

The Holocaust and Schindlerjuden in *Schindler's List* movie: A New Historicism Study

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Abstrak

Tujuan riset ini adalah memeriksa berapa banyak bagian history yang terdapat pada film dengan judul Schindler's List yang disutradarai oleh Steven Spielberg menggunakan teori Historicism yang baru dan teori Semiotic. Tujuan dari pembelajaran adalah : (1) menemukan latar belakang sejarah yang terdapat pada film, (2) menemukan relasi dari latar belakang sejarah yang terdapat pada film dengan sejarah sesungguhnya. Penulis menggunakan data qualitative dan metode deskriptive untuk membantu focus pada analisa dan interpretasi dari isi riset. Penulis menggunakan film sebagai sumber data utama dan untuk sumber data lainnya, penulis menggunakan data-data sejarah yang didapat dari journal-journal social, website-website dan buku-buku. Hasil dari riset ini menunjukkan bahwa meskipun terdapat sedikit perbedaan antara versi sejarah yang terdapat pada film dan sejarah sesungguhnya, film ini menunjukkan sejarah Holocaust dan Schindlerjuden. Terdapat simbol-simbol yang menggambarkan Holocaust dan Schindlerjuden yang terdapat pada film yang membantu penonton untuk mengerti jalan cerita dari film.

Kata kunci : *Historicism baru, Holocaust, Schindlerjuden*

Abstract

[Title: The Holocaust and Schindlerjuden in Schindler's List movie: A New Historicism Study] This research purpose is to examine how many portions of history are shown through the movie entitled Schindler's List directed by Steven Spielberg using New Historicism and Semiotic theory. The aim of the study are : (1) to find the historical background described in the selected movie, and (2) to find the relevance of the historical background portrayed in the selected movie to the real history. The writer used qualitative data research and descriptive method to help this study focuses on the analysis or interpretation of the content of the research. The writer used the movie itself as the first data source and for the second source the writer used the real history in today's society from journals, websites, or books. The result of this study shows that although there are minor differences between the actual movie and the real history, this movie manage to describe how the Holocaust and Schindlerjuden in history. There are symbols interpreting the Holocaust and Schindlerjuden in the movie that helps the audience to understand the meaning of the movie.

Keywords: *New Historicism, Holocaust, Schindlerjuden*

1. INTRODUCTION

The causes of a war are numerous and varied. There are a variety of reasons for a conflict and all of which can be complicatedly intertwined. World War II, also known as the Second World War, was a pivotal event in twentieth-century geopolitical history. It was the world's largest and deadliest war, involving more than 30 countries. The war began in 1939 and lasted six bloody years, was mostly started with discrimination of Germany against Jewish

people, and ended with millions of people being killed. Between 1939 and 1945, the German Nazi regime persecuted and murdered millions of European Jews. Since 1945, the term "Holocaust" has been used to describe the ideological and systematic persecution and mass murder of millions of Jews by the state. The Holocaust and the Second World War should not be forgotten because there are so many lessons to be learned from them.

Humans can learn from history by looking back at what has happened in the past and applying what they have learned to the present and future. In his book *What is History?* (1961), Richard Carr argued that history is an unending dialogue between the present and the past. Historians should probe historical events and actions in order to discover the interconnections of meaning and symbolic interaction that human actions have created. (Sherratt, 2006). However, a survey found that people in all 50 states have a widespread lack of knowledge about Nazi atrocities against Jews in the 1930s and 1940s. 11% of respondents believe Jews were responsible for the Holocaust and blame them. Only 12% believe they've ever heard the term "Holocaust." 10% believe the Holocaust did not occur, or are unsure whether it did or did not occur.

There are numerous works inspired by historical events that serve a variety of purposes, including the movie entitled *Schindler's List*. Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* is a historical movie based on the novel entitled *Schindler's Ark*, which was published in 1982. *Schindler's List* is a movie about the Holocaust and also about Oskar Schindler, a German industrialist and Nazi party member who owns a factory in Poland. After witnessing the persecution of Jews in Poland during World War II, the character plays an important role in saving Jews from death.

This study sets two statements of the problems: (1) How The Holocaust and Schindlerjuden depicted in *Schindler's List* and (2) How relevant The Holocaust and Schindlerjuden portrayed in *Schindler's List* to the real history. The followings are the objective of this study: (1) To find how The Holocaust and Schindlerjuden depicted in *Schindler's List* and (2) To find out the relevance of The Holocaust and Schindlerjuden portrayed in *Schindler's List* to the real history.

