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The Othering of Palestinians in Film: *Munich* (2006) and *Waltz with Bashir* (2009)

STEPHEN BENNETT, *University of Minnesota*

ABSTRACT

This paper is a critical textual analysis of two of the most popular and critically acclaimed non-documentary films on the Arab-Israeli conflict. The wide array of popular films on Israel and Palestine released in the past two decades, and the myriad perspectives they present, call for a more current critical textual analysis, as some of these films have been very well-received by audiences worldwide and have garnered numerous international film awards. These films include *Divine Intervention* (2002), *Munich* (2006), *Miral* (2010), *Ajami* (2010), and *Waltz with Bashir* (2009), to name a few. Film provides a popular medium through which we find an active Othering of Palestinians, sometimes even in films that have set out to upend dominant narratives. By undertaking a textual analysis of two of these films, *Munich* and *Waltz with Bashir*, and utilising works on collective memory along with elements of critical race theory, this paper discusses some problematic aspects of modern film representations of Arabs in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict. This study carries implications for both historical and political studies of this conflict, and for communications theory by delving more deeply into media depictions of race, ethnicity, and nationality amidst the Arab-Israeli conflict. It also raises questions as to the dominance of Orientalism and neo-Orientalism in media depictions of Palestine and Palestinians and how that may be changing due to an emerging 'Palestinian narrative' in recent films. Furthermore, by lending a critical eye towards these films, we can take a more accurate look at the larger historiography and media landscape surrounding the Arab-Israeli conflict and observe how recent political developments 'on the ground' have, or have not, influenced depictions of the conflict and the region.

KEYWORDS

Orientalism; Film; Othering; Palestine; Israel; Arab-Israeli conflict; Memory; History

Introduction

Few histories are as contentiously debated as that of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The debate taking place within its historiography involves deep disparities between seemingly parallel realities and concurrent narratives. Wider mass media narratives comprise some of the primary battlegrounds for public opinion across the international stage, and this battle for favourable public perceptions has been waged globally through the traditional news media, online social media, activist movements, and in popular culture. Complicating matters further, the multi-layered media landscape on Israel and Palestine is reflective of the Arab-Israeli conflict itself, with increasingly complex and intertwining elements of fervent religious belief and prophecy, geopolitical strategic interests, colonialism, ethno-nationalism, military conflict, and competition for natural resources. When taking this complex media environment into account, film stands as one of the more accessible and popular media that

assists in the formation of public perceptions and understandings of both the history and current status of Arab Israelis and Palestinians.

This paper attempts to answer the following questions: How are elements of the ‘self’ and the Other created, upended, or displaced by recent film representations of Arab Israelis and Palestinians? Are elements of Orientalism present in these depictions of Palestinians? Do more recent films challenge the Orientalist trend, or do they merely reinforce it? What is the effect of this Othering on the historical narrative of the Arab-Israeli conflict in a more modern context?

Defining ‘Collective Memory’

Beginning with Maurice Halbwachs’ (1992) foundational work, the scholarship on collective memory and memory studies has expanded rapidly in recent years. This is partially a result of its particular relevance and relation to post-modern theory. Definitions of collective memory identify a malleable shared record of the past that ‘continuously negotiates between available historical records and current social and political realities’ (Zerubavel 1995, 3). Zerubavel examines ‘how the meaning of the past is constructed, and how it is modified over time’ as a result of social collective memory, and sets the study of history apart from actual historical events themselves (3). Here, history is ‘the product of a scholarly scrutiny of the records of the past’, and a ‘superorganic’ discipline. Collective memory, though, ‘is an organic part of the social life that is continuously transformed in response to society’s changing needs’ (14). However, the overarching American positions on Israel and Palestine have largely remained unmoved in comparison with the shifts in collective memory and historical interpretations of the conflict elsewhere. While the vast majority of the global community supported the establishment of a Palestinian state when it passed at the United Nations in late 2012, the US voted in opposition (Marquart and Hughes 2012). With the exception of some activist organisations, Americans have not been receptive to arguments lending credence to Palestinians, as reflected in the almost unconditional diplomatic support that the US professes for Israel. Thus, we should investigate the American construction of historical memory on Israel and Palestine.

