



Remembering The Civil War in Today's Lebanese Cinema

Gökhan Evecen, Akdeniz University, gokhanevecen@akdeniz.edu.tr

Sırrı Serhat Serter, Eskişehir Anadolu University, ssserter@anadolu.edu.tr

Volume 13.1 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.714 | <http://cinej.pitt.edu>

Abstract

In the aftermath of the civil war, memory and trauma are a prominent thema in Lebanese cinema. This study aims to explore how the civil war is remembered through cinema in contemporary Lebanese cinema, based on an analysis of the films *Where Do We Go Now?*, *Tramontane*, *The Insult* and *Memory Box*. These films, selected from among the films made in Lebanon after 2010 by Lebanese directors and dealing with the civil war, were analysed through descriptive analysis under the themes of past, identity, trauma and space. The films under scrutiny serve as conduits for the articulation of remembrance, both as a means of confronting past traumas and of reflecting upon the present. The act of remembering the past and confronting traumas is rendered through the medium of personal recollections by the directors, thus creating a narrative of collective memory. When the subject of the civil war is represented in films, it is commonly remembered as “the past in the present”.

Keywords: Collective memory; Collective trauma; Past; Lebanese cinema; Lebanese civil war



New articles in this journal are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 United States License.



This journal is published by the [University Library System](#) of the [University of Pittsburgh](#) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](#) and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](#).



Remembering The Civil War in Today's Lebanese Cinema

Gökhan Evecen¹

Sırrı Serhat Serter

Introduction

The relationship between cinema and collective memory is multifaceted, encompassing the creation of cultural narratives, the evocation of personal and social experiences, and the representation of historical events. Cinema has the power to reinforce or alter collective memory, serving as a medium of both mourning and healing trauma.

Cinema has been instrumental in shaping our understanding of the social past, serving as a repository for numerous images and representations (Duruel Erkıılıç, 2014). However, it is important to recognise the subjective nature of these representations, which are influenced by the narrative codes inherent in cinematic storytelling (Toplin, 2002). Films can emphasize certain aspects of history while neglecting others, thus shaping collective memory to reflect contemporary cultural and political contexts. This highlights the necessity of critically engaging with cinematic narratives to ensure a comprehensive understanding of collective memory.

Film can evoke strong emotions, from affect to trauma, while hiding these emotions behind the immediate experience of the image (Fluck, 2003). Narrative and representation are key concepts in understanding the ontology of trauma. Collective trauma narratives are shaped by the

power relations and orientations of social groups, with some events being forgotten and others being given greater importance. The representation of these events has an ideological aspect, making cinema a field of struggle in the construction of representation and reality.

The geographical location of Lebanon has resulted in the formation of social groups that have historically been prone to conflict and rivalry with neighboring states. The Lebanese population is characterized by a mosaic structure comprising communities with diverse religious, sectarian, and ethnic identities.

The Civil War process, which occupies a significant position in Lebanon's collective memory and has persisted to the present day, is an evident reality. Despite the involvement of various parties, there is no clear victor, yet the Lebanese people bear the brunt of the consequences. The impact of the Civil War can be discerned in the country's social and physical landscape, where reckoning with the past is hindered for various reasons. These include the traumatic imprint of the civil war on collective memory and the destruction of urban infrastructure.

Lebanon, which had previously occupied a leading role in film production in the region, together with Egypt, since the 1950s, lost its competence with the civil war (Mellor, 2024). Since its end, the Lebanese Civil War has remained a pivotal and persistently relevant topic, though with diminished repercussions in the present era. In the films produced in the immediate

aftermath of the war, the civil war was treated as a “present in the past,” which later evolved into a “past in the present”. In a country where the memory of the civil war has been rejected, the past continues to seek a means of expression, with new events added to the collective memory, including small-scale conflicts, the political and economic crises that followed in 2019, and the Port of Beirut explosion. It was inevitable that these traumas would be reflected in art.

This research is confined to the period of Lebanese cinema between 2010 and 2020. It encompasses four films created by disparate directors that address the Civil War. This research investigates how these four selected films address the Civil War, which holds a significant place in Lebanon’s collective memory during this recovery period for Lebanese cinema.

Collective Memory

The accelerated pace of contemporary life and the technological advancements that characterize modern society profoundly influence human experiences and social structures. This situation is evident in how these forces shape various aspects of life, including communication, production, and consumption (Rosa, 2010). The influence of velocity prompts a continuous cycle of consumption and forgetting among human beings. This implies the ascendancy of the present and, thus, the growing significance of remembering. Although the processes of remembering and forgetting appear to be opposed, they are, in fact, complementary. In memory studies, the focus

is not only on what and how we remember but also on what and how we forget (Sönmez, 2015).

As posited by Boyer and Wertsch, memory plays a pivotal role in the formation of the contemporary human being, a consequence of the evolutionary trajectory of the species. Memory is regarded as a mechanism for the present moment and the future rather than the past (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009). Consequently, the function of memory is to eliminate and alter specific information while supplementing the remaining gaps.

In his seminal work, *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs embarked on a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted elements underpinning collective memory, offering a nuanced exploration of the concept of the social individual from diverse theoretical vantages. To achieve this ambitious goal, Halbwachs deftly drew upon a range of disciplines, including psychology, philosophy, biology, and anthropology. A seminal aspect of Halbwachs's analysis pertains to his insightful examination of the intricate differences and similarities between individual and collective memory. These differences and similarities are discussed by Halbwachs in the context of history, time, and space. Halbwachs's seminal contribution to the field was the positing of the concept of multiple collective memories, thereby challenging the prevailing notion of a universal memory (Halbwachs, 1992).

