



MEMORY, POWER, AND REPRESENTATION IN “WALTZ WITH BASHIR”: THE TRANSFORMATION OF CONFLICT NARRATIVES IN ISRAELI CINEMA

BAŞİR İLE VALS’TE HAFIZA, GÜÇ VE TEMSİL: İSRAİL SİNEMASINDA ÇATIŞMA ANLATILARININ DÖNÜŞÜMÜ

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Abstract

This article critically examines the transformation of conflict narratives in Israeli cinema, with a particular focus on “Waltz with Bashir” as a paradigmatic case study. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from Althusser, Gramsci, and Hall, the research explores how Israeli cinema functions both as a mirror and a mold of collective memory, national identity, and political discourse in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Employing a qualitative, interpretive methodology, the study analyzes narrative structure, visual style, and ideological subtext to reveal the mechanisms through which filmic texts shape, legitimize, or destabilize dominant representations. The findings highlight the complex interplay of ideology, hegemony, and propaganda, demonstrating how the film negotiates consensus and dissent, complicates binary oppositions, and foregrounds the ethical stakes of historical representation. While the film is lauded for its formal innovation and self-reflexivity, the research also critiques its limitations, particularly the marginalization of Arab subjectivity. The article underscores the need for continued critical engagement with cinematic representation, advocating for greater inclusivity and reflexivity in future scholarship.

Keywords: Israeli Cinema, Ideology, Hegemony, Propaganda, Collective Memory.

Öz

Bu makale, İsrail sinemasında çatışma anlatılarının dönüşümünü eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla incelemekte ve özellikle “Waltz with Bashir” filmi örnek olay olarak öne çıkarmaktadır. Althusser, Gramsci ve Hall’un kuramsal çerçevelerinden yararlanan araştırma, İsrail sinemasının Arap-İsrail çatışması bağlamında kolektif hafıza, ulusal kimlik ve politik söylemin hem bir yansıması hem de şekillendiricisi olarak nasıl işlev gördüğünü araştırmaktadır. Nitel, yoruma dayalı bir metodolojiyle yürütülen çalışma; anlatı yapısı, görsel stil ve ideolojik alt metni analiz ederek, film metinlerinin baskın temsilleri nasıl şekillendirdiğini, meşrulaştırdığını veya istikrarsızlaştırdığını ortaya koyan mekanizmaları açığa çıkarmaktadır. Bulgular, ideoloji, hegemonya ve propaganda arasındaki karmaşık etkileşimi vurgulamakta; filmin uzlaşma ve muhalefeti nasıl müzakere ettiğini, ikili karşıtlıkları nasıl karmaşıklaştırdığını ve tarihsel temsilin etik boyutlarını nasıl öne çıkardığını göstermektedir. Film, biçimsel yenilikçiliği ve öz-düşünümelliğiyle övgü alırken, araştırma aynı zamanda özellikle Arap öznelliğinin dışlanması gibi sınırlılıklarını da eleştirmektedir. Makale, sinematik temsile yönelik eleştirel angajmanın sürdürülmesi gerekliliğinin altını çizmekte; gelecekteki akademik çalışmalarda daha kapsayıcı ve öz-düşünümsel yaklaşımlar benimsenmesini savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İsrail Sineması, Ideoloji, Hegemonya, Propaganda, Kolektif Hafıza.



INTRODUCTION

The accelerating forces of globalization have profoundly reshaped the modalities of media production, circulation, and reception, engendering a dynamic interplay between localized narratives and transnational discourses. Nowhere is this transformation more acutely felt than in regions characterized by enduring conflict, such as the Arab-Israeli context, where cinema emerges not merely as a cultural artifact but as a strategic arena for the negotiation of ideological meaning. Within this contested terrain, Israeli cinema assumes a dual function: it both mirrors and molds collective consciousness, serving as a site where national identity, historical memory, and political aspiration are continuously constructed, deconstructed, and reimagined.

This study undertakes a critical interrogation of Israeli cinema's engagement with the Arab-Israeli conflict, deploying the interrelated theoretical lenses of ideology, hegemony, and propaganda. By scrutinizing the mechanisms through which visual narratives are mobilized to shape, legitimize, or destabilize dominant representations, the research seeks to illuminate the subtle and overt processes by which filmic texts participate in the broader politics of meaning-making. The analysis is anchored in a close reading of a paradigmatic film, integrating established theoretical frameworks with original interpretive insights to advance ongoing scholarly conversations about the power of media in contexts of conflict.

