. Even peace is sustained through violence. To display this truth, there have been many Second World War movies such as *The Schindler’s List*, *The Pianist*, *Saving Private Rayne*, *Amistad*, *Munich* or almost all the classic war movies in twentieth century but *Basterds*, much like all other Tarantino works, seems to give a unique form of uncensored violence and obscenity that no other movie

provides to the frozen obscene consumers of post modernity. No other movie has changed the known history so drastic in a manner to cater the fantasy in the way Tarantino has done in this work.

Film Synopsis:

The film opens with a scene in a dairy farm in German- occupied France in 1941, where Col. Hans Landa notoriously known as the ‘Jew Hunter’ interrogates a French farmer about the rumors that he has sheltered a Jew family who lived among the dairy farmer after the occupation. Landa, with various philosophical justifications, manages to break the farmer who admits that he was hiding them underneath the floorboard. The soldiers open fire into the floorboard and kills all except the teenage girl called Shoshanna, who runs for life into the woods nearby, while Landa screams at her saying ‘until we meet’. In the meantime, the film crosses onto a special unit of Jewish Americans (the *Inglourious Basterds*) who land in occupied France to take vengeance from the Nazis. They ambush Nazi patrols and kill the prisoners showing utmost brutality; they scalp the dead Nazis, mutilate the bodies, crash their skull with a baseball bat and finally curve their forehead with swastika; the Nazi symbol in those whom they leave alive in order to spread the rumor as to how the Jews respond to Germans.

The film then moves to Shoshanna who, after her escape from the dairy, reappears in Paris as a proprietress of a small cinema, which was eventually chosen to show a Nazi propaganda movie called ‘Nation’s Pride’. The movie was the latest of the propaganda series by Goebbels. It was believed to be attended by all the top politico-military officers of the Third Reich including Hitler, Barmen and Goebbels himself. The film reaches it climax when Shoshanna celebrates the rare and precious opportunity to revenge the death of her family. She, with her lover, prepare to commit a heroic suicidal act by burning the cinema down when the Nazis gather to watch the movie. By the time of the fire when everything is consumed by a blaze, in the screen, Shoshanna hysterically and satanically laughs claiming, ‘This is the face of the Jewish vengeance’ at the frightened Nazis who are burning alive. In the meantime, Col. Landa who plans to escape to States by betraying the Nazis with the assistance of the remaining members of the Bastereds get

a permanently curved swastika in his forehead before allowed to survive by Lt. Aldo Raine who says, 'the world will not know you were a Nazi after taking of the uniform'.

Justice is restored and the Jew vengeance is materialized in a cinematic atmosphere. In the movie, Tarantino has built a plastic history of fantasy to stand against the textbook history of 'true' by punishing those who were engaged in the acts of obscenity. Tarantino also suggests that an alternative travel back to the history is fantastically possible, 65 years after the Holocaust. Here, it is not that the true history of Nazis burning Jews, but the fantasy opposite.

Modernity as an Essential Organic Paradox of Enlightenment:

If the idea of Equality (communist hypothesis) is not right, if it is not practicable, well that means that humanity is not a thing in itself, not very different from ants or termites (Jean Paul Sartre).

With Hegel, we learnt how to understand any historical phenomenon in its dialectic construction. The human existence, consciousness as well as the existence of the society are manifested in a binaristic pattern that its 'good' is determined by the cost that is paid to eliminate 'bad'. Similarly, the harmless or decent aspect of the human fantasy is essentially maintained by the suppression of its dirty or obscene aspect. The decent aspect of man has always to be an essential product of his dirty fantasy. The civil laws or discourse of humanity do not admire the destructive use of the dirty side of the human fantasy, since such a move will put the humanity in danger.

We live in a modern world despite many new words which have come up to describe the developments after 1950s. It may be post-modern, post-ideological, post-structural, technocratic capitalistic or even a virtual world, but this is definitely an extension of the post-enlightenment modernity. Hence the word 'modern' with its broader sense of de-traditionalizing the traditional communities is still applicable to define the phenomena that the present world is progressing with human intervention and deviating far away from the traditional world of the previous centuries. Modernity refers to the break with the past and, according to Habermas, the world is first employed in the late fifth century in order to distinguish the present, then officially

Christianity, from the pagan and Roman past (Habermas 1996 p. 38,39). Modern world, therefore, means the changed world; everything is changed from traditional to modern. It is the time of science and experiments with which the world underwent changes that it has never experienced before. If it is the world of science, then it is easier to say that we live in a world of rationalism. The collectivism of the previous generations fast disappeared in the face of technology supported individualism. Logic mattered in thinking rather than believing. Reason and inquiry were the sources of knowledge and empiricism was the over-determining criterion of the discovery of truth. Modern world, in another word, is a post-Kantian and post-Hegelian world.

