

Conservatism as an Ideology in *Inglorious Basterds* (2009)

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Abstract

Conservatism is one of the ideological expressions to maintain the circumstances and power in society. One of the popular literary works that depict conservatism as an ideology is Tarantino's movie "Inglorious Basterds." The idea of conservatism as an ideology is represented through the central characters in the plot, the "Basterds." This study aimed to analyze the representation of conservatism as an ideology in the movie *Inglorious Basterds*. The writers applied a sociological approach and analyzes the social behavior and social history depicted by the characters in the movie. According to the findings, conservatism's representation as an ideology is shown by the characterization of the "Basterds" that uphold their rules, value, and tradition. However, it does not mean they cannot accept other values or traditions completely. The writers also found that the movie challenges the standard American remembrance of World War II. Consequently, it is essential to highlight that conservatives do not dishonor and reject other norms, values, or traditions.

Keywords: Ideology; Conservatism; Popular literature

1. Introduction

Ideology is a crucial notion in modern political and social discourse. It is discussed in various forms across a collection of literature that explores the link between individual beliefs and the functioning of social systems. Ideology is a broad fundamental method that creates social life concepts, ideas, and norms. Eagleton argues that a society's ideology, or culture, can be seen as the cumulative effect of its meaningful activities or representational systems. This can be understood as an allusion to how individuals of that community "experience" those activities (Eagleton, 1991). In Althusser's view, according to Moramollu's article, ideology is a reflection of the conceptual attachment of persons to their actual life circumstances (Moramollu, 2016). Patarin-Jossec in his article concludes that "ideologies" according to Marx are not just projections; they are a solid and functional substance that does not constitute history's driving force (Jossec, 2017).

Ideology is a topic studied in sociology and other disciplines, such as social sciences. However, the goal of almost every scientific discipline is to accumulate additional knowledge that can be independently verified through the processes of simplification and categorization, interpretation, and projection. On the other hand, literary knowledge is all about exact details that are special and authentic. Thus, literary studies aim to demonstrate how these characteristics are frequently transformed into appealing elements through literary interpretation. The authors of literary works still attempt to inject ideology into the literature. They strive to study, explore and enlighten people about humanity's most significant challenges.

Moreover, the interpretation of the literary work can be analyzed from its intrinsic and the extrinsic elements. Intrinsic elements compose a literary work, such as theme, characters, setting, and plot. According to Wellek and Warren, the intrinsic element is the interpretation and analysis of the works of

literature themselves. The theme is one of the intrinsic elements, the primary and fundamental idea in a literary work (Wellek, 1963). Therefore, the writer chose to analyze the topic of conservatism as an ideology with the popular literature “Inglourious Basterds,” a movie by Quentin Tarantino as the object of analysis. The story revolves around a team of Jewish soldiers that must go undercover on a mission to overthrow the Nazi regime and end the war. Meanwhile, a woman wants to avenge the death of her family because of a German soldier.

Furthermore, according to aristocratic theory, conservatism is an ideology that stems from a specific historical movement, for instance, the French revolution. Conservative ideology is an independent set of concepts usually accepted as being accurate. It is characterized by basic principles such as morality, justice, stability, and fairness. Huntington argues that it is not a person’s social associations that determine the extent to which they place a substantial significance on these principles; instead, it is the person’s capability to recognize the intrinsic validity and acceptability of these principles (Huntington , 1957). In his article, Kekes depicts conservatism as adheres to an ethics that is grounded in politics. It is political in the sense that it is a concept about the political systems that make a civilization beneficial. Society is understood to be approximately equivalent to a modern state that has existed for, at most, a few generations (Kekes, 1997).

The term “conservatism” refers to a political ideology that incorporates a diverse set of concepts, motivations, and constituents; hence, many conservatives do not believe they are required to decide between the competing or contradictory motivations that drive their beliefs. Brinkley believes that conservatism is not a coherent “ideology.” It is a broad collection of thoughts through whom various conservatives derive various conclusions. To illustrate, the traditions conservatives hold in the United States are varied and often contradictory. They can be both libertarianism and authoritarian, aristocratic and populist; ethically appealing and indefensible; and so on (Brinkley, 1994). Therefore being conservative, according to Wilson, is always to respect a conviction in the lessons of history and reject the idea that swift revolutionary shifts can have lasting benefits. The argument opposing revolution asserts that it will not produce innovative results and can only result in adverse outcomes (Wilson, 1941).