Assmann advances the notion of commemorating historical figures by underscoring the prerequisites for remembering within the social framework proposed by Halbwachs. For

remembering to occur, it is necessary for there to be a commitment to time and space, as well as a commitment to the group and the reconstruction of the past. Attachment to time and place denotes contexts in which the act of remembering is of paramount importance, necessitating updating figures of remembrance within a specific temporal and spatial framework. Events such as festivals represent a period of collective experience, while places reinforce the group's identity. The concept of collective memory, which encompasses the knowledge created and transmitted by a group, develops within the context of the group's collective feelings and values.

Consequently, collective memory is inextricably linked to the group's concrete identity. A collective group's preservation of the past provides the context for developing identity consciousness. The concept of reconstructing history implies a temporal shift, whereby the past is viewed in the present tense. This necessitates the construction of memory, as the past is not a fixed entity but a constantly evolving construct (Assmann, 1992). Olick elucidates the concept of remembering concerning the group, employing the notion of "re-membering," which posits that the identities of groups are reconstructed through memory (Olick, 1999). The construction of a coherent shared past ensures the coherence of group identity and facilitates the formation of a community. Identity construction is contingent upon the coherence between past, present, and future, with narratives playing a role in forming social consciousness (Başaran İnce, 2010).

The concept of collective memory represents the past and influences how collective groups choose to remember or impose narratives about historical events (Moliner & Bovina, 2019). In this sense, collective memory is a dynamic entity subject to variation following the needs of societies at any given time.

Trauma and Cinema

In contrast to physical or psychological trauma, collective trauma can be defined as an event that leads a community that is accustomed to living in harmony to a loss of meaning and a lack of identity. Consequently, each group member does not need to experience this situation in an absolute way (Eyerman, 2004). The concept of collective trauma is defined by the collective experience it represents, which carries the wound to the group level. Collective traumas influence collective identity, engendering destructive effects within the cultural domain of societies (Woods, 2019).

In the aftermath of a traumatic event, memory assumes a structure wherein temporal progression is not linear. Instead, it manifests in a fragmented and uncontrolled manner. The past is either inaccessible, as evidenced by amnesia, or present in an uninvited and unconscious manner, as demonstrated by hypermnesia (Hirsch, 2004). The involuntary presence of traumatic memories within the human consciousness can be likened to the experience of a dispersed olfactory sensation. At this juncture, the individual cannot control the recollection of the

traumatic event. Consequently, the traumatic past emerges spontaneously in the present, necessitating its recollection (Sarlo, 2012).

In the context of recollection figures, it is notable that while everyday memories evolve, traumatic memories remain consistent. To put it clearly, in normal memory, the event is experienced by a person, and when he recalls it, it is another individual as well. However, in the case of traumatic memory, the person who experienced the past event is also the one who memorizes it (der Kolk & der Hart, 1995). Collective traumas have the potential to foster unity among individuals. Nevertheless, they can also lead to the formation of rigid identity consciousness and a tendency to distance oneself from other societies. The ramifications of such traumas are not limited to the immediate period but have the potential to be transmitted by groups from generation to generation.

The transformation of a traumatic memory into language and voice indicates a healing process. Expressing one's pain to achieve personal reconciliation and liberation is a process that can facilitate healing and emotional growth (Le Breton, 1995). The process of coming to terms with the past, which imposes itself on the present continuously and in the same way, offering apologies to victims of trauma and ensuring the proper functioning of the judicial process,

provides both individual and social relief. It is also significant that these stages resonate within society, providing relief for victims (Susam, 2015).

The relationship between collective traumas and the media is inextricably linked to the concept of mediated memory, whereby traumatic experiences are frequently experienced through representations rather than through direct recollection. The advent of new archival technologies has facilitated the dissemination of traumatic narratives, enabling individuals to adopt the memories of others as their own (Pinchevski, 2011). The enabling feature of films as a medium is that they bring out more about the impacts of trauma by making sure that the affective and cognitive aspects of the audience are engaged. In this context, the complex nature of trauma is frequently depicted through sophisticated aesthetic techniques that integrate a diverse range of narrative strategies and cinematic techniques, offering viewers a multifaceted experience of visual and auditory representation (Groh, 2023).

In her seminal work *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust*, Janet Walker explores the representation of individual and traumatic events in cinema. Walker's conceptualisation of "trauma cinema" as films that result in individual or social destruction encompasses a broad spectrum of cinematic forms, ranging from Hollywood productions to documentary films. She employs a multifaceted approach to analyse the depiction of trauma in cinema, drawing upon techniques such as fragmented editing, reenactment of traumatic events,

the integration of these scenes within the linear narrative, and the interweaving of fiction and documentary styles (Walker, 2005).

