

# Spielberg vs. Tarantino - Hollywood and the Past

by

**Gilad Atzmon**

on

[Counter Punch](#)



History is commonly regarded as an attempt to produce a structured account of the past. It proclaims to tell us what really happened, but in most cases it fails to do that. Instead it is set to conceal our shame, to hide those various elements, events, incidents and occurrences in our past which we cannot cope with. History, therefore, can be regarded as a system of concealment. Accordingly, the role of the true historian is similar to that of the psychoanalyst: both aim to unveil the repressed. For the psychoanalyst, it is the unconscious mind. For the historian, it is our collective shame.

Yet, one may wonder, how many historians really engage in such a task? How many historians are



courageous enough to open the Pandora Box? How many historians are brave enough to challenge Jewish History for real? How many historians dare to ask why Jews? Why do Jews suffer time after time? Is it really the Goyim who are inherently murderous, or is there something unsettling in Jewish culture or collectivism? But Jewish history is obviously far from being alone here: every people's past is, in fact, as problematic. Can Palestinians really explain to themselves how is it that after more than a decade of struggle, they wake up to find out that their current capital has become a NGO haven largely funded by George Soros' Open Society? Can the Brits once and for all look in the mirror and explain to themselves why, in their Imperial Wars Museum, they erected a Holocaust exhibition dedicated to the destruction of the Jews? Shouldn't the Brits be slightly more courageous and look into one of the many Shoas they themselves inflicted on others? Clearly they have an impressive back catalogue to choose from.

### **The Guardian vs. Athens**

The past is dangerous territory; it can induce inconvenient stories. This fact alone may explain why the true Historian is often presented as a public enemy. However, the Left has invented an academic method to tackle the issue. The "progressive" historian functions to produce a "politically correct", "inoffensive" tale of the past. By means of zigzagging, it navigates its way, while paying its dues to the concealed and producing endless ad-hoc deviations that leave the "repressed" untouched. The progressive subject is there to produce a "non- essentialist" and "unoffending" account of the past at the expense of the so-called "reactionary". The Guardian is an emblem of such an approach, it would, for instance, ban any criticism of Jewish culture or Jewishness, yet it provides a televised platform for two rabid Zionist so they can discuss Arab culture and Islamism. The Guardian wouldn't mind offending "Islamists" or British "nationalists" but it would be very careful not to hurt any Jewish sensitivities. Such version of politics or the past is impervious to truthfulness, coherence, consistency or integrity. In fact, the progressive discourse is far from being "the guardian of the truth", it is actually set as "the guardian of the discourse" and I am referring here to Left discourse in particular.

But surely there is an alternative to the "progressive" attitude to the past. The true historian is actually a philosopher – an essentialist – a thinker who posits the question "what does it mean to be in the world and what does it take to live amongst others"? The true historian transcends beyond the singular, the particular and the personal. He or she is searching for the condition of the possibility of that which drives our past, present and future. The true historian dwells on Being and Time, he or she is searching for a humanist lesson and an ethical insight while looking into the poem, the art, the beauty, the reason but also into the fear. The true historian is an essentialist who digs out the concealed, for he or she knows that the repressed is the kernel of the truth.

Leo Strauss provides us with a very useful insight in that regard. Western civilization, he contends, oscillates between two intellectual and spiritual poles – Athens and Jerusalem. Athens — the birthplace of democracy, home for reason, philosophy, art and science. Jerusalem — the city of God where God's law prevails. The philosopher, the true historian, or the essentialist, for that matter, is obviously the Athenian. The Jerusalemite, in that regard, is "the guardian of the discourse", the one who keeps the gate, just to maintain law and order at the expense of ecstasies, poesis, beauty, reason and truth.

### **Spielberg vs. Tarantino**

Hollywood provides us with an insight into this oscillation between Athens and Jerusalem: between the Jerusalemite "guardian of the discourse" and the Athenian contender – the "essentialist" public enemy. On the Left side of the map we find Steven Spielberg, the "progressive" genius. On his Right we meet poesis itself, Quentin Tarantino, the "essentialist".

