

ABOUT THE MOVIE

This movie is a documentary which follows two popular rap artists, one Israeli and one Palestinian, and the deterioration of their personal relationship in the wake of the Second Intifada in 2000. The documentary demonstrates how a political situation can have a profound impact not only on music and the arts, but also on the life of the individual. The film also introduces the audience to many elements of Israeli culture and the music scene, including left-wing Israeli rock star Aviv Geffen.

USE THIS MOVIE TO EXPLORE

CINEMA Use of documentary format in portraying Arab-Israeli tensions in Israeli society

HISTORY The effects of the Second Intifada on Israeli society

CULTURE Learning about Israeli and Palestinian musicians and their music



BEFORE THE MOVIE

Subliminal Kobi Shimoni, 28, is the son of Jewish refugees from Arab countries—his mother is from Iran and his father from Tunisia. He has been performing music since age 12 and has adopted the rap name “Subliminal”. At 15, he met Yoav Eliasi, who became his performing partner under the name “The Shadow” (Ha’tzel). The two founded the record label TACT (Tel Aviv City Team), which includes other Israeli rappers and singers and has released more than 10 hit singles in Israel. TACT has also collaborated with rappers from other countries, including Wyclef Jean and rappers associated with the Wu-Tang Clan.

MC Tamer Tamer Nafar, 28, goes by the rap name MC Tamer. In 2000, he founded the first Palestinian rap group, DAM, with his brother Suhell and their friend Mahmoud Jrere. The group has performed in Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Europe and the United States.

Aviv Geffen Aviv Geffen, 34, is a leftist Israeli rock musician. In the 1990s he was extremely popular among Israeli youth known as the “Moonlight Children” as the icon for his generation’s dissatisfaction with the government, desire for change, and hope for peace with Israel’s neighbors. His music addresses themes including love and peace, death and suicide, and refusing to serve in the army (though he was officially dismissed from the IDF for medical reasons, some claim he was a conscientious objector). His most famous songs are “Cloudy Now” (Achshav Meunan), his first hit, and “Cry for You” (Likvot Lecha), whose lyrics were eerily prophetic of the assassination of Rabin at a rally on November 4, 1995, a rally at which he had chosen to perform that very song.

ABOUT THE MUSICIANS IN THIS FILM

PLOT SUMMARY

Subliminal (Kobi Shimon) is a proud Zionist Israeli rapper. MC Tamer (Tamer Nafar) is a Palestinian-Israeli rapper. Both are rising Israeli rap stars who share a belief that rap will have the power to bring about much-needed peace and coexistence in the Middle East. However, their vision is shattered with the eruption of the second Intifada in September 2000. With interspersed scenes of rallies and other historical events, this documentary paints a picture of the drastic plummets in mood, morale and Arab-Israeli relations experienced in Israeli society during this time. The audience learns about anti-occupation rallies on the left and the cooperation of Aviv Geffen with Tamer to produce a music video. In addition, the documentary shows how these events and public attitudes affected the artistic development of these two rappers as well as the vicissitudes of their relationship.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

WHAT WERE THE EFFECTS OF THE INTIFADA ON ISRAELI SOCIETY?

The Second Intifada was an unprecedented wave of Palestinian terrorist attacks targeted at Israeli civilians, including deadly suicide bombings and shootings. The violence began in September 2000 following the disintegration of the Camp David negotiations. It claimed approximately a thousand Israeli lives and wounded countless others.

This documentary shows how the impacts of the Intifada ricocheted through many areas of Israeli society. For instance, the Intifada caused precipitous drops in attendance at nightclub concerts, crowded places which might be targeted for terrorist attacks. This decline has implications not only for the weakening of Israeli economy, but also for the country's social scene, and consequently its morale. As Kobi says, "When you... perform in a place that holds 2000 people and only 100 show up after months of performing in places that hold 300 people and 1000 show up, it bums you out."

In addition, the Intifada deeply affected the attitudes of individuals and their perception by and of society as a whole. Through the deterioration of Tamer and Kobi's relationship after the Intifada's outbreak, we witness historical events as a force in our personal lives.

CINEMATOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

This movie is different from the other movies covered in this guide in two respects: it is a documentary, and it relies heavily on music and lyrics for character development, narration of a historical period, and representation of ideological beliefs and social realities. Watch for the lyrics to learn about the mindsets of the characters and their respective audiences.

ACTIVITY

Below are some translations of Tamer and Kobi's lyrics.
Compare and contrast how they deal with the following themes:

Nationalism • Violence • Religion • Personal Responsibility • Politics and the Government

“ TAMER

The minority is opening its mouth. You say the Arabs are primitive, you say the Arabs are aggressive. Say we are criminals and barbarians, we aren't! But just in case we are, this is what the government did to us!

Where's the fairness when I live in a tin nest and he lives in a ritzy residence?

Listen to the words. I'm sure everyone's alive just to make sure we aren't. Divided and torn. Who? The Arabs of '48. An Arab who doesn't forget Allah. Why when Jews are hurt you see them protesting in the streets? You see their anger erupt. There's a cop with a club, not violent, telling them to go home. But when the Arabs are hurt, it's a different story. The cops go into every house, killing the children's moms. They don't want the kids to be orphans, so they kill them too. A 13-year-old with a body full of holes is asked: Why are you afraid of the government? Poor world. Sleepless eyes. Fear and horror. Poor man! Tearing eye, the heart is sad. Strange world. No one to complain to.