Located at the intersection of globalization studies, media theory, and conflict analysis, this work addresses an academic audience attuned to the complexities of visual culture and ideological production. It foregrounds the necessity of a nuanced, multi-layered approach to cinematic representation, one that recognizes film as both a product and producer of hegemonic discourses, capable of reinforcing, contesting, or transforming prevailing narratives. In doing so, the study not only contributes to the critical literature on Israeli cinema and the Arab-Israeli conflict but also offers methodological and conceptual tools for examining the entanglements of film, ideology, and power in other conflict-ridden contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of ideology, hegemony, and propaganda in media representation, particularly within Israeli cinema's engagement with the Arab-Israeli conflict, has evolved into a rich and interdisciplinary field. Foundational theorists such as Althusser and Gramsci established the conceptual groundwork for understanding how media function as ideological state apparatuses and how cultural hegemony is maintained through subtle, often invisible, mechanisms of consent. Hall's encoding/decoding model (1980, p. 128–138) further advanced this discourse by foregrounding the active role of audiences in negotiating, resisting, or subverting hegemonic messages.

Israeli Cinema and the Construction of the “Other”

Israeli cinema's role in constructing and contesting national narratives has been extensively documented. Shohat's (1989, p. 45–78) seminal work deconstructs the visual and narrative stereotypes that legitimize dominant Zionist discourses, revealing how filmic representations of the “Other”, particularly Palestinians and Mizrahi Jews, are embedded within broader colonial and racialized frameworks. Shohat's analysis is echoed and expanded in recent scholarship, which situates Israeli cinema within a matrix of Euro-Ashkenazi hegemony and postcolonial critique (2010, p. 6-22). Gertz & Khleifi (2008, p. 102–140) trace the evolution of Palestinian representation, highlighting moments of rupture and contestation that destabilize hegemonic frameworks.

Recent studies have further nuanced this analysis by examining the interplay between national and transnational discourses. Harris & Chyutin (2021) argue that Israeli cinema's transnational ties, manifested through coproduction networks, global distribution, and the migration of filmmakers, complicate the notion of a singular, nationally bounded cinematic identity, challenging the boundaries of “Israeli” cinema and foregrounding the fluidity of cultural production in a globalized era.

Propaganda, State Power, and Artistic Autonomy

The strategic deployment of propaganda in Israeli media has been theorized by Jowett and O'Donnell (2012, pp. 54–89), who distinguish between overt and covert forms of influence. In the Israeli context, propaganda is not limited to state-sponsored productions but permeates independent works that may subtly reinforce or challenge official narratives. Ben-Ari & Levy (2015, p. 200–222) explore the role of military cinema in shaping images of heroism, sacrifice, and enemy “Otherness,” revealing a complex interplay between state interests and artistic autonomy.

Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the intensification of censorship and the politicization of cultural institutions in Israel, particularly in the wake of the 2023–2025 Gaza conflicts. Reports of government crackdowns on films and cultural events that foreground Palestinian perspectives underscore the ongoing struggle over narrative control and the boundaries of permissible discourse. Alioglu (2025) employs critical discourse analysis to examine Israel's digital propaganda apparatus, revealing how language, imagery, and algorithmic suppression reinforce state power and shape global perceptions of the conflict.

The perpetuation of visual stereotypes remains a central concern in the literature. Pickering (2001, p. 23–47) theorizes stereotypes as cognitive shortcuts that reinforce binary oppositions and simplify complex social realities. In Israeli cinema, the depiction of Arab characters often oscillates between demonization and victimization, reflecting broader socio-political anxieties (Shohat, 1989, p. 50–52; Gertz & Khleifi, 2008, p.110–115).

However, the emergence of counter-hegemonic films such as those by Elia Suleiman (2025) and Hany Abu-Assad has challenged established tropes, offering alternative perspectives that humanize Palestinian experiences and foreground the agency of marginalized subjects (Labidi, 2021). These efforts employ formal innovation, narrative disruption, and self-reflexivity to contest dominant narratives and open space for critical engagement (Friedman, 2010, p. 88–105; Stam & Spence, 1983, p. 1–16).

Recent research has also highlighted the role of digital activism and social media in producing counter-hegemonic narratives. Al-Haddad (2025) demonstrates the way Palestinian digital activism has become a crucial tool for asserting self-representation, challenging Western and Zionist narrative hegemony, and mainstreaming decolonial critique.

The intersection of ideology, hegemony, and propaganda extends beyond narrative content to encompass aesthetic choices, production contexts, and audience reception. Stam and Spence (1983, p. 1–16) argue that cinematic form itself can be an ideological statement, with shifts in technique such as the move from realism to postmodern aesthetics signaling broader changes in political discourse and cultural self-understanding (Noy, 2019, p. 61–84). Recent analyses have explored how Palestinian filmmakers employ “formal refusal,” through camera angles, editing, and narrative structure, to resist the surveillance gaze and create visual counter-cartographies that protect privacy and dignity (Ismail, 2025).

