

COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN HISTORICAL HOLOCAUST FICTION FILMS:  
A COMPARATIVE FILM ANALYSIS AND CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF  
*SCHINDLER'S LIST* AND *DARA OF JASENOVAC*

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## Introduction

Historical fiction films are utilized to establish collective memory, and influence audiences. The film genre accounts for its psychological effect on viewers as it produces a collective historical experience. Two notable historical-fiction films based on true stories of the Holocaust—released twenty-eight years apart—are Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993) and Predrag Antonijevic’s *Dara of Jasenovac* (2021). Both films are structured around their protagonists—who are profoundly similar and different —*Schindler’s List* follows Oskar Schindler, a German Nazi profiteer, who famously arranged to save the lives of his Jewish workers. In comparison *Dara of Jasenovac* is a narrative based on the experience of a young girl held captive in Croatia’s largest concentration camp operated by the fascist forces during the Second World War.

The purpose of this paper is firstly to provide a comparative film analysis of the background and genre conventions based on two scenes, the opening and the closing, in the films *Schindler’s List* and *Dara of Jasenovac*. Drawing upon research by academic Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska and Paul Grainge along with several other academics, the research argues that films are an integral part in understanding collective Holocaust memory. The comparative film analysis utilizes Erving Goffman’s (1974) framing theory to analyze cinematic elements such as setting, lighting/color, narrative and sound/music. In the research, it is considered how the films are influenced by political, geographic, and time-related contexts which could affect the depiction of historical storytelling. Along with the considerations, framing theory is utilized to compare the cinematic elements to understand how Holocaust film production has evolved in the past twenty-eight years.

Secondly, a critical discourse analysis is conducted based on the reception of *Schindler’s List* and *Dara of Jasenovac*. Analysis of the responses is conducted after the international release

of both films. There is a specific focus on Western, mainly of the United States, press and academic reception. The research analyzes acclaimed magazines such as *Variety Magazine*, *The Jewish Chronicle*, and *Deadline Magazine* which generate the reception from popular Western publications. The research also analyzes credible scholarly articles which have been published in academic journals. The research draws upon Stuart Hall's (1974) reception theory to analyze the critical reception of the two films using written language responses by the journalists, and scholars. Through critical discourse analysis, there is a documentation of the cultural and social norms that shape the reception of the films, and the underlying power dynamics. In the research, there is an acknowledgment regarding how the film production, distribution and time of the release could affect the reception of the two films.

The purpose of the research is to understand and compare the impact of the two films on collective Holocaust knowledge, memory and consciousness. Empirically, there is limited knowledge of the individual reception of Holocaust films which depict victims outside of the central Jewish narrative. Research regarding Holocaust victims such as the Serbian, Roma, and numerous other victimized Holocaust minority groups have limited media and academic coverage. As a result, this article presents key findings from a qualitative study of the cinematic elements and critical responses to *Dara of Jasenovac* in comparison to *Schindler's List*. The discussion focuses on the 'voice' and 'visibility' of each of the films in the Western imagination.

In conclusion, the research argues that *Schindler's List* has been received positively by Western audiences and is considered as a Hollywood classic which depicts a central narrative line of the Holocaust. In comparison *Dara of Jasenovac* is a minoritarian, Eastern European feature, which is regarded as a controversial narrative of the Holocaust and has been rejected by Western audiences. To justify this argument, the reasoning for the positive reception of

*Schindler's List* in comparison to the negative reception of *Dara of Jasenovac* is because of the time of release, narrative focus, and setting.

## **Literature Review**

### **Collective Memory**

Numerous academics regard collective memory as referring to the shared memories, knowledge and information by a large group of individuals. The philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs was the first scholar to write about the concept of collective memory in his academic seminal works, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925). In his academic works, Halbwachs discusses the term "communicative memory," which are shared representations of a group's past based on a common identity (Radstone, S., et al. 2010). In context to Halbwachs work, scholars Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz discuss social psychological approaches of collective memory and address their functions (Radstone, S., et al. 2010). Furthermore, Radstone and Schwarz argue that collective memory impacts how historical fiction films are discussed in media studies.

### **Memory Studies and Traumatic Pasts**

Past scholars have regarded the field of memory studies in relation to cultural history, social psychology, media archaeology, political philosophy, and comparative literature. In *Traumatic pasts, literary afterlives, and transcultural memory: new directions of literary and media memory studies*, scholar Astrid Erll defines the study of 'traumatic pasts', as i.e., representations of war and violence in literature and other media regarding the sociocultural aspects of those specific past events (Erll, 2011). According to Erll, traumatic pasts focus on memory, and on the representation of specific events within chronological, geographical, and media settings (Erll, 2011). From Astrid Erll's study, the terms 'cultural memory' and collective

memory are understood as a theoretical perspective which connects historical literature and media studies closely to interdisciplinary research within the humanities and social sciences (Erl, 2011).

### **History Versus Collective Memory**

Numerous scholars agree that history should broadly provide a comprehensive, accurate, and unbiased portrayal of past events (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008). Many scholars also agree that historical media should include the representation and comparison of multiple perspectives to provide a complete and accurate depiction of a historical event (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008). In contrast, collective memory focuses on a single perspective, for instance, the perspective of one social group, nation, or community (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008). Consequently, collective memory represents past events as associated with the values, narratives and biases specific to a particular group of people (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008).

Studies have found that people from different socio-cultural backgrounds can have major differences in their recollections of the past. In a study conducted by James V. Wertsch (2008) in which American and Russian students were instructed to recall significant events from World War II, as a result the events which were recalled by the American and Russian students were not similar. Differences in political views towards the Civil War, World War II and the Iraq War have also been found in many scholarly studies comparing collective memory between nation groups. Studies like these have differentiated collective memory in history.

### **The Effect of Cinema on Collective Memory**

Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska defines Maurice Halbwachs's term for "collective memory", synonymous for "cultural mythology" or "national imaginary", as shared memories of a group about its history and identity (Saryusz-Wolska, 2020). Saryusz-Wolska further states that the

collective memory of a group such as a nation is but one component of that mythology or “imaginary.” Fiction films such as *Memento* (2000), and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) and documentaries such as *Waltz with Bashir* (2008) highlight the degree to which personal and collective memories are in part constitutive of our identities. Collective memories, as they figure within cultural mythologies, are similarly constitutive of the identity of any tribe or affiliation, be it a nation, ethnicity, family, gang, club, political party, or other institution (Saryusz-Wolska, 2020).

In *The Unbearable Lightness of Bones: Memory, Emotion, and Pedagogy in Patricio Guzmán’s Chile, La Memoria Obstinada and Nostalgia De La Luz*, scholar Brad Epps writes about the importance of time memory. Past historical events become central to the interplay of memory and history, pedagogy and emotion (Epps, 2016). In his research, Epps discusses the novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, which is based upon the collective memory of Europeans who lived through wars and famine. Epps often references academic Patrick Blaine, who remarks that historical memory is “antithetical to the ideology of neoliberalism, which depends on ‘forced obsolescence,’ creating a present essentially devoid of substantial meaning’ a present in which the past, reduced to a store of fetishized images and preprocessed emotions, matters not” (Epps, 2016).

### **Historical-Fiction Film**

In *The Framework of Reception: Public Responses to Historical Fiction Films*, academic Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska defines “historical fiction film” as fictionalized accounts of history in a moving-image medium that purports to tell a true story about or provide a historically ostensible account of the past and dates to early film history,” (Saryusz-Wolska, 2020). Other terms for historical fiction utilized by scholars are “docudrama” and “dramatic documentary”, all

referring to a hybrid genre that consists of fiction and nonfiction narratives (Ebbrecht, 2007). Saryusz-Wolska explains how historical fiction films are culturally significant when they cover issues that have become silent and then amplified due to current events. Saryusz-Wolska exemplifies this notion through the film *Just Mercy* (2019), a film about racial injustice and the exoneration of a black man falsely convicted of murder, which, at the time of this writing, has become an important subject matter in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States (Saryusz-Wolska, 2020).

Many scholars have questioned and criticized Hollywood's depiction of historical events in films for being unrealistic. For example, British historian Geoff Eley discusses how historical fiction film focuses on the profit from eliciting the audience's emotional response rather than the accuracy of the information displayed (Eley, 2001). However, he juxtaposes himself by stating that there is a growing belief that Hollywood can contribute to the study of world history through more accurate accounts of storytelling (Eley, 2001). Despite critique, social scientist Benjamin Justice argues the overarching themes in film narrative and treatment of characters are vital documentation of history which is reflected in popular culture. These beliefs, aspirations, and biases of the generation to which it caters (Justice, 2003). Because of this, a study of film can be exceedingly beneficial for those who wish to study major trends in social history (Justice, 2003). Justice concludes that historical fiction films provide indelible images of some of the twentieth century's great events (Justice, 2003). Many historical film scholars agree that filmmakers focus on social and cultural history, which provides historical evidence and records.

