Regards

USJ 1875 IESAV
Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth
Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines
Institut d'études scéniques audiovisuelles et cinématographiques

Regards
33 | 2025
Le crime à l'écran dans le monde arabe

The Crime in Little Wars and Very Big Shot: A Microcosm of a Lost Generation

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Edition électronique
URL : https://journals.usj.edu.lb/regards/article/view/1418
DOI : https://doi.org/10.70898/regards.v0i33.1418
ISSN : 2791-285X

Editeur
Editions de l'USJ, Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth

Référence électronique
ASMAR, N. (2025). The Crime in "Little Wars" and "Very Big Shot": A Microcosm of a Lost Generation. Regards, (33). https://doi.org/10.70898/regards.v0i33.1418

THE CRIME IN *LITTLE WARS* AND *VERY BIG SHOT*:
A Microcosm of a Lost Generation

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Abstract | Depuis les années 1970, le cinéma libanais a évolué parallèlement aux transformations politiques et sociales du pays, avec des récits criminels illustrant ces changements. Pendant la guerre civile (1975-1990), des réalisateurs comme Maroun Baghdadi ont employé le crime pour mettre en évidence le chaos et la complexité morale de l'époque, comme en témoigne *Petites guerres* (Ḥurūb ṣaġīra. 1982). Plusieurs années plus tard, les récits criminels réapparaissent dans le cinéma libanais, alliant conventions de genre et thèmes de lutte sociale. Dans les années 2010, des films comme *Very Big Shot* (Fīlm ktīr kbīr. 2015) de Mir-Jean Bou Chaaya redéfinissent le cinéma criminel à travers l'humour noir et la critique sociale, en écho à l'instabilité continue du Liban. Cet article examine l'évolution des récits criminels dans le cinéma libanais, en utilisant ces deux films comme étude de cas pour analyser comment le crime fonctionne à la fois comme un dispositif narratif et comme un reflet des changements historiques et politiques. À travers une analyse comparative de *Petites guerres* et *Very Big Shot*, cet article explore les évolutions thématiques et stylistiques qui suggèrent l'émergence d'un cinéma criminel libanais distinct, mêlant éléments de genre et commentaire social sur les réalités complexes du Liban.

Mots-clés | Cinéma libanais, guerre civile, crime, fiction, jeunesse, Maroun Baghdadi, Mir-Jean Bou Chaaya

Abstract | Since the 1970s, Lebanese cinema has developed alongside the country's changing political and social landscape, with crime narratives reflecting these shifts. During the Civil War (1975-1990), filmmakers like Maroun Baghdadi used crime to highlight the chaos and moral complexity of the time, as seen in *Little Wars* (1982). Several years later, crime stories reappeared in Lebanese cinema, combining genre conventions with themes of social struggle. By the 2010s, films like *Very Big Shot* (2015) by Mir-Jean Bou Chaaya redefined crime cinema through dark humor and social critique, reflecting Lebanon's ongoing

instability. This article examines the development of crime narratives in Lebanese cinema, using both films as a case study to analyze how crime functions both as a narrative device and as a reflection of historical and political changes. Through a comparative study of *Little Wars* and *Very Big Shot*, this paper explores the thematic and stylistic shifts that suggest the emergence of a distinct Lebanese crime cinema, blending genre elements with social commentary on Lebanon's complex realities.

Keywords | Lebanese Cinema, Civil War, Crime, Fiction, Youth, Maroun Baghdadi, Mir-Jean Bou Chaaya

After fifteen years of Civil War in Lebanon, the year 1990 marked its end without a real closure for this dark chapter in the history of the country, leaving the warlords in power without proper accountability. The aftermath of this era has influenced Lebanese artists and storytellers across disciplines, including cinema, for over three decades.

The literature shows that Lebanese cinema has long been associated with narratives that centered around the country's turbulent political history, more particularly the civil war. Therefore, when one talks about Lebanese cinema, the collective mind, both local and international audiences often expect stories revolving around war and violence. However, the growing frustration of the Lebanese audience towards "another film about the war" has led filmmakers to try to tackle this subject subtly through more accepted and popular genres, such as comedies, thrillers, and crimes, bringing their stories closer to the new generations and their modern, mainly American-influenced, taste. While the generation of filmmakers who directly experienced the war period – including Maroun Baghdadi, Jocelyne Saab, Jean Chamoun, to name a few – has continued to engage with its repercussions in their motion pictures, a newer generation of filmmakers sought new ways to address Lebanon's social and political realities in their stories, favoring indirect allegories through the use of the war and its repercussions as a backdrop to a fictional story rather than its direct portrayal as a character on its own in the foreground. This "new wave" is also seen as the initiator of the "renaissance" period of Lebanese cinema, beginning in 1998, as it restored the audience's interest and increased film production[1]. Other voices name this post-war period as "an art of revival" to indicate Lebanese cinema's new prolific era[2]. No matter the term, this era marks a turn in the history of Lebanese cinema. This shift and recovery that these filmmakers brought to Lebanese cinema led to the emergence of a larger palette of film genres and categories, including crime films which borrow heavily from foreign – primarily American – narrative structure and aesthetics. While crime stories were present in Lebanese cinema prior to the war, their contemporary resurgence suggests a shift in storytelling, blending a popular category of films with social and political critique. As a matter of fact, there is a "changing representation of crime and criminals in relation to the wider political, economic, and cultural transformations[3]" since crime films are now more than ever highly influenced by outside sources – that is reality and what is happening in the world.

When discussing crime films,, we examine a category that encompasses genres, and subgenres. As a matter of fact, Nicole Rafter "decided to define crime movies as films that focus *primarily* on crime and its consequences – leaving aside all those in which crime is incidental. Crime films [...] constitute not a genre but

1- KHATIB Lina, *Lebanese Cinema: Imagining the Civil War and Beyond*. London, I.B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2008, p. xv.

2- MILLET Raphaël, *Le Cinéma au Liban / Cinema in Lebanon*. Beirut, Rawiya Editions, 2017, p. 20.

3- SPINA Ferdinando, « Crime Films », in RAFTER Nicole and BROWN Michelle (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Crime, Media, and Popular Culture*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 3. [Consulté le 2 février 2025]. Disponible sur : https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319242002_Crime_Films

a *category* within which fall various genres such as detective films and prison movies. Thus, 'crime films' is a sort of umbrella under which more specific genre subdivisions fall[4]" and are "all those movies whose central theme is crime and its consequences[5]". In the realm of Lebanese cinema, numerous films from various genres are eligible to be categorized as crime films – whether crime is a dominant or subcategory –, with a significant number of them drawing strong inspiration from the crime films' classic codes and aesthetics. However, Lebanon witnessed the emergence of crime narratives in the film industry during the 1960s, largely influenced by an influx of foreign films in which crime played a central role. Directors such as Mohamed Selmane adopted a framework inspired by the American model, which itself evolved in response to the socio-political contexts of the United States. From the moral dilemmas characteristic of classic film noir to the depiction of organized crime in contemporary thrillers, this model incorporates fundamental elements such as antiheroes, law enforcement, corruption, and justice. While Lebanese crime films integrate some of these conventions, they also diverge significantly in their portrayal of crime. Rather than centering on individual ambitions or mystery-solving structures, as is commonly observed in American crime cinema, Lebanese crime films often present crime as an intrinsic aspect of survival, set against a backdrop where law enforcement is either absent or complicit, particularly within the broader framework of collective struggle and socio-political upheaval, including the war. In contrast, Arabic crime narratives – all disciplines included – take a direction that is closer to "oppositional forms" of narratives, where "the crime does not serve as the starting point for a triumphant investigation but rather as a descent into violence, injustice, or the absurdity of the world[6]".