Based on scholarly articulations of collective memory, and in conjunction with the relatively open nature of US media systems, one could argue that Americans would be most open to re-writing historical interpretations of major events. Certainly the media landscape of the Arab-Israeli conflict has been skewed in Israel’s favour from the beginning, especially in mainstream news media (Bennett 2010). In addition, part of the challenge in altering a dominant social memory is that alternative narratives threaten the legitimacy of belief systems, and thus the alternative narratives are seen as having a ‘hostile and subversive relation to collective memory’ (Zerubavel 1995, 10). However, the stakes are, in fact, much higher, as the challenge presented by a counter-narrative extends beyond the ‘symbolic realm’ as it translates into ‘direct political implications’ (10). Yet, collective memory is in a nearly constant state of ‘selectively emphasizing, suppressing, and elaborating different aspects of that (historical) record’ (5). So, how malleable is collective memory, and why has the American memory of it remained so static on the issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict?

It appears that the current theoretical approach towards collective memory is not useful in the Arab-Israeli context. Gedi and Elam (2002) take issue with the ‘collective’ approach toward studying memory, as well as with ‘the belief in memory as an actual living entity’, as a ‘supposition of memoriologists’ (34). In their view, all uses of the ‘collective’ aspects of

memory 'are problematic [...] because they are conceived as having capacities that are in fact actualized only on an individual level' (34). Though I agree with their assertion that Halbwachs (1992) took Durkheim's theories to the extreme by only giving meaning to memory in the social context, we cannot dispose these formulations entirely. Indeed, 'individual conscious' is 'real and determinate' and holds meaning, but social context and influences, as well as previously acquired information, inarguably bears on the formation of historical memory at an individual level (Gedi and Elam 2002, 34). More specifically, these pre-existing aspects of memory determine the context in which an individual 'decodes', 'reads', or views an audio-visual text (Hall 1980). Gedi and Elam's call for emphasis on the term 'stereotypes' is a move in the right direction, but their conclusion that collective and individual memory reside with the individual does not account sufficiently for the social and cultural influences of the formations of memory, nor for memory's influence on society and culture.

Having evaluated the usefulness of the 'collective', we should evaluate 'memory' more deeply as the terrain for analysis. Confino (1997) identifies memory as 'the ways in which people construct a sense of the past' and identifies media as 'vehicles of memory' (1386). However, there remain limitations in its uses, since we cannot construct the past wholly on a memory, as it must be placed within the larger contexts of history, and it must also be subjected to scholarly theory and methods. Instead, Confino proposes using memory in 'articulating the connections between the cultural, the social, and the political, between representation and social experience' (1388). In turn, it seems that memory itself may not be the primary object of analysis but, instead, its social function and influences. In other words, memory is the product of, and is subject to, myriad influences, most importantly media depictions of the past and one's own cultural surrounding and identity.

I argue that both the 'collective' and 'memory' in 'collective memory' are useful elements but, in their current uses, they do not provide the most efficient tools for analysis, as previously defined. Instead, we should use media as cultural artefacts to identify and analyse dominant *collective narratives* as determinants of memory. Here, collective memory retains both its relevant aspects, though as a much larger meta-product of collective narratives formed by media. Memory then retains its susceptibility as it is 'subsumed within a culture that is constituted by common practices and representations' (1399).

My move here toward narrative as the object of analysis follows Kansteiner (2002) in calling for studies of collective memory through methods used in communications and media studies, which are very useful in historiographical and postmodernist approaches. By using methods of communications studies, utilising critical theory and textual and discourse analysis to understand memory, we immediately find that 'physical and social proximity to past events and their subsequent rationalization and memorialization do not have to coincide' (Kansteiner 2002, 190). Simply put, memories are always constructed and mediated through media. According to Kansteiner, 'even the memories of eyewitnesses only assume collective relevance when they are structured, represented, and used in a social setting' (190). Narrative uses memory as a form of media that helps us to communicate and share our understandings of the past, again subject to cultural and social contexts. That is, 'collective memories are multimedia collages' and dominant media narratives of events form its very patchwork (190).