### **History of Holocaust Films**

According to academic, Kathleen H Cross, the Holocaust film genre did not become popular until after 1961, following the trial of key Nazi bureaucrat, Adolf Eichmann (Cross,

2014). Eichmann's highly publicized trial delivered universal media exposure about the realities of the Holocaust (Cross, 2014). Following the revelation of new Holocaust information, many films, varying from documentaries to art-house films and to Hollywood blockbusters, have been released on the subject (Cross, 2014). Each film offers its own unique insight, and perspective of the Holocaust. Cross describes modern Holocaust films, which have been produced in the twenty-first century, as having a new audience because the individuals who had experienced the Holocaust first-hand are diminishing (Cross, 2014). This is inevitably leading to a shift in the broad understanding of the Holocaust away from personal recollections and toward collective memory.

One of the most prominent concerns over the making of Holocaust films is that the dead might be dishonored or disrespected by their representations. In response to this concern, author Aaron Kerner writes about a set of three rules that have implicitly guided much of the critical body of Holocaust films to date. The first of these rules is that the Holocaust must be treated as an entirely unique event and a special case in history (Kerner, 2011). The second rule is that representations of the Holocaust should be as true to the facts and events of the Holocaust as possible and should avoid manipulations (Kerner, 2011). The final rule guiding Holocaust films is that the Holocaust should be treated as a solemn and sacred event (Kerner, 2011). Kerner's rules have been integrated in Holocaust film production as guiding principles for Holocaust films that seek to be respectful and non-- offensive in their representations by numerous scholars and film directors.

### **Western Holocaust Film Versus Eastern Holocaust Film Victimhood**

Academic Laurence Baron discusses the entry of the Holocaust into American cinema, citing *The Young Lions* (1958) and *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959) as the first Hollywood



dramatizations of the topic (Baron, 2010). Baron accounts the first emergence of Holocaust films as being heavily directed by Western directors and mainly focused on Jewish victims while having excluded other ethnic groups who were heavily victimized during the Second World War (Baron, 2010). Scholar Karel C. Berkhoff references the victimized minority groups, (Slavs, Roma, etc.) as being present in the Eastern cinema and often misrepresented in Western cinema. Many Eastern scholars have noted that the Jewish population have responded to persecution and dispersal with a monumental industry of remembrance. While other minority groups such as the Roma have been eliminated from Holocaust cinema.

### **Historical Fiction Film in Academia**

Most traditional universities include film studies or media studies as part of a broader humanities curriculum. In academia, film studies have become increasingly applicable in recent historical scholarships. For example, publications such as the *American Historical Review* and the *Journal of American History* regularly include film reviews as well as scholarly articles focusing on cinema. Scholars such as Robert Rosenstone and Robert Brent Toplin have written studies of film and history by examining the role film plays in modern memory. Scholarly journals such as *Film & History*, edited by Peter Rollins and founded by John O'Connor, also demonstrate that film is an artifact which deserves the serious attention of historians.

Over the last twenty-five years Robert Rosenstone has been a key academic in the shaping of an important new field of study dedicated to exploring the relationship between film and history. His work spans a period from the early 1980s (he began teaching a f to the present and culminates in the summary work, *History on Film/Film on History* (2006). His research is an analysis of how film has irrecoverably changed our historical consciousness.

### **History of Film Critic**

Examples of film criticism date back to the late 1800s, this is when publications like *The Optical Lantern*, *Cinematograph Journal* and the *Bioscope* began to include full-text film reviews as a regular feature (Battaglia, 2010). According to academic James Battagila, critique was an art form and an opportunity for the critic to write insightful comments of the film in the context of a review. Since there would usually be only one reviewer per local paper, that individual's opinion held great sway over the viewers in the area—it wasn't too easy to get a second opinion. Movies, like restaurants and hotels, were rated with stars, and a four-or-five-star rating was a sign of a worthwhile film (Battaglia, 2010). In the early 1900s, a film commentary industry began to emerge (Battaglia, 2010). *The Optical Lantern and Cinematograph Journal* was one of the first examples of a cinema trade paper (Battagila, 2010).

### **Rise of the Film Critic**

Over the twentieth century, several film critics rose to national prominence, both for their astute writing and occasionally audacious criticism. Particularly famous critics include Andrew Sarris, Pauline Kael, Manny Farber, Peter Travers, Gene Siskel, and Roger Ebert. (Battaglia, 2010). Until his death, Roger Ebert remained the biggest name in movie criticism of the modern age and cemented in the mind of viewers the value of ratings and recommendations.

Beginning in the early 1920s, select publications started offering film commentary that treated the medium as more than just entertainment. For the first time, writers judged films based on their entertainment value and artistic merit (Battaglia, 2010). According to Battaglia, many prominent newspapers began employing film critics in this time, and the public was finally introduced to serious film criticism. By the mid-1940s, film criticism had evolved. This new genre of criticism was heavy, and personal (Battaglia, 2010). This style of film criticism caught on in highbrow magazines like *Time*, *The Nation*, and *The New Yorker* over the next two decades

as film finally achieved what many consider the pinnacle of its recognition as an artistic medium with the emergence of auteur theory in the 1960s (Battaglia, 2010). Critics like James Agee, Andrew Sarris, and Pauline Kael surfaced as trusted voices in a sea of opinion (Battaglia, 2010). The Internet has made reviews more democratized. Blogs and review sites such as Rotten Tomatoes, were created so that the common viewer of a film could publicize their opinion with others. Rather than there being any single authoritative voice on what movies are worth watching, publications such as *Rotten Tomatoes* allowed the public to be the film critic.

### **Film Criticism Versus Film Theory in Academia**

Many scholars regard the phrase "film criticism" can apply to academic articles and short reviews designed for mass audiences. According to academic Stephan Heath et al, the term "film theory" applies exclusively to the academic study of film, which approaches criticism as part of a broader context of a film's legacy and its connection to film history (Heath et al., 1982). Heath et al regard academic film publications as longer than a newspaper review, but notably smaller audiences consume them—sometimes limited to fellow film theorists (Heath et al., 1982).

While numerous film scholars agree that the terms "review" and "criticism" are often used interchangeably, there are several differences between them. According to the University of Vermont's library film research principles, film criticism is considered as the study, interpretation, and evaluation of a film and its place in cinema history. Film criticism, as defined by the University of Vermont, offers interpretation of its meaning, analysis of its structure and style, judgement of its worth by comparison with other films, and an estimation of its likely effect on viewers. Film theory (e.g. feminist, postmodernist, etc.) often informs the critical analysis of a film. Criticism may examine a particular film or may look at a group of films in the same genre, or a director's or actor's body of work. Another reason, film criticism differs from

movie reviews in several ways: it entails both analysis and judgement; it may be published many years after a film is released; it is usually longer and more complex than a movie review.

A film review documents the critical reception of a film at its time of theatrical or dvd release. It is more "consumer-oriented," placing more emphasis on recommendation than analysis. Reviews of feature films or mainstream films may be found in online databases, newspapers, and general interest magazines (e.g. *New York Times*, *Village Voice*, *Cineaste*). In-depth criticism and analyses of some feature films or mainstream films, foreign films, independent films, documentaries, etc. may be found in more scholarly or academic publications (e.g. *Film Quarterly*, *Cinema Journal*, *Film International*).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The two primary theories that guide the research paper are Erving Goffman's (1974) "Framing Theory" and Stuart Hall's "Reception Theory" (1971).

#### **Framing Theory**

Goffman describes framing theory as being able to regulate the audience's perception of the intended meaning of the media (PERSSON, 2020). As media plays an important role in audience perception, the content must be framed with values as it influences and controls the audience (PERSSON, 2020).

#### **Applications**

The concept media frame is at the center of a dynamic research program in communication (PERSSON, 2020). A media frame is a written, spoken, graphical, or visual message modality that a communicator uses to contextualize a topic, such as a person, event, episode, or issue, within a text transmitted to receivers by means of mediation (PERSSON,

2020). The term communicator can refer to individuals, conceived as people unaffiliated with one another, or to groups of people located within a formal organization (e.g., a news staff or advocacy organization) (PERSSON, 2020). The term receiver can refer to individual people, formal groups, and groups of people who are informally connected (e.g., audience members or constituents) (PERSSON, 2020).