This article explores the evolution of crime narratives in Lebanese cinema and examines whether a distinct Lebanese crime cinema is emerging. To do so, I analyze two feature films helmed by two different generations of filmmakers in two different contexts of Lebanon's history. These films employ crime and criminals as main characters who are influenced by social, religious, and political factors: *Little Wars* (1982) by Maroun Baghdadi and *Very Big Shot* (2015) by Mir-Jean Bou Chaaya. By analyzing their thematic and formal elements, this study explores how crime functions as both a narrative device and a reflection of broader socio-political dimensions in Lebanon. The selection of these films is also grounded in their diverse perspectives and attributes, including their narrative and production periods – war and post-war eras – and their genres – the first one being a war drama while the second one is a modern dark comedy. *Little Wars*, a film produced and released during the war, largely studied in critical film analysis

4- RAFTER Nicole, "Crime Films and Visual Criminology", in BROWN Michelle, CARRABINE Eamonn (ed.), *Routledge International Handbook of Visual Criminology*, Oxon/New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 57-58.

5- SPINA Ferdinando, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

6- GHOSN Katia, TADIÉ Benoît, "Introduction : Le récit criminal arabe existe-t-il ?", in GHOSN Katia, TADIÉ Benoît (dir.), *Le récit criminel arabe / Arabic Crime Fiction*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz verlag, 2021, p. 4. / Personal Translation.

as "the witness of an entire era[7]", serves as an early example of how crime narratives intersect with political unrest during the war, using morally ambiguous characters to reflect a country descending into chaos. As for *Very Big Shot*, it represents a contemporary take on crime in a post-war Lebanon still struggling with corruption and instability, employing crime-comedy subgenre to satirize contemporary Lebanon while highlighting corruption, media manipulation, and blurring the lines between criminals and "respectable" figures in the society. Despite their disparities in tone and approach, both films reveal how crime cinema in Lebanon operates as a medium for exploring disillusionment and power structures which influence the most vulnerable ones in society: the youth. Following its premiere at Cannes Film Festival within the Un Certain Regard section, the story of *Little Wars* was briefed by several newspapers and magazines through the use of the same term: "the lost generation" (« la génération perdue », in French)[8] which indicates "the youth growing up in an absurd world, no longer knowing who the enemy is or where ideologies stand[9]". Three decades after Baghdadi's debut, emerging filmmaker Bou Chaaya directed his own feature debut, *Very Big Shot* (2015). The film narrates the story of three brothers, one of whom manipulates not only his brothers and surroundings but also the public opinion. With the assistance of a submissive filmmaker, he seeks to accomplish a mission of fenethylline (commonly called "captagon") drug smuggling from Lebanon to other countries. Consequently, both films mirror the ongoing turmoil and chaos observed by old and young generations. In both films, the war and its consequences push the characters to commit crimes and/or become part of the criminal circle. These characters have been shaped by external influences and individuals, leading them to become entangled in criminal activities and eventually turning into criminals themselves.

Through this work, I aim to explore a potential identity of what we tentatively call "Lebanese Crime Cinema". In the first part, I briefly discuss the stories of the films to establish the link and dynamics between their respective characters while underlining the theoretical framework of their analysis. Afterwards, I focus on the representation, development, and categorization of their characters, pinpointing the similarities between these two films as Lebanese crime productions. As for last two parts, we highlight the aesthetic and narrative codes of these films, as

7- ZACCAK Hady, *Le cinéma libanais : Itinéraire d'un cinéma vers l'inconnu (1929-1996)*. Beirut, Dar el-Machreq, 1997, p. 127. / Personal Translation.

8- For instance, in France, Nicole Cornuz Langlois wrote an article about the film in *Le Matin* under the title: " « Petites guerres » de Maroun Baghdadi : La génération perdue", CORNUZ LANGLOIS Nicole, "« Petites guerres » de Maroun Baghdadi : La génération perdue", *Le Matin* [issue of 21 May 1982]. The next day, another article in *Le Matin* mentioned that the film's main characters "embody a lost generation". Other critics also utilized the same term in other publications, such as Charles Tesson in *Les Cahiers du cinéma* who stated that Baghdadi tackled very closely "the portrait of a lost generation in this war", TESSON Charles, "Portrait of a lost generation in this war", *Les Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 338, 1982, p. 23.

9- Maroun Baghdadi's words while presenting his film in Cannes Film Festival in 1982, referenced in in Annahar newspaper, 23 June 1982, and translated as quoted in: KALAKECH Samar, *La guerre civile libanaise vue par le cinéma libanais*, Doctoral Dissertation, Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3, 2007. [Accessed: February 11, 2025]. Available at: https://scd-resnum.univ-lyon3.fr/out/theses/2007_out_kalakech_s.pdf. / Translated from French / personal translation.

well as their classification within the broader category of critical crime films. While we are adopting a comparative analysis scheme to identify certain codes and distinctive features within the films of our case study, our intention is to try to find some elements that would eventually be seen as codes for an emerging Lebanese crime cinema. Hence, this study aims at bringing some elements into the light for a larger study on a broader group of crime films in Lebanese cinema.

Framing the Crime Narrative

The two films we chose to study in our research are not categorized as crime films as much as they are associated to other categories of films, more specifically other (sub)genres: drama and war (*Little Wars*), thriller and dark comedy (*Very Big Shot*). So, why are we studying them within the crime films category in the first place? As we mentioned before, the stories of these films revolve around criminal acts in two historical periods in Lebanon, focusing on criminal culture in both contexts. Referencing Rafter's work, the attempt to define crime films mainly falls in its consideration as a category regrouping several genres and subgenres of films. Defining crime films remains a debated topic, as scholars struggle to agree on a set of definitive elements and codes. As a matter of fact, Thomas Leitch argues that the test of the definition of crime films "like that of any genre, is neither its narrowness nor its inclusiveness; it is its ability to raise questions that illuminate its members in ways existing modes of thinking about crime films do not[10]" which in other words suggests that the importance is not in categorizing a film within a certain genre, but in "how rewarding it is to discuss it as if it were"[11]. This applies to our study which suggests that the two mentioned films fall in the category of crime films, hence considering an emerging crime films category in Lebanon. In this article, I try to understand where the two films of our corpus are placed within the crime films category. It is also worth mentioning that Leitch talks about a common paradox in all crime films which is related to "the continual breakdown and reestablishment of the borders among criminals, crime solvers, and victims[12]". This specificity of three distinguished characters that form crime films will be further discussed in this article in our case study. Moreover, Leitch questions the pertinence of the distinction between heroes of thrillers and heroes of crime films, referencing this distinction mentioned by Carlos Clarens as "a distinction between crime as an isolated event (the province of thriller) and crime as a metaphor for social unrest (the province of the crime film)[13]". In the case of our two films, the stories are using crime as a metaphor for social unrest by showing the impact of these collective crimes on the society as well as the impact of society on individuals committing those crimes. However, these crimes are also considered isolated events since they aren't involving the