Globalization, Transnationalism, and the Shifting Terrain of Israeli Cinema

The impact of globalization on Israeli cinema has become an increasingly salient theme. Morag (2012, p. 134–157) and Peleg (2025) document the growing circulation of Israeli films beyond national borders, the rise of streaming platforms, and the consequent negotiation of multiple audiences. This transnational dimension complicates the relationship between local hegemony and global ideological flows, raising questions about the universality and particularity of cinematic propaganda (Harris & Chyutin, 2021)

Recent scholarship has also interrogated the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in Israeli cinema's engagement with the “Other,” noting that while some films reinforce settler-colonial narratives, others present critical perspectives that acknowledge Palestinian suffering and contest dominant frameworks (Madar Center, 2023).

In synthesizing these perspectives, the literature reveals a complex, contested terrain in which Israeli cinema functions as both a mirror and a mold of ideological, hegemonic, and propagandistic discourses surrounding the Arab-Israeli conflict. The field has moved beyond static models of representation to embrace dynamic and multi-layered analyses that account for the interplay of narrative, form, production, and reception across local and global contexts. Future research should continue to expand the analytical horizon, incorporating digital media, transnational flows, and the voices of marginalized communities to foster a more inclusive and reflexive understanding of cinema's role in shaping collective memory and identity in contexts of conflict.

METHODOLOGY

Methodological Approach

The study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology, combining close textual analysis with contextual examination of production, reception, and intertextual references. Drawing on established frameworks from film studies, cultural theory, and media studies, the analysis attends to narrative structure, visual style, character construction, and ideological subtext (Stam & Spence, 1983, p. 10–12; Friedman, 2010, p. 88–105).

The research is guided by the following core questions:

- a. How does "Waltz with Bashir" construct and negotiate representations of the Arab-Israeli conflict?
- b. What mechanisms of ideology, hegemony, and propaganda are evident in the film's narrative and aesthetic choices?
- c. How does the film position audiences with respect to dominant and counter-hegemonic discourses?

To mitigate interpretive subjectivity, findings are triangulated with existing scholarship and theoretical models (Shohat, 2010, p. 6, 9, 22; Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012, p. 54–89). Reflexivity is maintained throughout, with critical attention to the researcher's positionality and the evolving political context that shapes both the production and reception of cinematic texts (Alioglu, 2025, p. 22).

Analytical Procedures and Scene Selection Criteria

The qualitative, interpretive analysis conducted in this study is not based on random scene selection; rather, it follows a systematic procedure grounded in criteria of theoretical saturation, representativeness, and ideological intensity. The film text is evaluated holistically regarding narrative structure, visual style, character construction, and ideological subtexts. Within this framework, scenes chosen for analysis are identified from among the narrative nodes that most clearly illuminate the processes of ideology, hegemony, and propaganda in the film. Scenes concentrating on themes such as the repression of memory, the representation of trauma, the positioning of the military subject, and the visual/narrative delimitation of Arab subjectivity constitute the analytic backbone of the study.

The analytical process was structured in three sequential stages. In the first stage, the film was approached as a coherent and unified text, and its overarching ideological orientation was identified through a holistic reading of the narrative. In the second stage, key scenes located at the intersection of ideology, hegemony, and propaganda were subjected to close analysis through the theoretical frameworks of Althusser's concept of ideological state apparatuses, Gramsci's formulation of cultural hegemony, and Hall's encoding/decoding model. At this level, the selected scenes were examined not only in terms of their explicit narrative content, but also with regard to aesthetic choices, narrative gaps, silences, and mechanisms of exclusion, thereby foregrounding the implicit dimensions of meaning production. In the third stage, the analytical findings were interpreted comparatively in relation to the existing body of scholarship. To prevent the analysis from remaining at the level of subjective impression, the interpretations were cross-validated through systematic engagement with relevant theoretical texts. This multi-layered and systematic approach aims to enhance the transparency, coherence, and academic rigor of the analytical process.

Aim and Significance of The Study

The principal objective of this study is to critically interrogate the representation of the Arab-Israeli conflict in Israeli cinema, employing the interlocking theoretical frameworks of ideology, hegemony, and propaganda. This inquiry is anchored in a close, qualitative analysis of a paradigmatic film, "Waltz with Bashir", selected for its innovative narrative structure, international acclaim, and explicit engagement with conflict representation. By synthesizing multiple theoretical perspectives, ranging from Althusser's concept of ideological state apparatuses (1971, p. 121–173) to Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony (1971, p. 12–15) and Hall's encoding/decoding model (1980, p. 128–138), the study advances a nuanced, multi-layered approach to cinematic analysis.