Framing can be used for effective communication in all fields of media. (PERSSON, 2020). It is mainly applied in understanding media effects. Effective communication among a mass can be done with well-organized framing of meanings and issues. Goffman exemplifies this notion by utilizing political campaigns to frame a biased narrative effectively so that the public can understand its significance and accept it. In terms of film, directors prioritize a narrative in accordance with agency policies. When historical information is being depicted the film makers decide which frame the information is presented in. Through framing, each film director could influence the public in a manner which would affect socio-cultural collective memory.

### **Reception theory**

Created by scholar Stuart Hall, reception theory focuses on the encoding and decoding of an audience's reception of media content. The concept of reception theory analyzes the meaning of media (Chen, 2019). Stuart Hall argues that although media does have inherent meaning, the audience who watches or experiences the media creates the content's meaning (Chen, 2019). The audience receives the creative work and perceives the content either similarly or differently to the original context of the media (Chen, 2019). Hall argues that the audience reception is heavily subjected to social and cultural contexts (Chen, 2019).

Hall separates the two modes of understanding media messages. The two modes of understanding media messages according to Hall are:

1. **Encoding** – The encoded messages usually contain shared rules and symbols common with other people. So the (encoder) sender has to think how the receiver perceives the message.
2. **Decoding** – Decoding would be a successful delivery only if the message sent by the encoder is understood completely as it was intended.

Hall describes that the messages as sent with verbal/non-verbal cues and gestures do not bring the same result always as intended by the sender, bringing an altogether different meaning and insight to the concept sent (Chen, 2019). The rejection of the material occurs when the audience cannot understand the concept of having a different take on the conclusion itself (Chen, 2019). Hall states that such inability to understand the information can be because of the age, gender, religion, race, political views, ethnicity, class, culture and the mood in which the audience receive the message etc. (Chen, 2019). It is difficult to gather the information necessary to analyze every single audience's experience belonging to a mass (Chen, 2019). So, the media houses and other social handles come as a useful tool to reach the bigger mass as to get to know their experience and understanding (Chen, 2019).

Here the perceiving of the work can scope in three categories:

#### **A) Dominant Reader**

They are the audience which understand the media content as in accordance with the creator.

#### **B) Negotiated Reader**

The negotiated reading here is the audience are aware of the acts made in the film and understand the meaning. They accept the author's message even if it goes against the audiences' personal convictions.

### **C) Oppositional Reader**

The audience does not accept the author's perspective on the concept of the film or the subject it depicted. It can be morally wrong, emotionally disturbing, unnecessary adult contents of violence and blood gore, religious belief, political outlooks etc., which allows the audience to reject the idea.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the reviewed literature, it appears that there should be further analysis on Holocaust film regarding the impact, effect, and pre-mediated bias of the collective memory of audience groups and how reception differs during different time periods in which the films were released. Drawing on background knowledge and the considered theoretical frameworks, three main research questions can be proposed:

- 1. How has the emergence of new Holocaust films such as *Dara of Jasenovac* (2021) changed the reception of the Holocaust film genre in comparison to traditional Holocaust films such as *Schindler's List* (1993)?**
- 2. How does the film *Dara of Jasenovac* (2021) add to the already established collective cultural memory of the Holocaust in film studies?**
- 3. Why has Serbia decided to release *Dara of Jasenovac* in which themes of national trauma, genocide and perennial inter-ethnic conflict – that continually resurge in the Balkans- in 2021 rather than an earlier date?**

The research questions aim to reveal trends and patterns in media coverage that would affect the public's perception of *Schindler's List* and *Dara of Jasenovac*. Each of the questions explores a key area that was focused on in the literature review, such as memory studies and traumatic pasts, collective memory, historical-fiction films, etc. Furthermore, the questions allow

the research to explore how the film narrative of historical-fiction film can shift due to the bias of the filmmaker, how language can be utilized to frame individuals in specific ways, and how collective memory can impact the reception of films.

### **Methodologies**

In this paper, a comparative film analysis and a critical discourse analysis are conducted. This paper provides a comparative film analysis to analyze various aspects of genre conventions, film language and cinematic elements utilized in *Schindler's List* and *Dara of Jasonovac*. The first section of the analysis obtains a synopsis of each film, as well as a brief analysis of the film and its connection to the Holocaust. As the films are produced and released during different decades, there is a specific focus on how time-related contexts affect Holocaust film production. The second section of the comparative film analysis isolates two specific scenes (opening and closing) from each film to compare in detail. There is a comparison in terms of cinematic elements (setting, narrative/performance, lighting/color, etc.). The comparative film analysis is written under the influence of Erving Goffman's Framing Theory. Comparison between the two films focuses on subject positions as categories which create collective memory in the Holocaust film genre.

To analyze critical reception from various viewpoints, a critical discourse analysis is conducted. Critical discourse analysis requires an account of detailed relationships between text, talk, society and culture. The research method is ideal for studying written or spoken language in relation to its social context. This correlates with research based on collective memory in Holocaust film because of the concern of language and meaning in the application of film reception. Through the analysis, there is an examination of the patterns of reception in regard to *Schindler's List* and *Dara of Jaseonovac*. The critical discourse analysis allows an interpretive analysis of the sampled text to analyze the social context and meaning. The paper draws mainly



upon the Western reception of *Schindler's List* and *Dara of Jasenovac*, with a focus on the United States. The critical discourse analysis focuses on the cultural aspects of the film and the importance of distribution, promotion and audience reception. The critical discourse analysis is written under the guidance of Stuart Hall's Reception Theory. As a result, the discourse analysis is utilized to understand the links between language used by film critics and academic scholars which influence the social reception of the two films. The discourse analysis is conducted by comparing six tabloid newspaper articles and six scholarly articles. The critical discourse analysis is conducted to understand the discursive dimensions of critical reception in historical fiction films.

### **Comparative Film Analysis**

Firstly, there is a discussion of the basic general synopsis/background of each film, the dates that the films were released, and the background of the film production. *Schindler's List* is a biographical film which is centered on the life of Oskar Schindler, a German businessman who has been recorded as directly saving the lives of 1,100 Jewish victims during the Holocaust by employing them in his factory (Rapaport, 2002). The film is based on the book "Schindler's Ark," by Thomas Keneally. Keneally credits Leopold Pfefferberg, one of the Jewish workers in Schindler's factory, in his book for encouraging him to publicly write about Oskar Schindler (Rapaport, 2002). Schindler's Ark is based on interview accounts of more than fifty of the Jewish workers which he saved (Rapaport, 2002). The screen rights to Schindler's Ark eventually came into the possession of director Steven Spielberg, who directed the film *Schindler's List*. *Schindler's List* was released on December 25, 1993.

In comparison, *Dara of Jasonovac* is based upon the testimonies of survivors, it deals with war crimes and atrocities that took place at Jasenovac concentration camp, which was a part

of the Holocaust and the wider genocide of Serbians in the Independent State of Croatia. *Dara of Jasonovac* is a film directed by Predrag Antonijević, which was funded by the Serbian government. The film was released on February 5, 2021.

### **Cinematic Elements**

I have chosen two specific scenes from each film, and then I have compared and evaluated the cinematic elements which created these scenes. The cinematic elements I have chosen to analyze are setting, narrative/performance, lighting/color, and sound/music. I analyze the opening and the ending of each film. I utilize framing theory in this section of the comparative film review. The first ten minutes of the film are chosen to represent the opening scene and the last ten minutes prior to the credits are chosen to represent the closing of each film. I have chosen to analyze the first ten minutes of the two films because this is the time that is crucial in setting the tone, introducing the characters, and establishing the plot. It is a critical period for grabbing the viewer's attention and drawing them into the story. I have also chosen to analyze the ending of the films because it is the audience's last impression of the plot, the characters, and the message. Therefore, it is crucial because it reinforces the film's general message.

The comparative film review is separated into sections. The sections are separated based on the cinematic elements. Within each section, the two films are separated. The opening is analyzed first, then the closing, and then the framing theory. The cinematic elements evoke collective memory which impacts audience reception.

### **Setting**

#### ***Schindler's List***

*Opening (0:00 – 10:00)*

The film *Schindler's List* opens inside of a familial home. A single Jewish family is standing around a dinner table. As the scene continues, it shows many Jewish civilians arriving in Kraków, Poland. The Nazis force local Jewish civilians into the overcrowded Kraków Ghetto. The audience can view a sign hanging from the platform which indicates the characters are in 'KRAKOW GKOWNY', the main train station in Krakow in Poland. The film then moves into an overcrowded fancy dining hall. This is where dancing and dinner take place, which is occurring in the same city, Kraków, Poland.