Post-enlightenment modernity also resulted from reason. The cause and effect as well as scientific justifications based on empirical evidence explained and defined the world. Systematic accumulation of reliable data on nature, experiments, observations and analysis were the mottos of this era. Defining and mastering nature, hypothesizing and theorizing in changing nature for the betterment of humanity (nature is secondary to man) made the foundation for humanity to deviate from religious beliefs and to move onto the 'age of reason'. Therefore, the modern world is about excellence in thought without prejudices, bias or partialness and man is expected to be free in thinking and acting. Truth was solely derived from scientific discoveries. Man could argue in the process of discovering the truth and logic played an important role. Logical thinking is cultivated in man from childhood through a well organized education system and intellectual autonomy was established across the system.

From a Hegelian deterministic point of view, history progresses dialectically. In the dialectic history everything is made out of opposing forces or of contradictions. Those mutually opposing forces, though appear separate and non- amalgamating, actually exist in interpellation with each other or exist in harmony. They are just two sides of the same coin. These two poles are made of both good and bad at the same time, even though only the good part surfaces in the media and educational dialogues. Progress is achieved not only by means of good, peaceful and harmless acts but of harmful and destructive forces as well. The 'good' is maintained with the expense of 'bad'. To build a peaceful world, modern society has employed a number of wars and destructions which cost millions of lives in the twentieth century alone.

If the world is a carefully calculated phenomenon of the enlightenment man, there is a paradoxical question as to why evil exists in the modern world. If reason is the driving force of the post-enlightenment humanity, why has reason invoked so much violence and inhumanity in the twentieth century in the name of massive wars? Its path for emancipation was not free from violence and the political dialogue was mostly taken over by forceful use of militarism. How did it bring about the mega changes in the recent history? How did it interfere into humanity to bring global transformations? The answer is power, control and violence. The violence that is portrayed in the movie displays how the 'decent' political space has been taken over by the 'diabolic evil' or the obscene aspect of the modern project, which are inseparable from each other. The spiritual crisis of modernity was obvious through the dual existence of man that it generated.

By 1930s, literature was found to be a solution to rescue man from spiritual bankruptcy of modernity. The learnt man is supposed to educate the youngsters and pass the knowledge on to next generations in altering those who are not so far 'cultured' or slow to recognize the fundamental values of great traditions of literature. With refined literature being taught in the higher educational institutes, and awareness for human rights and religion with its stress on love and harmony, it was an unsolvable paradox in modern humanity that why man did not elevate himself from his animalistic drives to the standards that were set by neo-classical education. The 'cultivated' crowd who learnt the transformative power of literature was supposed to carry the torch of culture (Eagleton: 2008). According to F. R. Leavis, literature was so important in this cultural and moral crusade because it makes you a better person (Ibid p. 29, 30). In real life, could literature be able to make a person better or refined to unconditionally love humanity?

When the allied troops moved into concentration camps some years after the founding of *Scrutiny*, to arrest commandants who had whiled away their leisure hours with volumes of Goethe, it appeared that someone had some explaining to do. If reading literature did make you a better person, then it was hardly in the direct ways that this case at its most euphoric had imagined (Ibid p. 30, 31).

Why did violence become an indispensable component of modernity or why could not modernity lift peace above hate and vengeance were questions that were tried to be answered by several thinkers in the recent history. In this context, the naked and explicit violence shown in *Inglourious Basterds* proves nothing but the conditions of the pitfall that modernity has paradoxically been trapped in and it provides substantial evidence as how modernity moved forward amid the ferocious wrath of nationalistic antagonism. How can modernity rationalize the irrational brutality of instrumental Reason? There are four major ideological attempts made to theorize this paradox.

(I). *Adorno's and Horkheimer's Thesis of 'Dialectic of Enlightenment'*: the "totalitarian" potentials of the Enlightenment are inherent and crucial, the "administered world" is the truth of Enlightenment, the 20th century concentration camps and genocides are a kind of negative-teleological endpoint of the entire history of the West (Adorno:).

(II). *Habermas' hypothesis as Modernity an Unfinished Project*: Enlightenment is in itself a positive emancipatory process with no inherent "totalitarian" potentials, these catastrophies are merely an indicator that it remained an unfinished project, so our task should be to bring this project to completion (Habermas: 2005).