In terms of how trauma is represented in cinema, the strategies of traumatic representation in cinema, which Kaplan and Wang characterize as a cure, shock, voyeurs, and witness, were created by considering the audience's position in front of the film (ignoring, fearing, avoiding responsibility and acting critically). Films that adopt the cure strategy have a traditional narrative construction and promise a happy ending by pointing out that the traumas are over. Films using the shock strategy are based on re-enacting the traumatic event in such a way as to create fear and anxiety, which may result in the audience reliving the trauma or abandoning the viewing. Like watching television news, the peeping strategy can lead the audience to distance themselves from the memory narrative and thus approach the traumatic past superficially. Finally, the strategy of witnessing refers to a position in which the audience is in the position of a witnessing (Kaplan & Wang, 2004). The existence of a critical approach is a fundamental condition for the collective memory of a traumatic past to lead to the healing of large segments of society. In this respect, the representation of trauma in cinema is essential to prevent the transmission of collective trauma from one generation to the next and achieve a healthy coexistence.

Cinema functions as a technology of memory, reconstructing the past and bringing it into the present. The past is a malleable entity, shaped according to the demands and inclinations of the present. In this regard, how the past is represented in a narrative is inherently contentious, given that memory is inherently subjective. Film and other visual representational media serve as the conduit through which the past is conceptualized in the present and imbued with meaning through the audience's experience. As these tools reconstruct the past, they imbue it with meaning in the present. In this process, the content and form of the representations are of significant consequence.

Lebanese Civil War (1975 - 1990)

The ethnic and religious composition of Lebanon is defined by a multifaceted mosaic of sectarian groups, including notable populations of Shia Muslims, Sunni Muslims, and Christians, particularly Maronites, Druze, and other denominations. This diversity has historically influenced the country's political landscape, resulting in a system of sectarianism in which political power is distributed among different religious sects. The interaction of these groups has had a significant impact on the social dynamics of Lebanon, frequently resulting in tensions and conflicts, particularly during periods of violence and civil war (Mikdashi, 2023).

The Lebanese Civil War, which commenced in 1975 and was predicated on intricate socio-political factors, originated from a precarious political system founded upon sectarian divisions,

wherein authority was apportioned among disparate religious groups. The economic disparities and political grievances between the various communities exacerbated the tensions already emerging. Additionally, external influences, including interventions by neighboring countries, were instrumental in intensifying the conflict (Hagerdal, 2021). The war had a profound impact on the country's social fabric, resulting in significant changes to its political structure. The events of this period are regarded as one of the most pivotal and tragic eras in Lebanon's history. The civil war emerged as a consequence of the country's already fragile structure and internal and external developments in the region.

The 1967 Arab-Israeli War resulted in the radicalization of Palestinian organizations and an increase in attacks against Israel from Lebanese and Jordanian territories. As a consequence of Jordan's military action against Palestinian organizations in 1970, a considerable number of these groups crossed into Lebanon. This new situation served to exacerbate the existing Palestinian-Maronite tensions in Lebanon, with the conflicts intensifying as a result of the intervention of Israel (Ayhan, Tür, and Benli Altunışık 2009).

In response to the Christian militias' armament campaign against the Palestinians, the PLO and leftist organizations were compelled to take up arms. Consequently, by 1975, armed groups in Lebanon were prepared for civil war (Cleveland & Bunton, 2018). In April 1975, a minor

incident in the Beirut suburb of Ain al-Rummana precipitated a civil war that would ultimately result in the dissolution of Lebanon's fragile unity (Dannreuther, 1998). During this period, the intensity of violent conflicts in Lebanon increased, particularly between the Shiites and Palestinians and the Phalangists (Salibi, 1976). From 1970 to 1975, Syria intervened directly and indirectly in Lebanese politics and the economy to gain influence over its neighbor (Naor, 2014).

The 1989 agreement in Taif, Saudi Arabia, constituted a significant step towards the civil war's conclusion. The Taif Agreement established a balance between the powers of the president and those of the prime minister and equalized the representation of the various religious groups (Cleveland & Bunton, 2018). In Lebanon, where the total population is approximately 3 million, the civil war resulted in the deaths of approximately 150,000 individuals and the wounding of a further 200,000. Approximately 600,000 individuals were left homeless, and over 250,000 people fled Lebanon (Haugbolle, 2012; Zisser, 2011).

The Lebanese Civil War, in which all parties were complicit and victimized, resulted in a reluctance to confront the traumatic past. Indeed, following the conclusion of hostilities, most Lebanese citizens perceived the civil war as an external conflict occurring on their own territory, effectively excluding themselves from its direct impact (Sawalha, 2014). Furthermore, the transformation of militia leaders, who were active in the civil war, into political subjects in

parliament after the conclusion of hostilities also suggests that the process of reckoning with the past has been incomplete and unsatisfactory.

Lebanese Cinema and Collective Memory

The cinematic memory in Lebanon is not a shared memory like Lebanon itself (Vimercati, 2021), and engaging with historical narratives in Lebanese cinema is challenging. This is because in Lebanon, each group, community, and even individuals have minimal connection with the history of their own country and the analogous commonalities of others, which can result in tensions and conflicts. The divisions above render the formation of a unified political entity unfeasible. A significant challenge is the need for a unified history curriculum in Lebanon. Histories are taught in diverse ways across different educational institutions and regions, shaped by the school's religious identity and the teachers' religious beliefs. To illustrate, in some history textbooks, the Phoenicians are barely mentioned, whereas, in others, they are identified as the founders of Lebanon. Furthermore, there is a dearth of consensus regarding the 1975-1990 war, with this period frequently being overlooked. The topic remains a taboo subject, as there is a fear that it may lead to the re-emergence of tensions (Yazbek, 2012). Moreover, the statement that communities in the country act both in victim and perpetrator roles as they are at war with each other complicates and hinders any attempts at constructing a complete narrative regarding the

war. Consequently, in opposition to the attempt to erase the past, the artists opposed this collective amnesia and sought to emphasize the collective memories that are embedded in individual memories, even in the absence of an intention to establish a shared narrative.

