

The effect of visual narrative language of color codes in Youssef Chahine's cinema

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Abstract

This study explores the ways in which Egyptian director Youssef Chahine employed colors within the narrative of his films, influenced by historical, religious, and cultural factors. The main purpose of the study is to shed light on the significance of colors and their symbolism in any cinematic work, due to its impact on the viewer's emotions and perception of a film, as well as its ability to enhance the aesthetics of the cinematic imagery. In this context, two different films of Chahine, *Al Nasser Salah Al-din (Saladin the Victorious, 1963)* and *Al-Massir (Destiny, 1997)*, which were shot in different periods, were selected. In study uses Roland Barthes' semiological approach as a to analyze the denotational and connotational meanings of color in selected films. This analysis reveals the significance of color in Chahine's films and how color symbolism is employed to convey the director's ideas and depict their distinctive visual style.

Keywords

cinema, egyptian cinema, youssef chahine, color, semiotics, visual narrative

Highlights

- The use of colors in Youssef Chahine's films is crucial for conveying symbolic meanings that enhance the narrative and emotional depth of his work.
- Chahine's employment of color reflects the historical, religious, and cultural contexts, adding layers of meaning to the visual storytelling.
- By analyzing denotative and connotative meanings of color, the study reveals how Chahine uses visual symbolism to communicate complex ideas and themes.

Youssef Chahine sinemasında renk kodlarının görsel anlatım diline etkisi

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Atıf

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Öz

Bu çalışma, Mısırlı yönetmen Youssef Chahine'in tarihsel, dini ve kültürel faktörlerden etkilenerek filmlerinin anlatısında renkleri nasıl kullandığını araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmanın temel amacı, izleyicinin duyguları ve film algısı üzerindeki etkisinin yanı sıra sinemasal görüntülerin estetiğini zenginleştirme kabiliyeti nedeniyle renklerin ve sembolizmin bir sinema eserindeki önemine ışık tutmaktır. Bu bağlamda, Chahine'in farklı dönemlerde çekilmiş iki farklı filmi, *Al Nasser Salah Al-din (Muzaffer Selahaddin, 1963)* ve *Al-Massir (Kader, 1997)* filmleri örneklem olarak seçilmiştir. Çalışmada, Roland Barthes'ın göstergebilimsel yaklaşımı, seçilen filmlerdeki rengin düzenlamsal ve yananlamsal anlamlarını analiz etmek için kullanılmıştır. Bu analiz, Chahine'nin filmlerinde rengin önemini ve renk sembolizminin yönetmenin fikirlerini aktarmak ve kendine özgü görsel tarzını tasvir etmek için nasıl kullanıldığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler

sinema, mısır sineması, youssef chahine, renk, göstergebilim, görsel anlatı

Öne çıkanlar

- Youssef Chahine'nin filmlerinde renk kullanımı, eserlerinin anlatısını ve duygusal derinliğini güçlendiren sembolik anlamları aktarmak için çok önemlidir.
- Chahine'nin renk kullanımı tarihsel, dini ve kültürel bağlamları yansıtarak görsel hikaye anlatımına anlam katmanları eklemektedir.
- Çalışma, rengin düz ve yan anlamlarını analiz ederek, Chahine'nin karmaşık fikir ve temaları iletme için görsel sembolizmi nasıl kullandığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Introduction¹

Telling a film story or conveying a narrative on screen goes beyond simply presenting a linear sequence of actions or images. It involves the art of visually representing images and capturing them in a way that evokes a specific mood and conveys a specific meaning. Accordingly, color plays a significant role as a visual narrating element in filmmaking for its ability to convey themes, effectively communicate messages, and enhance the overall cinematic experience. Color has long been a powerful form of visual communication. Discoveries like the Lascaux cave paintings and ancient Egyptian murals show how colors symbolized natural elements like fire, blood, and the sky, reflecting cultural, religious, and spiritual beliefs. Today, color symbolism remains significant across cultures and religions. Black represents mourning and death, red symbolizes blood and sin in Judaism and the blood of Christ in Christianity, and green is associated with the prophet Muhammad and paradise in Islam.

Since the dawn of art, humans have used visual expression to convey their thoughts, emotions, and perceptions. Today, visual media—such as photography, advertisements, video games, and cinema—dominates communication, enhancing the emotional impact of messages. Cinema, in particular, relies on visual language and the interplay of light and color to convey meaning and create artistic expression. By focusing on color and visual techniques, filmmakers can craft intricate narratives and elevate the art of storytelling. In cinema, color is more than just an aesthetic choice; it embodies historical, cultural, and psychological dimensions, influencing how viewers perceive and interpret films. Filmmakers use color to establish mood, evoke emotions, and drive the narrative, making precise decisions based on color theory principles like hue, saturation, value, and harmony. Effective color use enhances visual storytelling, creating emotional and psychological impact.

Color in film is also explored through semiotics, where colors are seen as signs that convey deeper meanings. This involves examining the filmmaker's intentional use of color, its visual composition and impact, and the viewer's personal interpretation. Color codes, with their symbolic meanings, allow filmmakers to communicate complex ideas and engage audiences on both conscious and subconscious levels. In this study uses Roland Barthes' semiological approach as a qualitative research method to analyze the denotational and connotational meanings of color in selected films by Egyptian director Youssef Chahine. This method explores the significance of color in Chahine's films and how color symbolism is employed to convey the director's ideas and depict their distinctive visual style.

