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The Rise of Decolonial Image: Postcolonial Reading to *Django Unchained* Movie by Quentin Tarantino

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Abstract

This paper provides postcolonial analysis of *Django Unchained* movie which is written and directed by American Film writer Quentin Tarantino in 2012. More specifically, the analysis focused on three primary components: firstly, Quentin Tarantino's critique for slavery of blacks and racial discrimination, secondly, Orientalized Oriental discourse via postcolonial lens, and thirdly, decolonization discourse which is represented by Django, the protagonist of the movie. Throughout the movie, the viewers can see many scenes of slavery and racial intolerance which reflects many historical facts in the era of American slavery; including how blacks were obliged to work and how they were treated inhumanely. In a similar vein, the viewer can see the spirit of Orientalized Oriental phenomenon through Stephen as one of the major actors of the movie who embodies the phenomenon which supported abusing with blacks although he is a black actor. Quentin Tarantino gives a spectacular role to Diango who becomes a symbolic emancipation of blacks and earns his freedom and frees his wife, Broomhilda. Postcolonial critics react against the imperial history of colonization, like the structure of racism as well as colonial power which reshaped itself by Orientalized Oriental discourse. After all, Diango Unchained Movie contributes to the discourse of postcolonialism in which Quentin Tarantino reveals some historical facts about African American slavery, and in contrast to many other Film Makers, he gives a good role to non-European hero, Django.

Keywords: Django, Decolonization, Orientalized Orientals, Postcolonialism and Quentin Tarantino.

I- Introduction:

I.I- Quentin Tarantino and Django Unchained Movie

Quentin Jerome Tarantino was born in 1963 and is a successful film writer and producer who produced many films. His love for movies goes back to the age of twenty-two when he worked in a video store in Manhattan Beach, California (Page, 2005). In 1986 he made his first film, *My Best Friend's Birthday* but eventually remained unfinished because of financial problems (Pearly, 2013). As a film director, screenwriter, producer, and actor, he has obtained a great reputation in cinema because he is called "an encyclopedic artist. He draws on anything and everything at hand to tell his stories. He mirrors what in literature is called encyclopedic authors" (Holm, 2004, p.9). *Django Unchained* (2012) is among his successful movies which addresses racial aspects in American slavery. Adilifu Nama (2015, p.11,12) argues that the movie "destabilizes American history and the mythological constructs of black enslavement in American pop culture. The depiction of black enslavement in American cinema is explored along with the common aesthetic representations that filmmakers often employ to portray the horror of black racial oppression".

The *Django Unchained* movie is an epic tale and has two different plots. The first one is about Dr. King Schultz, a German dentist and a "bounty hunter" who is looking for different outlaws of people including "The Brittle Brothers" to bring them into justice, and asks Django to identify them, "I don't know what they look like. But you do... dont'cha?" (Tarantino, 2012, p. 17). In return Dr. Schultz set Django a free man, "I agree to give you your freedom twenty-five dollars per Brittle brother - that's seventy-five dollars your horse, Tony - even though I've already gave him to you - but once the final Brittle brother lies dead in the dust, I'll buy you a new saddle, and a new suit of clothes, handsome cowboy hat included" (Ibid, p.18). The second one is about Django who later on seeks to free his wife, Broomhilda with the help of Dr. King Schultz:

Well frankly, I've never given anybody their freedom before. And now that I have, I feel vaguely responsible for you. You're just not ready to go off on your own, it's that simple. You're too green, you'll get hurt. Plus when a German meets a real life Sigfried, it's kind of a big deal. As a German, I'm obliged to help you on your quest (Ibid, p. 49)

There are, of course, many interpretations for the portrayal of Django and his heroic actions throughout the movie as a black actor, but the most satisfactory one can be linked to Quentin Tarantino's statement that he is influenced by the black communities. He states that, "kind of grew up surrounded by black culture. I went to an all-black school. It is the culture that I identify with. I can identify with other cultures too; we all have a lot of people inside of us, but one of the ones inside of me is black" (Pearly, 2013, p. 138). In this way, one can detect that Tarantino has a different perspective towards racial production in American movies and provokes the controversy of race representation that blacks exist although it is not unfavored among white movie directors (Nama, 2015). But still *Django Unchained* can be seen as a flashback movie about the bitterness and uncomfortable fact about African American history in which "slavery at the local, state, and national levels was the law, including the highest law of the land, the U.S. Constitution" (Speck, 2014, p.76).