There are several previous studies to make this study arrangement easier and help to find and compare the areas of research that have not been studied by previous researchers. One of which is entitled *The New Historicism Approach: Pearl Harbor and The Great Raid* written by Sincerelyn Bongcawel Ganob. The study employs new historicism theory to illustrate and compare historical accounts from World War II, focusing on the incident in Hawaii's Pearl Harbor and the plight of both Filipinos and Americans. According to the findings, both movies' settings, characters, and plots aided in the integration of literature and history.

Following the previous study above, this study uses New Historicism theory by Stephen Greenblatt to analyze the historical account depicted in the movie. New Historicists believe that we must interpret events as products of our time and culture and we cannot look at history objectively. Society do not have clear access to any but the most basic facts of history...our understanding of what such facts mean...is strictly a matter of interpretation, not fact" (Tyson, 279). New Historicists believe that history and literary works are inextricably linked. As a result, New Historicists view literature in a broader historical context. The goal of New Historicism is to gain a better understanding of a work or text by looking at it in its historical context.

Semiotic theory also used to analyze the symbols in the movie related to the Holocaust and Schindlerjuden. Semiotics is the study of cultural signs and symbols. It is a theory which take a deeper look into the unconscious cultural patterns that shape consumer behavior and response to textual messages, thematic content, and still or video imagery. The signs themselves can take the form of drawings, paintings, or photographs, as well as words, sounds, and body language. Semiotics is a branch of psychology that investigates all forms of communication based on signs (Segers, 2000).

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The descriptive-qualitative approaches were used in the discussion of the chosen movie, *Schindler's List*, because the goal of this study is to determine how the Holocaust and Schindlerjuden are depicted in the movie. It is descriptive in that it describes the themes and historical context of the chosen movie, whereas the qualitative method investigates the why and how of decision-making rather than just the what, where, and when.

The primary sources of data for this study were signs and utterances from Steven Spielberg's movie *Schindler's List*. This study uses screenshots from the movie that contain significant signs that imply the statement of the problem, as well as the movie script to amplify and support the data collected. This study's secondary data source is real history from books, journals, and websites that is related to the history depicted in the movie. there are a variety of methods and techniques to use.

Some actions were taken to analyze the data collected in order to see how relevant the history of The Holocaust and Schindlerjuden in the movie was to real history. The first step is to classify the identified data, which are the signs or symbols from the movie that are relevant to the problem statement. The next step is to interpret the signs that have been collected using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. Then, using the New Historicism method, compare the data collected, namely the history depicted in the movie, to real history.

3. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

The findings and discussion of this study will be divided into two discussions which according to what has been written in the method previous research. The first discussion will discuss the portrayal of the holocaust in the movie and the real history and

the second discussion will discuss the portrayal of the Schindlerjuden in the movie and the real history.

A. The Portrayal of The Holocaust in *Schindler's List* and History

The affliction of Jews begin with the implementation of Edict 44/91 which the Jews were ordered to register all family members and relocate to major cities. The movie starts with a coloured scene showing a Jewish family praying and several candles placed on the table.

The scene becomes black and white as the camera moves in closer to observe the candle's final breath. The candles in this scene can be interpreted as a sign or symbol of what is to come with the Jews later on. Where a flame represents peace at first, it later represents the burning of bodies, as seen in the smoke from the Auschwitz crematorium chimney, an image that Spielberg repeats (Mattia, 2017).

In the movie, Jews were also compelled to use armbands and badge figured the Star of David. According to Skolnik and Barenbaum (2009), the Jews badge had vanished in Western Europe around the 18th century until the coming of the French Revolution and Jewish emancipation in the 19th century. The badge was then reintroduced by German authorities as an important part of their effort to persecute and eventually exterminate Europe's Jewish population. Not only was the badge used to humiliate and stigmatize Jews, but it was also used to segregate them and monitor and regulate their movements. Those who fail or refuse to wear the armbands and badges risk severe punishment or even death, according to the movie.