(III). *Etienne Balibar's Theory of Modernity as an Open Ended Battle*: modernity opens up a field of new freedoms, but at the same time of new dangers, and there is no ultimate teleological guarantee of the outcome, the battle is open, undecided.

(IV). *F.J.W. Schelling's Argument of Evil (ground) and Good (spirit) as Dialectic Totality of Human Existence*: Both evil and good are inseparably interconnected in human existence since man has emerged from nature and has to exploit it as a predator for his survival as well as he has placed himself above nature as a spiritual being, therefore, preserving nature (Zizek 2006).

The irrational and violent aspects that we experience in modernity are inseparable components since in the material world there is no separation in existence but good and bad are different parts that appear simultaneously.

Inglourious Basterds: an Evidence of the Paradox of Modernity:

Through plastic dummies of the true characters in recent modern history *Inglourious Basterds* rearranges history in a fantasy. Tarantino's attempt obviously belongs to the popular Holocaust film genre, but here the portrayal of the Jew does not fall into the stereotyped cinematic representation of the 'Jewish victim' who is innocent and harmless in the face of the bureaucratic murderous ideology known as Nazism. The genre concentrates on the trauma of the post-war man as an intense emotional account that tries to depict the history of the 20th century through the eyes of the Jewish protagonist whose identification is always sympathized with a phantasmic faultlessness. As in *Schindler's List* or *The Pianist* the Jewish innocence confronted with Nazi's institutional terror is somewhat altered in the movie with the introduction of the organized 'killer drive' of the Jews to shock the entire Nazi murder maniacs. The Jewish retaliation equals the murder intensity of Nazi's and the revengefulness and the suicidal vengeance resemble the savagery of the pre-modern. It touches the obscene aspect of the modern civilization and the 'decent and cultured' existence that modernism fancied is de-mystified with horrific and sadistic human slaughter from both Nazis and Zionists. The potential of man to become an extremely irrational creation in the face of an absolute Master whose 'voice' is signified as the order of the master in executing countless cruelty against another fellow being is yet again made clear to world film viewers.

Inglourious Basterds seems to represent 'the Real' of the dual world of modernity: the one which manifests both black-and-white dialectic of good and evil at the same time with a sardonic tone. The obscenity of the modern nation building surpasses the discursive meanings in our histories. The ultimate form of brutality and the satanic vengeance surface instead of Biblical love and compassion. The film does not stay where the fantasy is, but reaches further out to show us where the reality is. In depicting reality, Tarantino distorts the accepted facts about modern history and reshapes events without any dedication to the scholarly discourse about history but

he struggles to elevate a symbolic reality about the ethical core (the Lacanian Real) of the modern man. Existentially speaking, the responsibility of modern man who turned a blind eye to the sadistic development of the modern project which generated Zionism and Nazism as compulsory destructive mechanisms is also shown throughout the movie. In short, what Tarantino concentrates in the movie is the fundamental barbarity of the modern lifeworld. The film ends with an unsignifiable brutality with which Swastika is cut into Landa's forehead as a mark that can never be erased. The film digs deep down to viewers' mind as a traumatic 'inerasable real'.

Hate as Non-reason:

Throughout the movie hatred is shown as an evil force that does not necessarily require rational justification for its application of violence. Since action is abstract from reason, one can claim that *Inglourious Basterds* is a real postmodern movie. Irrational violence sweeps across the movie as the Nazis enter and dominate France by killing the Jews settled in France and the retaliation that American Jews create to traumatize Nazis. None of these acts sticks to the humanistic textbook dialogue of the modern man, nor does it care much for the moral conscience of the minimal decency of the post-Renaissance literary reading for better humanness. In fact, the literary philosophical knowledge of the modern dialogue is used here as a vehicle to justify and theorize such killings. The conversation between Colonel Landa and Mr. Lapadit is an ideal example for this. One can suggest that even the Bearer Jews too make use of the same spirit to reach their macho-sadistic ends. Landa cleverly uses his persuasive language skills to break Lapadit to confess his 'sheltering the enemies of the state' as well as to justify the massacre of the Dreyfuses, the dairy farming Jew family apparently hidden under Lapadits' floorboard. However, Landa's conversation evidences that reason fails to justify the actions of the modern man. Landa is excited to hear the 'rumours' about the Dreyfuses rather than the 'facts' about the hidden Jews, though facts are the foundation to build empirical knowledge in the modern humanity

Landa: I love rumors! Facts could be so misleading, where rumors, true or false, are often revealing.