I.II- Movie Portrayal of non-Europeans and Postcolonial Thought

Filmmaking and cinema study are deeply connected to literary works, especially "the relationship between modern literature and cinema" and this notion became "familiar at the beginning of the twentieth century and cinema can be considered an art" (Pacchioni, 2020, p.21). On the other hand, to a great extent, nowadays filmmaking plays a huge role in characterization and misrepresenting of non-Europeans, Middle Easterners and African Americans. The general manifestation of Hollywood films is injustice about the community of African Americans. The racial Hollywood stereotypes are changing from one time to another. If blacks were servants in the early movies, now they would become criminals and brutal actors (Michaels, 2017). Hollywood movies, "feature images of African Americans (male or female), with low self-esteem who are thuggish, uneducated, drug dealers, thieves and murderers" (Candell, 2011, p. 19). These misconceptions are problematic because of two main reasons. First, "it has given white people another set of misconceptions and misunderstandings about black people. Second, black people themselves see these stereotyped representations, and some observers have argued that these racially prejudicial films have encouraged black youths to take on the roles they see on the screen. This reinforces inaccurate stereotypes" (Michaels, 2017, p.9). On the other hand, as a school of thought, postcolonialism questions the way of portrayal to non-Europeans in literary works throughout the history and the reason behind such characterization. As Leela Gandhi (1998, p.4) puts it, postcolonialism is an evaluation of history, which is "a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past". Postcolonialism integrates the

eurocentric representation of movie characterization of non-Europeans and endeavors to criticize the way of picturizing non-Europeans as Robert Young finds out:

Colonial and imperial rule was legitimized by anthropological theories which increasingly portrayed the peoples of the colonized world inferior, childlike, or feminine, incapable of looking after themselves (despite having done so perfectly well for millennia) and requiring the paternal rule of the west for their own best interests in simple terms, the west-non-west relation was thought of in terms of whites versus the non-white races. White culture was regarded (and remains) the basis for ideas of legitimate government, law, economics, science, language, music, art, literature - in a word, civilization (Young, 2003, p.2)

II.I- Slavery:

Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* meticulously appears as a resistance to colonial slavery. He opposes abuse with non-westerners and a racial discrimination as "the black was deemed to be inferior, inhuman and animal-like, and therefore could only be property with no agency" (Nayar, 2015, p.139). The movie is a kind of critique to history; there are some instances in which Tarantino shows how the blacks were treated, manipulated and trivialized by the whites. It seems that Tarantino is aware of the fact that there should be a unification of both blacks and whites in order to abolish slavery. For instance, Django's love to free his wife 'Broomhilda' reflects blacks struggle to emancipation from slavery and Dr. King Schultz's attempt to bring some white men into justice which ironically reflects the notion that laws should be equally enforced to all. Dr. King Schultz "is looking to purchase a slave named Django to identify a trio of notorious sibling bandits called the Brittle Brothers" (Nama, 2015, p. 107). For this purpose, Dr. King Schultz needs help from Django as he cannot do it himself alone. So, Tarantino's message is, if Americans want to enforce law, there should be a unification of both blacks and whites because blacks comprise a huge community of American society.

The critique of postcolonial theorists to European slavery to non-European becomes an iconic tool in developing postcolonial theory. The movies, *Django Unchained* starts by giving the historical portrayal of African American slavery. As it can be seen at the beginning of the movies when the viewers observe Django who is shoeless and shirtless and has kept in the "giant round pen" in the auction field (Tarantino, 2012, p. 3). Sometimes trivializing the slaves by showing their sexual bodies as one can detect from Django's wife

'Broomhilda' "The Seller makes her expose her breasts to the small crowd. Then her back, revealing her whip marks. Then pointing out the runaway "r" branded in her cheek." (Ibid, p. 53) Tarantino provides pictures about suppression of black people by Americans foregrounding a critique for postcolonial theory. During their journey to find Broomhilda, Django and Dr. King Schultz see one of the fugitive slaves, D'artagnan who lies down in the dirt and surrounded by four dogs because he refused to fight and entertain his slaveowner, Calvin Canie (Tarantino, 2012).