In an interview, Director Ziad Doueiri, who has focused on collective memory narratives in Lebanese cinema since the Civil War, stated that although the Civil War officially ended, its effects continued and that the conditions that gave rise to the war persisted due to a lack of reckoning with the past (Khatib, 2008). Upon returning to the country, filmmakers who had sought exile due to the civil war focused on the traumatic effects of the war itself rather than on the war itself (El-Horr, 2016). In this context, it is evident that the factors as mentioned above contribute to the formation of a complex collective memory that is shaped by a multitude of factors and experiences.

In any case, the aesthetic practices of Lebanese filmmakers in the domains of documentation, archiving, and editing (Launchbury et al., 2014) may be characterized as a counter stance to the general amnesty law passed by the Lebanese parliament in 1991 and the ban on speaking about the civil war (Yazbek, 2012)

The films produced during and in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War can be characterized as narratives based on documentation. With the gradual decline of the physical evidence of the conflict, the recovery of the economy, and the emergence of a new generation of

filmmakers who sought to confront the past, the concept of collective memory assumed a significant role. Audebert characterizes post-civil war Lebanese cinema as “the art of piecemeal reconstruction” (Audebert, 2021). This description resonates with the country’s experience of gradual reconstruction in the aftermath of the war. The cinematic output of Lebanon engages with the theme of collective memory, prompting reflection on the atrocities of the civil war and the role of society in its occurrence. By challenging the phenomenon of collective amnesia, these films prompt audiences to assume responsibility for the war (Ayoub, 2017; Sawalha, 2014). The cinematic output of Lebanon addresses the issue of traumatic memory by examining the hidden legacies of the civil war and their impact on social and individual life (Rastegar, 2015; Silverman, 2021; Tarraf, 2017). Lina Khatib posits the argument that the reconstruction of Beirut in the aftermath of the Civil War exhibited a bias towards the erection of new edifices as opposed to the restoration of existing structures. Consequently, the city of Beirut, akin to the nation as a whole, has been imbued with a claustrophobic and morose character, where the nation’s traumatic past has been consigned to oblivion, a phenomenon that has been elucidated in cinematic representations (Khatib, 2024). In Lebanese cinema, the Civil War is represented in terms of its traumatic consequences rather than being documented and discussed factually (Khatib, 2008).

Civil war is an important concept in Lebanese cinema, as is the memory and trauma associated with it. The majority of Lebanese films illustrate the deleterious impact of war on the endeavour to modernise Lebanese society, with the characters representing the tragedy of the entire nation (El Din, 2024). Today, it seems possible to say that the civil war continues to impact Lebanese cinema, even if its weight has diminished. Although Lebanese cinema had a bright period after 2010, especially after 2019, with the political issues, the great economic crisis, and the explosion of the Beirut port in 2020, elements other than the civil war were added to the collective memory.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach using descriptive analysis to examine how the Lebanese Civil War is represented in today's Lebanese cinema and relies on analysis to interpret the representation of memory and trauma in the selected films. The films - *Where Do We Go Now?* (Nadine Labaki - 2011), *Tramontane* (Vatche Boulghourjian - 2016), *The Insult* (Ziad Doueiri - 2017) and *Memory Box* (Joana Hadjithomas/Khalil Joreige - 2021) - were chosen through purposive sampling based on their thematic focus on collective memory and trauma. The films were selected according to the following criteria:

1. Temporal Frame: The films were produced in contemporary Lebanese Cinema, between 2010 and 2020.

2. Directorial Perspective: The films were directed by Lebanese filmmakers who have addressed the war and its aftermath in their work.

3. Narrative Scope: The films explore various aspects of memory, trauma, and identity, aligning with the core themes of this study.

In the aftermath of the Lebanese civil war, memory and trauma in relation to it have become prominent topics in Lebanese cinema for a number of reasons. Following the war, academic studies on films about the civil war in Lebanese cinema have been undertaken; however, the number of recent studies on the subject is very few. In light of this paucity, the present study has been undertaken to address this dearth of research by selecting films that have achieved distinction at prominent international festivals from the extensive corpus of contemporary Lebanese cinema that pertains to the civil war. The selected films were analyzed using a descriptive analysis method under the themes of past, space, re-membering and trauma, which are the fundamental dynamics of collective memory.

Findings

Past

In *Where We Do We Go Now?* Forgetting and remembering are at the film's center.

Although the time and place of the film are ambiguous, it can be deduced that it is about the

Lebanese civil war. From the men's cemetery, which is divided between Muslims and Christians, and from the news in the media, it can be understood that there is a civil war in Lebanon. The director has taken this route to prevent remembering and forgetting through time and space from being personalized, appropriated, or distanced. In this sense, the film, whose narrative structure is constructed as a fable, has acquired a structure that no one can watch without feeling responsible for the past. In the film, remembering is reflected negatively, and forgetting is preferred. In this sense, the past remains without being reckoned with and confronted.

Tramontane offers insights into Lebanese history and memory through Rabih's memory.

