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Munich: Home, Family, and Nationalism through Montage

Munich, directed and produced by Steven Spielberg, is a film about the events after the 1972 Olympics in Munich, Germany, where Palestinian terrorists murdered the Israeli Olympians. The Israeli government, deciding to physically stand up for itself, funds a team of seemingly ordinary Israeli's to assassinate the responsible men. The movie follows this group of assassins as they kill these often likeable men and struggle with justifying their actions to themselves but at the same time become more and more accustomed to killing. Furthermore, it follows Avner, sucked into leaving his expecting wife behind by feelings of nationalism, as he struggles to lead this team both emotionally and physically. The events as represented in the film parallels the war with Iraq today, dealing with issues such as blind patriotism, family, the sense of home, and the never-ending cycle of retaliation and replacement of the men they kill. The montage in the movie creates the tragedy and realism, hides the blindness of the main character's passionate nationalism in his actions, and presents a reoccurring theme of home being family.

From the very beginning of the movie, with the introduction of the title, the audience gets a feeling of dread and knows there will be bloodshed, even if they know nothing about the premise or event. Names of cities, the possible Olympic sites, simultaneously appear across the entire black screen. The name, Munich, changes to blood red as the other white names disappear. This foreshadows the events that are yet to occur. After the title, the film shows the group of Palestinian terrorists infiltrate the hotel, all the way up to them breaking into the Israelis' room. However, it does not show the events that occur after this quite yet. Instead it cuts to a newscast, and people all

over the world watching this newscast. This newscast follows the events that are happening but from a very limited point of view: the public point of view. The audience has virtually no idea what either the hostages or the captors are going through. There is no privileged point of view at this point, as it attempts to make the audience feel as if they themselves are watching these events unfold live. We go from knowing that they have been taken hostage, to them being transported to the airport, to suddenly them all being dead. Very little is known of the specifics of the events that had taken place, because the public, like the audience, does not know this.

There are three different flashbacks throughout the film that tell us what exactly happened. They occur as Avner hits different emotional stages and coincide with thoughts about his family, signifying his connection to Israel as his second mother, as family. Avner's wife, when he talks about not being able to refuse this mission, agrees to it, knowing its importance to Avner, and actually makes this statement that Israel is his mother. As mentioned, each occurs as a flashback, as if Avner himself is remembering the event, which would have been impossible considering the fact that he was not there. This illustrates this connection, this nationalistic feeling, quite similar to the ones we, as Americans, felt after 9/11, where we found ourselves, whether by choice or not, vividly picturing what the people must have been through.

The first flashback comes as Avner is flying to Europe. He is looking out the window at the sky and is thinking about his family, as the audience can gather from the previous scene. He then sees this flashback in the sky outside the plane, and the sky eventually fades away as the events in Munich completely take over the screen. The sound eventually fades out during the flashback, creating a surreal effect. The Palestinians break in, gather up the Israeli athletes. Some resist but are overwhelmed, others at first try to escape but then come back to help their fellow countryman; one even kills one of the captors but is then killed himself, as the flashback is coming to an end and the sky is coming back into view. The sky is now red, linking this particular moment

with the bloodshed, and Avner takes off his wedding ring. This signifies the sacrifice of family, and the audience is left with feelings of overwhelming sadness. This first glimpse enhances the tragedy in the film, and shows the same love for the fellow Israeli, in the athletes that fight back and those that escaped and came back to help, that Avner now feels.

The next flashback occurs after Avner has killed, immediately after he talks to his wife and hears his daughter speak for the first time on the phone. He is crying as the next flashback begins, suggesting that he is crying for both his immediate family and the sons of Israel. He is beginning to regret being away from his family, doing what he is doing. The flashback, again, is surreal, and shows the hostages and captors being transported to the airport and then seated in the helicopters. The captors tell the hostages that everything is going to be okay, and the atmosphere is less tense, giving the audience a feeling of false hope, even though we know that everything is not going to be okay, because we have already been told that they were all killed. Avner then awakens from this nightmare, again suggesting this connection, because he actually had a nightmare about it.

The third and final flashback comes after Avner is back with his family, now in America, haunted by what he has done and going crazy from the thought that someone is now looking for him and his family. As they had continued to kill important Black September leaders and by mistake, a Russian, people began looking to assassinate them in the same manner that they were assassinating these Palestinians, actually killing three of the five members of Avner's team. He begins to have sex with his wife as the last flashback occurs. This flashback, however, is different than the other two in that the film cuts back and forth between the ambush at the airport and the sex scene, and also it seems less like he, himself, is specifically remembering the event. In the last piece of the puzzle, the army sets a trap and snipers kill many of the captors, who, in the heat of passion and sensing their own impending doom, gun down the unexpected Israelis. This violent scene is paralleled in Avner's seemingly violent sex with his wife. The flashback occurs

less as a memory of Avner because he is beginning to feel detached from Israel. His life now and what happened in Munich are no longer intertwined as they had been for the first two flashbacks. He no longer feels this nationalism because his home is no longer Israel. His home is now Brooklyn, with his family, illustrating that home is with family, not with land, as the Palestinian he befriended and eventually killed in Europe had told him when trying to explain the Palestinian struggle for land. He feels betrayed by the Israeli government in doing what he had done with absolutely no evidence of these men's guilt. He, himself, had also killed in the heat of passion, the passion he felt for his murdered comrades, as the Palestinians had done at the end.

These events could have simply been unveiled at the beginning of the movie instead of the original presentation of information through the newscast. But instead, by doing it the way Spielberg did, he creates a false sense of justification that provokes Avner and the other assassins to do what they did, in the heat of passion. When it is seen that the Palestinians did not mean to kill their hostages, this justification is somewhat unclear, as Avner discovers in the end. A very strong sense of a home based on family, rather than land, is created in the film. It is my opinion that this film is also making a political reference to 9/11 and the war in Iraq, in which America has gotten caught up in blind patriotism and in the heat of passion, killing first and asking questions later, along with a serious problem with war against terrorists: as leaders are taken out of power, others rise to fill their places.