#### *Closing (02:59 03:09)*

The closing scene takes place in the auditorium where Oskar Schindler was awaited by the hundreds of Jewish civilians which he saved. The scene then moves towards a car driving away with Schindler and his wife in the passenger's seat. The ending is set in the countryside, where the Jewish civilians have been liberated. The last section of the closing is set in the Mount Zion Catholic Cemetery in Jerusalem, the location which Oskar Schindler is buried. The film ends with a procession of now-aged Jewish civilians who worked in Schindler's factory, each of whom reverently sets a stone on his grave which is in Jerusalem.

#### *Framing Theory*

Framing theory indicates that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning (D'Angelo, 2019). Spielberg focused on the city of Krakow, Poland and the nearby territory. Mostly in the Jewish ghetto set up after the Nazis conquered the country, and the Plaszow labor camp set up outside of Krakow. The reason that the director set the film in Krakow, Poland was to indicate the importance of the area in relation to the Holocaust. Before the war, about 3.3 million Jewish civilians lived in Poland. Three

million of them were killed in the camps: half of those killed in all of Europe. There were six extermination camps and other forced labor and internment camps in occupied Poland.

Spielberg chose to end the film in the city of Jerusalem because it has been the holiest city in Judaism and the ancestral and spiritual homeland of the Jewish people since the 10th century BCE. During classical antiquity, Jerusalem was considered the center of the world, where God resided. The city of Jerusalem is given special status in Jewish religious law.

### *Dara of Jasenovac*

#### *Opening (0:00 – 10:00)*

The film opens in a large corn maze where there is a single file-line of Serbian civilians marching through. The opening then moves to the Ustaše Railway Guard which was established for the purpose of securing and monitoring railway lines and the accompanying infrastructure, guarding railway equipment and escorting trains and monitoring the movement of passengers and cargo. The scene proceeds to a train station, which is presumably in the same city. The opening ends when the main characters are in the train travelling to Jasenovac concentration camp. The rest of the film took place in Jasenovac, Croatia.

#### *Closing (01:59-02:09)*

The closing begins by being set inside of a closed-off area in the Jasenovac concentration camp. The scene then is taken outdoors where they are burying the men in a large, and vast open space. The men are attempting to escape the guards in the forest. The director then returns to the outdoors space of the Holocaust camp, in which the film ends until the two main protagonists are taken away by the train.

### *Framing Theory*

In terms of framing theory, the film's focus is on the Holocaust in Croatia, *Dara of Jasenovac* is set in Jasenovac which is a village and a municipality in Croatia, in the southern part of the Sisak-Moslavina County. The film is set during World War II, the director framed the setting to focus on this specific area of Croatia because it was the largest, and most effective Holocaust camp which occurred in the Independent State of Croatia which was the Former Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia at the time of the film. The film focuses heavily on the setting as it is even written into the film's title.

### **Narrative/ Performance**

#### ***Schindler's List***

##### *Opening (0:00 – 10:00)*

In the opening, the audience views a pair of elderly hands lighting a candlestick. Then, there is a family that is shown standing around a dinner table. There is an elderly man performing a Jewish prayer in Hebrew. The opening moves to the Krakow train station where there is another elderly man opening a table and setting it with administrative settings. The camera then fixes on an elderly man setting up a table with a chair in the middle of the platform; the platform is nearly empty, there are only a few other men who are walking by. The camera cuts to the same family on a much busier platform with many more tables, German officials and many more Jews registering at these tables. The Jewish civilians are voicing their names. The same family is portrayed to provide continuity. The German soldiers overseeing the process.

The camera then focuses on a singular man who then walks over to a bed where he lays out ties on various suits which are lying there. This man is the main protagonist of the film, Oskar Schindler. The scene follows Oskar Schindler into a night club. He appraises the scene and notices several Nazi officials. Schindler buys the men drinks to ingratiate himself with them.

By the end of the evening, Schindler is seated with an entire table of officials and dancers. He buys them food and drinks and takes photographs with every man of note seated at the table.

*Closing (02:59-03:09)*

The concluding scene begins with Schindler being upset, realizing that if he had sold his pin or his car, that he could've saved more lives. His Jewish workers comfort him by surrounding him and embracing him. The workers watch as Schindler's car exits through the factory gates. The scene changes to the next morning. A Soviet soldier finds the Jews sleeping outside the factory on the train tracks. The soldier tells them that they have been liberated. They ask him where to go and the soldier provides no real answer, simply informing them that they are not liked on either side of Europe but that there is a town nearby. The camera cuts to a massive line of Jews walking across a field toward a town while a popular Hebrew song plays.

The scene changes to a clip of Amon Goeth's hanging. He was charged with crimes against humanity and executed. The scene changes to the outside of Schindler's original factory, and a title informs the viewer that Schindler failed at his marriage and several businesses after the war. Another title tells the viewer that Schindler was declared a righteous person by the council of Yad Vashem in Israel in 1958.

The scene changes back to the line of walking Jews, and the shot fades into color. A subtitle tells the viewer that the people now walking toward the camera are the actual Schindler Jewish survivors in the present day. The survivors, accompanied by the actors who played them in the film, walk by Schindler's grave and place stones on it. At the end of the procession, the camera shows the stone-covered grave of Schindler. An unidentified hand that we understand to be the hand of Liam Neeson (the actor who played Schindler), places two roses in the center of

the grave. The camera cuts to a shot of Neeson in the distance looking down at the grave before fading to black.

### *Framing Theory*

In terms of framing theory, the director decided to focus the film on Oskar Schindler who was an integral figure in saving more than a thousand Jewish victims during the Holocaust. Steven Spielberg focused the narrative to frame Schindler as an ultimate saviour to the audience.

### *Dara of Jasenovac*

#### *Opening (0:00 – 10:00)*

The film opens with families marched to the cattle cars, and 10-year-old Dara Ilić (Biljana Čekić) asking her older brother Jovo (Marko Pipić) why their Croatian neighbors aren't also being rounded up since they look the same. The able-bodied men were taken some time earlier, leaving the children's mother Nada (Anja Stanić Ilić) alone to look after them and her toddler son Bude. At the swastika-bedecked station, Father Miroslav Filipović-Majstorović (Vuk Kostić) weeds out the ill and elderly, and as the train departs Dara witnesses the priest coolly gun down those left behind.

#### *Closing (01:59-02:09)*

In the ending, Dara is holding her younger brother Jovo, telling him that she never leave him. The scenes then cut to Dara's father, speaking to the other Serbian man (Mldan) as they are planning an escape. As they were escaping, two Ustache soldiers shot them down. The scene then moves back to the Holocaust camp, where they are taking some of the children back to their hometown. Dara and her brother are eventually chosen, and they travel back home.

### *Framing Theory*

*Dara of Jasenovac* is based on documented first-hand accounts from Holocaust survivors, the film is rooted in the perspective of ten-year-old Dara, a courageous Serbian girl who endures unimaginable tragedy even as she goes to tireless lengths to protect the life of her infant brother. The director focuses on the importance of familial love and support. This is why the framing of the relationship between Dara, her younger brother, and their father is the most important.

### **Lighting/Color**

#### *Schindler's List*

##### *Opening (0:00 – 10:00)*

The first scene is one of the few colour scenes, it starts completely black until a match is struck and you see a hand lighting two candles. The lighting at this point is very dim as the only light is that of the match and the candles as they are lit. The scene is in color, but it is short, and fades out with the smoke from the candles. The candle smoke becomes steam from a steam engine, and the film is now black and white. is set in black and white which allows the viewer to concentrate more on details, for example Steven Spielberg uses light, or limits light to indicate a mood of stress and unhappiness.

The opening scene of the film is one of the few instances of color in *Schindler's List*. The color in this scene draws a stark contrast with the cold black and white of the following one. The prayer and candlelight are ominous, setting a dark tone from the outset of the film. The black and white of the following scene is used to increase the documentary feel of the film. It separates the film from the color scene at the opening and pushes it back in time. The scene is short and dull in color but soon fades out with the smoke from the candles then is cleverly changed from the candle smoke into steam from a steam engine from the next scene, and the film suddenly changes to black and white.