Spielberg, provides us with the ultimate sanitized historical epic. The facts are cherry picked just to produce a pre meditated pseudo ethical tale that maintains the righteous discourse, law and order but, most importantly, the primacy of Jewish suffering (Schindler's List and Munich). Spielberg brings to life a grand epic with a clear retrospective take on the past. Spielberg's tactic is, in most cases, pretty simple. He would juxtapose a vivid transparent binary opposition: Nazis vs. Jews, Israelis vs.

Palestinians , North vs. South, Righteousness vs. Slavery. Somehow, we always know, in advance who are the baddies and who are the goodies. We clearly know who to side with.

Binary opposition is indeed a safe route. It provides a clear distinction between the "Kosher" and the "forbidden". But Spielberg is far from being a banal mind. He also allows a highly calculated and carefully meditated oscillation. In a universalist gesture of courtesy he would let a single Nazi into the family of the kind. He would allow the odd Palestinian to be a victim. It can all happen as long as the main frame of the discourse remains intact. Spielberg is clearly an arch guardian of discourse – being a master of his art-form, he will certainly maintain your attention for at least 90 minutes of a historic cinematic cocktail made of factual mishmash. All you have to do is to follow the plot to the end. By then the pre-digested ethical message is safely replanted at the hub of your self-loving narcissistic universe.

Unlike Spielberg, Tarantino is not concerned with factuality; he may even repel historicity. Tarantino may as well believe that the notion of "the message" or morality are over rated. Tarantino is an essentialist, he is interested in human nature, in Being and he seems to be fascinated in particular in vengeance and its universality. For the obvious reasons, his totally farfetched Inglorious Bastards throws light on present Israeli collective blood thirstiness as being detected at the time of Operation Cast lead. The fictional cinematic creation of a revengeful murderous WWII Jewish commando unit is there to throw the light on the devastating contemporary reality of Jewish lobbies' lust for violence in their relentless push for a world war against Iran and beyond. But Inglorious Bastards may as well have a universal appeal because the Old Testament's "eye for an eye" has become the Anglo American political driving force in the aftermath of 9/11.

### **Abe'le vs. Django**

What may seem a spiritual clash between Jerusalemite Spielberg and Athenian Tarantino is more than apparent in their recent works.

The history of slavery in America is indeed a problematic topic and, for obvious reasons, many aspects of this chapter are still kept deeply within the domain of the concealed. Once again Spielberg and Tarantino have produced distinctively different accounts of this chapter.

In his recent historical epic Lincoln, Spielberg, made Abraham Lincoln into a Neocon "moral interventionist" who against all (political) odds, abolished slavery. I guess that Spielberg knows enough American history to gather that his cinematic account is a crude Zigzag attempt, for the anti slavery political campaign was a mere pretext for a bloody war driven by clear economical objectives.

As one may expect, Spielberg peppers his tale with more than a few genuine historical anecdotes. He is certainly paying the necessary dues just to keep the shame shoved deep under the carpet. His Lincoln is cherished as a morally driven hero of human brotherhood. And the entire plot carries all the symptoms of contemporary AIPAC lobby assault within the Capitol. Being one of the arch guardians of the discourse, Spielberg has successfully fulfilled his task. He added a substantial cinematic layer to ensure that America's true shame remains deeply repressed or shall we say, untouched.

Needles to mention that Spielberg's take on Lincoln has been cheered by the Jewish press. They called the president Avraham Lincoln Avinu (our father, Hebrew) in The Tablet Magazine. "Avraham", according to the Tablet, is the definitive good Jew. "As imagined by Spielberg and Kushner, Lincoln's Lincoln is the ultimate mensch. He is a skilled natural psychologist, an interpreter of dreams, and a man blessed with an extraordinarily clever and subtle legal mind." In short, Spielberg's Lincoln is Abe'le who combines the skills, the gift and the traits of Moses, Freud as well as Alan Dershowitz. However, some Jews complain about the film. "As an American Jewish historian, writes Lance J. Sussman, "I'm afraid I have to say I am somewhat disappointed with the latest Spielberg film. So much of it is so good, but it would have been even better if he had put at least one Jew in the movie, somewhere."