According to College of Liberal Arts (n.d.), Nazi atrocities against Jews began as soon as they invaded Poland in 1939. The Nazis were looking for a way to exterminate Europe's Jewish population by killing a large number of people in a short period of time by the early 1940s. The Nazis' policy shifted to focusing on Jews and their belongings. They descended upon the streets of Germany and Austria, destroying and looting Jewish shops, homes, and synagogues, as well as arresting an estimated 30,000 men. The new regime's first targets were the Jewish men. They were kidnapped for forced labor, and some were never seen or heard from again. (Cohen, 2006).



Figure 1.
Jews Badge “Star of David”
00:19:23



Figure 2.
Nazi’s Mass Arson
02:09:32

The horrors and crimes committed by the Nazis did not end there. When Chujowa Gorka was exterminated in 1944, the Nazis were instructed to exhume and burn the bodies of almost 10,000 Jews who died in the murder. The surviving Jews were compelled to dig up the dead and burn them. It's also depicted in the movie in the scene below.



Figure 3. People Queuing
02:30:55

During the Holocaust, the Nazis did many things to torture or get rid of Jews. Starting from building concentration camps to serve as "death camps" and create an "industrial massacre" against the Jews. Until finally, Nazi Germany planned what was called the "Final Solution" which referred to their attempt to exterminate the Jewish people. The Germans orchestrated and carried out the "Final Solution" by murdering Europe's Jews. They assassinated Jews by enacting policies that in hunger, illness, and sporadic acts of terrorism. In the movie, it is shown Jewish people who presumed were ordered to enter the poison gas chamber. Toxic gas chambers are tightly closed rooms with chemically produced pure carbon monoxide gas.

The Nazis had a policy of mass murdering civilians, primarily Jews, since the outset of the conflict. Initially, the Nazis planned to hang and shoot Jews, but these tactics were discovered to be excessively slow and ineffectual. This strategy evolved into Hitler's "final solution," the annihilation of the Jewish people. They started using gas chambers as their primary means of execution. To make the process more efficient, crematoriums were built on top of the gas chambers. The Nazis massacred almost three million Jews in extermination camps. The "Final Solution" resulted in the killing of around six million Jews.

B. The Portrayal of Schindlerjuden in *Schindler's List* and History

This movie, set during World War II, not only depicts the bleakness of the time when Germany managed to invade Poland, but also focuses on Oskar Schindler, a German

businessman who initially intended to use the war for personal gain but ended up saving Jews from German atrocities. As a result, this chapter will focus on Oskar Schindler's process of saving Jews. The name Schindlerjuden refers to approximately 1,100 Jews who survived the Holocaust as a result of working for Oskar Schindler's ammunition company. Despite the fact that Schindler initially only wanted to use Jews and had no intention of saving them, his heart was moved to help the Jews after witnessing Nazi Germany's atrocities against Jews right in front of him.

Schindler first appears in the movie with a Nazi badge pinned to his left chest. Schindler is a Czechoslovakian businessman who came to Poland with the goal of establishing an iron factory to manufacture kitchen utensils and war equipment. Schindler wanted to take advantage of the Jews' ability to

work in his factory in order to reduce the amount of money he spent on wages and increase the amount of money he made. As a result, Schindler is portrayed as a greedy and manipulative character from the beginning of the movie. Schindler went to a party attended by high-ranking Nazi officials with a Nazi badge on his left chest, neat hair, expensive suits, and a lot of money to build relationships with Nazi officials and get military support to start building his factory.

The Schindler company ran smoothly thanks to Itzhak Stern's hard work, a Jewish accountant named who help him find Jewish investors and workers. Schindler appeared to thrive in his surroundings at first, according to the World Holocaust Remembrance Center. He took over an enamelware factory that had previously belonged to a Jew. Then, with the help of his accountant, he began to build his fortune. Schindler had almost 800 men and women working for him by the end of 1942, 370 of whom were Jews from the ghetto that the Germans had established when they entered the city. Schindler started by

converting his factory into a sub-camp of a newly constructed labor camp. Schindler and his wife Emilie, according to Canadian journalist Herbert Steinhouse, never slept in their luxurious villa in Brinnlitz. They preferred to sleep in a small room in the factory because Schindler was well aware of the Jews' apprehensions about the SS.

The ghetto was liquidated shortly after that. Schindler noticed a little girl dressed in a red coat at that time. He sees her from a high vantage point on a hill and is almost completely absorbed by her, oblivious to the surrounding violence.



Figure 4.