The original contribution of this study lies in its examination of "Waltz with Bashir" through an integrated analytical framework that brings together the concepts of ideology, hegemony, and propaganda. While existing scholarship has largely approached the film through the lenses of trauma, memory, and ethical representation, ideological processes have often been addressed through isolated theoretical perspectives. By relationally mobilizing the theoretical approaches of Althusser, Gramsci, and Hall, this study demonstrates how the film operates not only as a self-critical narrative of memory but also as a cultural practice functioning within hegemonic boundaries and producing specific propagandistic effects within its global circulation. This integrated approach moves beyond established readings by revealing how cinema, in contexts of conflict, can simultaneously perform critical, conciliatory, and legitimizing functions; in doing so, the study offers both a conceptual and methodological contribution to the literature on Israeli cinema as well as to broader debates on media, ideology, and the representation of conflict.

This methodological integration is significant in that it transcends the limitations of prior research, which often isolates ideology, hegemony, or propaganda as discrete analytical categories. Instead, the present study foregrounds their entanglement within cinematic texts, offering original insights for scholars of media, conflict, and visual culture.

Population and Sample

The research population comprises Israeli films produced between 2000 and 2025 that directly engage with the Arab-Israeli conflict. The sample is purposively selected based on critical acclaim, thematic relevance, and scholarly impact, with particular emphasis on works that have catalyzed significant academic debate. "Waltz with Bashir" is selected as the primary case study due to its formal innovation and its capacity to foreground the psychological and ideological mechanisms underpinning national narrative construction (Shohat, 1989, p. 65–70; Gertz & Khleifi, 2008, p. 130–138).

Although the study centres on a single case analysis, it deliberately avoids treating "Waltz with Bashir" as an isolated example. The film is situated within the broader context of post-2000 Israeli cinema, particularly in relation to narratives of memory, trauma, and self-critique. It is assessed in indirect comparison with other works that foreground military experience and engage critically with national narratives. These comparative references do not detract from the primary focus of the research; rather, they serve to render the film's cinematic and ideological specificity visible within a wider framework. Thus, the limitation of generalisability inherent in a single-case approach is balanced through contextual and theoretical comparisons. This approach enables "Waltz with Bashir" to be examined not merely as an individual auteur expression but as a paradigmatic instance reflecting the transformation of ideological negotiation, hegemonic boundaries, and representational politics in Israeli cinema. Accordingly, by combining in-depth case analysis with contextual comparison, the study aims to achieve both methodological coherence and analytical clarity.

Limitations

Several methodological limitations are acknowledged:

- a. The focus on a single film, while enabling in-depth analysis, may constrain the generalizability of findings to the broader corpus of Israeli cinema.
- b. The interpretive nature of the analysis entails a degree of subjectivity, despite efforts to triangulate with established scholarship.
- c. Reliance on published sources and translations may limit the scope of textual evidence, particularly regarding non-Hebrew materials.
- d. The rapidly evolving political landscape may affect the relevance and reception of the analyzed film over time.

By integrating multiple theoretical frameworks and conducting a detailed case study, this methodology offers a robust template for future research on media, ideology, and conflict. It underscores the importance of formal innovation, self-reflexivity, and critical engagement in the ongoing negotiation of cinematic representation.

ANALYSIS OF “WALTZ WITH BASHIR” AS A NEXUS OF IDEOLOGY, HEGEMONY, AND PROPAGANDA

Theoretical Foundations and Analytical Scope

Title : “Waltz with Bashir”
Director : Ari Folman
Country : Israel
Year : 2008
Genre : Animated Documentary, War, Biography
Language : Hebrew
Running Time : 90 minutes

The passage under consideration positions “Waltz with Bashir” not simply as a cinematic artifact, but as a critical site for interrogating the complex interplay of ideology, hegemony, and propaganda within the context of Israeli cinema’s representation of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

This analysis is grounded in a robust theoretical framework, drawing from the seminal works of Althusser, Gramsci, and Hall, and is further enriched by postcolonial critique, media theory, and the insights of globalization studies. The film is approached as a multifaceted cultural text, whose narrative strategies, aesthetic choices, and patterns of reception collectively illuminate the broader politics of meaning-making in societies marked by protracted conflict.

Ideology: Memory, Denial, and the Construction of National Narratives

At the heart of “Waltz with Bashir” lies a profound and multifaceted investigation into the ideological processes that shape and sustain collective memory within Israeli society. The film’s narrative, centered on the protagonist’s psychological journey to recover repressed memories of the 1982 Lebanon War, operates as a compelling allegory for the broader societal struggle to confront, process, and ultimately integrate traumatic historical events into the fabric of national consciousness. This odyssey is not merely a personal quest but a dramatization of the mechanisms by which societies negotiate the boundaries of remembrance and forgetting, and by which uncomfortable or destabilizing truths are managed within the public sphere.