Egyptian cinema

The earliest attempts at film production in Egypt were pioneered by foreign

¹ This study is based on the master's thesis titled *The Effect of Visual Narrative Language of Color Codes in Youssef Chahine's Cinema* completed on June 27, 2024, under the supervision of Prof. Alev Fatoş Parsa and Assist. Prof. Elçin As.

organizations, influenced by the country's economic situation following the British occupation in 1882 (Gaffney, 1987, p. 54). A few months after the Lumière brothers' first film screening in Paris in 1896, it was shown in Alexandria and Cairo, leading to regular screenings in Alexandria by 1897. The first cinema in Egypt was built by the French company Pathé in Cairo in 1906 (Shafik, 2007, p. 10).

In 1917, one of the first foreign-Egyptian collaborations was the Italo-Egyptian film company, founded by Banco di Roma. Despite attempts to create films with Egyptian themes, they failed to attract Egyptian audiences and dissolved after two years. Following the 1919 Revolution, there was a push to develop national industries and cultural expressions. One of the first Egyptian-produced films was *Al-Bashkatib* (1924), made in Bayoumi Photo Film studio by Mohamed Bayumi around the same time, under the reign of King Fuad I (1868-1936), Egypt saw significant development in its support for cinema and acting. In 1925, the Egyptian Royal Decree provided financial backing for film production, marking a new chapter in the growth of Egyptian cinema. The first full-length silent film entirely funded by Egyptian capital, *Leyla* (1927), directed by Ahmed Kamal and starring Aziza Amir, was a key milestone. Turkish filmmaker Vedat Örfi Bengü, the grandson of Ottoman Grand Vizier Halil Rıfat Pasha, played a significant role in the film as both actor and producer.

In 1927, he also became the artistic director of Isis Corporation, one of Egypt's major film companies at that time, founded by Aziza Amir and her husband, Ahmed El Sherai. Bengü's contributions to both Egyptian and Turkish cinema were notable, though the number of films he directed in Egypt is debated, with estimates ranging from 12 to 14. Bengü is sometimes regarded as a founder of Egyptian cinema, however, other figures such as Mohamed Bayumi, Bahiga Hafez, and Togo Mizrahi also played key roles, making it inaccurate to credit Bengü alone as the industry's founder (Özyıldırım, 2014). Moreover, in 1934, the foundation of Studio Misr by Talaat Harb marked a flourishing period for Egyptian cinema, attracting foreign directors and later becoming a hub for Egyptian filmmakers. This era saw Egyptian cinema gain international recognition, being dubbed *The Hollywood of the Orient* (Abdulmaged, 2022, p. 46-55).

By the 1940s, Egyptian cinema had grown to be a major exporter to Arab countries, known as the "golden age". The 1950s saw a shift towards socially conscious cinema following the 1952 coup and the government of Gamal Abd El-Nasser. During Nasser's rule, all Egyptian cinemas were nationalized in 1963, leading to challenges in film production. Filmmakers often relied on external expertise and equipment. Despite this, Egyptian films influenced Arab filmmaking with popular genres like comedy, melodrama, and musicals. Attempts to reprivatize the film industry occurred during Anwar Al Sadat's rule in 1971, but the public sector ceased producing feature films due to debt (Shafik, 2007, p. 21-32). The government retained control over censorship, restricting religious and political criticism. This led to the rise of "New Arab Cinema", featuring films that explored social issues and personal stories. Filmmakers often worked as craftsmen, seeking financial support for creative freedom. Notable auteur filmmakers like Chahine found success through private production and foreign co-producers, attracting Western

interest in Arab art films (Shafik, 2007, p. 33-39).

Thus, the Egyptian film industry underwent significant changes due to political circumstances, evolving as a tool for social and political expression. These changes shaped the careers of directors like Chahine, who created impactful works reflecting the transformation of Egyptian cinema and society.

Youssef Chahine

Chahine (1926-2008), an Egyptian film director born in Alexandria to a middle-class Christian family of Lebanese and Greek roots, attended Victoria College and studied acting at the Pasadena Playhouse in Los Angeles. Upon returning to Egypt, he chose to become a film director (Hamam, 2010, p. 84). Chahine's career began with *Baba Amin* (1950) and *Ibn El Nil* (1953), showing his creativity and technical skill. His reputation soared with *Siraa Fil-Wadi* (1954) and *Bab El Hadid* (1958), where he played a schizophrenic character, showcasing his unique editing style (Elnaccash, 1968, p. 71).

Chahine gained international recognition, receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award at Cannes in 1997. He introduced actors like Omar Sharif and had several films ranked among the top Egyptian films. Initially making social melodramas and musicals, Chahine's style evolved in the late 1950s to counter mainstream cinema. In the early 1960s, he directed *Al Nasser Salah Al-Din (Saladin the Victorious, 1963)*, reflecting contemporary political themes and Arab unity (Halim, 1992, p. 78).

In the 1970s, Chahine's films became more complex, mixing genres and experimenting with storytelling. He established Misr International Films, leading to co-productions like *Adieu Bonaparte* (1985). Despite challenges in the Egyptian film industry, Chahine's work gained international acclaim. He faced controversy with *Al-Muhajir* (1994), accused of offending religion, and *Al-Masir* (1997), which addressed intolerance and censorship (Hamam, 2010, p. 85-86).

Chahine's autobiographical films, such as *Alexandria... Why?* (1978), explored personal and societal issues, influencing other Arab filmmakers. He critiqued society through his life events, reflecting Egypt's cultural and political context (Chahine & Massad, 1999, p. 78-79). His filmography, spanning from the 1950s until his death in 2008, highlights the evolution of Middle Eastern cinema amidst political turmoil. Chahine's unconventional style, tackling taboo subjects and real-life experiences, made him a unique filmmaker. His work remains a significant part of Egyptian cinema history, pushing the boundaries of artistic expression. The films of Chahine will be analyzed in more detail in the subsequent analysis part.