In addition, Alexander argues that conservatism has several blatant inconsistencies. The resistance to transformation paradoxically embraces evolution. It is a form of ideology that works with opposing ideologies. It does not stand for any ideals, but it does stand for ideals. It is both secular and religious. Although it supports tradition, nothing about it prohibits it from ultimately doing away with all traditions (Alexander, 2013). Conservatism has become a group of ideas that cannot be separated from the discussion concerning how to deal with change. It could be viewed as the ideological expression of a rightist predisposition to maintain the circumstances and power in society, or it can be understood as a practical way to show that individuals might not like taking risks and are skeptical of big plans to make society a better place.

More importantly, Andreasson stated that conservatives do not just oppose any shift in the current social, governmental, or economic system. Rather, they recognize the necessity of transition and have developed a novel strategy for figuring out when and how that shift might help smooth over tensions in the status quo. By opposing all change, conservatives hope to ensure that established norms and procedures are not disrupted or destroyed (Andreasson, 2014).

2. Method

This article is composed using library research by collecting authentic sources from articles, journals, or books related to the topic of study. According to George, library research entails finding and researching materials that deliver verifiable knowledge or professional analysis on a subject of study (George, 2008). The writer collects sources from various e-journal databases by reviewing and analyzing the materials to determine whether they can be used as references for this study. Most of the sources used are related to the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the movie. The sources obtained are used as references in composing this article. The data source of this study is analyzed from the script of the movie “Inglourious Basterds.”

In order to uncover the conservatism ideological representation implied in the movie “Inglourious Basterds,” the present study uses a sociological approach. This approach examines society construction and social behavior knowledge that has been established through the methodical application of experimental study and thoughtful evaluation. By using this approach, the writer analyzes the social behavior and social history depicted by its characters in the movie.

3. Results and Discussions

At first look, *Inglourious Basterds* could seem amusing due to its humorous denouement, which is unusual for action movies meant to expose the horrors of warfare. There was never any pretense that this movie was supposed to be a realistic depiction of anything, considering its fictitious plot involving a parallel period during World War II and Quentin Tarantino’s distinctive aesthetic flair. Instead, *Inglourious Basterds* is a scathing indictment of war movies and their repeated glorification of the period of World War II. This indictment is communicated through Tarantino’s passion for brutality scenes, pop culture, and the great utilization of analogies. The story is set in German-occupied France and follows two distinct but connected plans to assassinate Hitler. Shoshanna Dreyfus, a Jewish businesswoman in France who owns a theater, miraculously avoids being killed by SS Colonel Hans Landa despite having witnessed the execution of her family members at his orders. Several years later, when German war hero Fredrick Zoller prepares for the screening of a Nazi propaganda movie to be presented at her theater, she plots to kill all the Nazi figures’ audience by putting the theater on fire. At the same time, the Jewish-American guerilla troops identified as the Basterds, whom Lieutenant Aldo Raine commands, are also planning an assault on the

premiere. Prior to the opening show, the plot follows the preparations of both parties for the attacks and Colonel Landa's curious skepticism.

Conservatism as an ideology is mainly represented by the group 'the basterds' in this film. The Basterds are an organization of Jewish Americans who, ironically, espouse a concept of ethnic supremacy similar to that of their fascist opponent. By demonizing the Nazis, the glorification of brutality excuses the Basterds' acts. That is why, in a method parallel to how Hitler brutalized the Jews, they killed everyone wearing a Nazi uniform. Their goal is to find any remaining Nazis, eliminate them, scalp them, and carve a swastika onto their skulls. The harsh tactics they employ are successful. There was widespread panic among the German troops as they learned of the Basterds's existence. Even Adolf Hitler is showing signs of unease.



“When you join my command, you take on a debit. A debt you owe me, personally. Every man under my command owes me one hundred Nazi scalps...”

The Basterds, led by Lt. Aldo, have their own rules against the Nazis. Their main identity is as an anti-Nazi group that hunts down Nazis radically and sadistically. In his speech, when Lt. Aldo recruited “Eight—Jewish—American—soldiers,” he emphasized that all soldiers under him must collect one hundred Nazi scalps (100 per person). The Basterds are portrayed using a conventional iconography comparable to the heroes in action movies. These diabolical protagonists are ruthless spirits that lack a sense of morality and thus are willing to indulge in unethical behavior to achieve their goals. Aldo's proclamation to the troops says that the Nazis “will find evidence of our cruelty, in the disembowel, dismembered, and disfigured bodies of their brothers we leave behind us.” It demonstrates the Basterds' obliviousness to the pain and misery of other people and their disrespect for the military rules that have been formed.