Someone's identity can also be determined not only by means of established official and formal information (as Landa goes through the official files for such) but also by informal 'knowledge' derived from jokes, nicknames as well as rumors. Often such informal knowledge is transparent of someone's obscene or the ugly aspect of the character. With such 'obscene knowledge' the totality of the character is made against the incomplete textbook formal knowledge (Zizek 2005). Similarly, Landa proudly refers to his nickname 'Jew Hunter' and repeatedly asks Lapadit to pronounce it, which he does hesitantly.

Landa: Are you aware of the nickname the people of France have given me?

Lapadit: I have no interest in such things.

Landa: But you are aware of what they call me?

Lapadit: I'm aware.

Landa: What are you aware of?

Lapadit: That they call you "The Jew Hunter."

Landa: Precisely... Heydrich apparently hates the moniker the good people of Prague have bestowed on him. Actually, why he would hate the name "the Hangman" is baffling to me. It would appear he has done everything in his power to earn it. Now I, on the other hand, love my unofficial title...

Landa reveals a truth about human identity, which is signified sometimes through a nickname. Though we are given proper names by birth, our real existence which demands both good and evil would indirectly suggest something other than the proper name. Often such nicknames bear the evil aspect of man's existence. Man is split between his spiritual and material existence. He has to identify himself with evil in the real life, even if he maintains a kind of refined spirituality in his mental world. The real proper name as well as the nickname of a human being totalizes man's complete existence; the duality of the surface identity and the deep fathomless obscene being at the same time. Though Landa uses a highly literate language and bourgeois gestures in

his social life, his cruel anti-human pathology is far more apparent throughout his deeds as a soldier at war. He is a ruthless killer who theorizes such massacres and maintains a distance from such ugly acts by masquerading (his word) in the social being. Such complicated and un-comprehensible man has been created in the modern world. The Killer-gentleman dual existence of the modern man is successfully portrayed in many Tarantino movies.

Similarly, Landa hints that he, unlike other 'ordinary soldiers', can sense where the Jews can hide in this cow country and it seems that is why he has been given this assignment by the top Nazis.

Landa: Precisely because I've earned it. The feature that makes me such an effective hunter of the Jews is, as opposed to most German soldiers, I can think like a Jew where they can only think like a German. (CHUCKLING) More precisely, a German soldier.

How could he think like a Jew? A hawk (Nazi symbol of the beast) can only guess the place it would hide but a rat (an obscene beast with no dignity) may hide in place where a 'dignified' hawk can never think of. Only a hawk with no dignity can assume where a rat would hide; Landa is one of them. Therefore, he is not just a German soldier (with dignity) but an obscene rat that fits really into the Nazi demand of ruthless murderous act, which de-dignifies Jew existence. That is why Landa does not think that the Nazi propagation of hawk and rat comparison is an insult but a reality.

Landa has apparently 'earned' this title for his cleverness in finding Jews. He is celebrating and theorizing his own submission to evil while appreciating the obscene aspect of his character. His self-conscious identification with the dark side of humanity is apparent throughout the movie even when he finally chooses to betray Hitler and the Nazis as a double agent. This too he does for personal benefit but not as part of a project to destroy Nazis for the betterment of humanity. Therefore, Landa's choice to 'end the war' cannot be considered as an honest act inspired by a 'refined' enlightened character who commits for good. Landa's claim that he can think like a Jew because of his instinctual awareness of 'what tremendous feats human beings are capable of once they abandon dignity' in turn displays that he is also a man who has lost his dignity (may be

during the childhood or while working with the Nazis. Because of a bad traumatic memory, he quickly smokes the pipe) and is capable of doing anything for his survival. Dignity is what makes you a human and when that is gone what is left in man is the animalistic pleasure principle (Id) and the self-destruction in seeking that pleasure. Self-destruction is evident when Landa adventurously dies in the hands of Apache (Col. Aldo). Here too reason fails to demarcate good but only personal benefits, therefore, yet again the movie becomes a portrayal of post-modernity.

In the movie, the hidden Dreyfuses symbolizes the sense of the secretive dark spectral supplement of the Jew who cannot be castrated in the Nazi anti-Semitism (but be annihilated therefore). The total harmony of the Nazi regime is maintained by excluding a 'conceptual enemy' i.e. the Jews (the dead father who brought law and prohibition for humanity for the first time) by naming them as an evil of humanity.