Importance, purpose, and methodology of the study

The importance of the study lies in focusing and directing the attention of the viewer towards the aesthetics of the cinematic imagery of Chahine, while observing the use of

colors and their symbolic functions within his works, which enhanced and enriched the dramatic narrative of the films, ensuring their impactfulness. Moreover, the purpose of the research is to shed light on the significance of colors and their symbolism in any cinematic work, due to its impact on the viewer's emotions and perception of a film, as well as its ability to enhance the aesthetics of the cinematic imagery. Also this reflects the historical efforts of making a color image, and then giving it a meaning to be symbolic. Additionally, the study aims to emphasize the importance of researches about color within the realm of Egyptian cinema and attribute a value to it. Based on this, the study is to investigate the employment of color and its narrative language through the films of the late Egyptian director Chahine to identify its contextual significance, interpret its meanings within the context, and to unravel the emotional and cultural connotation. In this context, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How did the director's employment of colors contribute to the narrative of the films?
- How did historical, religious, and cultural factors influence the employment of color in the selected film?
- How did the director's choices of color reflect his ideological themes within the films?

The films were selected through purposive sampling for its visual aesthetics following a qualitative research method using Barthes' denotation and connotation theory as a semiotic approach for analyzing the data obtained from the selected films. According to Barthes, semiology therefore aims to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all these, which form the content of ritual, convention or public entertainment: these constitute, if not languages, at least systems of signification (1968, p. 3). There are two types of signs, denotive and connotative. "Denotation is the direct, specific, or literal meaning we get from a sign. It is a description or representation of the signified—that is, language (or visual) specifically about the object" (Moriarty, 2005, p. 231). Based on Barthes' notions, Ferdinand de Saussure's model of sign mainly focused on denotation, without addressing connotation. He also emphasized that connotation can be distinguished from denotation analytically in a photograph (Chandler, 2002, p. 138). In simpler terms, denotation refers to the actual thing is being photographed, while connotation refers to the way in which this thing is being photographed, in terms of the elements that contribute to the overall meaning or feeling conveyed by the photograph (Fiske, 1990, p. 86).

Connotation is the meaning attributed to a sign that is beyond its literal definition. According to Barthes, connotation is what the sign symbolizes based on cultural meanings of personal experiences and associations (Moriarty, 2005, p. 231). Those associations can be influenced by different factors, such as age, social class, gender, ethnicity, experience. Thus, connotation depends on the context in which a sign is interpreted (Chandler, 2002, p. 138). To sum up, Barthes approach on denotation and connotation discusses the layers of meaning within the sign, in which denotation is the

literal representation of the sign, while connotation delves deeper into the sociocultural meanings associated to it. Chahine films are *Al Nasser Salah Al-din (Saladin the Victorious, 1963)* and *Al-Massir (Destiny, 1997)*. The data is collected by watching each film multiple times at different time intervals to ensure reaching different interpretations. Moreover, an analysis of different scenes/frames that consists of strong color representation from each film is conducted by the researchers, revealing the denotative and connotative meaning of color in different context. Therefore, the semiotic analysis of color in the selected films aims to reveal the effect of visual narrative language of color in Chahine's cinema.

Film semiotic analysis: *Al Nasser Salah Al-din (Saladin the Victorious, 1963)*

Al Nasser Salah Al-din was an attempt to challenge Hollywood's dominance in the 1960s, particularly in the historical epic genre. Inspired by Hollywood's success, Egyptian filmmakers like Chahine began focusing more on the visual aspects of their films. The use of color in *Al Nasser Salah Al-din* helped create a vivid historical imagination through costumes, landscapes, and buildings. Chahine's use of color contributed to the film's interpretation through symbolic visions. By applying Barthes' semiotic theory to the colors in *Al Nasser Salah Al-din*, we aim to uncover the layers of meaning within the film's visual language, reflecting historical context, geographical context, and character traits. The film opens with Arabs celebrating Sultan Salah El-din's victory over the Franks in Alexandria, depicted in vibrant colored attire. During the Islamic golden age, particularly under the Abbasid caliphate, textiles and dyes flourished, symbolizing wealth and social status. Bright colors like white, blue, green, red, and yellow became prominent. This historical influence is reflected in the film's opening scene, where the vibrant fabrics highlight Arab culture's richness before the Third Crusade, showcasing the lasting impact of the golden age on Arab culture.



Image 1. Salah El-din's brother, vizier, and an Arab prince

Denotation: Screenshot scene of Salah El-din's vizier asking Salah El-din's brother where he is, while an Arab prince standing waiting for the sultan just like them (image 1).

Connotation: The colored attires and jewelry reflect the wealth, social status, and glory of Arabs at that time. It also signifies the victory of Salah El-din, and the celebration made for his return.

It was until Salah El-din was called for rescuing Jerusalem, during which several attacks from crusaders happened. Colors starts to get warmer as earthy tones of the Sahara emerges depicting Jerusalem being attacked and people resisting. The use of red hue and yellow tone depicts the struggle happening to Arabs of Jerusalem, both Muslim and Christian Arabs, which was also happening in real life during the making of the film. This lead many people and critics think that the film was intended as a representation of the period of Pan Arabism by the former Egyptian president Gamal Abd El-Nasser.



Image 2. Palestinian man and a crusader soldier

Denotation: Screenshot scene of crusader soldiers attacking homes in Jerusalem, while the owner of one house confronts one of the soldiers. The man is wearing the traditional scarf of the levant region named *keffiyeh* (image 2).