The importance placed upon narrative here is also a result of narrative as a tool of persuasion, and 'analyzing how exposure to fictional narratives designed to entertain or cause enjoyment

[and contain] implicit *arguments* about different topics or social actors' (Igartua and Barrios 2012, 514). The Extended Elaboration Likelihood Model shows that

fictional contents can be effective tools of persuasion because *involvement in the narrative* [narrative absorption or transportation] and *involvement with the characters* [identification with characters] are processes that limit counter-arguing [...] thus reducing individuals' *resistance*" to preferred decodings of the narrative presented (Igartua and Barrios 2012, 515, original emphasis).

Even in films that deal with highly controversial issues, a viewer's identification with a character fostered by narratives provide 'an effective tool for cultivating beliefs regarding polemical topics or for weakening strongly consolidated attitudes, as it is assumed that counterarguing during the reception process [...] and identification with characters are incompatible' (Igartua and Barrios 2012, 517). This is because film narratives, particularly as audio-visual representations, can create emotional empathy, cognitive empathy, a feeling of shared goals with the viewer, or actually becoming the character.

On Orientalism and media representations of Israel and Palestine

According to Said (1994), Orientalism is 'a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience' (1). Orientalism is a sort of reflection of how the West perceives itself, in that we fit the Orient into a framework with Western models used as the standard of comparison. The Orient and Orientalism help to define what the West is not and, by extension, what is not Western. It defines and articulates what is 'the West' and 'the Other'. The de-humanisations of Arabs as the Other in popular film are where we locate 'an epistemological barrier that keeps the other incomprehensible, inaccessible and ultimately ungrievable' (Potzsch 2011, 75).

The specific focus here is on how the film establishes what I call *proximal narrative distance*, which refers to an epistemological barrier that prevents the viewer from empathising with the Arab subjects of these films. Regarding Israel and Palestine in the news media, Orientalist discourse presents a racially-charged representation of Arabs. Said (1994) pointed out that 'information wars' were being waged by Israel in order to portray itself 'to Americans and Europeans as a victim of Islamic violence' (xxi). Orientalist discourse effectively essentialises the Eastern and Western civilisations, creating a binary opposition between them. As we fit the Orient into a framework which Western models use as the standard of comparison, the categories of the civilised 'Us' and the inferior 'Other' are defined accordingly.

More substantively, when taking the present conditions faced by Arabs in Israel and Palestine into account, Said's (1994) commentary on Zionism is remarkably prescient. In his view, 'Orientalism governs Israeli policy towards the Arabs throughout' (306). Within the Israeli, orientalist mindset, the Palestinian who dared to resist the division of Palestine was made to look as 'either a stupid savage, or a negligible quantity, morally and even existentially' (306). Said points to the vast inequalities in Israeli civil rights law between Palestinians, Arab Israelis and Jews as being a direct manifestation of the marginalisation within Orientalist discourse about Arabs in Israel and Palestine. Israeli Orientalism portrays the Arab mind as 'depraved, anti-Semitic to the core, violent, unbalanced' (Said 1994, 306). Said utilises Roland Barthes' structural semiological concepts, to argue that myths effectively speak to, reproduce and support one another within Orientalist discourse. These myths contribute to the

construction of a system of knowledge that uses the Palestinian as the dangerous, undesirable Other. In Said's words, 'there are good Arabs (the ones who do as they are told) and bad Arabs (who do not, and are therefore terrorists)' (306). In keeping with the Orientalist line, we have been told that those 'bad Arabs' who dared to resist any aggressive Israeli action bear responsibility for the seizing and occupation of all of Palestine. This is the image that ultimately provides the justification for the permanent division of the land and peoples of Palestine, and for America's perpetual support for Israel's violation of Palestinian human rights.