“You see, we like our Nazis in uniforms. That way, you can spot ’em just like that. (snaps his fingers) But you take off that uniform, ain’t nobody gonna know you was a Nazi. And that don’t sit well with us.”

Furthermore, in exchange for the lives of the Nazis whom the Basterds released, they carved the swastika on their foreheads. The Basterds carved a swastika on the forehead of ‘the survivors’ because it would be indelible proof that they were Nazis. The swastika carved into the forehead of the Basterds’ survivor serves as a further oblique reference to the tyrannical past of the United States. This is analogous to the way the Nazis coerced Jews to wear the Star of David as a form of recognition, and it acts as a permanent reminder to the two Nazi commanders of the brutality they perpetrated, from which they cannot flee. In the frame of the swastika mark, Aldo’s backstory and the inclusion of the string scorch wound encircling his throat combine to form a more complex symbolism. Those are both memorials to the victims of racist violence inflicted by the U. S. and Nazis on African Americans and Jews. Americans’ tendency to think of themselves as warriors based on their nationalism would perhaps make it hard for them to remember that their historical background has been unfair to racial minorities. However, Aldo’s rope burn wound carries an explicit reaffirmation.

In spite of the fact that justice and vengeance are not synonymous concepts, the movie *Inglourious Basterds* depicts how they can overlap. Jewish retribution does not mean that people should go around scalping or swastika-marking Nazis. Freedom is the inevitable fate for the Jews because it allows them to restore the very thing that Hitler wanted to destroy. Our resistance to him is our revenge and our justice, and it takes the form of carrying on our customs, studying our history, and making a success of ourselves in the modern world. *Inglourious Basterds* employs flashbacks to demonstrate this idea, sending a statement that our actions today will determine our tomorrows.



“You know, we’re not looking for trouble right now...I need to know we can all remain calm.”

In addition, the cooperation between Lt. Hicox and the Basterds also shows the characteristics of conservatism. Throughout Operation Kino, British Army Lieutenant Archibald “Archie” Hicox teams up with the Basterds to assassinate the German Military Elite in time for the screening of the Nazi movie “Nation’s Pride.” He encounters the Basterds at a wrecked building, in which they mock him because the pub where they were expected to encounter Bridget was underground. Hicox acknowledges that the circumstance is complex and is apprehensive about Hugo Stiglitz. In the next corner, Hugo can be seen quietly honing the blade of his blade. Hicox walks up to Hugo and says they are not planning whatever incident before asking, quite rudely, if Hugo could keep his cool on the occasion when anything goes wrong. Stiglitz finally stopped polishing his blade and responded by asking, “I don’t look calm to you?” after he had paused. Hicox responds to Hugo with, “well, when you put it that way, I suppose you do,” despite his efforts to avoid appearing like a dumb person who posed a hypothetical remark. After that, Stiglitz returns to his placid routine of honing his blade. Hicox comments to Raine that Stiglitz is not precisely a talkative person.

Through these kino operations, the Basterds carry out the missions in ways they would not normally do. They did it with a full plan without radical and brutal action. When they enter the tavern on a mission, they can maintain their attitude like a dignified soldier. In this case, the Basterd’s action proves the argument as explained by Andersson (2014) which states that conservatism does not always reject outside ideas or values. The Basterd as an example of conservatives shows that they can accept ideas from other parties that are even very different from their values and traditions. In order to achieve their goals, the Basterd can be open to any ideas that can be useful to them. Although in this case, it does not mean that the things they do outside of tradition they will forever do or become one of the values and norms that they will apply in the future.

4. Conclusion

By making the audience examine their personal complicity in being subjugated and the hypocrisy of their personal ego splendor, *Inglourious Basterds* explores the conventional Hollywood WWII movie. By depicting an alternative narrative, the movie challenges the standard American remembrance of World War II. By making comparisons between the patriotic American savior and the villainous fascist Nazi, the similarities between the protagonist and the antagonist are clarified, even though our political history is clouded by our sense that we are morally superior. It is important to remember that Americans are just as receptive to Nazism and indoctrination as anyone else, and that they are just as willing to commit the same crimes that they accuse the Germans for. Tarantino challenges his audience to compare and contrast Nazi aggressiveness with the stereotypical ferocity of the western hero. By reassuring the audience of the wrongs done by the United States, Tarantino rejects the notion that Americans are heroes and that their culture is better than other cultures. Conservatism in *Inglourious Basterds* depicted in the *Basterds* characters where they are a group of radical fighters who have certain rules in accordance with their traditions. However, as a group that fights for their nation, they do not completely reject the rules of other groups. They can still cooperate with other groups while upholding the traditions and rules they believe in.

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