

Narrative and the Holocaust: From Structure to the Worlds of Cinema

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Abstract:

This study explores the Holocaust through sociological and cinematic lenses, analyzing its impact on modern intellectual and cultural thought. It highlights the contributions of Zygmunt Bauman, who connects the Holocaust to the rationality and structures of modernity, and Abdel Wahab Al-Messiri, who examines aggression and dehumanization mechanisms in human behavior. The study also investigates how the Holocaust influenced global cinema, fostering empathy, collective memory, and moral vigilance. The findings underscore the importance of moral reflection and education to prevent future atrocities.

.Keywords: Holocaust, Zygmunt Bauman, Abdel Wahab Al-Messiri, modernity, cinema, empathy, dehumanization, moral vigilance, genocide, intellectual history.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The madness that engulfed Europe in the twentieth century, which many prominent thinkers and ethicists view as a rupture in the course of Western modernity, is epitomized by what is known as the extermination of the Jews of Europe (the Holocaust). This event is considered a major moral turning point in the history of modern European intellectualism. The ideological and cultural currents of modernity contributed to the political and military chaos that unfolded in Europe, particularly in Germany. The genocide of the Jews stands apart from other massacres, which often involved displacement, abuse, and deliberate warfare aimed at settlement and expansion.

This illusion experienced by Europe in its past history reflects a significant shift toward a new vision of modernity and postmodernism in its various forms. The social theorizing of the Holocaust has moved beyond a limited personal and individual understanding of the systematic genocidal processes against Jews. Research centers and government funding have become increasingly active and essential in fostering a deeper understanding of these events.

The Zionist interpretation of this history continues to dominate and is effectively employed by the Israeli government as a tool to evoke widespread sympathy from the masses. However, this narrative has evolved beyond the role of victimhood, often being used as leverage to suppress criticism of Israel, particularly

regarding its current settlement policies in the Palestinian Territories.

2. Anti-Semitism and Ideological Mobilization: The Theory of Modernity by Zygmunt Bauman

Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman offers an in-depth, comprehensive, and highly insightful analysis of the history of ideological movements in Europe and the various manifestations of hostility toward Jews. He argues that the development and expansion of such hostility is a sociological phenomenon influenced by historical, religious, and ethnic factors. Bauman views anti-Jewish hatred as a distortion and intrinsic flaw of European modernity that arises during a period of widespread animosity and the redirection of social frustration toward a specific group perceived as the "other" or the "enemy."

In Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of the Holocaust, social frustration plays a crucial role in understanding how a society can commit acts as extreme as genocide. Bauman argues that social frustration, arising from economic and political crises, can act as a catalyst for mass violence (Bauman, 1989, p16).

In post-World War I Germany, the Weimar Republic experienced severe economic turmoil and rising unemployment, which fostered widespread frustration and dissatisfaction among the population. Rather than addressing the underlying causes of these crises, the Nazi regime exploited this social frustration by directing public anger toward the Jewish community. Jews were scapegoated and blamed for society's problems, creating a unifying narrative of a common enemy. This ideological

manipulation of frustration enabled the Nazi regime to rally societal support and implement the policies that led to the Holocaust policies.

Bauman also emphasizes that the bureaucratic rationalism characteristic of modernity played a significant role in transforming social frustration into organized violence. Through efficient and systematic bureaucratic organization, the Nazi regime was able to carry out exterminations in a highly organized and effective manner, amplifying the scale of mass violence (Bauman, 1991, p55).

Additionally, Bauman highlights that uniting a collective identity around a shared hatred of Jews served as a means to channel social frustration. This unification not only provided a mechanism to control public anger but also reinforced national identity and consolidated the power of the Nazi regime (Donskis, 2013, p68).

• Liquid Modernity and the Cinematic Memory of the Holocaust

In his exploration of modernity, Zygmunt Bauman developed the concept of "liquid modernity" to describe the instability and fluidity that characterize contemporary social life. Unlike the solid structures of earlier modernity, where institutions and identities were fixed and predictable, liquid modernity reflects a world in which social forms are constantly

shifting, leading to uncertainty, fragmentation, and moral ambivalence (Bauman, 2000, p89-95).