The film highlights the profound impact of Lebanon's complex and traumatic history on memory. Although Lebanon's civil war has ended, its legacy continues to cast a shadow over the country. While it may seem logical to think that the suppression of memory is a temporary measure, it is essential for people to remember their connection to their past in order to envision a future. As a result of the shortcomings of the state's official historical narrative, each segment has constructed its narrative, and collective memories have been reinforced. The film deals with the polyphony of memory and the resetting of the content produced by citizens due to this process. A notable phenomenon is the temporal inconsistency between when an event happened and when it is remembered. In addition, the interplay between myth and reality is a prominent element in the narratives.

The Insult portrays the collision of disparate identities and recollections and the endeavors of both parties to justify their respective positions. The film's objective is to provide the audience with a certain degree of objectivity, enabling them to view the parties involved in the conflict more objectively. In this manner, the film permits a critical examination of the constructed past regarding the ethics of memory. The Maronite Christians, who perceive themselves as the rightful proprietors of the nation, have historically had a problematic relationship with the Palestinians, particularly during wartime. Conversely, the Palestinians have an adverse history with the Maronites, shaped by traumatic events both within and beyond the country's borders. The absence of national narratives about the civil war serves to exacerbate the existing animosity between communities. Furthermore, the film elucidates the interconnection between politics and collective memory. The collective memory of Lebanon is a multifaceted phenomenon, shaped by a range of factors and attributing varying degrees of significance to different events.

Memory Box is a film that examines the Lebanese civil war and its impact on the population. The film elucidates the enduring repercussions of the war on Lebanese society and the challenges they encounter in confronting their past. The film's principal theme concerns the arrival of a box containing memories from the past, which symbolizes the traumatic experiences of the war. The film posits that denying or avoiding these memories can have catastrophic

consequences, akin to the mythological Pandora's Box. The narrative primarily focuses on three generations of women, Theta, Maya, and Alex, residing in Montreal, Canada, during a snowstorm. The snowstorm serves as a metaphor for how memories of the past interact and evolve. It is demonstrated that present circumstances shape memories and may manifest in varying emotional states. Maya's diaries from the war period reflect the challenges faced by the Lebanese population at the time. The film also shows the reconstructive nature of memory, that is, how it is subjective and can be influenced by one's purpose and perspective.

Space

The film *Where Do We Go Now?* Demonstrates how different spaces, including the village, cemetery, bakery, church, and mosque, are designed with identity and memory. The village, constructed on a hillock and circumscribed by fencing, symbolizes Lebanon and its historical presence. The sole route linking the village with the broader world is represented as a bridge on the brink of collapse, underscoring the precarious state of the nation's existence. The cemetery serves as a symbol of collective memory, with its division into Muslim and Christian sections reflecting the concept of identity. Furthermore, the film underscores the significance of women's identity within the café, a public space that women established to counter the civil war that was instigated by men and continues to pose a threat of recurrence. The presence of religious spaces,

such as churches and mosques, accentuates the distinctions between groups and reinforces the collective's identity.

In *Tramontane*, it is evident that each individual and group recalls events by their recollections. To illustrate, some recall Rabih's birthplace as a Shiite village designated as Kefarlaya in Lebanon, whereas others remember it as an Armenian neighborhood in Beirut. The director has crafted the locations Rabih visits during his journey into the past to underscore the significance of identity. The locations depicted in the film facilitate the processes of forgetting, manipulation, and remembering. For those disinclined to recall past events or individuals, the locations that remind them of such occurrences are of no consequence. The locations are classified as either interiors or exteriors, and each location is represented as a setting where the characters seek answers to their personal questions or reflect their social subconscious. These factors underscore place's pivotal role in the characters' pursuit of memory.

The film *The Insult*'s principal settings are Tony and Shirin's house, the workplace, Yasser Salameh's house, and the court. The severing of the drainpipe in the house can represent the point at which collective memory diverges from individual memory. The photograph in the nursery symbolizes the future for those who embody collective identity. In the film's second scene, Tony's nervous response to Şirin's desire to relocate to Damur village can be seen as an

indication of his efforts to distance himself from his traumatic past. Damur village, the setting of Tony's childhood, is depicted as a site of recollection and confrontation with the past. The courtroom is characterized as a site where the collective memories of groups and individuals converge and collide. The film, which the director has constructed with great care, functions as a site of memory where opposing memories are discussed and evaluated.

About the concept of collective memory, the spaces of *Memory Box* can be enumerated as follows: the basement, Montreal, civil war-era Beirut, and the present-day city of Beirut. The Memory Box is confined to the house's basement, symbolizing the traumatic past. The basement is imbued with symbolic significance, evoking the subconscious and the past that one seeks to suppress. The film employs a temporal contrast between Montreal and Beirut and a focus on spatial nuances to underscore specific moments in time. Maya's relationship with the city is analogous to her identity and memory. Beirut is a city that has borne the burden of its history for too long. About spatial memory, the film seeks to emphasize both the past and the present without succumbing to nostalgia. In Lebanon, which has physically recovered from the civil war, it is evident that the country's mental structures have not undergone a similar recovery, resulting in a perception of the country as an "open-air war museum." Regarding spatial memory, Beirut is a "museum" that imprisons the past and constantly emigrates.

