A Cinema of Survival:

Palestinian Minor Transnational

Cinema Post-1980

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the films of contemporary Palestinian filmmakers that have gained a considerable following among arthouse and commercial cinema audiences since the 1980s. Developing a concept of minor transnationalism, the thesis concentrates on the feature and documentary films of Michel Khleifi, Rashid Masharawi, Elia Suleiman, Hany Abu Assad, Najwa Najjar, Annemarie Jacir, Cherien Dabis, Azza El-Hassan, and Jumana Manna.

Focusing on the principal line of investigation – how do we think about the evolution of Palestinian transnational cinema in the post-1980 period, and its key attributes – this thesis specifies the ways in which transnational film production engages with the minor form in the works of Palestinian film directors, and examines the geopolitical, historical, and cultural contexts in which Palestinian film production is situated. A number of subsidiary lines of inquiry revolve around this central question: Who can speak for Palestine, and where and how are Palestinian films produced? What are the frameworks of film production, marketing and distribution? What audiences are these films produced for? How do they fare on the commercial and film festival circuit, and what does that tell us about Palestinian cinema's transnational modes of collaboration?

Adopting Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih's conceptualization of transnationalism, this thesis contributes to the broader fields of Palestinian cinema and transnational cinema, arguing that Palestinian film production in the post-1980 period is characterized by dynamic and irregular transnational connections within and between minor and major modes of production. Working within the framework of Mette Hjort's periodization of cinematic transnationalisms and in dialogue with the concept of minor transnationalism, this thesis identifies the modes of modernizing, cosmopolitan and opportunistic transnationalism in the films of Palestinian directors. Specifying the connections between the transnational and the minor form, this examination accentuates

political value intrinsic to Palestinian cinema, identifies the new forms of subjectivity and the formation of new cinema audiences in the Palestinian cinema of the post-1980 period.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Contents

Introduction

The popularity, and artistic and critical success of Palestinian films at the turn of the twenty-first century has occurred concurrently with dynamic developments in the cinemas of the Middle East. Palestinian cinema has emerged as a focus of scholarly interest, expanding the horizons of critical re-thinking of non-Western cinemas, along with Iranian, Turkish, Israeli, Egyptian, Syrian, Lebanese, Iraqi and Kurdish films that continue to capture worldwide attention. Similar to other cinemas in the region, Palestinian cinema has expanded its global visibility by gradually increasing its production and distribution capacities, and its transnational connections. However, due to its extraordinary political, cultural and artistic significance, the conditions in which it was born and continues to operate, and because of its resilience and adaptability, Palestinian cinema occupies a special position within regional and global contexts.

This thesis concentrates on the cinematic texts of Palestinian filmmakers within particular historical, political, cultural and economic frameworks, focusing on the principal line of investigation: How can we conceptualize the evolution of Palestinian transnational cinema in the post-1980 period and what are its key attributes? A number of subsidiary lines of inquiry are generated by this central question: Who can speak for Palestine? Where and how are Palestinian films produced? Who are the main filmmakers, financiers, and distributors, and what are the main sources of funding? What audiences are these films produced for in Israel-Palestine, and abroad? How do these works relate and respond to globalized modes of film production, distribution, and exhibition? And, finally, what does this tell us about Palestinian cinema's transnational identities, connections and modes of collaboration?

The central premise of this thesis is that minor transnationalism has been the key attribute of Palestinian cinema since its beginnings in the 1960s, and continues, in different

ways, to inform the production modes and aesthetics of Palestinian film today. Operating within transnational contexts, Palestinian cinema has been distinguished by its deterritorialized and marginal modes of production since the 1960s, when, supported by nationalist organizations, it began to confront global imperialism and subvert the hegemonic narratives about Palestine in Israeli and Western films and media. The key marker of Palestinian cinema during this period was the short documentary film, distinguished by the filmmakers' revolutionary enthusiasm and their opposition to colonialism. Removed from the commercial mainstream, these films used formulaic representations of Israelis and Palestinians to anchor Palestinian identity within narratives of national liberation.

Since the early 1980s, transnational sources of funding have been used to produce films that were no longer predominantly characterized by stereotypical representations of Israelis and Palestinians. This period is marked by the rise of the Palestinian feature film that gained recognition and popularity amongst film festival audiences. Key filmmakers, including Michel Khleifi, Rashid Masharawi and Elia Suleiman have continued to oppose the Israeli occupation while reassessing the position of the *auteur* as a proponent of national culture and rejecting the idealized visions of the revolutionary struggle. Their films challenge the nationalist paradigm and destabilize conventional screen representations of national identity. Emerging in the international film festival circuit, these films situate Palestine at the center of the global struggle for human rights, justice and equality. Present-day Palestinian filmmakers are concerned with their inability to be recognized as the legitimate inhabitants of Israel-Palestine and to be granted full citizenship rights, in order to participate in the historical and transformative processes of reconstituting their homeland. Using their resourcefulness and initiative from within the globalized system of cultural economy, Hany Abu-Assad, Najwa Najjar, Annemarie Jacir, and others, have shifted away from revolutionary rhetoric and detachment from the commercial mainstream. They continue to

expand their transnational ties, to develop cultural partnerships and to diversify sources of funding, securing production and distribution for their films aimed at both local and international audiences.