A Little Girl in A Red Coat
01:05:38 - 01:06:43

When Schindler first sees her, he is forced to confront the horrors of Jewish life during the Holocaust, as well as his own role in that horror. She represents the innocence of the Jews being slaughtered to Schindler. Schindler's face appeared to be changing, becoming heavier and more sad.

Aside from the candles, the little girl in the red coat is Schindler's List's most visible symbol. The little girl's red coat evokes the "red flag" that Jews waved at Allied powers as a plea for assistance during World War II. The little girl walks through the evacuation's violence as if she doesn't notice it, oblivious to the carnage around her. Her oblivion echoes the Allied powers' failure to assist in the rescue of the Jews. Her death symbolizes the death of innocence, as Schindler discovers her in a pile of exhumed dead bodies.

Schindler began saving Jews by handing over his property to the Nazis, including cigarettes, matches, watches, gold, and everything else he owned, in order to atone for the Jews who had been forced to work in Nazi concentration camps. However, many movie reviews have criticized the historical inaccuracy depicted in the movie, particularly regarding the real Schindler. Schindler was a hedonist and a gambler by nature. Schindler lives a lavish lifestyle, philandering with beautiful Polish women and partying late into the night. The only difference between Schindler and other war profiteers was the way he treated his employees, particularly Jews. Schindler would claim the exemption for his workers who would be deported to Auschwitz, as depicted in the movie. Even though he knew he was endangering his own life, Schindler was willing to falsify records, register children, housewives, and lawyers as mechanics and metalworkers, and cover as much as he could for unqualified or temporarily incapacitated workers (World Holocaust Remembrance Center, n.d.).

According to Tabazcnik (2013), the Nazis realized they couldn't keep the war going in the spring of 1943, so they ordered the ghettos to be liquidated, which amounted to mass genocide. Schindler then requested permission from the German government to build a barracks on the grounds of his factory so that his employees would not have to spend another day in the ghetto and, more importantly, their lives would be saved. Building a barracks, Schindler told the government, would help the war effort because the factory would be more efficient and the workers' commute to and from the ghetto would be shorter. Schindler typed the list of 1,100 Jews he claimed as his workers who traveled to Brännlitz in October 1944 using names provided by Jewish Ghetto Police officer.

After awhile, Schindler's workers are complete. They were taken to the Schindler factory and worked there until the war ended.

According to Facing History and Ourselves (n.d), Schindler used his money and prestige to transport those workers to a new factory he was constructing at Brinnlitz, Czechoslovakia. This support the scene in the movie, when the Jewish women who worked in his factory were transported to Auschwitz by mistake, he accomplished the impossible: He managed to get the women back by offering Nazi officials a fortune in bribe. According to the movie, the war ended shortly after that and the Jews were finally free from Nazi Germany. After the Allied victory, Schindler is a hunted war criminal. When the workers hear he must flee, they make him the ring as a small token of their appreciation, knowing that there is no way to repay the gift of life. A gold ring contained a quotation inside that is from Talmud, "Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire".

4. CONCLUSION

This study moves on to the next chapter, which is the conclusion. After analyzing Steven Spielberg's Schindler's List using New Historicism theory, there are two conclusion that are obtained. First, with its black and white cinematography, Schindler's List succeeds in capturing the main idea of how the situation and conditions during the Holocaust occurred. Details such as how Jews lived in the ghetto, what haunted them every day, the pain that all of the innocent people were going through, and how Nazis treated Jews were all depicted in this movie in an engaging manner.

Second, this movie also depicted how a German businessman who profited from the war eventually became a hero who saved hundreds of Jews. It is reported how Schindler bribed the Nazis with all of his assets in order to spare hundreds of Jews, until he ultimately prepared a list with the names of his Jewish workers so that they may be saved from the Nazis. Schindler's List is a somber depiction of events during the Holocaust, but also highlighting some of the humanity that remained.

However, the Holocaust and Schindlerjuden are well represented in the movie with the actual facts in today's history. There are some minor differences in the movie's history and the original history, according to the author's study. For example, how the director of the movie chose to improving the portrayal of the main movie character. This movie, on the other hand, has been highly effective in providing knowledge about the Holocaust and Schindlerjuden. Given the director's stated goal of teaching, Schindler's List may be utilized as a medium of learning to help people comprehend what the Holocaust is and what happened during it.

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