The film foregrounds the intricate interplay of denial, repression, and selective recall, illustrating how ideology applies not only through explicit discursive formations but also through the more insidious processes of silencing, omission, and the strategic erasure of histories and subjectivities. In this sense, the film can be examined through the lens of Althusser’s concept of ideological state apparatuses—the institutions and cultural forms that, often imperceptibly, reproduce dominant ideologies and stabilize existing power relations. Through its selective representation of historical events, privileging of certain

voices, and marginalization or outright exclusion of others, the film can be read as a site where the contestation over the meaning of the past is articulated and made visible.

The narrative structure of the film, with its recursive movement between memory and amnesia, serves as a metaphor for the nation's collective struggle to acknowledge and come to terms with its own complicity in violence and trauma. The narrative suggests parallels with broader societal processes within Israeli public discourse through which inconvenient or painful episodes may be relegated to the margins. These dynamics underscore the extent to which ideology operates not simply as a set of beliefs or doctrines, but as a lived, embodied practice that shapes the very contours of what can be remembered, spoken, or imagined within a given historical moment.

Moreover, the film's engagement with ideological reproduction is not limited to its narrative content but extends to its formal and aesthetic strategies. The use of animation, for instance, functions both as a distancing device and as a means of visualizing the unreliability and constructedness of memory itself. By refusing the conventions of documentary realism, it foregrounds the mediated nature of all historical representation, inviting viewers to reflect critically on the processes by which narratives are assembled, authorized, and circulated within the public sphere. This reflexivity is further heightened by the film's abrupt transition to archival footage in its final sequence, a gesture that both disrupts the aesthetic continuity of the film and confronts the audience with the material realities that underlie its narrative abstractions.

In sum, "Waltz with Bashir" serves as a powerful lens through which to interrogate the ideological underpinnings of collective memory and national identity in Israeli society. By dramatizing the processes of denial, repression, and selective recall, and by exposing the mechanisms through which certain histories are privileged while others are silenced, the film illuminates the complex and often fraught relationship between media, ideology, and the construction of national mythologies. In doing so, it not only reflects but actively participates in the ongoing negotiation of historical memory, challenging audiences to reconsider the ethical and political stakes of remembering and forgetting the past.

Hegemony: Consensus, Dissent, and the Boundaries of Identity

The engagement of the film with the concept of hegemony is not merely a thematic gesture but a sustained, multi-layered interrogation of how consensus and dissent are negotiated within Israeli society, particularly in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Drawing on Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, the film dramatizes the gradual unraveling of official memory, culminating in the protagonist's confrontation with the Sabra and Shatila massacre, a moment that destabilizes the hegemonic discourse of innocence and victimhood so often embedded in national narratives.

This pivotal narrative rupture compels both characters and viewers to grapple with the ethical and political stakes of historical representation. The film's recursive structure, oscillating between memory and amnesia, serves as a metaphor for the broader societal processes by which uncomfortable truths are managed, repressed, or selectively recalled. In this sense, it exemplifies the operation of what Althusser termed "ideological state apparatuses," institutions and cultural forms that, often imperceptibly, reproduce dominant ideologies and stabilize existing power relations.

The reception of "Waltz with Bashir", both within Israel and internationally, reflects the contested terrain of hegemonic negotiation. While some critics have lauded the film for its introspective courage and willingness to confront uncomfortable truths, others have perceived it as a challenge to national consensus, highlighting the fragility and dynamism of hegemonic formations. This divergence in reception underscores the film's capacity to function as a site of ideological contestation, where the boundaries of collective identity are both reinforced and interrogated.

Aesthetically, the film's fragmented, dreamlike visual style further subverts the conventions of documentary realism, signaling a refusal to endorse any singular narrative or authoritative account of history. This formal innovation invites audiences to interrogate the processes by which meaning is constructed, stabilized, and potentially contested within the cinematic medium. By eschewing closure

and embracing ambiguity, it foregrounds the constructedness of all historical narratives and the ethical imperative to remain vigilant against the seductions of consensus.

Moreover, the film's engagement with hegemony is not limited to its narrative content but extends to its production and circulation within transnational contexts. As the document notes, the globalization of Israeli cinema complicates the relationship between local hegemonic discourses and global ideological flows, raising critical questions about the universality and particularity of cinematic propaganda. The international acclaim and distribution of it amplify its potential as a vehicle for both reinforcing and contesting hegemonic narratives, situating the film at the intersection of national memory and global cultural politics.

In sum, the film's nuanced negotiation of consensus and dissent exemplifies the dynamic, contested nature of hegemony in societies marked by protracted conflict. By dramatizing the processes through which official memory is constructed, destabilized, and renegotiated, it not only reflects but actively participates in the ongoing struggle over the meaning of the past and the boundaries of collective identity. Its formal and thematic innovations challenge audiences to critically engage with the politics of representation, underscoring the ethical and political stakes inherent in the cinematic mediation of history.