Identity (Re-Membering)

Nadine Labaki's film, *Where Do We Go Now?* addresses Lebanon's multifaceted, multicultural composition and the tensions that arise from the coexistence of disparate identities. The film presents a multifaceted representation of identity conflicts, including Muslim-Christian, male-female, and Eastern-Western identities. Through the lens of gender roles, Labaki associates the concept of war with that of masculinity and the notion of peace with femininity. Additionally, the film delves into the interconnection between spatiality and identity. In the film's midpoint, Palestinian identity is represented as an additional identity, and the Palestinian condition of statelessness is depicted as an inherent fate. In examining the concept of female identity, Labaki challenges the orientalist perspective and the notion of women being confined to the roles of mother or object of desire. In terms of the historical and cultural aspects of the film, the figure of Mary, as represented by Christianity, is depicted as a protective, healing, and hopeful figure while also being influenced by the tradition of the mother goddess. After the film, the female characters assume one another's identities during the funeral ceremony, thereby challenging the collective identity that arises in conjunction with collective memory.

The film *Tramontane* reflects the concept of identity both directly and indirectly. Directly, it does so through the protagonist Rabih's struggle to learn about his identity, which encompasses

the acquisition of an identity card, passport, and knowledge of the population directorate and mukhtar's office. Indirectly, it reflects identity through Rabih's journey into the past to know who he is and the stories he tells others about himself. While the characters' names are associated with ethnic and religious identity, the director refrains from ascribing the characters in the film with identities that carry prejudice in this sense. In this context, the main characters' identities in the film are subjected to detailed analysis, with particular attention paid to the question of identity. Moreover, Rabih's exploration of identity is closely intertwined with his relationship to music, with the violin as a pivotal instrument in this process. In examining Rabih's quest for identity, music is a powerful conduit for articulating the character's inner journey. This is evident in Rabih's song at the beginning and end of the film, which resonates deeply with the themes of identity exploration and self-discovery. The film's pivotal characters, Samar and Hisham, exemplify the core concept of identity. Samar is a character who presents Rabih with false information and justifies his identity. By representing Lebanon through multiple identities, the film subjectively examines the struggle for identity and power relations.

The film *The Insult* addresses the concept of collective identity as a pivotal theme, drawing upon the concept of collective memory. The narrative commences with Tony's utterance to Yasser Salameh, shaped by his identity and formed from memory. In the film, Tony's provocation of Yasser in court and Yasser's defense against Tony's nationalist identity is

presented to the audience as an expression of collective memory. The representation of George Hanna, who witnessed the Lebanese civil war and experienced the pain, as a figure of conscience and the trace of the massacre in Damur village in the film demonstrates the significance of collective memory as a theme. The film demonstrates that identity, a significant aspect of collective memory, is a central theme in Lebanese culture and cinema.

In *Memory Box*, in particular, the characters of Maya and Alex are noteworthy for their portrayal of the conflict between mother and daughter and between the past and the present. Maya displays an introverted psychological disposition as a consequence of her traumatic past experiences. Alex expresses discontent with her mother's lack of awareness regarding her personal history. Additionally, Maya conflicts with her mother due to her ineffective communication with her family and her pursuit of identity. It is postulated that daughters engage in a process of confrontation with their mothers as they embark on the journey of identity formation. The characters' journeys to the past and the present have reinforced their identities and bonds. Furthermore, the film underscores the significance of accented filmmakers in terms of the concepts of homeland and journey.

Trauma

The film *Where Do We Go Now?* addresses the issue of trauma, which is a central theme. It depicts a village still suffering from the devastation of a past and ongoing war. In the film, the female characters endeavor to forget the past and focus on the present in order to prevent conflict between the male characters. The village men are suddenly prompted to reflect on their collective past when they receive news via the media, which incites conflict between them. By analyzing the film through the perspective of the women affected by the civil war, it becomes evident that the film's conclusion, which suggests that traumatic memories should be silenced and empathized with, exemplifies a cure strategy that addresses traumatic representational approaches. This is illustrated by the film's suggestion of exchanging identities. The film's narrative arc illustrates the notion that the traumatic past should be forgotten to achieve happiness in the present. This is evidenced by the film's portrayal of the pursuit of a cure strategy that aligns with this premise.

The film *Tramontane* is a work of narrative fiction that draws upon the director's traumatic experiences. The confrontation with the traumas of the civil war in Lebanon does not occur constructively due to the state's pressure not to discuss the subject and the public's desire to move on from it. In his film, Boulghourjian employs the strategy of witnessing, which is typically employed in the representation of collective traumas in cinema, to ensure that the

audience approaches the narrative from a distance. The director encourages the audience to observe and reflect on the traumatic past of Rabih as he grapples with his identity. The film's open-ended conclusion, lack of identification, and adherence to a classical cinematic narrative indicate that it is concerned with ethical issues. *Tramontane* represents a significant forum for grappling with the country's traumatic past in a country as diverse and persistently conflict-ridden as Lebanon.

In *The Insult*, the traumatic events experienced by Tony and Yasser share common characteristics. Given that traumatic events are fixed in memory, it follows that trauma victims will similarly recall them. In other words, while ordinary memories may evolve, traumatic memories tend to remain fixed. The transformation of these traumatic events into representations is once more associated with identity and politics. The two characters, representing Maronites and Palestinians, are defined and reconstructed through an identity based on the traumatic events they experienced in the past. The massacre that Tony witnessed during his childhood is reintroduced in the present, and the traumas experienced by the characters are occasionally presented to the audience through flashbacks. An illustrative example of a scene in which the film's cure strategy is discernible is when the leader of a political party turns to the camera and speaks to Tony Hanna on a television program. The film's conclusion depicts a scenario in which

the very individuals engaged in relentless conflict and discord express jubilation upon announcing the court's ruling. This depiction is perceived as an implausible resolution. These scenes prove the function of the cure strategy by making the viewers relax and experience the cure they could not experience in the real world, even for a short time.