*Closing (02:59-03:09)*

This is done to give the film a feeling of being in the past whilst maintaining the idea that it is not in the distant past; this sets the scene. In the passage where Schindler is looking at a little girl in the distance, this little girl is wearing a red coat despite the shot being in black and white; this makes the viewer's eye instinctively follow this poor little girl, having a dramatic and memorable effect.

Only at the end do the images of candle fire regain their warmth when Schindler allows his workers to hold Shabbat services. For Spielberg, they represented "just a glint of color, and a glimmer of hope."

*Framing Theory*

In terms of framing theory, the camera then focuses on one of the candles; its reddish flame dies as the prayer stops and the extinguished candle could be a symbol for the Jewish race which the Nazis try to extinguish in the film.

*Dara of Jasenovac**Opening (0:00 – 10:00)*

The opening scene is set in daylight with the sun beaming on the main characters' faces. Throughout the opening sequence, the director utilizes motivated lighting to imitate natural light sources such as sunlight to emphasize the importance of specific characters. For example, the director utilizes motivated lighting on the face of the main protagonist, Dara, throughout the opening.

*Closing (01:59-02:09)*

Most of the closing scenes are set in daylight, except for the scene when Dara and her brother are reunited with their father. This scene is set in white.

### *Framing Theory*

The director utilizes motivated lighting to indicate the importance of specific characters. Motivated lighting is the technique used to imitate or accentuate existing light sources. Motivated light is commonly described as light within a shot that can be justified. This approach to lighting allows the audience to believe in the world that they are seeing.

## **Sound and music**

### *Schindler's List*

#### *Opening (0:00 – 10:00)*

Spielberg starts this film instead with a Sabbath prayer in Hebrew because this, like the theme music, sets the scene for the entire film, showing that is about Jewish population. From the beginning, there is clearly a distinguished soundtrack. Schindler is introduced by the diegetic sounds of international (non-German) pop music of the 30s, most prominently by the instrumental versions of the hit songs *Gloomy Sunday*, written in Hungary in 1933, and *Por una Cabeza*, written in Argentina in 1935. The use and reception of both songs during and after the war also affects their reception in the context of *Schindler's List*. As the camera cuts you see that this beautiful classical music is playing on a radio in a hotel room.

The music is different to that of the last few scenes, Carlos Gardel's "Por una cabeza", a more upbeat tango played by the band in the club which makes the mood more uplifting. The maitre d' escorts Schindler to a good, central table in the main room. Many well dressed couples are dancing, the atmosphere overall is one of luxury and excess, emphasising that most people seem totally unaffected by the plight of the Jews.

*Closing (02:59-03:09)*

The closing scene begins with dialogue between the main characters. The song Yerushalayim Shel Zahav is set in the background when the survivors are walking to their next destination.

*Framing Theory*

Regarding framing theory, a memorable aspect of the film is its emotive, charged music score which creates a feeling of tragedy and portrays perfectly the context of the film.

Throughout the film Spielberg uses music to set the scene and to change the atmosphere by varying his use of tempo, pitch, volume and so on. Films have two main groups of music – the theme music and incidental music. The theme music recurs (with variation) throughout the film and provides continuity as well as helping to set the scene. The pieces of incidental music occur in individual scenes. Spielberg uses incidental music to compliment the cameos he uses to portray his ideas.

**Dara of Jasenovac***Opening (0:00-0:10)*

The opening begins with walking and wind sounds. This is when the characters are single-handedly filed together when marching to the train station. Most of the opening sequence is filled with the sound of dialogue between the characters. The director also utilizes sounds to mimic actions such as when the Croatian soldier shoots the elderly man with a gun. The sound of the gunshot is loud and clear. And when the trains show up to take the Serbian victims to take them to a camp. The train whistle is amplified to indicate the importance. The last important sound within the opening sequence is when the Serbian women sing the song Mother's eyes (Majčine oči) while in the train.

*Closing (01:59-02:09)*

The closing scene is mainly filled with the sounds of dialogue. Their voices are amplified with the importance of their characters. Like the opening, the director utilizes sounds to stress importance. This is exemplified in the sounds of the car engine and the gunshots. At the very ending, there are violin sounds to mimic the death of Dara's father.

### *Framing Theory*

The dialogue between the characters indicates that the Serbian victims are speaking in a softer, and quieter tone to indicate their submission while the Croatian soldiers are speaking in a louder, more aggressive tone to indicate their authority. The songs that are utilized represent the emotions of the Serbian victims.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

The research was intended to analyze credible film review articles which contained critical responses to one of the two films as units of analysis, and then to compare the critical film review articles in reference to one another. I analyze film criticism from various viewpoints, and a critical discourse analysis is conducted. It is written as an interpretive analysis of the sampled text to analyze the social context and meaning of the selected articles. The critical discourse analysis is theoretically framed under reception theory, which allows a means to understand the sampled media text by analyzing how it has been received by audiences. Through reception theory, there is an indication regarding how audiences create meaning and understanding of cinematic text.

My critical discourse analysis on selected film reviews and scholarly critical articles written about *Schindler's List* and *Dara of Jasenovac*. Newspaper publications and scholarly articles published in a newspaper, magazine, or academic journal describing and evaluating one of the two selected films are utilized. There is a comparison of the reception of the chosen

articles. The film reviews and scholarly articles selected have qualities indicating a legitimized critique of a film. The film reviews selected are written by journalists giving their opinion or analysis of the film published in a prominent newspaper. The film reviews analyze the effectiveness of the plot, theme, acting, direction, special effects, musical effects, cinematography, and all other cinematic elements. The academic articles selected have been written by a scholar or expert in film studies to discuss the film within a historical, social, political, or theoretical context. The criticisms are found in cinema studies journals as well as discipline-specific newspaper sources.

Before finalizing the research sample, the appropriate population of film review ‘s/critics first had to be identified. The aim was to focus on film reviews written by acclaimed Western newspaper publications. The reason that I choose to analyze Western content was because it represents a large, diverse population: The United States has a population of over 328 million people, which is one of the largest in the world. This diversity and multiculturalism of people in Western societies (Great Britain, Canada, the United States, etc.) allows for a wide range of perspectives to be represented in entertainment reception and academia.

To conduct the research, a sample that accurately represented the range of film review articles which critiqued either *Schindler’s List* or *Dara of Jasenovac* had to be chosen. The Google search engine was utilized to search for online film criticism of the two chosen films. The search title which was utilized was “*Schindler’s List* film review” and “*Dara of Jasenovac* film review”. For *Schindler’s List* the search yielded for 66,700,000 results and for *Dara of Jasenovac* the search yielded for 118,00 results. There have been many, both credible and non-credible film reviews, which criticized *Schindler’s List*, the most popular and relevant outlets had to be chosen. In contrast to *Schindler’s List*, there were limited film criticism and reviews written

about *Dara of Jasenovac*. The reviews and criticisms which were results of the search were produced after the release of a film, whether it was the initial release to theatres, or to the public through various formats (film-streaming services, the internet, etc.). To narrow down the search and since *Schindler's List* and *Dara of Jasenovac* were released during different time-periods, there was a consideration of time-related context when selecting the film reviews that were to be analyzed.

Due to the large amount of coverage, I attempted to select publications which provided film reviews of both *Dara of Jasenovac* and *Schindler's List* for the critical discourse analysis. I selected the film articles through systematic selective sampling. I choose articles which originated from the same acclaimed sources. I then narrowed down articles to those whose publications reviewed both films in a similar time. Therefore, systematic selective sampling was chosen to provide the most accurate and representative sample from the population. I selected three main articles which reviewed *Dara of Jasenovac* and three main articles which reviewed *Schindler's List* during a similar time. I selected the publications *Variety Magazine*, *The Jewish Chronicle*, and *Deadline Magazine*.

The first selection of articles was chosen from *Variety Magazine*. The article which was chosen for *Dara of Jasenovac* was titled “‘Dara of Jasenovac’ Review: A Holocaust Movie with Questionable Intentions,” which was written by Jay Weissberg, and the film review chosen for *Schindler's List* was titled “‘Dara of Jasenovac’ Review: A Holocaust Movie with Questionable Intentions,”. The second selection of articles were chosen from *The Jewish Chronicle* and were titled “Film review: Dara of Jasenovac: This Serbian film feels misjudged and gratuitous says Linda Marric,” and “Thirty years on, Schindler's List should never have been made: Schindler's Jews are terrorized people who cannot be whole in Steven Spielberg's 1993 film,”. The third

selection of articles was chosen from *Deadline Magazine* and were titled “Int’l Critics Line: Anna Smith On Serbia’s Oscar Entry ‘Dara Of Jasenovac’,” and “Steven Spielberg On Ending ‘Schindler’s List’ With Cemetery Scene: “That Ending Was A Way To Verify That Everything In The Movie Was True”. In terms of time related contexts, all of the articles above were published 2019 and onward.