10- LEITCH Thomas, *Crime Films*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 17.
11- *Ibid.*
12- *Ibid.*, p. 15.
13- As stated by Leitch to summarize the words of Clarens. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

entire country but are still strictly revolving around a small group of people within the society. As a result, the question that Leitch raises is relevant in the case of our two films. But in our analysis, we will still rely on the three codes (which are also problems in defining crime films according to Leitch) in our attempt to underline certain possible emerging codes in Lebanese crime films: first, the crime's normalcy while observing the way it weakens the social order, hence questioning if crime is abnormal or all too normal; second, the attempt to underline when the crime is a social (and political/ideological) metaphor and when it's just a crime; and third, the three leading roles or archetype characters of crime films – the criminal, the victim, and the avenger or detective – which overlap and blend into each other within the narrative[14].

Little Wars (1982)

As underlined by Raphaël Millet, the cinema of the war generation typically presents a more pronounced political, social, or cultural content compared to what has been done before[15]. This is indeed evident in the works of veteran filmmaker Maroun Baghdadi who was relatively young when the civil war erupted and militant forces occupied the country. Nearly two decades after the emergence of the crime narratives in national cinema, the generation of Baghdadi reworked and placed this category in the social and political context of the country during that historical period. Through his films, Baghdadi sought to understand the conflict during the civil war and its collective impact on the Lebanese people, especially the youth. His 1982 feature, *Little Wars*, represents a kind of synthesis of all his observations[16] during the ongoing war. The film tells the story of a microcosm of the youth and their misguidance in the midst of the war while searching for their identity. It is a war drama set seven years earlier than its release date, precisely at the beginning of the civil war in 1975, a temporal setting that is explicitly conveyed by the director in a disclaimer[17], signed with his initials, at the very beginning of the film. In his message, Baghdadi explains the context of the situation in Lebanon and the unsettling feelings of his generation, from which stems this story. Throughout the film, Baghdadi consistently references the presence of political events and changes in the country, which influence the evolving narrative and the characters' journey and transformations. The film is not about the war itself, but rather about the little wars in which the characters are entangled, and it "showed the absurdity and uselessness of a war going against the interests, desires and dreams of

14- LEITCH Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 12-13.

15- MILLET Raphaël, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

16- *Ibid.*, p. 197.

17- The disclaimer reads as follows: "*Little Wars* was completed in 1982, but its events unfold in 1975, at the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War. The year 1975 marks a heart-rending rupture in the History of Lebanon, a moment when Lebanese society was seized by distrust, fanaticism, and intolerance. Far from the front lines, this film is close to the doubts, fears, and frustrations of my generation. M.B." Translated from French / personal translation.

the Lebanese people[18]". The film is set in a country where militias and snipers dominate everyday life.and follows three young protagonists as they navigate this harsh reality. It starts with condolences where a group of university students discuss the last days of their friend whom they are mourning and whose portrait they are holding. Their words explain beforehand the struggles of this young generation, stating that he had shut himself off from the world, relying solely on his music and drugs to keep going. This statement completes the content of Baghdadi's disclaimer whose photo portrait is the one they are holding in the film. We follow Talal who becomes involved in a mission to find his abducted father, a feudal Bey. Driven by this objective and pressured by his mother, Talal moves from Beirut to the Bekaa region to join the armed faction that his father led, leaving behind the woman he loves, Soraya. The latter – whose point of view guides the film – is a student who considers leaving the country seeking a better future, but whose plan is halted as she secretly discovers her pregnancy with Talal's child. Struggling to understand their relationship which seems to be crumbling with time and in order to have Talal properly back in her life, she decides to organize the kidnapping of an innocent businessman to exchange him for her lover's father. The relationship between Soraya and Talal becomes complex when the mythomaniac photojournalist Nabil, who is also involved in a drug trade, becomes infatuated with the young woman. The apparent love triangle instead serves as Baghdadi's tool to connect the characters to each other, through Soraya, and the crime and violence of the war to their personal little wars. The film never stops questioning the reason behind immigrating and abandoning (or even escaping) the country in search for a better life abroad, as well as the reason behind not doing so and staying in the country[19]. This questioning is tightly linked to the characters' ability to continue believing in and fighting for Lebanon to bring it back to its pre-war state, symbolizing its potential rebirth after the chaos through Soraya's ability of reproduction. However, as Talal loses faith in locating his father and starts to believe in his possible demise – a metaphor for the bygone era of Lebanon, now replaced by the prevailing "law of the jungle"[20] –, he is essentially relinquishing his hopes for the envisioned life in Lebanon. Simultaneously, Soraya abandons the notion of immigration at the eleventh hour[21]. Her choice is likely influenced by the way she sees her life unfolding in this chaotic and war-ravaged country as she is about to bring to life her own child which is a new hope for the country's rebirth.

18- MILLET Raphaël, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

19- This subtheme echoes the earlier films in Lebanese cinema which were largely preoccupied by themes related to immigration, such as George Nasser's *Ila Ayn? | Where To?* (1957).

20- ZACCAK Hady, "Petites et grandes guerres : Une filmographie des longs métrages tournés au Liban pendant la guerre civile (1975-1990)", *Regards*, no. 24, 2020, p. 143.

21- When she was supposed to be boarding the car with her uncle on their way to the airport, she ends up getting off and sending away her uncle to leave the country alone.