Memory Box examines the Lebanese Civil War period, elucidating the impact of traumatic experiences on personal and collective memory. The impact of the war on the individual is revealed in a traumatic manner through an examination of Maya's diaries. Confronting the past acquires significance as Maya progresses through reading and completing the contents of her memory box. The film underscores the beneficial effects of confronting one's past, including tranquility and joy. The decision to dedicate the film to children serves to highlight the intergenerational transmission of trauma. In conclusion, the film addresses the traumas of the Lebanese civil war through a series of interconnected themes, including the process of coming to terms with the past, the dynamics of family ties, and the nature of intergenerational interaction. By preventing the audience from becoming indifferent to traumatic events through witnessing, the film offers viewers a constructive approach to trauma. The deliberate approach of the directors facilitates comprehension of these matters and fosters the development of a perceptive disposition towards trauma.

Conclusion

Lebanon's cinematic output reflects the country's social structure, centering on a memory devoid of national identity and shaped by traumatic experiences. Given the absence of collective memory in Lebanon and the country's ongoing grappling with its traumatic past, recent Lebanese cinema has come to embody the collective memory associated with individuals' traumatic pasts. Films such as *Where Do We Go Now?*, *Tramontane*, *The Insult*, and *Memory Box* bear the traces of the Lebanese Civil War and address collective memory by drawing on the directors' memories. While underscoring the necessity of confronting the past, these films present a multiplicity of perspectives on collective memory, eschewing a singular collective memory in favor of a more nuanced approach.

The films represent collective memory through the utilization of diverse memory tools and symbols. They use various media, including radio and television news, fake identities, archival images, and memory boxes, to illustrate the impact of the past on the present. These symbols illustrate the act of remembering the past and confronting the traumas of the present.

With regard to the spatial dimension, the city of Beirut is prominently featured in the films, symbolizing the devastation wrought by war, the process of reconstruction, and the formation of

collective memory in the context of spatial experience. Furthermore, religious spaces and cemeteries serve as efficacious symbols of identity and collective memory.

Representing traumatic experiences in the Lebanese film industry is a topic of significant debate. How traumatic material is represented in the films varies according to the narrative strategies employed by the directors. The films above employ distinct strategies of traumatic representation. *Where Do We Go Now?* and *The Insult* utilize the strategy of cure, whereas *Tramontane* and *Memory Box* employ witnessing. The Lebanese Civil War, a traumatic event, was represented as a reflection of the war in the present rather than as a representation of the war itself. This is even though the effects of the war continue to be felt many years after its end. In this regard, it can be observed that the strategy of voyeurism and shock, which highlights the acute period of the traumatic past, is not a prevalent approach in the selected samples or contemporary Lebanese cinema in general.

The cinematic output of Lebanon is situated within the context of the country's historical and social fabric. It engages with the search for national identity and the formation of collective memory, which are regarded as significant tools for examining the intricate social structure of Lebanon and the traumatic legacies of its past. In particular, films produced in the post-civil war period examine the relationship between individual and collective memories and address the recollection of the past and its effects on the present. By presenting the effects of war and

migration on people's identities from the perspectives of different social groups, directors construct a comprehensive narrative. In this context, Lebanese cinema can be considered an essential instrument for the documentation of the civil war period and the reconstruction of society. It is therefore proposed that this study represents a step towards a greater understanding of the complexity and richness of Lebanese cinema.

REFERENCES

- Assmann, J. (1992). *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*. Verlag C.H.Beck.
- Audebert, P. (2021). *Liban, cinéma du miel et du fragment*. <https://www.lanouvelledimension.fr/cours/liban-cinema-du-miel-et-du-fragment/>
- Aygün, G., & Tunç Cox, A. (2023). A Narrative of An Ideological Destruction: Where Do We Go Now?. *CINEJ Cinema Journal*, 11(1), 339–357. <https://doi.org/10.5195/cinej.2023.506>
- Ayhan, V., Tür, Ö., & Benli Altunışık, M. (2009). *Lübnan: Savaş, Barış, Direniş ve Türkiye ile İlişkiler*. Dora Yayınları.
- Ayoub, J. (2017). The Civil War's Ghosts: Events of Memory Seen Through Lebanese Cinema. In *The Social Life of Memory* (pp. 55–82). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Başaran İnce, G. (2010). Medya ve Toplumsal Hafıza. *Kültür ve İletişim*, 13(1), 9–29.

Boyer, P., & Wertsch, J. V. (2009). *Memory in Mind and Culture*. Cambridge University Press.

Cleveland, W. L., & Bunton, M. (2018). *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429495502>

Dannreuther, R. (1998). The Lebanese Civil War. In *The Soviet Union and PLO* (pp. 69–87). Palgrave Macmillan.

der Kolk, B. A., & der Hart, O. (1995). The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma. In N/A (Ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Duruel Erkılıç, S. (2014). *Türk Sinemasında Tarih ve Bellek*. Deki Yayınevi.