Landa's final remarks in this dialogue show how far modern reason has apparently failed in understanding certain fundamental antagonisms in civilizations. We hate certain things and we do not know why we hate them, specially the fundamental hatred towards the Jews.

Landa: You don't like them. You don't really know why you don't like them. All you know is you find them repulsive.

The German hate towards Jews seems to have inspired from nothing but an irrational source. Even the Germans cannot exactly explain the reason for the origin of such profound hatredness towards one of the oldest communities in the world. Landa uses the Heidegger's logic of our inability to explain certain phenomenon in human life specially pertaining to our dislikes and antagonisms. As Landa says, we do not like rats without exactly knowing our disgust towards them. What we know is that we immediately kill them or chase them away (reacting against their existence). Our application of violence is evidence, though we know that they cannot be harmful to our existence.

Landa: Has a rat ever done anything to you to create this animosity you feel toward them?

Lapadit: Rats spread disease. They bite people.

Landa: Rats were the cause of the bubonic plague, but that's some time ago. I propose to you any disease a rat could spread, a squirrel could equally carry. Would you agree? Yet, I assume you don't share the same animosity with squirrel that you do with rats, do you?

This logic is the same proposition on which the massacre of millions of Jews was justified. May be there are people who are characteristically similar to Jews (squirrels) but we hate the Jews more (because they are obscene rats). No matter even if they have not done anything to put your existence in danger, you treat them with the same animosity. There can be fake explanations to justify their non-existence such as their hand in the murder of Jesus Christ (they bite people or spread diseases) but the authentic reason is the simple hatred to end their being. The Jew other is externalized to achieve the complete totality of the German society. He is considered as the only obstacle which has blocked the perfection of the German community. The externalization is ideologized through a conceptual obscene object such as Jews, therefore, the reason is hidden within the decent dialogue of the bourgeois superstructure (academism or media). Therefore, however 'interesting' the explanation may be, it does not make 'one bit of difference to the way we feel it'.

On the other hand, even though we know that Jews are not the real cause of our imperfection of total harmony, the hate is located beyond our language and understanding. We 'know' that something is wrong, but we do it nevertheless. Therefore, this is not a question of our knowledge but our reluctance to accept it as such. We enjoy through an imaginary proposition that 'Jew other' is cause of our incompleteness in existence or cause of our unhappiness. Even after annihilation of the other, we still find that we are incomplete beings. The best example is the end of 'Tamil other' for the majority of Sinhalese in Sri Lanka after the Eelam War IV in 2009, in which the country still experiences the same poverty, corruption, highway traffics, transportation issues, malnutrition as well as medical problems as usual. The externalized enemy is a conceptual construction to forget the real social issues (Laclau: 2007 p. 87) in the third world. Those who suffer from similar socio-political issues (especially those who migrated from villages to cities) unite around such fake and conceptual 'master signifiers' derived from

nostalgic pre-modern ethno-cultural myths. What a community must do instead is that to touch the real socio-political issues and find authentic solutions to them avoiding the pitfall of the proliferation false signifiers.

The irrationality of the Bearer Jews who respond to Germans in the same way is also beyond the literary reasoning in the modernity. Perhaps the violence that the American Jew soldiers generate not only goes beyond that of the Germans, but traumatizes them beyond imaginable (teach humanity for those do not know humanity). The distorted bodies (such like the Jew deaths) of the Germans implant a humiliation about the very core of existence of the community. The intensity of the violence and cruelty that Jews plan to exercise on the Germans is such that even the thoughts about Bearer Jews would torture them in their subconscious.

Col. Aldo: We will be cruel to the Germans. And through our cruelty, they will know who we are. And they will find the evidence of our cruelty in the disemboweled, dismembered and disfigured bodies of their brothers we leave behind us. And the German won't be able to help themselves but imagine the cruelty their brothers endured at our hands, and our boot heels and the edge of our knives. And the German will be sickened by us. And the German will talk about us. And the German will fear us. And when the German closes their eyes at night and they're tortured by their subconscious for the evil they have done, it will be with thoughts of us that they are tortured with.

Even though there can be thousands reasons for the Jews to do so, curving Swastikas into the forehead of the let off Germans is the ultimate symbol of the obscene identity of the modern man. In the ephemeral shift in identities in the postmodern era, the inerasable *swastika* remains as a fixed identity for man. With the trauma that such excoriation may create in human mind forever, even though it is just a filmic fantasy, modern man's cultivated mind is in a heavy question. Hence, there is no argument that the modern civilization is build on violent drives like these and the antagonistic motivations originated in competing with other communities. It is not the decent dialogue we find throughout the evolution of humanity but 'animalistic' responses that have satisfied the obscene subconscious of man and towards which man is obliged despite his classical education.