Very Big Shot (2015)

Forty narrative years later, 25 years after the end of the civil war, young Lebanese filmmaker Mir-Jean Bou Chaaya presents his feature debut, *Very Big Shot*. While Lebanese cinema is largely dominated by stories depicting the civil war and its consequences in one way or another – including the collective trauma it has generated –, this film is a dark comedy rather than a mere drama, yet it still finds its way to belong to the crime film category starting with its opening scene. It is a crime scene, showing the three Haddad brothers – Ziad, Joe, and Jad – in a heated dispute with a fourth person. When Ziad kills that fourth man, the three brothers are interrogated by the authorities to determine who committed the crime. Alternating between their interrogations, the result is that the youngest brother, Jad, ends up incarcerated for five years instead of ten for a crime committed by his older brother Ziad. The motives behind this coverup are revealed in a particular scene of the film in which Ziad admits that incarcerating his younger brother prevented him from serving a long sentence in prison. We directly understand that Ziad is actually a criminal, not solely based on this one murder, and the film unfolds from his point of view which presents "a distorted reality[22]". Fast forward, the film sets its present actions in modern-day Lebanon when Jad is about to be released from prison. In that present, the third brother Joe has already established a pizza place with an occasional undercover drug delivery in-pizza service within the "special" order. Wishing to no longer be involved in the drug trade that led him to kill a man five years ago, Ziad struggles to release himself from the drug lord, Abu Ali's grip. He is unwillingly drawn into a final task – a large-scale smuggling operation across the Lebanese-Syrian border –, hoping to secure financial support from Abu Ali to open a restaurant for Jad upon his release. However, the mission turns into a trap to get rid of Ziad. In a bid to escape, Ziad kills two of Abu Ali's men, steals the drugs, and decides to sell them on his own as a way to build a new drug dealing-free life. Once released, Jad decides to join Ziad on this last mission whereas Joe stands his grounds as the opposing voice. Upon discovering a magic solution for the smuggling to avoid detection at the airport, Ziad decides to embark on a film production project with Charbel, a drug client and submissive filmmaker. The project is a pretext through which he uses undeveloped film reels to shield the contents (the drug powder). So, the film's plot centers around this risky endeavor in an attempt to exit the criminal world, clear the brothers' warehouse, and make a substantial amount of money. The narrative alternates between Ziad, who is serving as a producer on the film, organizing the drug trading work while Abu Ali's men constantly try to reach Ziad, and the film shooting taking place around the streets where the Haddads live since it's under their control. This collaboration allows Ziad to obtain necessary permits to bypass the airport security check and legitimize their activities as "work of art". The overturn of situation reaches a point where Ziad, who intentionally provokes violence around the shooting location, shifts from

22- SORRENTO Matthew, *The New American Crime Film*. North Carolina, McFarland & Company Inc. Publishers, 2012, p. 14.

being a suspected criminal into becoming a celebrated hero and truth-speaking artist whose goal is to embrace freedom of speech in the eyes of both the press and the public.

In both films, there is a dominant collective aspect designated as "collective efficacy" by Nicole Rafter and Michelle Brown, in reference to terms which were coined by several researchers, notably the sociologist Robert Sampson[23]. The authors specify that this term is often associated with "the study of social disorganization [and] refers to the ability of actors in neighborhoods to build social capital"[24]. Expanding the scope of this term, contemporary researchers emphasize that a phenomenon such as the collective efficacy "should be considered as part of larger systems of stratification and inequality beyond the neighborhood", affirming that individuals engaged in collective efficacy should not be held responsible for their challenging contexts[25]. However, I suggest using this term for a different purpose: that of collective efficacy within the realm of crime. Both films depict narratives involving multiple characters, all actively participating in the crimes and, significantly, often compelled to do so. This aligns with the statements of the aforementioned researchers, especially since it is their social and political situations, in addition to their family relations, that drive them to be a part of it, even when it goes against their initial morals and goals. Consequently, criminals in these films appear to be unwittingly adopting a criminal identity, with the criminal status imposed upon them, turning them into paradoxical criminal victims.

Criminals Versus Criminals: The Quest for a Hero

The collective dimension of crime narratives is shaped by the relationships between criminal characters and their surroundings, especially the individuals they love but cannot fully protect from eventual involvement. By examining the different characters, I categorize them into two types: active criminals and passive criminals, with particular attention to the influence of female characters within male-dominated spheres. For example, while it may seem that Talal is the protagonist of *Little Wars* – as his focus revolves around solving the mystery of his father's abduction –, it is actually Soraya who is at the center of the story. The narrative unfolds largely from her point of view, and her evolution from a victim to an active participant, culminating in her orchestrating an abduction, leads to a tragic crime. Soraya engages in this crime to regain Talal's attention, especially with her secret pregnancy with his child. In this way, her involvement in the crime, disguised as a victim's act, blurs the lines between her criminality and victimhood. As a matter of fact, crime films often center around three

23- RAFTER Nicole, BROWN Michelle, *Criminology Goes to the Movies: Crime Theory and Popular Culture*. New York/London, New York University Press, 2011, p. 73.
24- *Ibid.*
25- *Ibid.*, p. 74.

types of characters: those who commit crimes, those drawn into criminality by circumstance (often considered as victims), and those who fight crime or avenge it. However, in our case study, the last group's crime fighters are not largely present on screen but rather acknowledged as a concept within the idea of laws and order, such as in the beginning of *Very Big Shot*, where the authorities (gendarmerie) are interrogating the Haddads before putting Jad in prison. This absence of a direct focus on law enforcement emphasizes the focus on the criminal world and its impact on the vitcim characters, such as Soraya and Jad.

Central characters in crime films "either commit the crime, fall victim to it, or avenge it, thus driving our need to witness the conflict's resolution. But the action isn't enough: we want to know the criminal, the victim, or the avenger"[26], especially that "crime films almost always tend to offer a plausible explanation of the crime and therefore to reduce the state of uncertainty and shock that crimes and violence can generate"[27]. Moreover, crime narratives, in general, involve a significant shift in characters' realities:

With crime stories, the character abandons the ordinary world once a crime casts its shadow, either before him (if he is a criminal) or upon him (if he is the victim). A crime is surefire storytelling fodder – it demands a change in the character, since it alters his universe in a flash. For the victim of a crime, he now fears the world he once thought to be safe, and may feel the urge to avenge the offense, or even ponder the nature of evil, should he have the down time to do so. The criminal will enter a new, thrilling world, one in which everything is within his reach, until the authorities, or rival criminals, advance upon him.[28]

From this perspective, Soraya's shift from victim to criminal (passive to active) marks an apparent transformation, as she enters a world where the lines between victimhood and criminality become increasingly blurred. Echoing Leitch's reflection, this raises the question of whether some crimes are seen as more acceptable when committed in response to a greater crime. In other words, in the context of Lebanese crime films, can a crime be perceived as justified, less harmful, or even necessary when it serves as retribution for another, seemingly greater crime?