Peace on paper won't change the situation.

I started dying from the infection that keeps approaching my people. So I protect the Arabs through the microphone. Gimme a mic and you'll see how good we go together, like Lewinsky and Clinton. TN is here and no one saw me coming. The faces of the racists look like cats afraid of the water. But I'm original and my mind is criminal.

“ KOBİ

My mother land, All that was mine, Even my country became an international punching bag. That they will determine my destiny: to be or not to be... Closed my eyes, screamed: live and let live! These are not my people, disillusioned dreamers, weak souls in the rubbish, cannot be! Who am I? What am I? Where did I come from? I'm here and I came here, *Hadi ardi hona biladi* (Arabic: This is my land and this is my country).

Carry words like weapons. One more page to finish this chapter. When will the struggle end? One year to the millennium and the country's still dangling like a cigarette in Arafat's mouth.

Three eyes open, ears listening. Conspiracies are being whispered. Pouring rain. The deal is in vain. The roof is leaking, my frustration I'm masking. The heart is burning, troubles falling. Your hands can't catch them. Hot flames need to be smothered, enough! Boom, bye bye, everything is falling by. Doors closed at my back, my front and my side. Dear G-d, I wish you could come down. My enemies wanna destroy me. We're nurturing our haters, enough! We all have good intentions but we are feeling the tension. I'm lying in the battlefield. Sub[liminal] is offended by what he hears on TV. Politicians are arguing between right and left. Divide and Conquer: united we stand, divided we fall.

But we're here to stay. Zionism's in our blood. I am a Jew who respects Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and all the others too. My thirst is quenched, I ain't thirsty for blood. Understand, blood spills blood and it spills more blood. Then his uncle comes and his blood is spilled too!

THINKING ABOUT THE MOVIE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

UNIT THEME: Jewish-Arab Relations

Role of the Individual

Think about these quotes from the scene on the bus:

“ Only in Israel. Russian, Ethiopian, Arab and Persian rappers can stand on one stage!
Film the coexistence! Film it!
Only hip-hop will bring peace!

- In light of the rest of the movie, what do you think of these statements? What would it take for them to really come true? To what extent do you believe a positive political climate is essential for individuals to coexist?

“ **Tamer:** The problem isn't between Kobi and Tamer. If it were, just a few rap beats and everything would work out, right?

Kobi: Do you want to hear something funny? The problem is between Kobi and Tamer.

- To what extent can individuals maintain relationships when on opposite sides of major ideological, political, and physical conflicts? In the quote above, who do you feel is right, Tamer or Kobi?

Peace Process

Activity: Rate the effectiveness of the following in working towards a solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict on a scale from 1-10 (10 being the most effective). Compare your ratings with those of others and discuss any differences between them.

- Politicians negotiating peace deals: ____
- Individual Arabs being friends/ working with individual Israelis: ____
- Using “rage” (violence, etc.) to make a point: ____
- “Channeling” your rage through music you can share with others: ____

2 CINEMATIC THEME: The Documentary Format

- What are the advantages of the medium of documentary as opposed to feature film in portraying the Arab-Israeli conflict? What are the disadvantages?

3 HISTORY: The Second Intifada

Find evidence in the movie for how Tamer and Kobi each view the Intifada in the following contexts:

- How it affected “their people” and its meaning to them in a nationalistic sense
- How it affected “the other side” and how they feel about this effect
- How it affected their personal relationship, why, and how they feel about this effect
- How it affected their music and personal success (how each is perceived by Israeli and by Palestinian audiences)
- Compare and contrast the relationship between Tamer and Kobi at the beginning of the movie to their relationship at the end. What makes the relationship viable to begin with? Why does it deteriorate?
- How and why are personal friendships affected by the larger political picture? To what extent do you think this also happens in your own country? Has it ever happened to you?

4 CULTURE: Israeli and Palestinian Musicians and Their Music

- What did you think of the music in this film? What did it make you think about and what feelings did it inspire in you?
- How are rap music and rap stars in Israel similar to and different from their American equivalents?
- What are the advantages of using music as “channels of rage”? In what ways does it or doesn’t it work to solve problems? Consider the following quote:

“ **Tamer:** (after fight broke out) We’re an angry nation, I’m angry too. It’s in our blood, I don’t know... It’s all bottled up inside... I may be happy now, but someone could tick me off any minute... I’m against that, I get a grip of myself... In the music, like now, I’m stressed, I pound on the mic, and it makes me feel great... Everyone has their own way of releasing stress.

- What meaning does the music in this movie have for Israeli society? Do you think it can influence society? Or is it only a “channel of rage”?