This framework is essential for understanding the Holocaust as both a product and a rupture of modern civilization. Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust* argues that the genocide was not a regression into barbarism, but rather a logical outcome of modern bureaucratic rationality, where moral responsibility was dissolved in the machinery of administration. In his later work, *Liquid Evil*, he expands this idea by discussing how in liquid times, evil no longer appears in the form of grand ideologies, but in dispersed, banal forms that become normalized through media and everyday life. Cinema, as both a mirror and shaper of collective consciousness, plays a crucial role in this context by transforming the representation of the Holocaust into narratives that may oscillate between empathy and commodification. The cinematic portrayal of the Holocaust often simplifies complex moral realities into digestible plots, contributing to what Bauman might regard as the aestheticization of suffering. Furthermore, Bauman's concept of liquid love — the erosion of stable, long-term human relationships in favor of transient (Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, 2003, p222-225), superficial connections — finds an eerie resonance in how Holocaust victims were dehumanized, stripped of social bonds, and reduced to bureaucratic entries in extermination systems.

The disintegration of empathy and relational ethics in liquid modernity echoes the mechanisms of alienation and objectification that made the Holocaust administratively possible and emotionally tolerable for its perpetrators. Thus, Bauman's trilogy of "liquids" not only contextualizes the sociological roots of genocide but also frames how cinema engages with and sometimes distorts the memory of atrocity in an age of moral fluidity (باومان زيجمونت، 2017، ص98).

3. Instinctive Aggression: From Animal Behavior to a Human Mechanism - Abdel Wahab Al-Messiri's Perspective

Abdel Wahab Al-Messiri, an Egyptian thinker and critic, examines the concept of "animality" and the transformation of instinctive aggression from simple animal behavior into a complex human mechanism that manifests in various forms in modern societies. In his sociological analysis, Al-Messiri explains that, despite cultural and civilizational advancements, humans still harbor instinctive aggressive tendencies that can surface under certain social conditions.

The concept of "animality" (المسيري، 1999، ص266) stems from the idea that a person can revert to a state of animal-like instinctive behavior, particularly in terms of aggression. This transformation often occurs when human and civilizational values deteriorate under the pressure of socio-economic challenges, causing instinctive behaviors to emerge more prominently.

In animals, instinctive aggression is part of biological adaptation, used for self-defense, resource protection, and dominance mechanisms essential for survival and continuity. Al-Messiri argues that this aggression does not vanish in humans but evolves into a more intricate mechanism shaped by cultural and social influences. In human societies, aggression manifests in diverse forms, including physical violence, wars, political conflicts, and even verbal and psychological violence (المسيري)

(ص 67 ، 2006).

Socio-economic factors play a significant role in shaping how individuals express their instinctive aggression. Social transformations, such as poverty, unemployment, economic crises, and political unrest, can increase violence and lead to aggression as an outlet for frustration and anger. In this context, Al-Messiri notes that various ideologies often exploit this instinctive aggression to achieve political and social objectives. For example, repressive regimes like Nazism channeled collective hostility to target specific groups, such as Jews, turning instinctive aggression into systematic genocidal policies.

Al-Messiri provides applications from human thought to demonstrate how awareness and control of these instinctual tendencies can prevent their transformation into destructive forces. He emphasizes the importance of cultivating human and moral values to manage and redirect these instincts. Education, he argues, plays a crucial role in refining human behavior and channeling aggression into constructive rather than destructive forms. By fostering awareness and promoting positive outlets,

education can guide instinctive aggression toward building and development, rather than destruction.

4. Sympathy, Victims, and the Power of Cinema

In the aftermath of the Holocaust and the end of the Second World War, a wave of films and artistic productions emerged, addressing this tragic period in Europe's modern history. Major production companies played a significant role in financing this industry, creating works that sought to elevate post-Holocaust Western civilization and advocate for the eradication of violence through cinema and art.

The historical upheavals experienced by Europe during the Second World War and the Nazi Holocaust (Tester, 2004, p182) led to a profound transformation in the collective consciousness and social behavior of Europeans. This transformation extended beyond political and economic realms to deeply impact cultural and artistic dimensions. Confronted with the horrific realities of the Holocaust, European societies faced the urgent need to rebuild their cultural and moral identity.

In this context, cinema and the arts became powerful tools for expressing these transformations and played a vital role in reshaping collective consciousness. Recognizing the potential of these mediums to achieve humanitarian and cultural objectives, major production companies invested heavily in creating films and artworks that depicted the tragedies of that era. These productions aimed to educate future generations about the dangers of violence and extremism.

Through the portrayal of human stories and suffering, cinematic arts contributed to refining Western societies, offering lessons in tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and the importance of human rights. These works went beyond mere entertainment, evolving into educational and sociological tools designed to eradicate violence and hatred while promoting universal human values.