Palestine has historically been subjected to a wide array of contradictory yet overlapping imaginations for millennia, long before the modern state of Israel was declared. All three Abrahamic religio-historical traditions place Palestine and the city of Jerusalem at an elevated status, which has paradoxically sentenced Palestinians to their current reality. The high status that Palestine and Jerusalem have held for centuries has subjected Israel and Palestine to an existence determined by a colonial mindset, pitting religious and ethnic communities against one another in a quest for the possession of the 'holy land'.

What must also be accounted for is the dominant American imagination of the 'holy land'. Despite being an 'imagination' based on religious myth and a mediated hyper-reality, which exists separately from the actual realities of life in Israel and Palestine, the American view of the conflict is one of unequalled consequence. Americans' understanding of Israel and Palestine as the 'holy land' is profoundly affected by their religious systems and doctrines. As cited in Anderson's (2005) *Biblical Interpretation and Middle East Policy*, 'a 1996 study by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago revealed that 46 percent of Americans believe that "God promised the land to the Jews"' (19). This religious imagination is very useful for the state of Israel and its American supporters, especially as Israel's recent politics has arguably threatened not only its own security but America's as well (van Evera 2005). In addition to Israel being the top recipient of US military aid, the fact that the Israel lobby has essentially dictated US foreign policy in the Middle East is indisputable. The crucial role of the US in Palestinian and Israeli developments justifies the focus on American memory within this study.

Israel and Palestine in Film

The power of film has long been realised by academics and analysts 'as a specific social institution capable of wielding tremendous cultural power'. The cinema's power as 'capable of tapping society's irrational collective consciousness' remains an incredibly important 'institution of mass culture' (Mowitt 1992, 142-143). With its influence, film is a medium through which producers can propagate differing attempts at writing and re-writing historical narratives, and through which to identify and analyse dominant narratives and their relation to collective memory. Film, as a medium that partially operates in visual images, is a 'privileged' vehicle of memory and memory construction because of its 'exceptional ability to close, and at times even obliterate, the gap between first-hand experience and secondary witnessing' (Kansteiner 2002, 191).

Like Stuart Hall (1981), this study also approaches films as cultural artefacts which are reflective of popular culture. Here, pop culture represents 'a crucial terrain of power and struggle that "articulates" with broader social forces and political economic processes' (Stein and Swedenburg 2004, 8). This approach sees popular culture as going through varying states of articulation and re-articulation, where 'culture has no singular location or function, nor

subcultural or popular cultural forces or actors *necessarily* inscribed with counterhegemonic meanings or effects. Rather, the terrain of the cultural is contradictory and changeable' (8). We can then say that culture can serve as a tangible location of political action and engagement throughout a wide array of official and unofficial institutions.

Here, I am also drawing upon Hall to identify some of the 'determinant moments' in the encoding/decoding process when historical events are 'signified within the aural-visual forms of televisual discourse' (Hall 1980, 164). In presenting historical narratives of Israel and Palestine, these films constitute a 'communicative event' which will 'at another stage [...] be integrated into the social relations of the communication process as a whole' (164). Televisual discourse is analysed here in semiotic terms, engaging with televisual messages 'at the connotative level of the sign [where] situational ideologies alter and transform signification' (168). By accounting for some of the various socio-political contexts of the Arab-Israeli conflict, I analyse signifiers at 'the point where already coded signs intersect with deep semantic codes of culture and take on additional, more active ideological dimensions' (168). Careful attention must also be paid to the ways in which these messages are encoded in film as 'encoding will have the effect of constructing some of the limits and parameters within which decodings will operate' (170).

While there have been some useful textual analyses of films depicting the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Israeli occupation, including Ella Shohat's *Israeli Cinema* (1987) and Jack Shaheen's *Reel Bad Arabs* (2001), most do not focus on the particular aspects or contexts of media depictions of Israel and Palestine. Furthermore, several crucial aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the occupation of Palestine have changed dramatically in the period following the Oslo Accords. However, these changes have not yet been accounted for in current film scholarship. Perhaps the most important legacy of the Oslo Accords is how they have brought the political and military interests of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) closer to those of Israel, consequently distancing the PNA from the very people they are meant to represent. As a result, the Israeli occupation has, in many ways, become more normalised than ever before in its history.