Propaganda: Ambiguity, Self-Critique, and Global Circulation

The dimension of propaganda in "Waltz with Bashir" emerges as a profoundly intricate and multifaceted phenomenon, distinguished not by overt didacticism or explicit state-sponsored messaging, but rather by its subtle, ambiguous, and reflexive modalities. In contrast to traditional conceptualizations of propaganda as a unidirectional instrument of ideological imposition, the film exemplifies a more nuanced paradigm, one in which the boundaries between critique and complicity, introspection and influence, are persistently blurred.

Central to this complexity is the film's portrayal of Israeli soldiers, who are depicted simultaneously as victims and perpetrators within the broader matrix of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This duality disrupts simplistic binary oppositions and foregrounds the profound moral ambiguities that characterize both individual and collective experiences of war. Drawing on Jowett and O'Donnell's typology, the analysis recognizes that even self-critical or ostensibly subversive narratives can fulfill propagandistic functions, particularly when the film may function, particularly in its international reception, as reinforcing a national self-image associated with introspection and moral responsibility. In this sense, the film may be interpreted as engaging in a form of what could be termed 'reflexive propaganda' a mode of representation that, while appearing to interrogate dominant discourses, may ultimately serve to legitimize and stabilize them by foregrounding the nation's willingness to confront its own traumas and ethical dilemmas.

"Waltz with Bashir"'s propagandistic potential is further amplified through its international circulation and reception. As theorized by Morag and others, the globalization of Israeli cinema has engendered a dynamic in which local narratives are reconfigured for transnational consumption, often resulting in the attenuation of nuance and complexity in favor of more universally legible themes. The film thus becomes a site where national and global discourses intersect, its self-reflexive critique of Israeli memory and identity positioned as evidence of a progressive, self-critical national culture within global cultural markets. These dynamic raises critical questions regarding the universality and particularity of cinematic propaganda in an era marked by intensified globalization and the proliferation of transnational media flows.

Moreover, the film's formal and aesthetic strategies, most notably its use of animation and the abrupt transition to archival footage, function not only as artistic innovations but also as mechanisms for mediating the relationship between representation and reality. By eschewing the conventions of documentary realism, it foregrounds the constructedness and unreliability of memory, inviting viewers to reflect critically on the processes by which historical narratives are assembled, authorized, and disseminated. This reflexivity, however, is itself ambivalent: while it disrupts the authority of any

singular narrative, it may also serve to distance audiences from the material realities of violence and suffering, thereby complicating the film's ethical and political stakes.

The international acclaim garnered by the film further complicates its propagandistic function. On one hand, the film's success on the global stage can be interpreted as a testament to the power of self-critical national cinema to foster dialogue and reflection across cultural boundaries. On the other hand, the very process of global circulation may entail the commodification of trauma and the reification of national narratives, as local complexities are subsumed within broader frameworks of marketability and cultural prestige. In this context, the film's ambivalence becomes a site of both possibility and limitation: it opens space for critical engagement and counter-hegemonic readings yet remains implicated in the very structures of power and representation it seeks to interrogate.

In sum, the analysis of propaganda in "Waltz with Bashir" reveals a dynamic interplay between ambiguity, self-critique, and global circulation. The film invites viewers to reflect on the ethical dimensions of historical representation while its international reception underscores the shifting terrain of propaganda in a globalized media landscape. Ultimately, the film exemplifies the potential of cinema to function as both a mirror and a mold of ideological discourse, simultaneously reflecting and shaping the contours of collective memory, national identity, and political imagination in contexts of enduring conflict.

Representation: Visual Stereotypes, Counter-Narratives, and Formal Innovation

A central concern in the analysis is the perpetuation and disruption of visual stereotypes. "Waltz with Bashir" both reproduces and subverts familiar tropes, depicting Arab victims sympathetically yet passively, echoing Pickering's critique of stereotype as a form of reduction that simplifies complex social realities. Its focus on Israeli self-examination disrupts the binary logic of perpetrator and victim, inviting viewers to interrogate the processes by which identities are constructed, contested, and potentially transformed.

The film's final sequence, a dramatic shift from animation to archival footage, serves as a powerful formal disruption, confronting audiences with the limits of cinematic representation and the constructedness of all narratives. This gesture aligns with Friedman's argument that counter-hegemonic films deploy formal innovation to challenge dominant discourses and foreground the politics of representation. By refusing to provide closure or a singular interpretive framework, the film encourages its audience to engage critically and reflexively.

Marginalization and Counter-Hegemony: Challenges and Possibilities

Despite its self-reflexive critique, the film is not immune to the limitations of hegemonic discourse. Arab subjectivity remains largely marginalized, particularly through the absence of sustained Arab voices within the film's narrative structure. Nevertheless, its openness to counter-hegemonic readings, willingness to confront uncomfortable truths, and formal experimentation represent significant interventions in the field, demonstrating the potential of cinema to engage critically with its own ideological foundations.