Connotation: The Arab man's white beard and red keffiyeh symbolizes the long struggle of the region, Jerusalem in specific, from the several crusades. The red *keffiyeh* not only used as a cultural object, but it symbolizes the long yearning for freedom and shows resistance. As red color in this context signifies anger, resistance, war, violence, and blood.

Furthermore, Chahine skillfully used the contrast between visual representations of different cultures and religions in the film. Two of the scenes that highlight this contrast in colors of Muslims and Christians, when the Crusader King of Jerusalem is shown praying in a chamber fully in rich red hues, and the Muslim praying on their way to Mecca wearing white pilgrimage clothes.

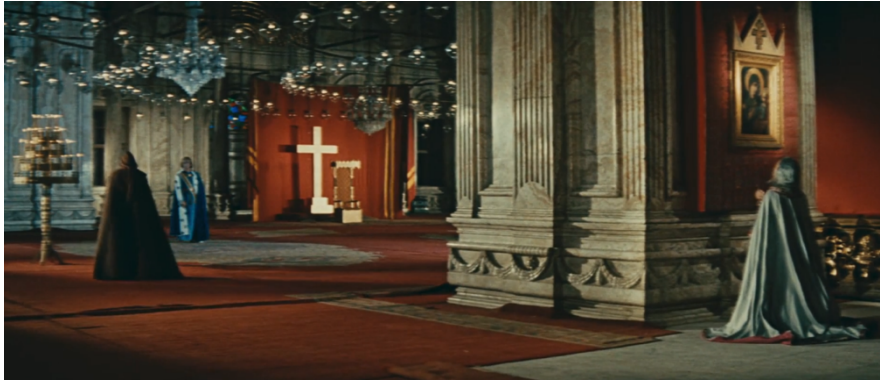


Image 3. Crusader King of Jerusalem praying, Raynald, and a Knight Templar

Denotation: Screenshot scene of the Crusader King of Jerusalem praying in a red chamber in front of a portrait for Virgin Mary, while Raynald, lord of Kerak, waiting for him (image 3).

Connotation: In this scene, the color red is taking a large space from the cadre. Red was adopted by the church as a symbol of the blood shed by Christ on the cross, representing sacrifice and martyrdom. Accordingly, the crusaders used the color red to signify their devotion to their religion and their willingness to shed blood for the sake of their mission to reclaim the holy land.



Image 4. Muslim pilgrims praying in the Sahara

Denotation: Screenshot scene of Muslims praying in a desert, particularly the land of Hijaz, wearing the traditional white attire of pilgrims (image 4).

Connotation: In this scene, the white color is the contrasting color of red, representing the opposite group in the film. To Muslims, white symbolizes simplicity, purity, spirituality, and devotion for God. The use of white pilgrimage clothes against the backdrop of blue sky and yellow sand of the desert, evokes a feeling of serenity and engagement in a spiritual act in its simplest form, which reflects the spiritual and cultural dimensions of the pilgrimage experience in Islam.

However, these two scenes are followed by a complex scene combining the use of red and white. Chahine skillfully used color along with an editing technique inspired by Sergei Eisenstein, which heightened the scene's visual symbolism creating a strong

metaphorical composition. In this scene, the pilgrimage got massacred during prayers and their caravans were looted by the order of Reynald of Chatillon.



Image 5. The pilgrims' massacre

Denotation: The first screenshot is a scene of blood-stained sword, underneath legs of a body laying down on a blood-stained white cloth. The second screenshot is a scene of white cloth. The third screenshot is a scene of red cloth (image 5).

Connotation: The third screenshots were combined for their interrelated contrast. Chahine used these scenes to depict the battle, in which the white cloth as mention before represents the Muslim pilgrims, the sword represents the crusaders, and the red blood stains on both the cloth and the sword represents the massacre, which also represents the gradual escalation of the massacre. from white to red, full of blood.

The second color associated with Crusaders is blue. In the film, during the third crusades, blue emerges as a significant color associated primarily with King Philip of France and his military forces. Soldiers are often seen dressed in blue robes or garments as a military identity during battles. In this scene, the dominance of the color blue was shown through the costumes of the soldiers and church behind, while a soldier interrogates a Christian man and accusing him of betrayal after he helped Isa, a Christian Arab, the friend and right hand of Salah El-din.



Image 6. The knight templars in blue

Denotation: Screenshot scene of a man hanged on a breaking wheel, after being accused for betrayal while blood is shedding from him due to the torture of the knight templars during interrogation before they kill him (image 6).

Connotation: The color of the sky, blue, carries rich religious and symbolic connotations to Christians. It is a heavenly color associated with spirituality and divinity. It is often used in religious artwork to represent the Virgin Mary wearing a blue robe, which became a religious motif during medieval Christian Europe. Additionally, Christian kings and rulers were depicted wearing blue, symbolizing royalty, power, and authority. However, in this scene, there is an imagery of betrayal, arrest, and ultimately, crucifixion, which resembles the story of Jesus. The imagery of the hanged man, reminiscent of Christ's crucifixion, juxtaposed with the blue of the crusaders and the red of Christ's blood. Based on this visual allegory, it serves the cinematic narrative by showing the difference between true Christian values and the violence committed with the name of religion. Thus, it signifies that those crusaders are not the true Christians, but rather they are deviating from the teachings of compassion and forgiveness, as they are torturing and killing Christians just like them.

Moreover, the informational function of color was also seen in the film through different colors of different flags, just like red flags of Richard and Blue flags of Philip, Salah El-din's yellow flag with the golden eagle was evident throughout the film. Colors of the flags play a significant role in the narrative of the film. It basically structures the narrative by highlighting key scenes, actions, conflicts, and interactions between characters. They also have a symbolic significance, as each color and emblem on the flags symbolizes an identity.