Refined art itself stands as a vehicle to employ death to those who actually are not sensitive to such subtle human issues. In Shoshanna's fatalistic response to Germans by burning down the theatre with all the Nazis packed within it, what is obvious is that extended 'enjoyment of the Jew other' corresponds nothing but death. She keeps the death of her family as an 'agalma'¹ and when the right opportunity arises, she responds like a vicious and venomous serpent without any mercy. She wants nothing but death for Nazis. Her life partner Mercel, the Negro projectionist, immediately understands her killer drive and makes no objection. Rather he asks the question 'what the fuck are supposed to do now?' as if he is pre-calculated about the burning down the cinema. They seem to have an unconscious agreement about the death drive they both are marching towards. Modern art (here the movie) which should actually preserve humanity, in Tarantino's proposition, is a bait to lure maniac Nazis for their self- destruction. Therefore, the movie is a revised fantasy and a political pulp to re-sculpt the ugly modern history.

The Theory of Disavowal: According to Zizek, the theory of disavowal involves the formula 'I know but' which means that 'I know what I am doing is bad but I do it nevertheless'. This is one of the greatest hurdles that we have to psychoanalytically overcome to reach at a better humanity. There can always be an excuse for someone who commits a crime without knowing that it is a crime because he is not fully aware of the consequences of his actions. But if someone does something bad knowing that it is a crime with a total consciousness of its consequences, then there cannot be any excuse. The persons in the top ranking German military were well educated and enjoyed the full cognitive potential to demarcate the right from wrong. Knowing the coordinates of the moral universe of the modern humanity, they willingly participated in one of the ugliest events in the recent history. In addition, they used their education and rational thinking to justify those actions. The theory of disavowal involves 'but'. We know that we are involved in inhuman acts but we continue to do them or allow others to do them having a full realization of their aftermaths. The main reason for the world to keep a blind eye towards injustice is made through this deliberate 'negligence'. The conversation between Landa and Lapadith bears witness to this.

¹ Agalma is a sublimated secret that a man may keep and reveal to the most intimated ones and derive pleasure by revealing it.

Landa: You don't like them. You don't really know why you don't like them. All you know is you find them repulsive.

In justifying the militarism of the government and its violent de-humanization during the last stages of the Eelam war, some intellectuals who were educated in well recognized universities in Western countries which were reputed to be the keystones in disseminating knowledge in modern humanism, deliberately forgot the most fundamental theories they learnt during their younger days about man and his unquestionable freedom to fight against injustice. They not only denied the guerilla warfare by the Tamil combatants but went on to the extent to negate the existence of a Tamil nationalistic movement to claim their sovereignty. These leant men knew the historical conditions of the nation state and the minority's right to separate from a majority dominating geo-political atmospheres but for the sake of the nationalistic motivations they took serious historical political discourses in advanced academic learning for granted. Not that they truly believed in Sinhalese nationalism, but they pretended that they did because of the materialistic benefits they desired after realization of their 'project'. Most of them became powerful officials in the popular post-Eelam war Sinhalese government (now you know why you did not like them). After some time they may also forget that they once theorized violence and advocated militarism to annihilate the imaginary enemy and leave their Nazi uniform behind and reclaim that they were humanists. For this shifting identity of utmost hypocrisy, however, the movie *Inglorious Basterds* suggests a violent and de-human solution for this in its very end i.e. to carve an inerasable *Swasthika* in the forehead of the Nazi officials if they are ever allowed to live.

The function of disavowal is always situated in an inner economy which seeks to rationalize the justification of violating a principle. This condition goes hand in hand with the unexplainable nature of man's own choices and actions in his survival instinct. The violence in the modern history and the suspicion towards the imaginary enemy are beyond definition or rational explanation. The theory of disavowal against the Jews is formulated beyond knowledge as a kind of a belief. It creates a self-distance with what we exactly know.

‘I know that the Jews are guilty of nothing; however, the fact is that in the development of capitalism, the Jews, as the representatives of financial and business capital, have usually profited from the productive labor of the others’ (Zizek, 2002 p. 242-3).