Active Criminals

The first type of characters consists of individuals who perceive their actions as part of a larger ideological battle. In *Little Wars*, Baghdadi presents fighters who view their struggle as a "democratic battle," a term explicitly used by one of the characters. However, an ironic tension underlies this supposed heroism, a point emphasized through Baghdadi's dialogue. This irony becomes especially evident when the photojournalist Nabil and a foreign crew capture images of the fighters. The staged nature of these photographs elevates the fighters to heroic status, portraying them as immortal warriors for their families and friends. Yet,

26- SORRENTO Matthew, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
27- SPINA Ferdinando, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
28- *Ibid.*, p. 5.

this visual construction of heroism contrasts with the reality of their manipulated participation in violence. Talal, on the other hand, does not seek violence, but it is imposed on him in his quest for justice and revenge through vengeance, one of the generic forms of crime films[29]. Though he is reluctant to embrace the faction's use of crime and the recruitment of teenagers, he ultimately allows these eager young fighters to take part in the conflict. This situation positions him between the three types of characters, confirming the words of Leitch that they "overlap and melt into each other[30]": by being a victim of a crime, he is pushed to turn into an avenger and eventually commit crimes. In this context, crime extends beyond physical violence; it encompasses the exploitation of vulnerable youth – teenagers and young adults who are manipulated into believing they are fighting for a noble cause. Their delusion reinforces their portrayal as Lebanon's lost generation, devoid of peace and driven by political ideologies or charismatic leaders who place them in constant danger. The film highlights the premature burden of maturity placed upon them, illustrating that wielding weapons and engaging in crime is not equivalent to adulthood but rather a reflection of indoctrination and disillusionment. Talal himself embodies this lost generation: pressured by his duty to save his father, he ultimately transforms into the very figure he tried to avoid – the leader of a faction. Though the film is set against the broader backdrop of war, Baghdadi chooses to explore the intimate conflicts within families and personal relationships. These "little wars" are fueled by individual interests and beliefs yet remain intricately linked to the larger national conflict that the younger generation struggles to escape.

In *Very Big Shot*, the protagonist Ziad is established as a criminal from the film's opening scene, despite his later-expressed desire to leave this world behind. However, once he enters the realm of crime, he finds himself unable to escape, trapped in a cycle where one crime inevitably leads to another. His efforts to break free only deepen his entanglement, as he manipulates those around him to achieve his objectives. The film demonstrates how crime becomes both the means and the justification for further wrongdoing, blurring the lines between self-preservation and criminal intent. Ziad even exploits the film industry itself, staging attacks on set to garner media attention and craft a public image of legitimacy. Through this spectacle, he unwittingly becomes a hero in the eyes of the public while simultaneously using the presence of security forces to send a veiled warning to his adversary, Abu Ali. The audience find themselves asking the same question that Leitch raised in his study: "Is criminal behavior in these [crime] films abnormal or all too normal?[31]".

Both films employ visual storytelling to reinforce their themes of power and manipulation. In *Little Wars*, Baghdadi conveys shifting power dynamics through body language and directorial choices. Early in the film, Talal's mother assumes a dominant role, issuing commands and pressuring him into action. Baghdadi

29- *Ibid.*, p. 7.
30- LEITCH Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
31- *Ibid.*, p. 12.

underscores her authority through her assertive posture and commanding tone. However, as Talal gradually embraces his leadership role, the balance of power shifts. This transformation reaches a turning point when Talal, now fully assuming his father's mantle, informs his mother of his father's death and asserts his own authority. Baghdadi visually accentuates this shift by altering their spatial relationship: Talal, now positioned on higher ground in a rocky forest, looks down upon his mother. The cinematography reinforces this power dynamic, with low-angle shots emphasizing Talal's newfound dominance and high-angle shots diminishing his mother's stature. These visual cues not only reflect the changing dynamics between the characters but also serve as a metaphor for Talal's reluctant yet inevitable transformation, making his story the one of the avenger's "in which a crime must be redeemed [...] [and] the hero may turn to criminal or victim[32]". At the same time, this shift is seen through the idea of men being considered the defenders of their country, thus separating men from women as a condition to male fraternity[33].

In *Very Big Shot*, power is established differently. Ziad consistently asserts his dominance, crafting an aura of authority through calculated body language and vocal control throughout the entire film. Bou Chaaya highlights Ziad's commanding nature by integrating deliberate silences and a composed yet intimidating tone, creating an unsettling atmosphere of authority. Ziad's power manifests not just in his speech but also in his physical presence – his posture, attire, and measured gestures all contribute to his ability to manipulate those around him. The peak of his Machiavellian control is reached in key scenes where his calm yet firm voice becomes a tool of persuasion, reinforcing his influence over others. Bou Chaaya constructs his criminal character as a figure whose success in persuasion and manipulation defines his criminal persona. With his playful character, Ziad reflects a certain "playfulness about violence" which is one of the characteristics of the crime films' aesthetic development in modern cinema[34].

Both films explore the intersection of crime and power, illustrating how individuals either succumb to or manipulate their circumstances. While Baghdadi examines the tragic entrapment of youth in ideological conflicts, Bou Chaaya presents crime as an inescapable force that perpetuates itself through power and perception. Despite their differing approaches, both directors reveal the inherent contradictions in the portrayal of heroism, crime, and authority, ultimately questioning the very nature of power itself.

Passive Criminals

In *Little Wars*, Soraya embodies the passive criminal archetype, an individual whose inaction and indirect involvement eventually contribute to the unfolding crime. Throughout the film, she remains largely on the sidelines, observing

32- SORRENTO Matthew, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
33- KHATIB Lina referencing the reflection of Sarah BENTON in KHATIB Lina, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
34- RAFTER Nicole, BROWN Michelle, *op. cit.*, 2011, p. 6.

rather than actively engaging in violence or criminal activities. She aspires to a normal life with Talal and resists leaving the country, even when circumstances urge her to do so. She downplays the seriousness of the violence around her through her interactions with firearms. When she follows Talal to the Bekaa and finds out he has a gun, she playfully asks, "since when you carry a weapon?" before casually holding it, ignoring its danger. She even stands behind a weapon in one of the trucks without seeming to pay attention to its lethal power. While she does not directly participate in Talal's mission, her passive stance allows it to unfold. She neither intervenes nor challenges his actions, effectively becoming an enabler of his criminal path through her unawareness of the crime, not like Joe who is against the crime yet doesn't go farther to stop it, making him an enabler of crime even if he doesn't participate in it. Baghdadi visually reinforces this passivity by frequently framing Soraya in isolation, emphasizing her role as an observer rather than an agent of change, mirroring the other preoccupations of her mind versus the reality that is unfolding before her eyes. However, in the second half of the film, Soraya's role shifts, and her character takes a more influential stand. She transitions from being a passive observer to become an indirect perpetrator when she orchestrates a kidnapping to assist Talal without his knowledge. This turning point marks her transformation from a victim of circumstance into an avenging figure, mirroring the trajectory often seen in crime films where victims resort to violence in pursuit of justice. Yet, in doing so, she also becomes complicit in criminality, blurring the moral boundaries between victim and avenger, eventually an active criminal. Through this shift, Baghdadi makes his protagonist and victim's experience central in the film by turning her as well into an avenging hero, trying to restore justice through violence, before falling into the trap of crime towards another victim – the kidnapped man in this case. This moral ambiguity constitutes a key element in the film's appeal[35]. While women are traditionally considered as being on the margin, silent, unimportant, and secondary to men's active roles, rendered to their roles as mothers and wives who observe the war as victims[36], Baghdadi challenges this notion through Soraya's character development. Initially passive and aligned with traditional expectations, she ultimately defies them, highlighting the significance of women's agency within a world typically dominated by men.