Image 7. Salah El-din's flag

Denotation: The first screenshot is the scene of Salah El-din's flag hanged behind the chair or throne where he sits, surround by soldiers and others to witness the execution of Reynald after he killed the pilgrims (image 7).

Connotation: In the context of the film, yellow is associated with power, authority, and leadership for Muslims. The golden Eagle on the flag represents courage, strength, and victory. Thus, the use of yellow in accordance with Salah El-din, reflects his powerful role as a leader and a statesman. It also signifies victory in this scene as he takes revenge by killing Reynald after he massacred the pilgrims.

Color also played a significant role in structuring characters within the narrative reflecting their personal attributes, cultural background, or emotional journey. The attributions are explored in the context of the character's actions, motivations, and relationships with other characters. One of the characters that had a significant role in the narrative was Virginia, Princess of Kerak and wife of Raynald of Châtillon. Virginia can be seen as the contrasting character of Louise, the French Hospitaller crusader knight. Virginia is represented as the archetype of a femme fatale through colors, by using her allure to manipulate every influential figure in the Crusades for her own advantage, such as the governor of Acre against his own people, Philippe King of France, Conrad Marquis of Montferrat, Duke Arthur, as well as Richard the lion heart, aiming for taking over Jerusalem and the wealth of Arabs.



Image 8. Virginia with King Richard

Denotation: Screenshot of the scene where Virginia goes to King Richard asking for his help to seize Jerusalem and join the crusades against Salah El-din after her husband was killed (image 8).

Connotation: Virginia is seen wearing black in different scenes throughout the film. The color black is usually associated with negativity like death and evil. In this scene, Virginia dressed in black after her husband was killed by Salah El-din, although it is shown throughout the film that she was faking her sadness over her deceased husband, yet she managed to manipulate everyone. In this scene, the color black makes her stand out in the middle of all colors surrounding her. She is seen holding hands with King Richard while everyone is focusing on her, which signifies that her position now is in power and that she succeeded in manipulating and charging the king with negative emotions to lure him into war. Thus, by the repetitive appearance of Virginia in black in different scenes, reflects her evil hateful character and her evil plans.



Image 9. Virginia and Conrad in a tent

Denotation: Screenshot scene of Virginia after she invited Conrad Marquis of Montferrat to her tent, while she is wearing a sleeping robe, in an attempt to seduce him (image 9).

Connotation: In this scene, the color red is dominating the scene, heightened by the warm yellow lighting, which creates an atmosphere of desire, passion, and temptation. Red is often associated with love and seduction, which reflects Virginia's attempt to seduce Conrad. Moreover, Virginia's sleeping robe in the color pink, a softer shade of red, symbolizes femininity and tenderness, which is the opposite of her real character. This conveys the shift in her character when she attempts to use her femininity for reaching her aim.

The opposite female character to Virginia is Louise. Louise is seen in light colors throughout the film. Louise was the French Hospitaller crusader knight, who fell in love with Isa the Christian Arab. She was mostly depicted wearing light colors. She is the opposite of a villain character, as she experiences a conflict throughout the film, resulted from her guilt after falling in love with the enemy despite of following the same religion, which made her feel that she betrayed her religion and the crusade's mission.



Image 10. Louise along with the knight templars

Denotation: Screenshot scene of Louise accompanied by the knight templars to be trialed in front of King Richard after Virginia caught her treating the Arab Isa, who was injured and drifted by the sea to the Crusaders' camp where the hospitallers found him (image 10).

Connotation: In this scene, Louise is wearing a white gown on her way to the trial. White color is often associated with purity and innocence, which is evident in the scene, as she acted out of humanity by treating Isa, who is also Christian. Despite of facing judgment, her purity represents a beacon of hope amidst the war.

Louise's trial scene was one of the scenes where Chahine used light to serve the narrative in skillfully. He shed light cinematically on the contradiction that characterizes the moral perspective of both Saladin and the crusaders. He juxtaposes the experience of Louisa's trial in front of Richard the Lionheart, and the trial of the governor of Acre in front of Salah El-din through unconventional set design and lighting arrangements, and instead of cutting between the two scenes, he uses split-screen to view the two events happening at the same time as a contrasting technique. The scene starts by cross cutting between both trials, showing the different preaches of both sides, where Conrad preaches hate over love, while Salah El-din preaches love over hate. Afterwards, a transitioning effect is created using lighting, in which the scene is gradually turning darker until Louise is left illuminated with a flame next to her on the right side of the frame, at the same time the Arab trial is occurring on the left side. Lighting on and off is switching from left to right as the trials happen side by side simultaneously. By employing visual techniques using color and lighting in the film's narrative, Chahine created a theatrical like scene, in which he used lighting skillfully to interpret space and time. However, this theatrical like stages serves the narrative by heightening the sense of drama and performance in the scene. It also represented justice and morality as performative acts that are influenced by societal and power dynamics.

Film semiotic analysis: *Al-Massir* (Destiny, 1997)

The film opens with a scene of burning one of Ibn Rushd's followers in Languedoc, France during the twelfth century, a period marked by the Catholic inquisitorial courts

especially against the Cathars posed a challenge and threat to the authority of the Catholic Church at that time. The opening scene serves as an introduction to the film's conflicts and themes of fundamentalism and oppression, which will be further explored and culminate in similar scenes towards the end of the film.



Image 11. Public execution of Ibn Rushd's follower

Denotation: Screenshot scene of the Men from the Catholic church in black attires with a gold big cross in the background while the French follower of Ibn Rushd is seen between the fire burning at the stake along with the books of Ibn Rushd (image 11).