As the movie goes away, D'artagnan begs Calvin Canie for forgiveness but Canie states "Now now, no beggin', no playin' on my soft heart. You in trouble now, son. Now you need to understand I'm runnin' a business. Now I done paid five hundred dollars for you. And when I pay five hundred dollars, I expect to get five fights outta a nigga 'fore he roll over and play dead. You've fought three fights" (Ibid, p.88). when then D'Artagnan refuses to do more fighting, Calvin Canie permits "the dogs continue to tear D'Artagnan apart" and he enjoys the scene (Ibid, p.91).

If literary writers including poets, novelists, dramatists, filmmakers have shown the notion of slavers so as to encourage power for business and misrepresent the slaves, *Django Unchained* Movie wants to say something different. Quentin Tarantino wants to give a real picture of history and criticize slavery. Like a postcolonial critic, Tarantino wants to give voice to the blacks who are human beings and disavows exploitation of black for the desire of whites as Calvin Canie wants D' Artagnan to fight more with other slaves. According to the movie, the blacks were not only suppressed, oppressed and exploited but also, they became a source of entertainment for white plantation owners as they took joy when they saw D' Artagnan's eyes "have been poked out. Big BITES have been bit out of both his face and neck (by past fights, human bites, not the dogs), as well as three fingers have been bit off" (Ibid, p.86).

II.II- Orientalized Oriental:

One of the dramatic tools which leads colonialism to sustain itself is through Orientalized Oriental phenomena. Sometimes it is also called 'brown sahib' or 'captive mind' (Sardar,1999). Ziauddin Sardar quotes Nevzat Soguk's notion about Orientalized Oriental that is referred to the people who are non-Europeans but they think Europeanly as he puts it:

[The] is one who physically resides in the "East" and sometimes in the West, yet spiritually feeds on the West.... S/he is the non- Western subject who makes her/himself largely in the image of the West, its experiences, designs, and its expectations. In spite of endless assurances to her/himself to the contrary, for her/him the "West" is always more intelligible and fulfilling, and thus more attractive than the East. Spiritually and intellectually, s/he is more of the West than the non-West. For the West, however, s/he is almost always a "stranger" and never completely like "us."(Ibid, 1999, p. 85)

In accordance with the above statement, one can claim that Stephen in Quentin Tarantino *Django Unchained* Movie is an Orientalized oriental or brown sahib, because he does believe in slavery as Westerner do in the Movie although he is a black character. Stephen can't believe his eyes when he views Django for the first time. He doesn't want to see a free black man or someone who has a greater position than him. The viewers can observe hatred and jealousy from Stephen's gaze at Django. Stephen might think; A black man riding a horse, wearing sunglasses, black gloves, and putting a big cowboy hat on his head who moves beside a Western man, Dr. King Schultz, a German dentist to the big house.

Like other European characters in the movie, Stephen calls black figures as niggers and this notion becomes clear when he asks Calvin Candie about identity of Django and Candie replies that his name is Django and he is a free man. Stephen says "Yeah yeah, hello my ass - who's this nigger up on that nag?" (Tarantino, 2012, p.93). Stephen is very depressed when he hears that Django is a free man. He thinks that blacks should be ruled and guided by Europeans because blacks are inferior and white are superior. Despite the fact that he is a great supporter of western colonization and black suppression, he doesn't realize that he is still black in the European perspective. For Calvin Candie as a master of the Candyland plantation (Tarantino, 2012, p.102), Stephen is the head house slave, but Stephen is still a black person and non-Westerner, "he is nigger like you that nigger there. Let me at least introduce the two of you Django, this is another cheeky black bugger like yourself, Stephen. Stephen, this is Django. You two should hate each other" (ibid, 2012, p.105). Candie uses Stephen for his own benefits because Stephen, as a black actor, knows more than Candie about blacks' cultures, languages and behaviors. So, Stephen is another tool for promoting colonization including slavery for business and merchandise and does not care about colonial administration. Orientalized Orientals like Stephen is a good oriental or brown sahib because he is Orientalized who follows western style of thought in portraying non-Europeans. Like his Western master, Stephen believes that black should live outside the house and they should not enter the palace except for service. When Calvin Candie claims that Django will stay at his mansion Stephen resists, as one can observe his peculiar attitude in the following conversation:

CALVIN CANDIE

Good. They're spending the night. Go up in the guest bedrooms and get two ready.