The film's achievements in formal disruption, self-reflexivity, and ethical interrogation mark it as a pivotal work in the ongoing negotiation of cinematic meaning in contexts of conflict. Its limitations, particularly in the representation of Arab subjectivity, underscore the need for ongoing critical engagement and methodological innovation in the study of media and conflict.

Despite its formal innovation and self-reflexive narrative structure, "Waltz with Bashir" reveals significant limitations in its representation of Arab and Palestinian subjectivity. While the film renders the Sabra and Shatila massacre visible as a historical and ethical rupture, Palestinian and Lebanese figures remain largely voiceless, with trauma mediated almost exclusively through the psychological and moral crisis of the Israeli subject. This absence of voice functions as an ideological mechanism that privileges the speaking and remembering Israeli soldier while displacing Arab subjects from the position of historical agents to that of ethical referents. Although the film challenges dominant narratives of

innocence within Israeli society, it does so without decentering the Israeli subject as the primary locus of narrative authority, operating less as a rupture with hegemony than as a negotiated critique within its limits. In the context of its global circulation, this representational asymmetry risks reframing historical violence as an abstract moral dilemma rather than a structurally grounded political issue. Accordingly, while “Waltz with Bashir” constitutes a significant critical intervention, its exclusions underscore the ambivalent ideological effects of cinematic self-critique and highlight the persistent challenges of advancing genuinely inclusive and counter-hegemonic forms of representation.

Synthesis: Cinema as a Dynamic Site of Ideological Negotiation

Synthesizing these dimensions, the film emerges as a dynamic, multi-layered text that both reproduces and interrogates dominant narratives about the Arab-Israeli conflict. Ideologically, it exposes the mechanisms of collective denial and selective memory; hegemonically, it negotiates the boundaries of consensus and dissent; propagandistically, it complicates national self-image while opening space for critical reflection. Its complex interplay of narrative, form, and reception advances scholarly understanding of media’s role in shaping collective memory and identity, while its formal and ethical innovations advocate for a more inclusive, reflexive, and critical approach to film analysis.

In conclusion, “Waltz with Bashir” exemplifies both the possibilities and constraints of cinematic engagement with contested histories. By synthesizing theoretical perspectives and conducting in-depth analysis, this study advances the scholarly understanding of the media’s role in shaping collective memory and identity in contexts of conflict. The article underscores the need for continued critical examination of filmic representation, advocating for greater inclusivity, reflexivity, and formal experimentation. As media landscapes evolve in response to globalization and technological change, the stakes of ideological negotiation in cinema remain as urgent as ever. Future research should build upon these insights, expanding the analytical horizon to encompass digital media, transnational flows, and the voices of marginalized communities, thereby fostering a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of cinema’s role in the politics of representation.

DISCUSSION

The discussion section provides a succinct yet profound reflection on the intricate interplay between ideology, hegemony, and propaganda in the cinematic representation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, as exemplified by the film “Waltz with Bashir.” To fully appreciate the depth and significance of these insights, it is essential to situate them within the broader analytical and theoretical context established throughout the document.

At its core, the analysis recognizes the film as a paradigmatic case study, a film that does not merely depict historical events but actively participates in the construction, contestation, and transformation of collective memory and national identity. The film’s narrative, which revolves around the protagonist’s journey to recover suppressed memories of the 1982 Lebanon War, serves as a powerful metaphor for the broader societal processes of denial, selective recall, and ideological negotiation that shape Israeli national consciousness. This aligns with Althusser’s theory of ideological state apparatuses, which posits that media and cultural forms are instrumental in reproducing dominant ideologies and stabilizing power structures.

The document’s literature review and theoretical foundations emphasize that Israeli cinema, and “Waltz with Bashir” in particular, operates within a matrix of competing discourses, national, transnational, and postcolonial. The film’s innovative formal strategies, such as its use of animation and the abrupt transition to archival footage in the final sequence, are not merely aesthetic choices but deliberate interventions that unsettle established frameworks of meaning. These formal disruptions invite viewers to question the processes by which narratives are constructed and to recognize the inherent limitations and constructedness of all cinematic representations.

From the perspective of hegemony, the film is positioned within Gramsci’s conceptualization of cultural hegemony, which highlights the dynamic negotiation between consensus and dissent. The film challenges aspects of hegemonic discourses of innocence and victimhood within dominant Israeli

national narratives, particularly through its unflinching confrontation with the Sabra and Shatila massacre. This moment of rupture compels both characters and audiences to grapple with the ethical and political stakes of historical representation, foregrounding the responsibilities of filmmakers and viewers alike in the ongoing negotiation of collective memory.