Connotation: In this scene, the black attires of the church men symbolize their authority and power during that historical period in the kingdom of France. It conveys the oppressive nature of the inquisitorial courts and their control over the execution, as they fight whatever threatens their religious dogma. The presence of the big gold cross held by the church men in the background as they burn the man, further symbolizes the religious significance, authority, and power of the Catholic Church at that time. Moreover, the man's attire contrasts with that of the religious men, in which the light colors stained with blood worn by the man, connotes his vulnerability, suffering, and helplessness. However, colors red and orange, representing blood and fire in the scene, symbolize violence, oppression and the brutality of the execution. Beyond the literal physical burning of a man, these colors symbolize and represent the suppression of any dissenting thought or challenge to the church's authority. The scene aims to instill fear and terror in those who dare to think outside the religious norms of the church.

Ibn Rushd's character is represented by two dominant colors throughout the film, black and muted grey-blue. The choice of colors attributed to each character in the film serve as visual cues, offering insights into the character's complex persona and its role in the narrative.



Image 12. Ibn Rushd's discussing with a former member of the religious group

Denotation: Screenshot scene of Ibn Rushd in his black attire, sitting in a room dimly lit by a candle that is illuminating the people through a window. He is engaged in a conversation with a former member of the religious group, the brother of the young man who attacked Marwan the singer. They are discussing the process of luring young people into this group (image 12).

Connotation: In this scene, Ibn Rushd's black attire symbolizes his role as a judge, representing power, authority, and formality. The use of black suggests that he seeks to utilize his position to uphold justice and combat extreme ideologies. Instead of immediately executing the young men who attacked Marwan the singer, Ibn Rushd chooses to take a different approach, displaying his judicial and wise character. The lighting from the candle positioned behind Ibn Rushd's head, seemingly in front of a window, symbolizes wisdom and enlightenment. It adds depth and emotion to the scene, illuminating the faces of those surrounding Ibn Rushd. This lighting not only creates a sense of importance but also implies a profound and meaningful exchange of ideas.



Image 13. Ibn Rushd looking through a telescope

Denotation: Screenshot scene of Ibn Rushd in his blue attire, looking through a telescope. By his side, Marwan sits attentively as they observe the distant figure of Abdallah, the son of the Caliph, aiming to save him from the clutches of the religious group (image 13).

Connotation: In this scene, Ibn Rushd is depicted wearing a muted blue attire, which symbolizes intellectual depth, wisdom, and his pursuit of truth. His intellectual nature is evident as he looks through a water telescope, a significant invention which he attributed

to Ibn Al-Haytham, also known as Alhazen. This detail not only emphasizes Ibn Rushd's dedication to knowledge and wisdom but also highlights the broader theme of the contributions made by Arab scientists and philosophers in various fields during medieval times, which often goes unrecognized or uncredited. Thus, blue here represents Ibn Rushd's intellectual acumen which allowed him to figure out and piece together information and discern the extent of Abdallah's involvement with the group. Upon that, he takes a decisive action to rescue Abdallah from the emir's castle. This reflects his role in the film as a protector against the extreme fundamentalists and a holder of the principles of intellectual freedom and enlightenment.



Image 14. Abdallah and Manuella dancing

Denotation: Screenshot scene of Abdallah, the son of the Caliph, is captured amidst the lively ambiance of the gypsy bar, wearing a mix of white and gold attire, denoting his noble status. He joins his gypsy friends, Marwan and his wife Manuella in their bar as they are singing and dancing in a cozy warm toned atmosphere. Moreover, the religious group, depicted in green which represents their Islamic identity, tries to establish a relationship with the son of the Caliph in an attempt to lure him to join their group. However, Manuella, who is depicted in blue and red, sees through their intentional plan and stops them (image 14).

Connotation: In the context of the scene, the orange lights and the warm tones symbolize happiness and warmth in the place as Abdullah is doing what he loves, dancing, with the people whom he considers as his family. Despite of denoting Abdallah's nobility and high social status as the son of the Caliph, in the context of the scene, white color connotes his desire to break free from the constraints of his privileged upbringing and embrace a more carefree lifestyle. Moreover, blue in Manuella's dress reflects her character's traits. As she treats Abdallah as her son, she takes the responsibility of protecting him very personal throughout the film, which symbolizes her loyalty and protective instincts. Red on the other hand, symbolizes her courage and passion, as she didn't hesitate to intervene and protect Abdallah from the religious group who calls her an infidel and later kills her husband. On the other hand, the green color worn by the religious group carries a negative connotation. While green symbolizes heaven, prosperity, and is associated with Islam and the prophet Mohamed, in the context of the film, it represents the group's misuse of religious teachings just like they misuse the color green which doesn't fit with their actions as Muslims. Thus, it signifies their rigid ideology and the corrupt manipulation of Islamic preaches for their own ulterior motives.



Image 15. Abdallah during religious rituals

Denotation: Screenshot scene of Abdallah participating in religious ritual, al dhikr, with the group. He appears hypnotized swinging his head and body left to right in the darkness in front of a big fire, led by the emir of the group (image 15).

Connotation: In this scene, the contrast between Abdallah's attire and the green worn by the group symbolizes the beginning of the gradual change in his character as he begins to get attracted to their beliefs and practices after they succeeded to influence him through dancing. Thus, white in this scene signifies his vulnerable character. Moreover, the darkness of the scene illuminated by the flickering light of the fire, gives a sense of secrecy and intensity of the ritual lead by the emir, who no one have seen him. As a central element of the ritual, fire may symbolize purification and destruction in the realm of the extreme religious beliefs of the group. Thus, the interplay of visual elements in this scene connotates the psychological and emotional experience of Abdallah as he become more involved in an extreme religious world.