The final six publications were found on the google scholar search engine and are academic articles which have been selected for the analysis. I have selected articles by acclaimed film and history scholars. I have selected scholarly articles in addition to the film review articles because of the expertise of the written subject in which they display scholarly articles are past written pieces which have been studied or researched on a topic as well as to find bibliographies that point to other relevant sources of information.

Therefore, there is an accurate distribution of film reviews, and scholarly articles which are analyzed. This sampling technique ensured that articles were evenly chosen over time. Systematic sampling provides the most accurate and representative sample of the population. In conclusion, all the articles selected provide accurate results regarding the research questions. This is because the selected research sample allows for a variety of opinions – film critics, the public, and academic scholars - to voice their opinions. Furthermore, the critical discourse analysis should reveal any pre-conceived biases and how cinema affects the collective memory of Western audiences. The next step was to determine how the discourse analysis would be conducted, and whether to include images in the analysis. Since the research is focused on coverage of two Holocaust films, the analysis of the text from each film criticism, specific themes would be the focus to analyze the reception of the two films.

**In the table below, all sources are listed.**

### Newspaper Articles for Analysis

Variety Magazine	The Jewish Chronicle	Deadline Magazine
<p><i>'Dara of Jasenovac'</i> Review: A Holocaust Movie With Questionable Intentions by Jay Weissberg (Jan 25, 2021)</p> <p><i>Schindler's List</i> by Todd McCarthy (Nov 19, 1993)</p>	<p>Film Review: <i>Dara of Jasenovac</i> By Linda Marric (Feb 04, 2021)</p> <p>Thirty years on, <i>Schindler's List</i> should never have been made: Schindler's Jews are terrorized people who cannot be whole in Steven Spielberg's 1993 film By Tanya Gold (March 02 2023)</p>	<p>Int'l Critics Line: Anna Smith On Serbia's Oscar Entry <i>'Dara Of Jasenovac'</i> By Anna Smith (Feb 09, 2021)</p> <p>Steven Spielberg On Ending <i>'Schindler's List'</i> With Cemetery Scene: "That Ending Was A Way To Verify That Everything In The Movie Was True" By Zac Ntim (Jan 29, 2023)</p>

### Scholarly Articles for Analysis

<i>Dara of Jasenovac</i>	<i>Schindler's List</i>
<p><i>Renationalizing Memory in the Post-Yugoslav Region</i> by Tamara P. Trošt &amp; Lea David (03 Sep 2021)</p> <p><i>New Memory of the Old Trauma? The Diary of Diana B. and Dara of Jasenovac</i> by Ana Kisinlic Lozica (19 Nov 2022)</p> <p>NATION BRANDING THROUGH CINEMA: SERBIAN CANDIDATES FOR THE OSCARS by Nevena Brašanac (10 Oct 2022)</p>	<p><i>Schindler's List Is Not Shoah: The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory</i> by Miriam Bratu Hansen (Winter 1996)</p> <p><i>Balanced Truth: Steven Spielberg's Schindler's List among History, Memory, and Popular Culture</i> by Christoph Classen ((May 2009)</p> <p><i>Narration and the Embodiment of Power in Schindler's List</i> by Ora Gelley (October 2022)</p>

### Reception Theory



In this section of the methodology, it is explained how reception theory is integrated into the research.

**Encoding – The presentation of information, such as the choice of language, images, and headlines/titles are the encoded messages. The encoding material are the two films that are analyzed *Schindler’s List* and *Dara of Jasenovac*.**

**Decoding – The decoding of a message is how a viewer understands and interprets it. It is a process of interpretation and translation of coded information into a comprehensible form. The decoding material are the newspapers, scholarly journals and critical websites that are analyzed.**

### Three Types of Viewer Reception

- **Dominant Reader:** The **Dominant Reading** would be that the audience receives the film's message precisely as the director intended.
- **Negotiated Reader:** A **Negotiated Reading** suggests that the viewer accepts some elements of the film’s intended message while rejecting or questioning others.
- **Oppositional Reader:** An **Oppositional Reading** occurs when the viewer completely disagrees with the perspective provided by the newspaper, interpreting the content in a way that contradicts its intended meaning.

### Encoder and Decoder Table

Encoder	Decoder
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Schindler’s List</i> (1993)</li> <li>- <i>Dara of Jasenovac</i> (2021)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Newspaper Articles (<i>Variety Magazine, The Jewish Chronicle, Deadline Magazine</i>)</li> <li>- Scholarly Articles</li> </ul>

### Themes of Analysis

To conduct a critical discourse analysis of articles, I first analyze the headlines. I then analyze the common themes of nationalism/nationalistic propaganda and political bias, publicity/time of reception, and positive vs. negative language to understand the public reception of *Schindler's List* and *Dara of Jasenovac*. The reason that nationalism/nationalistic propaganda and political bias are grouped together in the same category is because of the shared notion of loyalty and devotion to a nation. This is perpetuated in a sense of national consciousness exemplified in nationalism and political bias. In the critical discourse analysis, there is an indirect consideration of Van Dijk's categories of critical discourse analysis, and the background of the authors/scholars/publications.

A definitive feature of news reporting is the use of the headline and/or lead to express, in a highly concise form, the crux of the news event and to orient the reader to process the text in a pre-determined. In fact, as pointed out several news discourse analysts (including Tuchman, 1978; Cohen and Young 1981; Van Dijk, 1983; Bell, 1991), news in the daily press is organized by the principle of relevance or importance, along a dimension of decreasing prominence with respect to the macro-structure.

### Headlines and Leads

Published Articles	Headlines/ Leads
Variety Magazine	' <i>Dara of Jasenovac</i> ' Review: A Holocaust Movie with Questionable Intentions  <i>Schindler's List</i>
Deadline Magazine	Int'l Critics Line: Anna Smith On Serbia's Oscar Entry 'Dara Of Jasenovac'  Steven Spielberg On Ending 'Schindler's List' With Cemetery Scene: "That Ending

	Was A Way To Verify That Everything In The Movie Was True”
<b>The Jewish Chronicle</b>	Film Review: <i>Dara of Jasenovac</i>  Thirty years on, <i>Schindler’s List</i> should never have been made: Schindler’s Jews are terrorized people who cannot be whole in Steven Spielberg’s 1993 film
<b><i>Dara of Jasenovac</i></b>	<b><i>Schindler’s List</i></b>
<i>Renationalizing Memory in the Post-Yugoslav Region</i> by Tamara P. Trošt & Lea David (03 Sep 2023)  <i>New Memory of the Old Trauma? The Diary of Diana B. and Dara of Jasenovac</i> by Ana Kisinlic Lozica (19 Nov 2022)  NATION BRANDING THROUGH CINEMA: SERBIAN CANDIDATES FOR THE OSCARS by Nevena Brašanac (10 Oct 2022)	<i>Schindler's List Is Not Shoah: The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory</i> by Miriam Bratu Hansen (Winter 1996)  <i>Balanced Truth: Steven Spielberg’s Schindler’s List among History, Memory, and Popular Culture</i> by Christoph Classen (May 2009)  <i>Narration and the Embodiment of Power in Schindler’s List</i> by Ora Gelley (October 2022)

### Headlines and Leads Reception Theory

Regarding reception theory in connection to the headlines and leads, *Variety Magazine* received *Dara of Jasenovac* in an oppositional manner by using the phrase “questionable manner” while receiving *Schindler’s List* in a negotiated mode. *Deadline Magazine* received *Dara of Jasenovac* in a negotiated manner and *Schindler’s List* through a dominant reading by utilizing the word “true”. *The Jewish Chronicle* received *Dara of Jasenovac* in a negotiated reading while receiving *Schindler’s List* in an oppositional manner. All of the scholarly articles received *Schindler’s List* and *Dara of Jasenovac* in a negotiated manner.

#### A) *Nationalism/Nationalistic Propaganda*

The themes of nationalism/ nationalistic propaganda and political bias are leading themes when analyzing the reception of the two films. As previously mentioned, the analysis of these themes is guided by Stuart Hall's reception theory. When analyzing the text for themes of nationalism, propaganda and political bias, written language that points to the film's political, geographical and national positioning is considered. The words "nationalism/nationalistic" and "propaganda" are particular words that are specifically looked for in relation to the reception of the two films.