El Din, R. S. (2024). Cinema in the Levant. In N. Mellor (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook on Arab Cinema* (pp. 82–93). Routledge. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003302025>

El-Horr, D. (2016). *Melancolie Libanaise: Le cinema apres la guerre civile*. L'Harmattan.

Eyerman, R. (2004). Cultural Trauma: Slavery and Formation of African American Identity. In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (pp. 60–111). University of California Press.

Fluck, W. (2003). Memory and Film. In U. J. Hebel (Ed.), *Sites of Memory in American Literatures and Cultures* (pp. 213–229). Universitätsverlag.

Groh, F. (2023). “Experiencing Trauma”: Aesthetical, Sensational and Narratological Issues of Traumatic Representations in Slasher Horror Cinema. *Arts*, 12(132), 1–9.

Hagerdal, N. (2021). *Friend or Foe: Militia Intelligence and Ethnic Violence in the Lebanese Civil War*. Columbia University Press.

Halbwachs, M. (1992). *On Collective Memory* (L. A. Coser, Trans.). The University of Chicago Press.

Haugbolle, S. (2012). The (Little) Militia Man: Memory and Militarized Masculinity in Lebanon. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 8(1), 115–139.

Hirsch, J. (2004). *Film, Trauma and the Holocaust*. Temple University Press.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bt1dc>

Kaplan, A., & Wang, B. (2004). Introduction. In *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations* (pp. 1–22). Hong Kong University Press.

Khatib, L. (2008). *Lebanese Cinema: Imagining the Civil War and Beyond*. I.B. Tauris.

Khatib, L. (2024). The Contested City: Beirut in Lebanese War Cinema. In A. Marcus & D. Neumann (Eds.), *Visualizing The City* (pp. 97–110). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003572466>

Kraemer, J. A. (2015). *Waltz with Bashir* (2008): Trauma and Representation in the Animated Documentary. *Journal of Film and Video*, 67(3–4), 57–68.
<https://doi.org/10.5406/jfilmvideo.67.3-4.0057>

Launchbury, C., Tamraz, N., Celestin, R., & DalMolin, E. (2014). War, Memory, Amnesia: Postwar Lebanon. *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 18(5), 457–461.

Le Breton, D. (1995). *Anthropologie de la douleur*. Métailié.

Mellor, N. (2024). The value chain of the film sector. In N. Mellor (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook on Arab Cinema* (pp. 125–134). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003302025-11>

Mikdash, M. (2023). Ethnography, cacophony, and Lebanon as a zone of prestige in the anthropology of the Middle East. *The Journal of the American Ethnological Society*, 50(2), 206–207.

Moliner, P., & Bovina, I. (2019). Architectural Forms of Collective Memory. *International Review of Social Psychology*, 32(1), 1–11.

Naor, D. (2014). The Path to Syrian Intervention in Lebanon on the Eve of Civil War, 1970–1975. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 41, 183–199.

Olick, J. K. (1999). Collective memory: The two cultures. *Sociological Theory*, 3(17), 333–348.

Pinchevski, A. (2011). Archive, Media, Trauma. In N/A (Ed.), *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age* (pp. 253–264). Palgrave Macmillan.

Rastegar, K. (2015). *Surviving Images: Cinema, War, and Cultural Memory in the Middle East*. Oxford University Press.

Rosa, H. (2010). *Alienation and Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality*. Aarhus University Press.

Salibi, K. (1976). *Crossroads to Civil War, Lebanon 1958-1976*. Caravan Books.

Sarlo, B. (2012). *Geçmiş Zaman: Bellek Kültürü ve Özneye Dönüş Üzerine Bir Tartışma*. Metis Yayıncılık.

Sawalha, A. (2014). After Amnesia: Memory and War in Two Lebanese Films. *Visual Anthropology*, 27, 105–116.

Silverman, M. (2021). Latency in Lebanon, or bringing things (back) to life: A Perfect Day (Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, 2005). *Memory Studies*, 16(4), 694–708.

Sönmez, S. (2015). *Filmlerle Hatırlamak Toplumsal Travmaların Sinemada Temsil Edilişi*. Metis Yayınları.

Susam, A. (2015). *Toplumsal Bellek ve Belgesel Sinema*. Ayrıntı Yayınları.

Tarraf, Z. (2017). Haunting and the neoliberal encounter in Terra Incognita and A Perfect Day. *Cultural Dynamics*, 29, 39–62.

Toplin, R. B. (2002). *Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood*. University Press of Kansas.

Vimercati, G. F. (2021). *Port of Entry: Towards a Political Economy of Cinema in Lebanon (1919-1975)* [Master].

Walker, J. (2005). *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust*. University of California Press.

Woods, E. T. (2019). Cultural trauma: Ron Eyerman and the founding of a new research paradigm. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 7, 260–274.

Yazbek, E. (2012). *Regards sur le cinema libanais (1990-2010)*. L'Harmattan.

Zisser, E. (2011). Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990). In N/A (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of War*. John Wiley and Sons.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

¹ This article is based on the first author's 2023 the PhD dissertation (supervised by the second author) entitled "Collective Memory and Middle Eastern Cinema: Reflections of Collective Traumas on Lebanese Cinema", which was supported by TÜBİTAK (The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey) within the framework of the 2214-A International Research Fellowship Programme for PhD Students in 2022.