Image 16. Abdallah's submission to the Emir

Denotation: Screenshot scene of Abdallah and other followers of the fundamentalist group are dressed in traditional green attire during an annual event where the emir's face is revealed to his followers. The emir wears a white dress with a green robe on top and a green mask covering his face. After revealing his face, he is seen with a shaved head, a sharp beard, and an under-eye black kohl. Abdallah again seems hypnotized the moment he sees the emir's face and moves to kiss his hands for blessings (image 16).

Connotation: In this scene, Abdallah is depicted wearing the green attire of the religious group for the first time. This symbolizes the shift in his character as he reaches the max involvement with the group. Followed by a scene where the emir was introduced to Abdallah as an angel human who claims knowledge of everything with his ability to see the past, present, and future, Abdallah seems to be totally convinced and drenched in what the follower of the emir told him. Moreover, the white and green robe with his heightened position level symbolizes his superiority as a leader and his holiness in the

eyes of his followers. Additionally, the green mask covering the emir's face symbolizes mystery and deception, as the mask is used to manipulate the followers into believing that the emir is a sacred human angel that his face can only be revealed once a year. By that, the mask represents the tactics of the emir in showing himself as an enigmatic figure at the same time of asserting dominance over his followers, and thus, his ability to manipulate perceptions to solidify his rule. Lastly, the black kohl also represents part of the identity look. It coincides with the Islamic culture in some Muslim communities, as in some interpretations, wearing black kohl relates to the prophetic sunnah of Muhammed. Thus, the black kohl is used by the fundamentalist group to differentiate themselves from others and to claim that they are the keepers of the Islamic tradition as part of their identity.

As the tension in the film escalates, the fundamentalist group attempt to burn Ibn Rushd's books, aiming to undermine his influence and turn the people against him. Amidst these circumstances, several characters were revealed through their commitment and loyalty to Ibn Rushd reflecting on their deep moralities. These characters emerged as the beacons of light, hope and resistance. They devoted their efforts, their time and their lives to spreading Ibn Rushd's knowledge and protecting his ideas from being lost.



Image 17. Youssef and Ibn Rushd's wife

Denotation: Screenshot scene of Youssef seeking the help of Ibn Rushd's wife to hide some of Ibn Rushd's important books as he senses what the fundamentalists might do by burning the books. He is seen wearing an orange attire, Ibn Rushd's wife wearing a red dress, while the walls behind them are adorned with blue, white and yellow tiles representing the Islamic architecture in Andalusia (image 17).

Connotation: In this scene, the orange attire of Youssef reflects his character and intentions. Orange, a color between red and yellow, is an optimistic color that is often associated with enthusiasm and warmth. In the film, Youssef's orange attire symbolizes his enthusiasm and determination to protect Ibn Rushd's works, reflecting his commitment despite being a non-Muslim. Ibn Rushd's wife wears red, representing her love, warmth, and dedication to her family and husband's cause. The blue, white, and yellow tiles in the film symbolize wisdom, spirituality, and enlightenment, representing

the rich intellectual culture and peaceful atmosphere in Ibn Rushd's household. Overall, the warm colors convey warmth, love, determination, and intellectual pursuit.



Image 18. Youssef on his way back to France carrying Rushd's books

Denotation: Screenshot scene of Youssef depicted riding a horse through a forest full of red poppy flower., while carrying the books of Ibn Rushd back to France in order to save it and spread the teachings of Ibn Rushd (image 18).

Connotation: In this scene, the red poppy flower connotes several themes. The red color of the flower symbolizes Youssef's strong emotions of love, passion, and sacrifice towards Ibn Rushd. Just like his father admired Ibn Rushd and his teachings, the red poppy flowers create a visual contrast against the green forest symbolizing Youssef's dedication and deep devotion to preserving the books. It highlights the importance of Youssef's mission and the books he is carrying. Moreover, as the red poppy flower is usually associated with soldiers heading to war, in the context of the film it symbolizes Youssef's sacrifices by going back to his country with the books that were the reason of his father's killing. Thus, highlights how much it is worth the fight in order to preserve knowledge and spread intellectual freedom.



Image 19. Al Nasser and Salma

Denotation: Screenshot scene of Al Nasser, the eldest son of the Caliph, and Salma the daughter of Ibn Rushd. Nasser is depicted wearing red, while Salma wearing white in an intimate moment illuminated by warm candlelight as they are helping Ibn Rushd and the others to copy his writings (image 19).

Connotation: In this scene, Al Nasser's red attire symbolizes his love to Salma as he confesses his love to her. He also tells her his plan to take the writings of Ibn Rush to Egypt in order to save and spread them. Red could also symbolize his position as the crown prince the son of the Caliph and his ability to take brave and decisive actions even if it is against his father the caliph. Thus, again red here symbolizes love, passion, power, and sacrifice. Moreover, white color symbolizes Salma's purity, innocence, simplicity, and sincere intentions in supporting Al Nasser's plan and her willingness to be a part of it. It also symbolizes her sense of hope and optimism as she helps in copying her father's writings and willing to separate from her love and wait for his return hoping they will be together again soon. The warm tone in the scene illuminated by the candlelight, adds to the ambiance of the scene creating a sense intimacy and love reflecting on the connection between Al Nasser and Salma.



Image 20. Sarah and Abdallah after he was saved from the sect

Denotation: Screenshot scene of Abdallah after Marwan saved him from the religious group. While Abdallah is still in rage and have no control over his actions, they decided to tie him to a chair. Upon waiting for his return, Sarah is depicted in a blue attire trying to feed Abdallah, his lover and the one carrying his child (image 20).