STEPHEN

(pointing at Django) He's gonna stay in the Big House?

CALVIN CANDIE

Stephen, he's a slaver. It's different.

STEPHEN

(incredulous) In the Big House?

CALVIN CANDIE

You gotta problem with that?

STEPHEN

I don't gotta problem, unless you gotta problem with burin' the bed, the sheets, and the pillow cases once this black ass, motherfuckers gone!

CALVIN CANDIE

That's my problem, they're mine to burn; Your problem, right now, is making a good impression. And I want you to start solving that problem right now, and git them rooms ready (Tarantino, 2012, p.94-95).

Stephen has not recovered from the shock that Django is a freeman. Stephen believes that blacks will never become free humans and they should remain suppressed, oppressed and ruled by Westerners throughout their lives. Not only Stephen, but the whole members of Candyland Plantation get surprised when they notice Django as he rides a horse, "[a]ll the Candylanders see Django, dressed like he is, up on the horse, and for a

moment don't know what to think" (Tarantino, 2012, p.93). Stephen, like other black actors, has never seen a free black man and never thought about it. Stephen, as a black man, sees himself in the lens of Westerners that blacks are created to service the whites.

In a similar vein, Stephen is very loyal to his white master and he is not ready to help Django to take back his wife, Broomhilda and make her free. He is more devoted to Candi than those other white men inside the big house because he is completely Orientalized. Orientalized Orientals like Stephen, are proud to follow Western culture. "Their categories of life are already too far removed from those of the native cultures. They see the natives as the ultimate "others" to be infiltrated, studied, gazed at, and transformed in the image of modernity and progress" (Soguk, 1993, p. 374). He tells Candi about Django and Dr. King Schultz's visit in which they do not come to merchandise but to take Broomhilda back as Django's wife, "Those motherfuckers ain't here to buy no mandingos. They want that girl" (ibid, 2012, p. 125). Quentin Tarantino organized the events of the Movie in a way that Stephen's cunning plans are not only failed but also lead to his death. Stephen's characterization as Orientalized Orientals also appears at the end of the *Django Unchained*. Here, Quentin Tarantino ironically tells the viewers that the consequence of those who betray their own country and culture is death.

II.III- Dejano: The Rise of Decolonial Image

The term decolonization refers to the loosening "control of the European nations over settlements and colonies......and the more culturally focused process whereby former colonies, especially in Asian and South American nations, seek to attain intellectual, philosophical and political independence from the Europeans and from European legacies" (Nayar, 2015, p.59). Colonization perpetuates itself by many means even after the colonial period. So, decolonization as a process involves the freedom of culture, economy, political and psychology from the colonizer because "European intellectual hegemony wrought through instruments like law, education, religion and literature" (Ibid p.59).

On the other hand, one of the crucial subjects in American filmmaking is the way of portraying white and black people. Most importantly, the representation of heroes and heroines are closely connected with whiteness in American Hollywood and "whiteness is positioned as a default category, the center or the assumed norm on which everything else is based" (Benshoof & Griffin, P.92, 2011). The process of Othering or Otherization in which one group is recognized by other is very common in American movies. In these movies, "both Hollywood narrative form and the industry itself continue to marginalize

non-white people in many ways" (Ibid, P.88). But, the hero of *Django Unchained* can be seen differently.