Throughout the three newspaper and three academic articles analyzed, most of the articles which reviewed *Dara of Jasenovac* either directly reference "nationalism" or/and "propaganda" or more subtly framed nationalistic stereotypes and political biases. In comparison, articles which review *Schindler's List*, have a less direct reference to nationalism or propaganda although there is indirect discussion of nationalism, propaganda and political bias. Because the film reception of *Schindler's List* does not directly mention "nationalism/nationalistic" and "propaganda", there is an evaluation of the political positioning of the reception of the film.

Through the analyzation of the newspaper articles, *Variety Magazine* utilized the word "nationalist" twice, "nationalism" once, and "propaganda" three times, *The Jewish Chronicle*, mentions "nationalism" once and does not mention nationalist/nationalistic/propaganda, *Deadline* magazine does not directly mention nationalism/nationalist/nationalistic or propaganda in their reception of *Dara of Jasenovac*. In comparison, the three scholarly articles utilized the words nationalism, nationalist, nationalistic, and propaganda. In *Renationalizing Memory in the Post-Yugoslav Region*, "nationalism" is mentioned ten times, and "nationalist" is mentioned five times. "Nationalistic" and "propaganda" are not mentioned. In *New Memory of the Old Trauma? The Diary of Diana B. and Dara of Jasenovac*, nationalism, nationalistic, and nationalist are not

mentioned in the article, while propaganda is mentioned seven times. In the scholarly article, *NATION BRANDING THROUGH CINEMA: SERBIAN CANDIDATES FOR THE OSCARS*, nationalism and propaganda are mentioned once while nationalist and nationalistic are not mentioned. Through indirect reception, the articles which discussed *Dara of Jasenovac* regarded the film to be a byproduct of Serbian nationalistic propaganda.

In comparison, the newspaper and scholarly articles which review *Schindler's List* do not mention nationalist/nationalistic/ nationalism/ propaganda, although there are indirect undertones which directly connect to nationalism. In *Schindler's List Is Not Shoah: The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory* traditional politics and critical intellectuals understand and receive *Schindler's List* as a collective memory of a nation which remembers not an identical nation, to be sure, but distinctly different formations of a national public. There is also mention of national identity and national history in *Schindler's List Is Not Shoah: The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory*.

In terms of reception theory, the general evaluation of the word propaganda is 'negative' while "nationalism/nationalistic/nationalist" has both a positive and negative reception. The two films were created based on the film director's political positioning of the Holocaust. Therefore, the encoding material had predisposed political bias. Steven Spielberg created a narrative based approach which heroized the individual character of Oskar Schindler. His narrative gave Schindler a heroic savior image to the Jewish population. Schindler's German national identity with Austro-Czechoslovakian-Hungarian ethnic roots were not looked at with much importance, rather it was his individual actions which were heroized. Steven Spielberg's portrayal of Oskar Schindler was a rejection of his German national identity. Many of the articles which received *Schindler's List* through a dominant or negotiated reading.

In comparison, Predrag Antonijevic intended to document the real-life events that occurred to the Serbian, Jewish and Roma victims in the Jasenovac Holocaust camp. The director victimized the Serbian population through the narrative of Dara Ilic and her younger brother. The text's decoding indicated the film was received in an oppositional way. Most of the articles received the film negatively by framing the narrative as untrue. The words “propaganda” and “nationalism, nationalistic” amplified the negative reception of the film.

### ***Publicity/Time of Reception***

The second theme of analysis is publicity/time of reception. Regarding publicity/time of reception, the word “time” is a particular word that is specifically looked for in relation to the reception of the two films. Throughout the six newspaper and six academic articles analyzed, most of the articles which reviewed *Dara of Jasenovac* and *Schindler's List* either directly reference time or more subtly frame time through publicity and the time of reception. In terms of the reception of the film *Dara of Jasenovac*, the word “time” is utilized eight times in the newspaper articles and twenty-nine times in the scholarly articles. In comparison, the newspaper articles which review *Schindler's List* mention the word “time” four times, and the scholarly articles review the word time was analyzed “twenty times”.

In terms of publicity, *Dara of Jasenovac* was most publicized in Western media through the event of the Oscars. The Oscars was the most identifiable event which publicized *Dara of Jasenovac*, *Variety Magazine* described *Dara of Jasenovac* as “dressed up in concentration camp clothing, can find distribution outside its native land. Less surprising is that it's been submitted for Oscar consideration,” (Weissberg, 2021). In comparison, *The Jewish Chronicle* described the film as “Selected by Serbia as its entry for this year's Best International Film Oscar, the film tells the story of a young Serbian girl who comes face to face with the horrors inflicted by fascistic

Croatian forces against Serbs and Jews in the 1940s,” (Marric 2021). The third newspaper article discussed the Oscars in the title of the article “Int’l Critics Line: Anna Smith On Serbia’s Oscar Entry ‘Dara Of Jasenovac’” (Smith, 2021). Most of the scholarly articles which analyzed *Dara of Jasenovac* consisted of coverage after the international release of the film. Direct references to the Holocaust/ World War II in Croatia were the most prominent and frequent mentioning's in the articles. There was secondary reference to the Yugoslavian wars.

The most prominent publicity/time of reception discussed in the articles that reviewed *Schindler’s List* was the final profit the film made during the first week of release. These themes were discussed throughout each article. In *Balanced Truth: Steven Spielberg’s Schindler’s List among History, Memory, and Popular Culture*, time is acquainted with the how the film was received by the public during the release of the film. The following expert acknowledges how time was received in terms of financial success “If you measure this by the movie’s success, indeed Schindler’s List can hardly be topped. After the movie’s premiere in the U.S. in December 1993 and its subsequent release in Europe in spring 1994, the film was met with an overwhelming response: just two months after its release in the U.S., 7.5 million tickets had been sold, 3.4 million in Germany alone,” (Classen, 2009).

Regarding reception theory, the time of reception was received in a dominant/negotiated/oppositional. The encoder (the film director) along with the Serbian film academy regarded the film as being worthy of entrance for Serbia’s submission for the Oscars. *Dara of Jasenovac’s* rejection in the Oscars regards the film reception as oppositional. In comparison, *Schindler’s List* is received in a dominant/negotiated manner. The articles associate the publicity and time of release in positive means. Apart from *The Jewish Chronicle*, who

received *Schindler's List* in an oppositional reading. The scholarly articles along with *Variety Magazine* and *Deadline Magazine* recieved the film in a dominant and negotiated manner.

### ***C) Positive vs. Negative Language***

Lastly, the textual analysis focuses on the aspects of positive and negative language, and how it is represented in the text. To determine the difference between positive and negative language, the analysis considers positive words as accepting, praising and amplifying the importance of the film. While negative language is characterized as rejection, pessimistic and cynical reaction to the film. In this subsection of the critical discourse analysis, positive vs negative words is analyzed.

Through the analysis of the newspaper and scholarly articles which reviewed *Dara of Jasenovac*, had a negative response to the film in terms of language. The language utilized to describe the film was characterized as rejection, pessimistic, and cynical. The words the authors use to describe these narrative themes are aggressive, manipulative, and dishonest. The most dominant sub-themes pertaining to the claims of Serbian nationalistic propaganda depicted in *Dara of Jasenovac* was the denial of the holocaust in the Independent State of Croatia. The newspaper articles which reviewed *Dara of Jasenovac*

In comparison, the articles reviewing *Schindler's List* received the film through positive and negative language. The most common but limited sub-themes identified by the analysis of articles which reviewed *Schindler's List* included the trust of historical information because of the assumed bias of the film director. *Variety Magazine's* review of *Schindler's List*, released in 1993, discusses the film through positive language. Todd McCarthy utilizes the words “impeccable, fascinating, and extraordinary” (McCarthy, 1993). In comparison, the *Jewish Chronicle* used negative words to review *Schindler's Lit*. The most common words utilized to



describe *Dara of Jasenovac* were “bad”, “objection” and ‘repulsive’. The last newspaper article, *Deadline Magazine*, discussed *Schindler’s List* in a positive way by depicting the “importance” of the film. In the scholarly articles, *Schindler’s List Is Not Shoah: The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory*, regarded the film *Schindler’s List* as a positive contribution to popular modernism and public memory. In *Balanced Truth: Steven Spielberg’s Schindler’s List among History, Memory, and Popular Culture* investigates how this impression of historical truth in *Schindler’s List* and the authenticity emerges in a fiction film. Most of the article is framed in a positive narrative. The last scholarly article, *Narration and the Embodiment of Power in Schindler’s List*, utilizes positive and negative language economy in the narrative and aesthetic pleasure consistently undermines its attempts at representing traumatic events.