In the case of *Very Big Shot*, a similar passivity is embodied by Alia, the sole female character in the story. Alia is a secondary character positioned as an outsider to the criminal world, yet she is inevitably drawn into it through her relationship with Charbel, the director, and Joe, Ziad's brother. She questions the shady sources of the film's funding, acting as the voice of reason within the group, yet her concerns are ignored. Despite suspecting some criminal activity behind the financial support, she does not actively resist, question, or expose it. Instead, she continues working on the film as its lead actress, unknowingly becoming an accessory to the crime. Unlike Soraya, she remains relatively

35- Spina talks about the avenging hero in crime films in SPINA Ferdinando, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
36- KHATIB Lina, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

detached from the crime she is dragged into without her knowledge, keeping her observer status with no room for development throughout the story. She is absorbed in the world of men, accepting the reduction of her role of the girlfriend and the directed actress. However, her underscores the idea that passive participation – whether through silence, complicity, or willful ignorance – can be as integral to the mechanics of crime as a direct action. The irony of her involvement is elevated by the contradiction of the famous phrase: "making films is not a crime". In this case, the act of making a film itself becomes a vehicle for deception and criminal activity.

In both films, law enforcement is absent, reinforcing the idea that crime operates within a system where legal authority is either ineffective or irrelevant. In *Little Wars*, the police are entirely replaced by militias, who exert control over every aspect of society. Baghdadi himself addresses this absence in his response to film critic Serge Daney when questioned about the existence of Lebanese films:

> [...] Since the war, Lebanese cinema has even taken a small step forward. Now, we make very patriotic films with people standing up at the beginning for the national anthem. The hero is always a good cop who purifies the city by killing all the villains (we don't specify who to avoid losing clients). It's laughable because we've seen these cops for seven, eight years in the streets with no real power or authority![37]

Baghdadi's statement underscores the disconnect between cinematic portrayals of justice and the reality of law enforcement's impotence during the war. By omitting police presence from his narrative, he highlights a world where criminality thrives unchecked, and where civilians, whether actively or passively, are left to navigate moral dilemmas on their own. Similarly, in *Very Big Shot*, law enforcement is only introduced as a procedural necessity rather than an active force in the narrative. The film opens with the judiciary system and police serving as a backdrop to the power dynamics between Ziad and his brothers. The interrogation scene, structured through a parallel montage of three testimonies, deliberately obscures the police officers' presence, using over-the-shoulder shots that focus solely on the three brothers. The interrogator's face remains hidden for most of the scene, reinforcing the notion that authority is either faceless or ineffective. It is only at the end of this sequence that the officer is fully revealed, positioned authoritatively within the frame, momentarily asserting his power. However, this authority is ultimately undermined, as Ziad's dominance over his brothers, the legal system, and eventually public perception through media manipulation, renders law enforcement powerless. Even prior to that, his dominance prevails as his brother ends up in jail instead of himself. Ziad's use of media as a tool for control further emphasizes the blurred lines between legality and criminality. By adopting the dual role of filmmaker and activist,, he subverts the system, which was supposed to hold him accountable, manipulating public perception to justify his actions. This strategic use of media solidifies his position

37- DANEY Serge, "'Petites guerres' au Liban", *Libération*, February 11, 1983 / Personal Translation.

as the ultimate architect of crime, illustrating how passive criminals – those who do not resist or challenge unlawful acts – become complicit in perpetuating systems of power and corruption.

Both films explore the role of passive criminals who, despite not actively committing violent acts, facilitate or sustain criminal activity through inaction, complicity, or self-preservation. The absence of effective law enforcement in both films further amplifies the idea that crime operates in a moral dilemma, where justice is either self-imposed or entirely subverted. By depicting characters who bounce between victimhood and complicity, both filmmakers interrogate the complexities of crime in Lebanese society, where lines between innocence and guilt are often indistinguishable. They also deliberately challenge societal norms by using the active participation in crime to confirm the power of both genders, making women break into the territory of men.

Beyond the Characters, Multiple Narrative Manipulations

Crime films often serve as a window into underworld settings that remain inaccessible to most audiences. They provide insight into spaces such as drug factories, police interrogation rooms, glamorous nightclubs, and prison cells, establishing a distinct aesthetic that contributes to the genre's allure[38]. This spatial dimension extends beyond mere representation; it actively shapes the narrative by reinforcing themes of power, control, and vulnerability. In the Lebanese crime films of our study, the visual and auditory elements are employed to enhance the psychological and socio-political layers of the stories. Through framing, point-of-view, and sound design, these films construct immersive diegetic worlds that mirror both the characters' internal conflicts and the broader societal tensions that surround them, ultimately bringing narrative cohesion by paying off earlier established elements.

While Baghdadi's film uses a subtle narrative hook to establish a framework early on, Bou Chaaya employs a similar technique but with a different rhythm. Baghdadi introduces critical details at the start, setting up the events that follow. For instance, during an abduction, Soraya hears the driver suggesting a retaliatory kidnapping, which seems incidental at first but becomes crucial in the film's second half. As Soraya recontextualizes this information, it leads her to take decisive action, kidnapping an innocent person to secure the release of Talal's father. Similarly, in Bou Chaaya's film, an early conversation about Italians smuggling hashish in film reels becomes significant when Ziad later hears the same story, sparking the idea to smuggle drugs through airport security. This foreshadowing creates a dynamic tone in Bou Chaaya's film, contrasting with the slower pace of Baghdadi's. The rhythm of each film plays a key role in the evolution of their respective narratives, reflecting changes in style from 1975 to 2015.

38- RAFTER Nicole, *Shots in the Mirror: Crime Films and Society*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 9.

To fill this gap in the liyterature, the narrative structure in both films is deeply intertwined with the use of sound, which goes beyond serving as mere accompaniment to actively shaping the storytelling. Scholars have longdebated the distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic sound, particularly in relation to the impact of musical scores on narrative perception. While all sounds exist within the intra-diegetic framework, this study maintains a distinction between sounds with an identifiable source within the diegesis (diegetic) and those added in post-production without a direct narrative source (non-diegetic). These elements influence the atmosphere, character development, and narrative tension. In Baghdadi's film, diegetic sound plays a central role, serving as both an informational and psychological tool. The radio broadcasts, for example, provide a primary news source for both the audience and the characters, anchoring the story in a specific temporal and geopolitical context. The radio is more than a background detail; it shapes characters' perceptions and decisions, becoming a crucial structural element. Similarly, in *Very Big Shot*, Bou Chaaya uses radio and television broadcasts to emphasize the media's role in shaping public narratives. Early in the film, Ziad listens to fragmented news reports while driving, linking his personal journey to the broader socio-political framework. Later, television becomes a key narrative device when Ziad uses a live talk show to communicate with his adversary, Abu Ali, without jeopardizing his own safety. This transformation of media into a narrative intermediary underscores the significance of mediated reality within crime films.