Conspiracy Theory: The wars are fought on political decisions (outspoken) but underneath such political agreements there is ‘intelligence’ or ‘spy works’ (mute) helping in determining the conditions on which the super-structure is made comfortably. Under bourgeois terminology they are called ‘secret services’ and their ‘information’ is provided to the superstructure or the political bodies by ugly underground means. What happens in the underground is justified because of the decisiveness of the information they derive by those ugly means. Most of the war movies will prove this fact. There are several conspiracies taking place in the movie and the attention of the audience is sustained through these plots which, as prefigured, end in extremely tyrannous manner. First, the plot to kill Hitler and other top ranking Nazis by the Allies assisted by the Bearer Jews; and second, is to betray the Nazis and get personal benefits from the Americans by Col. Landa. The third is by Shoshanna to burn down the theatre with Nazis. These conspiracies, however ugly they can be, bring meaning to the historical political events in humanity. In case of the Second World War, it is to end the lunatic inhumanity of Nazis and bring back justice to the world.

Fantasy figure of a ‘hidden agent’ is always preferred to formulate this theory. The imaginary hidden enemy does not actually exist but remains a fantasy figure ‘to be somewhere else’ and to be borrowed whenever necessary for the function of discourse.

When we analyze the relationship between the decent superstructure (politics) and the ugly underground (intelligence), we can roughly condense the major picture into the following diagram.

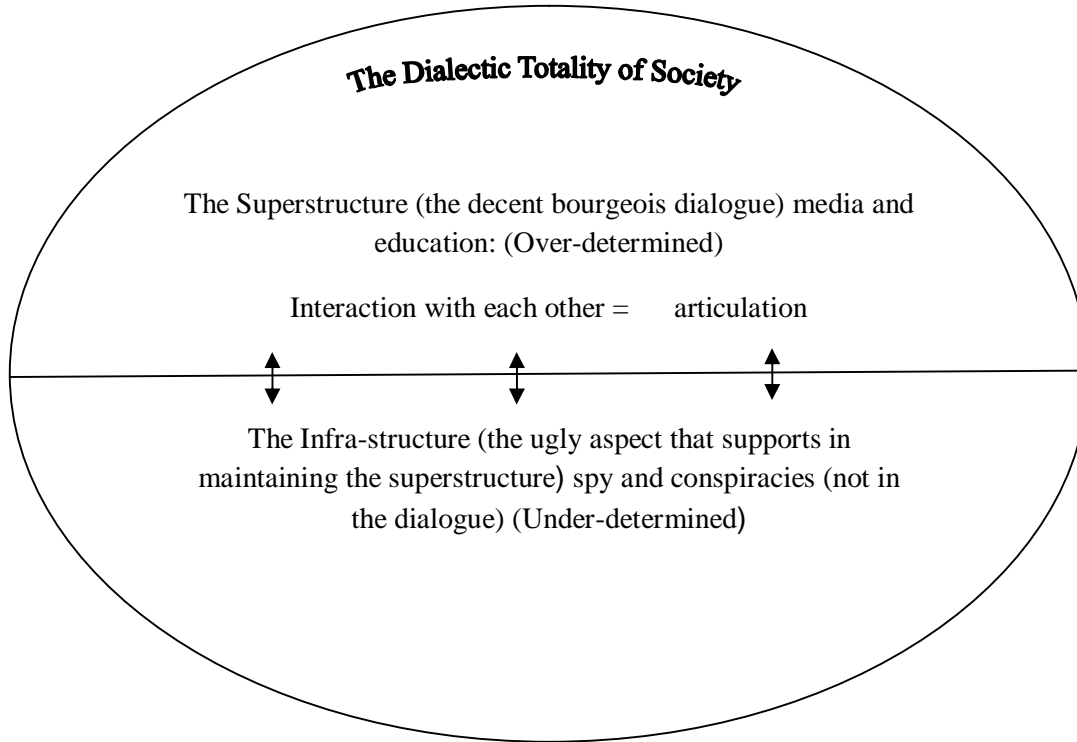


Diagram 01: The dialectic totality of the political society made through both decent and the obscene components.
(Source: Author)

These conspiracies always belong to the indecent aspect of humanity and, as a result, they are hidden from the main dialogue and kept underground. Practically, the secret services have to operate clandestinely but they always represent the ugly aspect of humanity. Since the operation of such underground disturbs the conceptual bourgeois dialogue of peace, sometimes such acts are further outcaste (double outcaste) even from the formal underground agencies. For example, in the movie *Munich* by Spielberg, Avner is legally made 'unofficial' when he is assigned to murder eleven Palestinians by Mossad. It is a 'contract' to 'do what the terrorists do' because Mossad cannot operate in Warsaw counties. The murders are done underground covering the true identity of Mossad, and in doing so, Israel government maintains the 'white' picture of its

existence in obedience with the mega political dialogue which is made possible by the cost that it pays to the 'dark' existence of Avner.