Connotation: In this scene, Sarah also represents women indirect significant roles within the film. After she got pregnant from Abdallah, he left her and joined the sect and called her an infidel. Despite of this, Sarah didn't leave him and was willing to take care of him after Marwan, her brother-in-law, saved him. The blue color associated to Sarah's character symbolizes her loyalty and forgiveness towards Abdallah, as she continues to care for him despite his hurtful actions towards her. It also suggests her calmness and patience in dealing with his rage and lack of control over his actions. Thus, blue conveys themes of loyalty and contributes to the characterization of Sarah's role as a supportive and steadfast woman within the film.



Image 21. Marwan and members of the religious sect

Denotation: Screenshot scene of Marwan depicted in his red attire as the central figure surrounded by members of the religious group along with the emir, have ambushed him. It conveys a sense of danger and tension as Marwan stands defiantly in the face of the group (image 21).

Connotation: In this scene, the color red attributed to Marwan's character symbolizes several themes. First, throughout the film, Marwan is depicted wearing red while as dances and sings, which symbolizes his love and passion for life and resistance against fundamentalists. Second, red symbolizes Marwan's bravery and rebel, as he decides to take the responsibility and risk his life to save Abdallah and confront the religious group. He considered Abdallah as his son despite of their different backgrounds as a gypsy and a son of the caliph. Moreover, the use of red in contrast with green in this image symbolizes resistance and bravery, as in this scene the emir of the group orders the killing of Marwan and threatens the people that this will be the fate of anyone who stands against the Islamic ruling and following the infidels. Marwan stands alone against them without escaping while they stab him from the back until he dies. It was only when they killed him that he stopped singing the songs of freedom and love of life.

Conclusion

Chahine's epic films and avant-garde techniques elevated Egyptian cinema's artistic significance and international recognition. His unique visual and narrative style, often bold or controversial, pushed the boundaries of traditional filmmaking. Chahine's films represented Egyptian socio-political realities and challenged mainstream conventions, resulting in complex storytelling. His work inspired generations of filmmakers nationally and internationally, leaving a lasting legacy. Chahine's films reflect and intertwine with political and social movements, shaping prevailing ideologies of their time.

This study explores how Chahine used color in his films, influenced by historical, religious, and cultural factors. It examines the relationship between color, visual narration, and semiotic theory. By applying semiotic theory and the frameworks of Barthes, the study analyzes color as a sign that conveys messages, cultural codes, and symbolism in Chahine's films. Using Barthes' denotation and connotation approach, the

analysis of two selected films provides insights into Chahine's visual aesthetics and storytelling techniques.

The film *Al Nasser Salah Al-din* depicts the Ayyubid Sultan Salah El-din's conflict with the crusaders over Jerusalem, highlighting themes of betrayal, loyalty, and honor. Color and lighting in the film convey multiple layers of meaning, with semiotic analysis revealing how colors represent different cultures, religions, and morals. Warm earth tones symbolize the Arabs' struggle, white representing Muslims, while vibrant reds denote the crusaders, contrasting the two groups. Red signifies blood and violence for the crusaders, and resistance for the Arabs. Additionally, red and blue colors reflect Christian spiritual motifs, with red symbolizing Christ's blood and blue representing the Virgin Mary.

The film *Al-Massir* explores the life of the 12th-century Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd, highlighting his conflicts between philosophy and rising fundamentalism, and themes of love, politics, and intellectual preservation. Semiotic color analysis reveals how colors enhance the narrative's depth. In the opening scene, where a follower of Ibn Rushd is burned, colors symbolize historical context and themes of fundamentalism and oppression. The contrast between the church men in black and the burning man, with a cross in the background, underscores the church's authority, brutality, and religious persecution. Moreover, green symbolizes Islamic fundamentalism, particularly through Abdallah's shift to fundamentalist attire and ideology. Color contrasts and emotions are conveyed through compositional and expressive uses of color. Blue, for example, represents loyalty, wisdom, and intellectual pursuit. It is associated with Ibn Rushd, reflecting his wisdom and commitment to knowledge, and with Manuela and Sarah, symbolizing their forgiveness and support for Abdallah despite his betrayal and Marwan's death.

Hence, in comparing the color palettes of each film illustrates the static color choices of Chahine in his visual narratives. First, in *Al Nasser Salah Al-din*, the use blue and red for the crusades and Christianity, green and yellow for Saladin and the Muslims, black and white for good and evil, evokes a sense of conflict, historical depth, and cultural richness conveying themes of struggle, nobility, wisdom, triumph, innocence, and evilness. In *Al-Massir*, the use of grey and greyish blue for the philosophical and the intellectual discourse, and wisdom within the film, fire orange for both ignorance and knowledge, green for fundamentalism and extreme groups, red for blood, resistance, and love, blue for steadfastness, protection and wisdom.

To sum up, the semiotic analysis of the selected film of Chahine reveals the significant role that color plays in conveying narratives in his films. Chahine skillfully employed color and lighting techniques, which contributed to the depth and meaning of his storytelling. In conclusion, it would appear that colors and their symbolism shed light on different aspects of the films, such as time, place, emotions, character traits, narrative themes, as well as cultural and historical notions. It was also revealed that color symbolism is closely associated with the psychological aspect as it reflects the characters' emotional state and unveils their development throughout the film. Moreover, colors

contributed to accentuating the realistic tone of the cinematic work of Chahine. In addition to the symbolic meanings, colors also contributed to the overall aesthetics of the films, contributing to the unique mise-en-scene and recognizable visual style of the cinematic work of Chahine in Egyptian cinema. As a pioneer Egyptian filmmaker, Chahine demonstrated a profound understanding of the expressive power of cinema and the use of visual techniques including colors, which is evident in his films where he tends to explore ideological themes and brave topics.

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