

Chapter 7

Forgive but Not Forget: The Social Role of Cinema in Restoring Collective Memory and Rebuilding Belonging

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ABSTRACT

Pierre Nora once said, “We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left.” Does it mean that we need to document memory so not to lose the truth? What is the ‘T’ruth? And from which perspective? Based on the Lebanese case, could films be one of the mechanisms used to achieve transitional justice? The author of this chapter depends on both Pierre Nora’s perception of sites and place of memory along with Maurice Halbwachs’ theory on collective memory in order to understand whether documenting the traumatic events is considered as an applicable mechanism to achieve justice within countries that struggle to accomplish national reconciliation? The methodological approach relies on visual critical discourse analysis combining Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutic approach and Norman Fairclough’s perception of dialectic of discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

The corpus of this chapter consists of analyzing 4 documentaries (were released with the emergence of the Arab Spring revolutions) documenting the Lebanese Civil War that took place between 1975-1990. The analysis is about studying their context, different actors, mechanisms, and hidden interpretations revealed through the following documentaries: *We Want To Know (Badna Naaref)*, by: Carol Mansour, 2012; *A History Lesson (Darson fel tareekh)*, by: Hady Zaccak, 2009; *Sleepless Nights (Layal Bla Noum)*, by: Eliane Raheb, 2012; *Lanterns of Memory (Masabeh El-Zakera)*, by: Jean Chamoun and Mai Masri, 2009. Finally, the author is using these documentaries as a platform to view some of the recent Arab experiences of Transitional Justice, especially within the Arab Spring countries and how the current political context affects the concepts of justice and belonging. Based on this, the research inquires about the possibility of having documentaries and films as a grassroots-mechanism used by the people to achieve transitional justice within the Arab world in light of the failure of Arab states to play their role in revealing the truth regarding different human-rights-violation incidences.

The Lebanese Civil War; Different Wars and Historical Contexts

The Lebanese Civil War has lasted for almost a decade and a half, from 1975 till 1990. The consequences were catastrophic for the dead and living people as well. Almost one third of the population was between killed, missing, kidnapped, and injured. For those who survived, fatal memories have become their companion till the rest of their life because of the countless cases of enforced disappearance amongst their family members. The families of those who were disappeared have become unable to resume the normal course of their lives as they are unable to know the truth and to figure out what really happened to their disappeared family members. Based on this, some argues that it was not only one war; it was actually several wars in different political, historical, and sectarian contexts.

The Civil War in Lebanon did not follow a sole trajectory. It had its preceding ups and downs that started back in the 1950s with the initiation of the Arab nationalism project in the 1950s by the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970) who followed anti-Western policies. Nasser's project was supported mainly by the Muslims Sunni groups at the Arab

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