There is a fantasy constitute of an enemy who is externalized by the total dialogue of the community; a belief of an external agent who threatens the internal totality. Jews are the enemy because of whom the total harmony of the German community is threatened and to eliminate that enemy a total, harmonious agreement of the community is demanded and limitless power is persuaded to be vested on the centre to create a kind of dictator who irrationally executes that power until the termination of the enemy. Historically, there is a 'conspiracy' by the Jews to gain dominance in the world. He is a free, active, demonic agent. He wills, indeed he manufactures, the mechanism of history himself" (Hofstadter. 1964 p. 85). In that case, Jews set stage for the function of history. The film *Inglorious Basterds* too is structured in such a manner that displays a secretive use of complex network of conspiracies in many aspects.

A. The Allied Forces use a secret plot to topple down the German Nazi regime by killing all the top ranking officers.

B. Shoshanna plans to burn down the entire cinema with all the Nazi officers in it.

C.Col. Landa plans to escape from German army to settle down in America.

All these plots are made underground for an elimination of one final enemy (in this case not an imaginary one), who torments humanity. Germans unlike the Jews are not the fantasy conception of the enemy or the subject of the impossible totality of the contemporary society.

The Tamil Otherness and 'the Rats': As the movie illustrates, the theory 'we don't know why we hate rats' can effectively be applied to the existence of Tamil (like the Jews in Germany) in Sri Lanka. They have been falsely identified as a community which has stolen the perfection of the Sinhalese who are defined as the historical inheritors of this land. Their inability to reach 'utopian perfection' (whatever it may be) is purely an economical reason of disparity,

exploitation and lack of industrial resources. Their attempts to shift into the service oriented economy in 1978 was also faltered due to neo-colonial liberal market policies which were hijacked by much stronger nations in the continent and due to our own strategic moves in the last three decades. Perceiving the Tamils (or even Muslims) as ‘the conspirators’ of the failure of our project which otherwise could have been successful is witnessed in 1983 Black July. (Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* (1994) being the precious example where Banduratne Mudalali uses his financial ability to free the entire city from Tamils under the banner of nationalism as well as later politico- military definitions until the end of fourth Eelam War to the Tamil Diaspora today.

The Dialectic Function of the Decent Discourse: The Sri Lankan government while practicing terror in its interior politics employed academic intellectuals to convince the global community about its commitment to human rights and law and order. These intellectuals knew the reality on the ground but willingly participated in the mischievous discursive role of the mega dialogue. A similar situation can be witnessed during the suppression of the youth uprising in 1988-89 in Southern Sri Lanka, where certain intellectuals justified the government’s act to use terror in killing thousands of youths just to display that ‘if you participate in politics which *actually question us*, you are not an exception’. In this case, actual questioning involves an ‘authentic shift in existing structure in power politics’. More preciously, those who question the status of affairs not to the extent of the entire collapse of the system can go on doing their ‘politics’. But those who actually threaten the existing system by revealing the real culprits will be considered as the true enemies and will have to face dangerous repercussions.

Conclusion: Modernity is made with an organic paradox where good and evil function together in its promise to achieve a better humanity and the film *Inglourious Basterds* bears testimony to illustrate that inner-contradiction. In that regard, the movie suggests through some selected events that our history is actually made through extreme violence and an alternative view to our known history is required to deconstruct what is written in his history text books, thereby, challenging the over-determined bourgeois/ academic dialogue of peace and harmony as the driving force of history. The major ideological developments in the modern history including Liberal Capitalism and Marxism, have seemed incapable to understand the manipulation of violence in the recent history. Instead, in practical political moments, they have, one way or

other, contributed to either initiate or to expand such violence against the classical textbook education of peace and negotiations. By over-exposing the animal impulse of modern man, the film also forces us to rethink the strategies of the civilizing process and to discover a new path to complete the 'modern project' with a radical alternative to its sadistic praxis.

Through the fantasy, the movie draws a brand new reality. As in the dream, *Inglourious Basterds* displaces and reshapes events without any commitment to any historical truth; it is not committed to the accepted factual narrations either as if Tarantino is trying propose that man should pursue his imaginary realities to materialize a brand new world for the future.

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