I guess that Spielberg may find it hard to please the entire tribe. Quentin Tarantino, however, doesn't even try. Tarantino is, in fact, doing the complete opposite. Through a phantasmic epic that confesses zero interest in any form of historicity or factuality whatsoever, he manages, in his latest masterpiece *Django Unchained*, to dig out the darkest secrets of Slavery. He scratches the concealed and judging by the reaction of another cinematic genius Spike Lee, he has clearly managed to get pretty deep.

By putting into play a stylistic spectacle within the Western genre Tarantino manages to dwell on every aspect we are advised to leave untouched. He deals with biological determinism, White supremacy and cruelty. But he also turns his lens onto slaves' passivity, subservience and collaboration. The Athenian director builds here a set of Greek mythological God like characters; Django (Jamie Fox), is the unruly king of revenge and Schultz (Christoph Waltz) the German dentist turned bounty hunter is the master of wit, kindness and humanity with a giant wisdom tooth shining over his caravan. Calvin Candie (Leonardo DiCaprio) is the Hegelian (racist) Master and Stephen (Samuel L. Jackson) is the Hegelian Slave, emerging as the personification of social transformation. To a certain extent, the relationships between Candie and Stephen could be seen as one of the most profound yet subversive cinematic takes on Hegel's master-slave dialectic.

In Hegel's dialectic two self-consciousnesses are constituted via a process of mirroring. In *Django Unchained*, Stephen the slave, seems to convey the ultimate form of subservience, yet this is merely on the surface. In reality Stephen is way more sophisticated and observant than his master Candie. He is on his way up. It is hard to determine whether Stephen is a collaborator or if he really runs the entire show. And yet in Tarantino's latest, Hegel's dialectic is, somehow, compartmentalized. Django, once unchained, is clearly impervious to the Hegelian dialectic spiel. His incidental liberation induces in him a true spirit of relentless resilience. When it comes to it, he kills the Master, the Slave and everyone else who happens to be around, he bends every rule including the "rules of nature" (biological determinism). By the time the epic is over, Django leaves behind a wreckage of the Candie's plantation, the cinematic symbol of the dying old South and the "Master Slave Dialectic". Yet, as Django rides on a horse towards the rising sun together with his free wife Broomhilda von Shaft (Kerry Washington), we are awakened to the far fetched cinematic fantasy. In reality, I mean the world out of the cinema, the Candie's plantation would, in all likelihood, remain intact and Django would probably be chained up again. In practice, Tarantino cynically juxtaposes the dream (the cinematic reality) and reality (as we know it). By doing so he manages to illuminate the depth of misery that is entangled with the human condition and in Black reality in America in particular.

Tarantino is certainly not a "guardian of the discourse". Quite the opposite, he is the bitterest enemy of stagnation. As in his previous works, his latest spectacle is an essentialist assault on correctness and "self-love". Tarantino indeed turns over many stones and unleashes many vipers into the room. Yet being a devout Athenian he doesn't intend to produce a single answer or a moral lesson. He leaves us perplexed yet cheerful. For Tarantino, I guess, dilemma is the existential essence. Spielberg, on, the other hand, provides all the necessary answers. After all, within the "progressive" politically-correct discourse, it is the answers that determine, in retrospective, what questions we are entitled to raise.

If Leo Strauss is correct and Western civilization should be seen as an oscillation between Athens and Jerusalem, truth must be said - we can really do with many more Athenians and their essentialist reflections. In short, we are in a desperate need of many more Tarantinos to counter Jerusalem and its ambassadors.