The film's engagement with propaganda is marked by ambiguity and self-reflexivity. Rather than functioning as overt state-sponsored propaganda, it employs a more subtle form of influence, presenting Israeli soldiers as both victims and perpetrators. This ambivalence complicates binary oppositions and challenges simplistic narratives, yet, as the document notes, even self-critical works can serve propagandistic functions by reinforcing a national self-image of introspection and moral responsibility. The film's international acclaim and circulation further amplify its propagandistic potential, transforming local narratives into global commodities and subjecting them to new forms of ideological negotiation.

A critical limitation identified in both the selected passage and the broader document is the marginalization of Arab subjectivity. While the film is lauded for its formal innovation and willingness to confront uncomfortable truths, it is also critiqued for rendering Palestinian and Lebanese figures as voiceless or peripheral. This underscores the persistent challenges of constructing truly inclusive cinematic discourses and highlights the need for continued critical engagement with issues of representation, voice, and agency.

The document's methodological approach, anchored in qualitative, interpretive analysis and triangulated with established scholarship, enables a nuanced exploration of these themes. By synthesizing theoretical perspectives from Althusser, Gramsci, Hall, and others, the study advances a multi-layered understanding of how cinema functions as both a mirror and a mold of ideological, hegemonic, and propagandistic discourses. The findings underscore the importance of formal innovation, self-reflexivity, and critical engagement in the ongoing negotiation of conflict representation.

CONCLUSION

This study has critically examined the representation of the Arab-Israeli conflict in Israeli cinema, focusing on the intricate interplay of ideology, hegemony, and propaganda as conceptualized by theorists such as Althusser, Gramsci, and Hall. Through a close, interpretive analysis of the film "Waltz with Bashir", the research has illuminated how cinematic texts serve not only as mirrors reflecting collective memory and identity, but also as molds actively shaping the contours of national consciousness and historical narrative.

The findings reveal that Israeli cinema, and "Waltz with Bashir" in particular, operates within a dynamic matrix of competing discourses, national, transnational, and postcolonial. Its narrative structure, which centers on the protagonist's journey to recover suppressed memories of the 1982 Lebanon War, is emblematic of broader societal processes of denial, selective recall, and ideological negotiation. This aligns with Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses, demonstrating how media function as powerful instruments of ideological reproduction, stabilizing dominant power structures while marginalizing alternative voices.

From the perspective of hegemony, the analysis underscores the film's role in negotiating consensus and dissent within Israeli society. Drawing on Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, it destabilizes the prevailing discourse of innocence and victimhood, particularly through its unflinching confrontation with the Sabra and Shatila massacre. This moment of rupture compels both characters and audiences to grapple with the ethical and political stakes of historical representation, foregrounding the responsibilities of filmmakers and viewers in the ongoing negotiation of collective memory.

The dimension of propaganda in the film is marked by subtlety and ambiguity. Rather than functioning as overt state-sponsored propaganda, it employs a more nuanced form of influence, presenting Israeli soldiers as both victims and perpetrators. This ambivalence complicates binary oppositions and challenges simplistic narratives, yet, as the study notes, even self-critical works can serve propagandistic

functions by reinforcing a national self-image of introspection and moral responsibility. The film's international acclaim and circulation further amplify its propagandistic potential, transforming local narratives into global commodities and subjecting them to new forms of ideological negotiation.

A critical limitation identified throughout the research is the marginalization of Arab subjectivity. While the film is lauded for its formal innovation and willingness to confront uncomfortable truths, it is also critiqued for rendering Palestinian and Lebanese figures as voiceless or peripheral. This underscores the persistent challenges of constructing truly inclusive cinematic discourses and highlights the need for continued critical engagement with issues of representation, voice, and agency.

Methodologically, the study's qualitative, interpretive approach, triangulated with established scholarship, has enabled a nuanced exploration of these themes. By synthesizing theoretical perspectives and conducting in-depth analysis, the research advances a multi-layered understanding of how cinema functions as both a mirror and a mold of ideological, hegemonic, and propagandistic discourses. The findings underscore the importance of formal innovation, self-reflexivity, and critical engagement in the ongoing negotiation of conflict representation.

In summary, the representation of the Arab-Israeli conflict in Israeli cinema is shaped by complex, evolving interactions between ideology, hegemony, and propaganda. The film exemplifies both the possibilities and constraints of cinematic engagement with contested histories through its formal experimentation and narrative self-reflexivity. As media landscapes continue to evolve in response to globalization and technological change, the stakes of ideological negotiation in cinema remain as urgent as ever. Future research should build upon these insights, expanding the analytical horizon to encompass digital media, transnational flows, and the voices of marginalized communities, thereby fostering a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of cinema's role in the politics of representation.

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