5. Empathy and the Executioner in Sociology: The Cinema of Reality

Theories of empathy and understanding the role of the executioner are essential tools for analyzing humanitarian disasters like the Holocaust. These theories provide insight into the social and psychological dynamics that led to such atrocities and explore how societies responded to them in their aftermath.

Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, plays a crucial role in the context of the Holocaust. Within concentration camps, empathy among victims helped many endure. Sharing hope, pain, and suffering fostered strong bonds that supported their resilience in the face of unimaginable atrocities. Additionally, the personal testimonies of Holocaust survivors continue to be instrumental in nurturing empathy in subsequent generations, preserving collective memory, and working to prevent the recurrence of such tragedies.

After the Second World War, European societies saw the emergence of widespread movements to acknowledge the crimes committed against Jews and express remorse. This collective compassion was reflected in policies of compensation, official apologies, and educational initiatives. Holocaust education in

schools has been part of broader efforts to cultivate societal empathy and prevent the repetition of such horrors by fostering awareness and understanding.

6. The Role of the Executioner in the Holocaust: Mechanisms of Participation in Mass Violence

The study of the role of the executioner in the Holocaust explores the mechanisms that led individuals to participate in mass acts of violence. Several theories help explain this behavior. Stanley Milgram's experiments in the 1960s showed that individuals can obey orders from a higher authority, even when those orders contradict their moral values. This blind obedience helps explain how many Nazi soldiers and officers carried out genocidal orders without facing accountability.

As Zygmunt Bauman pointed out, the bureaucratic system in Nazi Germany divided responsibility into small, manageable tasks, which made each individual feel like a minor part of a much larger machine. This fragmentation of responsibility removed the sense of personal moral responsibility for the crimes being committed. Those involved in these crimes may have justified their actions as mere obedience to orders, rather than as personal choices.

The Nazi regime also used propaganda to portray Jews as inhuman enemies, which helped reduce empathy and increased acceptance of violence against them. This process of dehumanization made it easier for the executioners to carry out orders for mass murder without feeling guilt.

7. The Holocaust and Ethics in Film Presentation

The Holocaust serves as a key case study for understanding the theories of empathy and the role of the executioner in sociology. This tragedy offers powerful examples of how humans respond to systematic violence and collective empathy during times of crisis. After the war, many institutions and organizations were established to support Holocaust survivors, document their testimonies, and ensure that the atrocities were not forgotten.

Cinema, literature, and the visual arts have played a significant role in passing on the experiences of the Holocaust to new generations. Films such as *Schindler's List* and *Life is Beautiful* have contributed to building universal sympathy for the victims. Cinema, as a mass medium, has been able to portray the stories of victims and human suffering in a moving way that resonates with a wide audience.

Schindler's List, directed by Steven Spielberg, provides a poignant retelling of the story of a man who saved hundreds of Jews from death, highlighting courage and humanity in the face of injustice. This film, along with others like it, helps to raise awareness and promote human values by offering lessons in tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

Understanding the behavior of the executioners during the Holocaust has also led to the development of policies and legal systems aimed at preventing such atrocities from happening again. The Nuremberg Trials marked the beginning of analyzing the behavior of the executioners from both legal and moral

perspectives, contributing to justice for the victims and laying the groundwork for preventing future genocides.

Theories of empathy and the executioner in sociology provide essential tools for understanding the dynamics of the Holocaust. Empathy allows us to recognize the shared humanity and emotions of the victims, while studying the role of the executioner helps us understand the mechanisms that drive individuals to participate in mass violence. This deep understanding can help build more compassionate and humane societies, reducing the likelihood of such atrocities happening again in the future. Art and cinema play a crucial role in this process by presenting human stories and experiences that can profoundly impact collective consciousness and promote fundamental human values.

8. The Structural Model in the Mindset of Abdul Wahab Al-Messiri: Analysis and Data

To analyze these data sociologically and statistically, we can focus on evaluating the number of films that address Jewish life and anti-Semitism in various historical contexts and their impact on world cinema. I will use the data provided to create a preliminary analysis of films dealing with the Holocaust and Jewish life from a cognitive perspective:

First, we consider the distribution of films by producing country, which provides insight into the cultural and historical interest in Jewish and Holocaust themes in each country. The United States stands out as the primary producer of these films, with seven

films, followed by France with two films, and then Italy and Hungary, each with one film.