Many film studies on Israel and Palestine which do not account for recent political and social changes are, consequently, relatively outdated. While Shohat's (1987) *Israeli Cinema* remains an indispensable source which analyses Orientalist depictions of Arab Jews in Israeli film, her study is now almost twenty-five years old. Shohat's book is primarily focused on depictions of Arab Jews in Israel, and masterfully captures how, though 'geographically set in the East, the dominant Israeli imagery inclines toward the West' (1). She also invokes several aspects of Orientalism, by addressing how 'Palestinians have been denied the right to "self-representation". Since Zionism undertakes to speak for Palestine and the Palestinians, the Palestinians have been largely unable to represent themselves on the world stage' (3). Whereas this marginalisation was largely true at the time when Shohat wrote *Israeli Cinema*, there have since been films that represent some elements from a Palestinian perspective. The more recent filmography on Israel and Palestine now presents a much more inter-textual body of work from which to explore a wider variety of scenarios. In addition, this newer host of films, which is still in need of more in-depth textual analysis, was produced after some key events unfolded, such as the Lebanese Civil War, the First and Second Intifadas, and the Oslo Accords, all of which took place after the publication of Shohat's book.

Shaheen's (2001) *Reel Bad Arabs* also analyses film depictions of Arabs during the last century of film, and briefly lends focus to film representations of Palestinians. However, the

scope of his analysis is fairly limited, as he focuses on Palestinians as villains at a time when films showing Palestinians as normal folk were completely absent. He points out that

Never do movies present Palestinians as innocent victims and Israelis as brutal oppressors. No movie shows Israeli soldiers and settlers uprooting olive trees. No movie shows Palestinian families struggling to survive under occupation, living in refugee camps, striving to have their own country and passports reading 'Palestine' (Shaheen 2001, 186-187).

In *Reel Bad Arabs*, Shaheen concludes that, 'when colleagues ask whether today's reel Arabs are more stereotypical than yesteryear's, I can't say the celluloid Arab has changed' (172). Shaheen's assertions may be true on the overall Orientalist depictions of Arabs in film. However, the body of film on Palestinians has, as noted above, changed to some extent in recent years. This is not to say that the depictions of Palestinians are no longer problematic. Instead, it appears that the methods of Orientalism in film have shifted and operate in more nuanced and complicated ways. For example, films like *Waltz with Bashir* and *Munich* lend some humanism to Palestinians, though indirectly, by presenting a narrative of their killers' remorse. Both these films should be placed in conversation with one another, in order to understand the full implications of films that humanise and elicit sympathy for the Palestinians' killers.

The two films discussed here are analysed as texts because they are terrains for contesting the history of Israel and Palestine. The narratives are understood as being comprised of two elements: 'the story and how it is communicated' (Vassilou 2006, 3). I will also be utilising the concept of 'collateral texts' of sounds and imagery 'that transcribe, accompany, or somehow describe the contents' of each film and how they interact with the discourse contained within each (4). The films are analysed as texts in the spirit of Shohat's useful model, which decodes them

as the product of the interweaving of specifically cinematic codes (lighting, editing, camera movement) with more widely shared artistic codes (narrative structure, character, genre, and point-of-view conventions, together with broadly disseminated cultural and ideological codes (Shohat 1987, 8).

However, in contrast with Shohat's study, my analysis will only be inter-textual in terms of intended audience and in reference to the historiographical record.