Non-diegetic sound also plays a crucial role in shaping the emotional and psychological depth of these films. Two primary forms emerge: original musical compositions and sound effects that do not correspond to the film's physical reality. In *Little Wars*, Baghdadi employs non-diegetic sound to externalize Soraya's inner conflict. For example, Soraya hears a crying baby, a sound she acknowledges but Talal does not, functioning as a foreshadowing device for her still-unknown pregnancy. The off-screen sounds of sniper fire and distant bombings amplify the war's omnipresence, creating an atmosphere of constant danger and making the unseen horrors as impactful as the visible ones. Gabriel Yared's original score further enhances the film's thematic complexity, blending jazz, electronic elements, and traditional Lebanese instrumentation to reflect the tension between past and present. This fusion contributes to the layered narrative of *Little Wars*. In contrast, *Very Big Shot* uses some non-diegetic Lebanese music to accompany the film, but within the narrative context, he opts more for silence and the natural rhythm of dialogue to build tension. Bou Chaaya intensifies dramatic stakes through voice modulation, tonal shifts, and unsettling silences, making the absence of sound as powerful as its presence.

Beyond the visual representation of space, these crime films manipulate framing and point-of-view to align the audience with specific character perspectives. In the case of Bou Chaaya, the director strategically positions the camera to emphasize the protagonists' navigation of a corrupt system, alternating between subjective and objective shots to create tension. As for Baghdadi, he

employs tight framing and handheld cinematography to immerse the viewer in the chaotic and fragmented reality of wartime Lebanon. These choices not only structure the viewer's engagement with the narrative but also work simultaneously with sound to reinforce thematic subtexts. Through strategic manipulation of sound and framing, both *Little Wars* and *Very Big Shot* extend the crime film genre's thematic reach beyond conventional portrayals of crime and justice. Sound, in particular, emerges as a crucial narrative agent, not only reinforcing spatial and temporal contexts but also deepening the characters' psychology. Whether through diegetic broadcasts that situate characters within a socio-political reality or non-diegetic sound that externalizes emotional undercurrents, these films illustrate how auditory elements function as more than mere accompaniments to the visual. In doing so, they reaffirm the role of sound as an integral component of crime cinema's storytelling apparatus.

Reinterpreting Critical Crime Films

In the introduction of her book *Shots in the Mirror*, Nicole Rafter discusses two common implicit arguments made by crime films: the critique of certain aspects of society and the triumph over corruption and brutality, which ultimately provides the audience with a sense of hope and solace[39]. She continues by saying that "crime films offer us contradictory sorts of satisfaction: the reality of what we fear to be true and the fantasy of overcoming that reality; the pleasure of entering the realm of the forbidden and illicit and the security of rejecting or escaping that realm in the end[40]".

Applying this theory to our Lebanese case study, we observe that the first argument is far more prevalent than the second. In *Little Wars*, the film presents an unfiltered depiction of reality, offering a direct critique of society and the political corruption that unfolds during the war. However, the progression of events and the film's conclusion do not provide any solace to the audience. Instead, they are confronted with the relentless harshness of the country's reality. Even though certain characters find temporary relief through art and moments of detachment, the film ultimately suggests that there is no true escape, except through the decision to leave the country. Similarly, in *Very Big Shot*, the audience is positioned as the judge of Ziad's actions: are they acts of misconduct or are they a justifiable strategy for self-defense? Bou Chaaya, much like Baghdadi, exposes the pervasive corruption in a system dominated by delinquents and lawbreaker –militiamen and drug dealers alike. However, his conclusion carries both a critique and an assertion: Ziad takes another step forward, deciding to run for the elections, symbolizing how many politicians originate from a background of criminality and lawbreaking. The only form of progress depicted in the film is that of corruption itself, where one can ascend to the highest ranks of power simply by undergoing a superficial transformation,

39- RAFTER Nicole, *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 3.
40- *Idem.*

donning a suit, and embodying the appearance of a respectable figure. This caricatured portrayal of corrupt politicians serves as a direct statement from the director, much like Baghdadi's depiction of militiamen posing for portraits to project an illusion of strength and power. In this way, Lebanese crime narratives act as a direct, fictionalized mirror (echoing the title of Rafter's book) to the country's reality. Rafter highlights certain films that explore the social realities of crime, where "[n]o one is saved [...], there may be no hero at all, or the apparent hero may be indistinguishable from the villain[41]". This notion aligns closely with Sorrento's perspective, which is particularly relevant to Lebanese crime narratives, as their audience falls into the second category: "They expect either an ending in the Shakespearean comedic tradition, in which the criminal's opposition rights the offense and restores order, the audience leaving with a sense of security; or the tragic mold takes shape, in which an ordered universe collapses gradually into disorder, the crime revealing a universe much darker than the previously innocent characters expected[42]". In that sense, Lebanese crime films are more likely to fall within the subgroup of critical crime films, which emphasize the impossibility of justice. These films adopt a distinctly pessimistic tone, offering no solace to the audience, unlike the more popular crime films. Instead, they expose harsh realities, even when presented through fiction. As a matter of fact, few years after the publication of her book, Rafter defines a new type of crime films in "the alternative tradition" which "are considerable interest because they reject the heroic fantasies and happy endings of traditional crime films to show us bleaker realities of crime, failures of the criminal justice system, even the impossibility of justice[43]". As a result, the arguments that Rafter offers align with those of the other researchers, confirming even further the existence of this category of alternative crime films that offer new characteristics and perspectives while maintaining realism as the core of their stories. Referring to Spina's words:

As with every cultural product, this relationship [between crime films and society] is reciprocal. On one hand, crime films reveal something important about the social context that they represent and from which they have been fashioned. On the other hand, they themselves have an effect on the social context, since their representation of crime, law, justice, and punishment itself becomes culture, acquires meaning, and provides an interpretation of reality.[44]

This uncompromising depiction of crime and corruption in Lebanese cinema underscores a broader critique of the socio-political landscape, where justice is either absent, unattainable, or itself corrupt. Unlike traditional crime films that follow a clear moral resolution, where justice prevails or, at the very least, a semblance of order is restored, Lebanese crime films often abandon such

41- *Idem.*
42- SORRENTO Matthew, *op. cit.*, p. 5-6.
43- RAFTER Nicole, *op. cit.*, 2017, p. 54.
44- SPINA Ferdinando, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

conventions. Instead, they emphasize a recurring state of dysfunction, where crime is not a disruption to be rectified but a fundamental necessity for survival. Furthermore, the absence of clear heroes in these narratives challenges the audience's expectations. Characters may engage in criminal acts not out of greed or malice but as a means of navigating an already broken system. This reflects the idea that, in these films, crime is not so much a disturbance of order as it is evidence of an order that has already collapsed. The audience is left without the comfort of resolution, as the world these films depict is one where lawlessness and power struggles persist beyond the final frame. Even the stylistic choices in Lebanese crime films contribute to this critical stance. Whether through documentary-style realism, fragmented storytelling, or abrupt endings that reject closure, these films refuse to conform to the conventional motifs of crime cinema, majorly American. Rather than offering catharsis, these films demand reflection, forcing their audience to confront the unsettling reality that crime is not merely a plot device but a reflection of deep-seated social and political turmoil. In this perspective, Lebanese crime films go beyond merely depicting crime stories. They unveil the systemic corruption that sustains them. By shifting the focus from individual transgressions to a broader critique of power structures, Lebanese crime films position themselves within the domain of critical crime films. This category or subgroup is evolving, as it now encompasses a broader array of films. Rafter and Brown examine how crime cinema in popular culture has moved beyond Hollywood conventions, identifying a new wave of critical crime films that challenge traditional narratives with "open endings and characters who are neither good nor bad but inscrutable". Whether Lebanese crime films belong to the traditional or the updated narrative forms (or perhaps a blend of both) remains an open question for further exploration and analysis[45].