QUOTE ANALYSIS

Answer the questions by comparing the quotes that follow.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

- What is the importance of the decision of Kobi or Tamer to use Arabic, Hebrew or English in their music? If language dictates audience, should it also dictate the message? If you were a performer, what would be the advantages and disadvantages of having an audience that feels exactly the same way you do? How would it help you or hinder you in advancing your message?
- “ **Kobi:** What upsets me is that he [Tamer] speaks to me in one way that he wants peace, and everything’s great...and in his songs, I heard that he says: ‘The Zionist enemy,’ ‘Jewish Nazis’ and stuff... When I talk to him, I hear ‘x’, [but] everyone tells me they hear ‘y’. He shouldn’t say one thing in Hebrew, something else in English and something entirely different in Arabic.
- “ **Tamer:** When I sang in Hebrew for the Israeli audience and told them that we’re Arabs and you did things to us, they’d go, ‘He’s so cute,’ all those Yuppies, but here with an Arab audience they feel like I do. The whole Arab thing.
- “ **Kobi:** If it’s up to me, making music is fine, but I always said that I use music as a means. My goal is to relay a message.
Interviewer: Why [the chorus *Biladi*] in Arabic?
Kobi: Because the people who are supposed to understand it, understand Arabic.
- “ **Kobi:** (to Tamer) People don’t know what your opinion is. People will judge you...saying: ‘He’s against the Zionist enemy,’ just like they turned me into the ‘Settlers’ Kid,’ the guy who’s against Arafat... That’s why you gotta watch out. You’re just coming out now, and gaining power, and you put your foot in this big game, so make sure you convey your position very clearly.

2 NATIONAL UNITY

- What messages do Tamer and Kobi send about the importance of political unity? What challenges exist in creating unity in Palestinian and in Israeli society?

“ **Kobi:** *(on stage)* Is there anyone here who has something bad to say about Tel Aviv or our holy Zion, eh?.. You know what, you're in Zion, in Israel, in Tel Aviv! There is only one! Listen up, guys, we say: Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Israel, Palestine, guys, we're together! ...But if someone comes to fight, we'll eat them alive!

“ **Kobi's father:** If we renounce ourselves, we won't have the strength to fight our enemies from the outside. And from the inside.
Kobi: And from the sides. And from the middle.

“ **Tamer:** I want the people to understand, there's a difference between the representatives and the people.
Yoav: But what you don't understand is that the people elected them.

3 IDENTIFICATION OF A MUSICIAN WITH POLITICAL CAUSES

- Why do you think prevailing attitudes about the national identity of an artist—whether that identity is Israeli, Palestinian, or even American—could affect the reception of his or her music? Would you think about music with a “leftist” message differently depending whether it was produced by an Israeli, Palestinian or American artist? What about a “right-wing” message? How so?

(Tamer on the phone under home custody)
“ **Caller:** What about the gigs in Egypt?

Tamer: There aren't any for now.

Caller: You're gonna give up the dream of 'invading' Arab countries?

Tamer: The Arab world doesn't like us too much.

Caller: Why?

Tamer: The Arab world regards us as Israelis, and the Israelis regard us as Palestinians.

Caller: So where will you find yourself in the end?

Tamer: I really don't know. We're traitors, we're scum. We live in Israel. I'm serious when I say our situation is the worst of all. I'm the one who didn't flee his lands, and you call me a traitor? I don't wanna hear the Egyptians talking about traitors, they're the ones who keep selling us out.

Caller: So you're not optimistic about the next tour.

Tamer: No.

“ **Kobi:** Isn't Aviv Geffen a leftist?...They didn't want to play [my song] “Living from Day to Day” on the radio. If you wanna be played, you gotta be some pathetic guitar-playing crybaby... If you don't want to play [my song], there's only one reason: you think the message sounds right-wing, so you censor it.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

WHAT IS IT REALLY LIKE TO BE A RAP STAR?

The two main characters, Kobi Shimoni and Tamer Nafar, are not your everyday individuals: they are both rap stars. As such, they are role models who can set trends amongst their fan followings almost without being aware they are doing so. If Kobi wears a conspicuously large Star of David pendant and declares, “The Star of David is cool,” the result is predictable: suddenly everyone on the street will do the same.

Of course, this influence extends more deeply than clothing. The two are icons of their respective political ideologies, and their fans look to them for cues for what to believe in a confusing world in the throes of the Intifada. When fans at a Subliminal concert chant, “Death to the Arabs!” Kobi declares, “Cut it out, not death to the Arabs, but life to the Jews!”—and they stop.

In the United States, rap has social implications, spreading messages that set precedents and reinforce perceptions of wealth, race and class. Kobi and Tamer each believe in the power of music to be relevant to and transformative for society.

Kobi aims to encourage others to embrace the Zionist principles embodied by his music and his persona as a self-styled Jewish rap star. His baggy clothes and gold chains may imitate the American rap scene, but Subliminal’s actual messages contrast with those usually exposed by American counterparts. “Zionist hip-hop” is patriotic and pro-army, eschewing drugs, alcohol and violence. Kobi explains, “People always say to me, ‘Rap is protest music. So, what is there for a boy from a good neighborhood to protest about?’ My protest songs aren’t about not having enough food, but about my country not having enough pride.” Kobi’s unabashed love for his country stems in part from his family history—his parents were refugees from Arab countries who were able to begin a new life in Israel.