Madison (1999) has contributed crucial work on the containment of resistance narratives in popular film, where the 'anti-racist white hero' displaces the oppressed from their own movement, thereby denying them any semblance of agency. In films on Israel and Palestine, this is done in a number of ways, including viewing the narrative through the eyes of the dominant group while keeping the Other at an almost constant distance from the viewer. As the Other is displaced and can only be rescued by a member of the dominant class, White/Jewish supremacy is merely reinforced as a result. In addition, the way members of subordinated classes are portrayed leads to sympathy from the viewing audience, and not empathy as is felt for the White protagonist. As a result, the experiences of the Other are 'devalued, simplified, marginalized, decentered, and subordinated relative to the experience of "white" people' (Madison 1999, 409). Special attention is paid here to narratives that reinforce White/Jewish supremacy by marginalising the Other within their own struggle, and narratives that show how patriarchal elements of White dominance issue moral judgments on

the acceptable methods of resistance in order to contain other methods which are deemed unacceptable. The relative levels of character development of members of the dominant class are significantly different from the development of the Other in the narratives presented by the films.

Representations of Palestinians in *Munich* (2005)

Stephen Spielberg's *Munich* was released in 2005 to much critical acclaim, and was nominated for numerous Academy Awards including Best Picture. Based on a true story, the film can be largely understood as a reflection of the costs of terrorism and violence. The film attempts to present a humanistic portrait of Mossad agents who have secretly been commissioned by the Israeli government to avenge the killing of eleven Israeli Olympic athletes taken hostage and killed by a terrorist Palestinian faction known as Black September in 1972. The film opens with the initial entry of Black September members infiltrating the Israeli Olympic athletes' quarters in Munich, immediately killing some of those who resisted. The events that unfolded as the hostages are moved and ultimately murdered are revisited throughout the film. These images provide dramatic effects for the motivations, and later misgivings, of Avner, a Mossad agent played by Eric Bana.

Despite its intents to show the human suffering produced by terrorism and the vengeance it can elicit, *Munich* Others Palestinians to the extent that any productive message is lost in the Orientalist representations it contains. It takes almost thirty minutes before the words 'Palestine' or 'Palestinians' are uttered by any of the main characters in the film. Prior to this mention, Palestinians are referred to as 'Arabs', '*fedayyin*', 'Arab terrorists', and 'people like these'. The first reference to the existence of Palestinians appears over twelve minutes into the film, when Golda Meier, unsure of her decision to exact revenge upon the members of Black September, describes Palestinians as follows: 'The people, they want to destroy us... Forget peace for now... We have laws, we represent civilization... I don't know where these maniacs are or where they come from'. The viewer of *Munich* also lacks the context to understand the Palestinian cause, the motivations of Black September for undertaking terrorism, and who Palestinians actually are. Instead, we are presented with a stark dichotomy similar to those seen in traditional Orientalist texts, that is, Palestinians are evil and, in Meier's words, 'unrecognisable', whereas Israel represents Western civilisation and values.

Soon after the viewer is informed of the incivility of Palestinians and the senselessness of their violent actions, we see Avner making love to his pregnant wife at home. Here, the Mossad agent is presented as a sexual being, a lover with much to lose in the form of his wife and unborn child. Avner's wife is similarly loving, affectionate, and supportive of her husband. Meanwhile, the only representations of Palestinian spouses found in *Munich* are those of hysterical women weeping when the newsmen on television states that the 'Arab terrorists' of Black September are dead. Thus, the Mossad agent as a lover and family man is set against nameless, faceless terrorists whose families only appear in a very limited sequence in the film. When Palestinian families are shown, they speak Arabic, yet subtitles are often not provided, Othering the Arab characters and rendering them even more 'unrecognisable' and unconnected to the viewer.

Tropes from the Orientalist rendition of the history of Israel and Palestine also emerge at various points in the film. The revenge killings are framed in terms of the apparent weakness of Israel because it is just 'a small country'. The Palestinian connection to their land is rendered inauthentic or false when one Palestinian character is told that he should leave

Palestine and settle elsewhere because they ‘are Arabs, there are lots of places for Arabs’. This perspective essentialises all Arabic cultures into one, painting them as a mass of commonality and sameness, which has usually been a method for Othering peoples of the Middle East throughout Western Orientalist historiography.