Conclusion

This study has examined the emergence of a Lebanese crime cinema by analyzing two films which are primarily categorized within other genres but foreground crime as a central narrative element. These films offer critical insight into Lebanon's socio-political landscape, particularly during and after the civil war, and through the lens of crime, they provide a unique reflection of the country's complex realities. By situating these films within the broader framework of crime cinema, this research explored the extent to which they engage with the conventions of the film category and contribute to the potential formation of a distinct Lebanese crime cinema. The comparative analysis shows that both films engage with key genre conventions typical of crime cinema, including the depiction of the criminal, the victim, and the avenger. However, in contrast to traditional crime narratives, these roles are not fixed but instead evolve, overlap, and often subvert audience expectations. This fluidity aligns with contemporary

45- RAFTER Nicole, BROWN Michelle, *op. cit.*, 2011, p. 6-7.

shifts within global (notably American) crime cinema, especially since the 1990s, where character archetypes are increasingly depicted as morally ambiguous and resistant to simplistic categorizations. This nuanced portrayal of characters underscores the socio-political tensions inherent in Lebanese society, where identities are shaped by larger historical forces, and the boundary between criminality and victimhood is far from being clear-cut. This blurring of boundaries between the traditional archetypes of crime cinema suggests that these films represent a move away from conventional genre norms, positioning them more closely with what can be defined as "critical crime films". Unlike the traditional portrayal of criminals as tragic heroes – often seen in American gangster films, where the criminal's actions are framed within a broader critique of societal inequalities as "desperate men in a desperate hour, victims of a society that stresses wealth and status while failing to provide working-class men with the means to achieve these ends"[46] –, *Little Wars* and *Very Big Shot* engage with crime not as an act of heroism or rebellion, but as a response to Lebanon's fractured political and social systems. In *Very Big Shot* in particular, the characters' criminal behavior is framed with irony, positioning them as victims of a corrupt and dysfunctional society rather than as figures to be admired or romanticized.

Beyond individual character archetypes, both films use crime as a metaphor for larger social and political issues. In *Little Wars*, crime is embedded within the context of the Lebanese civil war, where personal and collective struggles intertwine, reflecting the country's national crisis. Similarly, *Very Big Shot* portrays crime as a survival strategy in a society marked by systemic inequality, where characters are driven to engage in illegal activities as a means of navigating an unjust social order. Crime, in both films, emerges as a form of resistance and adaptation to an environment characterized by moral and political instability. The films' engagement with crime extends beyond simple transgression and reflects broader societal struggles. By placing crime within the context of Lebanon's turbulent history, these films contribute to a new understanding of crime cinema in the Lebanese context: one that is intimately linked to the country's socio-political realities. Far from adhering to traditional genre conventions, the two films illustrate how crime narratives can serve as a critical tool for examining the political and social forces shaping individual lives.

In light of these observations, it can be argued that a distinct Lebanese crime cinema is emerging, characterized not only by its engagement with global crime category conventions but also by its focus on local socio-political issues. These films, particularly through their complex portrayal of crime and its consequences, offer a critical reflection on Lebanon's political and social order. They exemplify how Lebanese crime cinema moves away from the celebratory tone often found in classic crime films and instead adopts a more critical stance, questioning the moral and political structures that nurture the criminal actions of its characters.

In conclusion, this study suggests that Lebanese crime cinema is in fact an

46- RAFTER Nicole, *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 20.

evolving category that draws upon both global cinematic traditions and the unique national socio-political landscape. The emergence of a distinct Lebanese crime cinema opens new avenues for scholarly inquiry, particularly in terms of how it develops and its contributions to broader discussions on genre, identity, and social critique. Analyzing crime narratives within the context of Lebanon's complex history and contemporary struggles offers important insights into the ways Lebanese filmmakers use crime as a narrative device as well as a form of social commentary. Such an exploration holds the potential to deepen our understanding of how these films engage with the country's socio-political landscape, reflecting and challenging the dynamics that shape the Lebanese society.

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ملخّص | منذ سبعينيات القرن الماضي، تطوّرت السينما اللبنانية بالتوازي مع التحولات السياسية الإجتماعية التي شهدها البلد، حيث شكّلت السّرديات الجنائيّة مرآةً لهذه التغيّرات. خلال الحرب الأهلية (١٩٧٥-١٩٩٠)، استخدم مخرجون مثل مارون بغدادي الجريمة كمدخل لتسليط الضوء على الفوضى والأزمات الأخلاقية في تلك المرحلة، كما يظهر في فيلم « حروب صغيرة » (١٩٨٢). وبعد عدّة سنوات، عادت السّرديات الجنائية لتظهر من جديد في السينما اللبنانية، موازيةً بين تقاليد النوع السينمائي ومواضيع النّضال الإجتماعي. وفي العقد الثاني من القرن الحادي والعشرين، أعادت أفلام مثل « فيلم كتير كبير » (٢٠١٥) لميرجان بو شعيا تعريف السينما الجنائية من خلال توظيف الكوميديا السّوداء والنقد الإجتماعي، بما يعكس حالة عدم الإستقرار المستمرّة في لبنان. تتناول هذه المقالة تطوّر السّرد الجنائي في السينما اللبنانية، بالإستناد إلى الفيلمين المذكورين كنموذج لتحليل كيفية توظيف الجريمة كأداة سرديّة وانعكاس للتحوّلات التاريخية والسّياسية. من خلال مقارنة تحليلية لفيلمَي « حروب صغيرة » و « فَيلم كتير كبير »، تبحث هذه المقالة في التحولات الموضوعيّة والأسلوبيّة التي توحي ببروز سينما جنائية لبنانية فريدة، تمزج بين عناصر النوع السّينمائي والنقد الإجتماعي لمشاكل الواقع اللبناني.

كلمات مفتاحية | السينما اللبنانية، الحرب الأهلية، الجريمة، الأفلام الروائية، الشباب، مارون بغدادي، ميرجان بو شعيا.

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