According to Cheryl McEwan the main task of postcolonialism is to "remove negative stereotypes about people and place" (McEwin, 2009, p.169). This is what Quentin Tarantino's hero doing in *Django Unchained* in which Django rises as heroical figure to negate and decolonize the negative stereotypes which portrayed by western wind. Bhabha (1994, p. 57) quotes from Frantz Fanon that blacks are living under paranoid and schizophrenic situation, "The Negro enslaved by his inferiority; the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation". So, the blacks are thinking that they should serve whites and the whites think that they should master them. This notion becomes clear when Django and Dr. King Schultz visit Bennett Manor to find the Brittle Brothers. Betina, a black servant female in Bennett Manor does not believe that Django is a free black man and she wonders how he could be free and dress like the whites, "So you really free? You mean you wanna dress like that?" (Tarantino, 2012, pp. 27, 28). As a decolonized image Django is very certain of who he is and he does not think like Bennett who says to her that he is a "free" man not "slave" (Ibid). Not only Bennett, but none of the blacks think that a black figure like Django is a free man and can ride a horse who walks without working in a field as the blacks are staring at Django in one of the cotton plantations, Tarantino states that "All of a sudden all the bent over backs in the field, straighten up to get a better look at the black riding a horse" (Ibid, p.90).

His decolonial image becomes more obvious when he takes revenge of his wife from two members of Brittle Brothers Big John and Little Raj. He whips Little Raj bitterly after he shots Big John which made the black actors to get surprised and not to believe what they see. Quentin Tarantino (Ibid, p. 35), finds out that "the slaves are flabbergasted" and astonished because they have never seen a black figure hits a white man. They just used to see white people whip black ones. Although the viewers of the movie will observe harsh violence in killing members of Brittle Brothers, but if one takes Django into a consideration he realizes himself as a human being and is an iconic for decolonizing the colonial stereotypes who takes his revenge from those who violated his rights and it doesn't make a difference whether they are blacks or whites.

Another instance which makes Django as a decolonial image is his strive to get back his lover, Broomhilda. He will perform the task and reunite with her in spite of going through many obstacles. As it can be seen at the last scene of the movie when, "Django leaves Candyland having rescued his Broomhilda from her Mountain, her Ring of Hellfire, and all her Dragon's" (Ibid, p.169). After killing Big John and Little Raj by Django and Ellis, "The German picks the middle Brittle brother off his horse", by Dr. King Schultz (Ibid, p.36), Django attempts to free his wife. He is not just thinking of himself and looking for his freedom but for his wife as well. Ironically, he thinks as a human being that people should be free and not oppressed or suppressed. Here he tries to abolish slavery and the notion that black should serve white because whites are superior to non-whites. So, he heads his way with the German man to Candyland plantation to free his wife. He doesn't accept to be kept in chains like other blacks, "BLACK MEN, WOMEN, and CHILDREN in BONDAGE are everywhere you look. LINES OF CHAINED SLAVES being marched one way or the other, move through the muddy streets of Greenville. WHITE MEN on horses move them along" (Ibid, p. 55).

Django becomes not only a source of self-realization and decolonizing the colonial discourses, but he also helps other black slaves like Rodney, Chester, and Chicken Charlie to rethink about themselves and get their freedom. Django kills Floyd, Joy and Jano, another group of slave sellers in front of their eyes. When he kills them, the scene becomes a shock for the black slaves as if they want to say how it is possible for a young black slave to challenge his white master. They do an intensive gaze at Django with half smile of approval for his action and claim, "Who was that nigger?" (Ibid, p. 154). Here in this scene Quentin Tarantino as director of the *Django Unchained* uses John Legend's song *Who Did That To You* to address vengeances of his lover, but there is no doubt that his lover is enslaved because of her color, (Legend, 2012)

Yeah, Now I am not afraid to do the Lord's work
You say vengeance is his but Imma do it first
I'm gonna handle my business in the name of the Law, Ooooh
Now if he made you cry oh I gotta know
If he's not ready to die, he best prepare for it
My judgment's divine I'll tell you who you can call.

Here Django decolonizes the idea that non-Europeans cannot rule themselves but they should be ruled. Through Dejano black get into self-realization and they abolish the myth of European superiority over non—Europeans which might be the real message of the movie writer or director. As it can be read from the above song, Django refuses the law of misbehaving the blacks and treat them as inhuman. He is going to make a new law which

is liberating himself and his wife. He is ready to die in order to get his rights because as a black actor, he is aware that he is a human like other white actors.