Despite being killers, the Mossad agents that carry out the targeted revenge killings of Palestinians in *Munich* are all presented as human and caring individuals. The only personality conflicts that emerge is when one of them begins to question the morality of their revenge killings, and even when such issues arise, the character with moral qualms is quickly killed off. The subsequent message seems to be that questioning the morality of such acts can only end in weakness and death. In addition, the agents are shown to make every effort to avoid civilian casualties. At one point, one of the Mossad agents declares that ‘it’s strange to think of yourself as an assassin’. No such qualms are mentioned by Palestinian characters in the film, who barely speak and for whom the morals of killing are apparently natural and never brought into question.

However, when Avner truly begins to question the morality of the killings he commits for Mossad, he is consistently reassured by other characters as to the righteousness of his actions. Among other justifications, Avner is explicitly told that ‘if these guys live, Israelis die... You know this is true’, and ‘you killed for the future, for peace’. When Avner again confronts his Mossad supervisor in the closing scene of the movie and communicates his misgivings, he is left standing alone, rendered small by a wide-out shot set against the skyline of New York City. As Avner struggles with the actions he has undertaken to avenge the killings of the Israeli athletes, the viewer is left to sympathise with the burden Avner bears as a revenge killer, who walks away and out of the frame. As the scene fades out, we see the Twin Towers in the background (which would be destroyed decades later in the 9/11 attacks).

Representations of Palestinians in *Waltz with Bashir* (2009)

Palestinian and Lebanese Arabs have an even less significant role in the 2009 part-animated film, part-documentary *Waltz with Bashir*, another popular film that garnered numerous awards and accolades upon its release, including nominations for a Golden Globe and Academy Awards. In *Waltz with Bashir*, narrator and auteur Ari Folman recaptures his memories from his time serving in Lebanon by tracking down and interviewing his former IDF comrades, who recount their time spent together in the war. Although the film appears to be critical of the slaughter of hundreds of Palestinian civilians at the hands of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and by Lebanese Christian militia members in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in the midst of the Lebanese Civil War in 1982, Palestinians are, in fact, marginal in the narrative.

Whereas Palestinians have problematic but still active roles in *Munich*, they are almost completely absent from *Waltz with Bashir*, despite the film ostensibly being about a mass murder committed against them. Instead, Palestinians are used primarily as background props, yet again in the form of mourning, wailing women. And within the numerous flashback scenes where the Folman’s IDF tank unit roll through Lebanon shooting their guns aimlessly, Arab characters are conspicuously absent. Yet, when Folman is told to gather and dump the bodies, a task he does not want to undertake, a number of dead Arab bodies are suddenly shown on stretchers. When hijab-wearing Arab women express their lamentations in the street, the animated scene scans right past them, instead focusing on Ari’s face. Similarly, when Ari’s unit senselessly opens fire on a car that happens to drive near them

when they arrive on a Lebanese beach, their victims are only seen as motionless bodies slumped over in their car. Here, the viewer is only provided with Folman's viewpoint, according to which Palestinians are nameless, faceless casualties. Their death is not a tragedy for Palestinians and their families, but it is only a burden of guilt placed upon the main character.

In one of the interviews, Folman's friend, Boaz, retroactively expresses his regret over being ordered to shoot dogs so that the soldiers can enter an Arab village, an act that still haunts him in his dreams. Boaz claims to remember 'every face, every wound. The look in their eyes. Twenty-six dogs'. Later in the movie, another of Folman's friends from his time with the IDF in Lebanon confesses that it was only when he came upon several emaciated and slaughtered Arabian horses that he became affected by the violence around him. Notable here is the fact that two characters become deeply disturbed and haunted by the death and suffering of animals, while human victims are hardly ever a topic of conversation or reflection.

The rare instances when Palestinian victims are shown (for example, when the Phalangist Christians load civilians into trucks and drive them to their execution), nearly all of the scenes consist of distant, impersonal shots. *Waltz with Bashir* closes with a real, unanimated video of Palestinian women screaming and mourning those who had been murdered in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. Still images of murdered Palestinians are shown, all of them swollen and bloody and, just as in *Munich*, unrecognisable. Over the course of the film, no Palestinian or Lebanese Arabs are interviewed or provided any voice whatsoever. Instead, the viewer is presented with a narrative of the Sabra and Shatila massacre from the Israeli standpoint, where the tragedy is only considered in terms of their guilt, thereby invoking the viewers' sympathy for the killers of Palestinian civilians.