Second, the analysis of the distribution of films by years of production reveals the chronological trends of production and the periods when these issues were most emphasized. It shows a relative balance between films produced before and after the year 2000.

Third, considering key figures such as directors and actors helps us understand who played influential roles in shaping the cinematic portrayal of these subjects. Directors like Steven Spielberg, Roman Polanski, and Roberto Benigni have had significant impacts, while Meryl Streep emerges as an actress who has participated in multiple works related to Jewish themes and anti-Semitism.

This analysis allows us to observe how world cinema has addressed the issues of the Holocaust and Jewish life. Our understanding can be further deepened by comparing critical and popular analyses of these films with historical events and social contexts.

In a deeper examination of the Messiri model, we find that offering a cognitive alternative beyond the Western model depends on consolidating concepts and frameworks of thought that reflect the unique characteristics of Arab-Islamic culture. Al-Messiri redefines the relationship between knowledge and identity, stressing the importance of activating the Arabic lexicon and Islamic concepts to generate theories and analytical models that are more compatible with the Arab and Islamic

reality. In the context of cinema, this methodology can be used to explain how films approach the experiences of the Holocaust, providing an opportunity to understand how these works contribute to shaping or altering cultural and social awareness about the Holocaust while challenging dominant Western narratives.

10. Films, read in number and content

The Holocaust has been a profound subject in global cinema, inspiring numerous films that explore its harrowing events, individual stories, and broader historical impact. Steven Spielberg's "Schindler's List" (1993), produced in the USA, tells the true story of Oskar Schindler, a German businessman who saved over 1,000 Jews, with remarkable performances by Liam Neeson and Ralph Fiennes. Roman Polanski's "The Pianist" (2002), a joint production of France, Germany, the UK, and Poland, depicts the survival of Polish Jewish pianist Władysław Szpilman, portrayed by Adrien Brody. Italy's "Life is Beautiful" (1997), directed by Roberto Benigni, combines humor and tragedy as a father shields his son from the horrors of a concentration camp. Hungary's "Son of Saul" (2015) by László Nemes offers a deeply personal narrative of a concentration camp prisoner's attempt to give a boy a proper burial.

Other notable films include Mark Herman's "The Boy in the Striped Pajamas" (2008), a UK-USA co-production that examines the unlikely friendship between a Nazi officer's son and a Jewish boy in a concentration camp. Edward Zwick's "Defiance" (2008, USA) recounts the true story of Jewish

brothers leading a resistance group. "The Counterfeiters" (2007), directed by Stefan Ruzowitzky in Austria, is based on a real counterfeiting operation run by concentration camp inmates under Nazi orders. Agnieszka Holland's "Europa Europa" (1990) dramatizes the story of a Jewish boy hiding his identity by joining the Hitler Youth, showcasing international collaboration from Germany, France, and Poland.

Documentary approaches include Alain Resnais's "Night and Fog" (1956, France), a stark portrayal of Nazi concentration camps using archival footage. Alan J. Pakula's "Sophie's Choice" (1982, USA) delves into the emotional aftermath of the Holocaust through the memories of a survivor, played by Meryl Streep. Quentin Tarantino's "Inglourious Basterds" (2009), a USA-Germany production, reimagines World War II through the lens of revenge-seeking Jewish soldiers. Elem Klimov's "Come and See" (1985, Soviet Union) presents a visceral depiction of Nazi occupation in Belarus. The TV mini-series "Holocaust" (1978, USA), directed by Marvin J. Chomsky, chronicles the lives of a Jewish family and a Nazi lawyer, offering a broad narrative of the era.

These films, spanning various countries and cinematic styles, provide powerful insights into the Holocaust's atrocities, human resilience, and the enduring need to remember history.

11. CONCLUSION

In the shadows of contemporary history, we are confronted with complex moral and philosophical challenges that were revealed during the Holocaust. These events were not just a separate tragedy in human history; they serve as a mirror reflecting the

darkest aspects of the modern human psyche and the moral dilemmas of modernity. Understanding the Holocaust goes beyond merely analyzing the events themselves; it involves examining the ideological and social shifts that allowed such atrocities to occur. Contemporary studies show how these horrors were the result of societies that shaped their intellectual and social foundations to serve extremist agendas. Bureaucratic rationalism and oppressive ideologies were used to abuse power and manipulate science. As we look to the future, we are reminded to learn from the past in order to create a future rooted in tolerance and mutual respect. The history of the Holocaust should serve as a call for moral vigilance and action toward a more human world.

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