Regarding reception theory, the journalist or scholar is an oppositional reader of *Dara of Jasenovac*. In comparison, the journalist or scholar is a negotiated and oppositional reader of *Schindler’s List*. The two films were created based on the film director’s image. *Dara of Jasenovac* was mainly rejected through its Western reception. The rejection and negative language utilized in the reception of *Dara of Jasenovac* indicates that the film was received in opposition. While *Schindler’s List* was received as dominant/negotiated/ and oppositional by the decoders. *Variety Magazine* decodes the film in a dominant manner, *The Jewish Chronicle* regards the film in an oppositional manner, while *Deadline Magazine* and the scholarly articles receive the film in a negotiated manner.

### Summary of Findings

Comparative film analysis was used to understand different perspectives of the Holocaust by examining the two Holocaust films regarding cinematic elements to identify similarities and differences in reference to the historical film genre. The discourse analysis analyzed the media

coverage of the films *Schindler's List* and *Dara of Jasenovac* across six tabloid articles, and six scholarly articles. The analysis aimed to uncover the bias centered towards the critical and audience reception of the two films. The themes of publicity, negative versus positive reception, politics and nationality played the largest role in how the films were perceived by audiences. The utilization of reception theory allowed for the research to understand how the films were interpreted by audiences. To demonstrate each theme's impact on the overall reception of the two films, in the summary of findings I address the findings in relation to each of the three research questions

**1. How has the emergence of new Holocaust films such as *Dara of Jasenovac* (2021) changed the reception of the Holocaust film genre in comparison to traditional Holocaust films such as *Schindler's List* (1993)?**

Based on the conducted comparative film analysis and critical discourse analysis, the reception indicates that past Holocaust films are accepted as factual in comparison to newer, minority Holocaust films such as *Dara of Jasenovac* which are considered as fictional. Through the comparison of cinematic elements, *Schindler's List*, and *Dara of Jasenovac* effectively communicate key themes and ideas present in the Holocaust film genre. Because both films are protagonist based, the film narrative follows two individual characters through their individual journeys. Both films are set in vulnerable areas where the Holocaust took place. Both films effectively capture the emotion of their audiences by making them feel as if they are experiencing the Holocaust using both camera movement, lack of light and cultural soundtracks which were popular during the Holocaust to elicit the feeling of the Holocaust. Overall, the comparative film analysis of the Holocaust films provided a powerful and personalized insight into the Holocaust.

On the level of reception, both *Schindler's List* and *Dara of Jasenovac* provoked discussions from many publications both public and scholarly. The newspaper publications and scholarly articles which analysed *Schindler's List* remains received as a classic Holocaust film which has a positive reception regarding the public. While *Dara of Jasenovac* illicit questioning and rejection from the Western public. *Schindler's List* was received in a dominant and negotiated manner by the decoders while *Dara of Jasenovac* was received in an oppositional reading.

## **2. How does the film *Dara of Jasenovac* (2021) add to the already established collective cultural memory of the Holocaust in film studies?**

The comparative film analysis indicates that *Schindler's List* and *Dara of Jasenovac* are both historical fiction-films which embody similar cinematic elements. *Dara of Jasenovac's* narrative reflects on the individual experiences of a young girl held in the Croatian Holocaust camp of Jasenovac in comparison to the Western mainstream focus on the events of the Holocaust that happened in Germany and Poland. Of the academic articles analyzed, the most prominent areas of discussion included national bias through cinema, renationalizing memory, and the revision of history in film. Firstly, the articles which analyzed *Dara of Jesenovac* made suggestion of the past extensive research which documented the history of mobilization of ethnic conflicts in the region, and particularly how the memory of World War II (WWII) was depicted in pro-Western biases. Both the film articles, and academic articles which were analyzed indicate that there is limited Western knowledge about the Holocaust that occurred in the Balkan region. Although most of the film critics rejected the political content written in *Dara of Jasenovac* with limited knowledge.

**3. Why has Serbia decided to release *Dara of Jasenovac* in which themes of national trauma, genocide and perennial inter-ethnic conflict – that continually resurge in the Balkans- in 2021? Rather than an earlier date closer to the release date of traditional Holocaust films such as *Schindler's List* (1993)?**

The public reception of *Dara of Jasenovac* belongs to a broader phenomenon of Holocaust historical fiction film with specific focus on the heritage of the Jasenovac and the Ustasha crimes committed to the Serbian, Roma, and Croatian Jewish communities. The findings across the articles which analyzed *Dara of Jasenovac* demonstrate a difference of opinion on the Holocaust in Croatia. The articles frequently framed the Balkans in biased narratives which were amplified in Western media. All three newspaper articles which analyzed *Dara of Jasenovac* discussed the former nation state of Yugoslavia, although none went into detail. Regarding reception theory, there is an indication that the reason why the film *Dara of Jasenovac* was released in 2021 rather than an earlier date was because of the current political stability between the Croatian and Serbian government. If the film was released during or prior to the break-up of Yugoslavia, there are indications that there could have been a larger negative reaction to the film.

In the academic article *Nation Branding Through Cinema: Serbian Candidates for The Oscars*, the text utilizes *Dara of Jasenovac* to examine Serbian cinema and the impact it has on the positioning and development of the image of Serbia on the international scene. Given that popular culture and art have a significant influence on how the outside world perceives a particular nation, the fundamental ideas of applying the concept of nation branding by making use of cultural potentials are presented, seen through theoretical framework and the depiction of successful nations' implementation of nation branding. When it comes to Serbia, the article concluded that there are several problems affecting the underutilized potential of cinema on the international level, and they concern the entire system of Serbian film industry, especially

persistent political interference in the fields of art and culture. Because of this controversy, it is assumed the film would not have been released during an earlier release period due to the larger political instability in the region during that time.

### **Limitations**

Despite a successful analysis, there are several considerations that should be explored in future research. It was difficult to summarize the description of the films into a short synopsis in the first half of the comparative film analysis. In terms of the comparative film analysis, it was also difficult to limit the descriptions of the cinematic elements to have an effective impact on readers. Regarding the chosen scenes, it was difficult to pick specific scenes over others to analyze. The opening and closing scenes were chosen because of the importance of the scenes and their impact on the viewers.

In terms of the critical discourse analysis, there were limitations in finding articles written during a similar time. This is because of the twenty-eight-year time gap between when the two films were released. In terms of the newspaper articles which were selected, there were three selected publications which reviewed both *Schindler's List* and *Dara of Jasenovac*. Although there was a long-time difference in the film articles published by *Variety Magazine*, there had to be a compromise because articles by the same publisher were sought after. It was also difficult to find scholarly articles written by Western academics which discussed *Dara of Jasenovac*. All three of the scholarly articles that discussed *Dara of Jasenovac* were written by either Bosnian, Croatian or Serbian authors.

### **Conclusion**

This research paper has highlighted the links between political attitudes, emotions, and film reception regarding *Dara of Jasenovac* and *Schindler's List*. It succeeds in demonstrating

how powerful the impact of historical fiction film can be, especially in a setting as highly politicised as that of the Holocaust. The film's impact is mediated by how the directors framed the film content and how the viewers received the film content. The comparative film analysis indicated the similarities and differences between *Dara of Jasenovac* and *Schindler's List*. The study's comparative approach was particularly effective in identifying differences and commonalities in the framing of a protagonist based historical –fiction film depicting the Holocaust. Although the Holocaust films are twenty-eight years apart, they simultaneously utilize the same film genre, similar aesthetics, and cinematic elements for the ability of viewers to authenticate the film text in understanding the collective memory of the Holocaust.

Although, there were many similarities between *Schindler's List* and *Dara of Jasenovac* as indicated through the comparative film analysis, the reception of both films had two different responses. The critical discourse analysis that was conducted indicated that *Schindler's List* was positively received especially in articles written closer to the release date of the film. While *Dara of Jasenovac* had a predominantly negative reception. This is because *Dara of Jasenovac* is understood as a false recount of trauma in collective historical dimensions by Western audiences because of political, geographical, and time-related contexts which was explained in the discourse analysis. In conclusion, *Dara of Jasenovac* adds to the collective memory of the Holocaust in film studies, although it is rejected by Western audiences because of geographical, cultural and time-related contexts. Therefore, the research offers great insight into the study of Holocaust collective memory and media studies, and particularly the difference of production and reception of different depictions of the Holocaust in Historical-Fiction film.

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