III- Conclusion

In *Detached Unchained*, Quentin Tarantino attempts to show colonial exploitations and its sustainment by different means such as slavery and Orientalized Orientals. The movie confronts slavery and Orientalized Orientals by the rise of decolonial image, Django. Tarantino as a film writer and producer criticizes the notion of African American slavery and shows how slavery is violent and rude. At the same time, he shows how colonizers try to sustain and reshape themselves by Orientalized Orientals so as to reinforce the idea that whites are superior to nonwhites. Both of the discourses slavery and Orientalized Orientals were confronting the rise of decolonial image in which Django is facing Stephen and liberating his beloved from slavery. So, Quentin Tarantino's *Detached Unchained* becomes a tool for non-Europeans so as to realize themselves that they are human beings and avoid the notion that non westerners are backward and incapable to rule and guide.

دياركهوتني سونبولي دژهداگيركهر: كوينتن تارانتينو وهكو رهخنهگريكي دژهداگيركهر له فيلمي "جانگو ئهنتهچت"

سامالٌ مارف محمد

بەشى ئىنگلىزى، كۆلىدرى پەروەردەى بنەرەت، زانكۆى راپەرىن، رانيە، ھەرىمى كوردستان، عىراق. پوختە:

ئەو نوسىينە خورىنەر ئاشنادەكات بە بىردۆزى رەخنەى ئەدەبى پۆستكۆلۈنىال بۆ فىلمى جانگۆ ئەنتەچت، كە دەرھىنەر و فىلم نوسى ئەمرىكى كوينت تارانتىنۆ لە سالى 2012 بەرھەمى ھىناوە. بەتاببەتتر، تىشك خراوەتە سەر سى بابەت، يەكەم، كوينتن تارانتىنۇ وەكو رەخنەگرىكى لە كۆيلەكردنى رەشپىستەكان و پەراويزخستنيان، دوەم، خستنەرو و رەخنەگرىن لە چەمكى خۆبەرۆژئاواكردن لە دىدنىگاى بىردۆزى پۆستكۆلۆنىلانمەوە، وە سىيەميان، چەمكى ئازاد بونى و بەرەنگاربونەوەى داگىركارى بە ھۆى جانگۇ ، كە پالەوانى فىلمەكەيە. بىنەرانى فىلمەكە بە لە زۆر دىمەنى بەكۆيلەكردن و جياواز كارى رەگەزايەتى ئاشنادەبىت بويناى مىزۋىي ولاتى ئەمرىكا نىشان دەدات. لەوانە كە چۆن رەشپىستان كاريان پىكراوە و بەشىۋەى نامرۆۋانە ھەلسوكەرتيان لەگەل كراوە. ھەروەھا بىنەر ئاشنا دەكرىت بە دىاردەى بە رۆژئاوايكردن لە رىگەى رەشبېستىكى فىلمەكە بەناوى، ستىفن، كە چۆن درايەتى رەشبېستەكان دەكات. كوينتن تارانتىنۇ، رۆلىكى بوخىزانەكەى، برومھىمدا. رەخنەگران لە لايەك بەتوندى درى چەمكى داگىركارى ناۋەرۆكى داگىركارى و خىزانەكەى، برومھىمدا. رەخنەگران لە لايەك بەتوندى درى چەمكى داگىركارى ناۋەرۆكى داگىركارى فىلەمەكە دەۋەسىتنەۋە و لەلايەكى ترىش سىتاسشى جانگۇ دەكرت ۋەكو سومبولى بەرەگارى و سەبەخۆخۆى فىلمەكە دەۋەسىتنەۋە و لەلايەكى ترىش سىتاسشى جانگۇ دەكرت ۋەكو سومبولى بەرەگارى و سەبەخۆخۆى ئاشنابون بە بىردۆزى پۆستكۆلۆنيالزم، بەشىپكى لە راستىيە مىزۋوييەكانى بە كۆيلەكردنى رەشپېستىكى، جانگۇ.

كليله وشهكان: جانگق، سەربەخۆبون، خۆبەرۆژئاوايكردن، بيردۆزى پۆسكۆلۆنيالىز و كوينتن تارانتىنق.

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