Conclusions

Munich and *Waltz with Bashir* were specifically chosen for this analysis because, while they constitute different genres of film, both propagate distinct but overlapping Otherings of Palestinians. While both are successful and popular films among critics and provide different portrayals of the killing of Palestinians, *Munich* was a large-budget film by an internationally-known group of actors and producers, while *Waltz with Bashir* was an independent film produced on a small budget. In *Munich*, Palestinians are terrorists who are killed in the context of justified revenge. In *Waltz with Bashir*, Palestinians are killed in the context of the circumstances and confusion surrounding the Lebanese Civil War. *Munich* presents realistic depictions of violence and killing, while the war scenes in *Waltz with Bashir* are accompanied by sleek music and effects that arguably glorify the violence unfolding on screen. Yet both films overlap perfectly as several of the main characters are burdened with the guilt caused by having killed Palestinians. Mossad agent Avner is intermittently haunted by visions of the Israeli athletes being murdered at the hands of Black September, and concurrently bears the burden of guilt for the killings he has committed in retaliation. However, it is not guilt that ultimately drives Avner to spin out of control and storm into the Israeli embassy in New York. Instead, he is overtaken by paranoia over possible retribution for his actions or for having left the Mossad and the state of Israel. Meanwhile, in *Waltz with Bashir*, Folman and his comrades discuss their guilt only amongst themselves as Israelis and former IDF members. No Palestinians or Arabs take part in the conversations, and the viewpoints of the victims in Sabra and Shatila hardly occupy any space throughout the entire film.

Even when the killings of Palestinians are ostensibly the topic of these films or, at the very least, when the morality of killing them is called into question, Orientalism still permeates their depictions at every turn. Perhaps more damaging, since these films attempt to confront the morality of Israeli killings of Palestinians, is the fact that old tropes are reinforced when Palestinian characters are Othered by making them completely absent and removing their agency and human nature, placing them in binary opposition with their civilised Israeli killers, and depicting them as unknown corpses. These depictions reinforce the traditional Orientalist Otherings of Palestinians, as originally elucidated by Said, and renders Palestinians disposable. While their killings may be portrayed as regrettable, they are only so to the extent that their Israeli killers must bear the burden of guilt. This effectively displaces Palestinians within films that supposedly address the morality of the Palestinian situation and the events that unfold as a result.

One should also note that these films attempt to represent pivotal events in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Therefore, we must consider the ways in which these narratives contribute to the formation of collective memory about Israel and Palestine. By presenting narratives from the point of view of the reluctant killer, the deaths of the Othered Palestinians in history become excusable, acceptable, and necessary. Despite these films purporting to provide humanistic narratives of the Arab-Israeli conflict, they merely serve to render Palestinian deaths grievable only insofar as they create guilt on the part of their Israeli killers. In the case of *Munich*, the deaths of Palestinians are unmistakably political and they are contextualised in terms of the waging of the conflict and the search for peace. In *Waltz with Bashir*, the main character is largely removed from the political context, and the killings of Palestinians in the Lebanese Civil War become essentially apolitical. These films obscure the actual face of Palestine and Palestinians, their legacy of resistance beyond terrorism and violence, and the historical roots of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Only by honestly engaging with the history and humanity of Israel and Palestine, and not glorifying death merely as an artistic exercise, will the medium of film begin to contribute productively to a more accurate collective memory.

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Biography

Stephen Bennett is a PhD candidate and graduate instructor at the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. He was previously an adjunct instructor of history at Illinois State University, and has worked as a researcher and editorial intern at the Institute of Jerusalem Studies in Ramallah. His research interests include critical media studies, media culture, memory studies, historiography, and representations of the Arab-Israeli conflict in film and entertainment media. He can be contacted at: benne662@umn.edu.