Drawing on the work of Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih in their edited volume, *Minor Transnationalism* (2000), this thesis elaborates upon the conceptual framework of minor transnationalism and specifies ways in which transnational film production engages with the minor form. Lionnet and Shih's ideas afford possibilities for examining the geopolitical, historical, cultural and economic contexts where Palestinian film production is located. Reframing transnationalism as a concept of "transversal movements of culture" (Lionnet and Shih 8), they emphasize the complexity of subaltern forms of cultural expression, frequently marginalized in the era of globalization and weakening of national sovereignty. Their approach centers on the dynamic transnational collaborations and irregular connections within and between minor and major modes of production, unconfined by the normative power of the nation-state, embodying the multiplicity of interactions and tensions between the national and the transnational.

The original contribution of my thesis to the broader concepts of Palestinian cinema and minor transnationalism is demonstrated in three key elements that permeate this investigation. The first original contribution is to open up new avenues for the critical examination of Palestinian cinema. Lionnet and Shih's reframing of transnationalism allows for an examination of subaltern cultural expressions in the works of Palestinian filmmakers in the post-1980 period, and the ways these are characterized by transnational cultural collaborations. Lionnet and Shih's approach opens up avenues for the examination of the resistance of Palestinian filmmakers to discriminatory policies and their aspirations for the recognition of minority cultures typical of colonial and postcolonial societies. This theorization also provides scope for extending the area of inquiry to the productive and

asymmetrical connections within, and between, minor and major modes of production in the works of Palestinian filmmakers, and the relationships and tensions between the national and the transnational in their output.

The second original contribution to the concepts of Palestinian cinema and minor transnationalism is a consideration of how different typologies of transnationalism illuminate the changing imperatives of modernization, the cosmopolitan identities of Palestinian filmmakers, and the framing of transnational partnerships and funding within the context of Palestinian cinema. Applying the framework of Mette Hjort's typology of cinematic transnationalisms ("On the Plurality") allows for this new perspective to be taken by concentrating on the key elements of modernizing, cosmopolitan and opportunistic transnationalism discussed in relation to the work of key Palestinian filmmakers. Using Hjort's classification in dialogue with the concept of minor transnationalism, allows this investigation to delve beyond the economic factors as the pivotal element in transnational collaborations. This in turn facilitates an examination of the geopolitical, historical, social, and economic conditions and their impact on cultural policies, as well as the production, marketing and distribution of Palestinian films.

The third original contribution of my thesis is outlined by specifying the connections between the transnational and the minor form and by identifying and emphasizing the political value that is intrinsic to Palestinian cinema. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's conceptualization of minor form in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975 [1986]), Palestinian films, discussed in this thesis, are not restricted to representations of two opposed nationalist agendas, and are seen as rejecting the notions of national essentialism and cultural purity. Discussing their rejection of nationalist ideology and the oppression of minorities, the political value in Palestinian cinema is examined as a tool for articulating new collective sensibilities and creating new cinema audiences.

The Structure of the Introduction

My thesis opens with an extended Introduction that maps out the historical, geopolitical and cultural contexts of Palestinian cinema, and establishes the concept of minor transnationalism as the principal theoretical framework for this study. This Introduction is divided into seven sections. Section 1 focuses on the historical trajectory of Palestinian cinema in the 1960s and 1970s when Palestinian film production was supported by national organizations. It establishes the key conditions of Palestinian cinema in the 1980s leading to the expansion of transnational connections and heralding the shift from a nationalist paradigm and the decline of the traditional system of film production. Section 2 surveys the scholarship on Palestinian cinema, concentrating on key historical periods and the centrality of the Nakba,[1] the pivotal historical event within the Palestinian imaginary. This section also identifies the salient notion of self-representation in Palestinian cinema and underlines the importance of transnational ties for its aesthetic and political concerns, industry connections and engagement with global and Palestinian audiences. Section 3 probes Israeli-Palestinian relations through the mixed lens of the ethnocratic political system established in the state of Israel, the transnational frame of reference and the mutual enfolding of Palestinian and Israeli societies and cultures. Section 4 provides a critical overview of transnational film studies, setting up the context for situating Palestinian cinema in this thesis. This section proceeds to elaborate on Hjort's typology of cinematic transnationalism and the main characteristics of modernizing, cosmopolitan, and opportunistic modes of transnationalism. Section 5 draws on Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of minor literatures and examines the centrality of the political element in Palestinian cinema. Extending their theorization of minor literatures, the section centers on subaltern forms of cultural expression, destabilizing the conventional language of cinema, identifying the new forms of Palestinian subjectivity, and cultivating the emerging Palestinian and global cinema audiences. In Section 6, I acknowledge the

applicability of Lionnet and Shih's idea of minor transnationalism to contemporary Palestinian cinema and proceed to elaborate on the extensions and interventions in applying their theoretical framework to minor transnationalism in Palestinian cinema. This section expounds on the adoption of an *auteurist* approach and its intersections with the framework of minor transnationalism within the context of Palestinian cinema. The section also elaborates on the notion of ethics and its implications for this inquiry in the context of minor transnationalism. This is followed by a brief overview of the remaining chapters in this thesis in Section 7, where the central arguments emerging from the analyses of films by Michel Khleifi, Rashid Masharawi, Elia Suleiman, Hany Abu-Assad, Annemarie Jacir, Najwa Najjar, Cherien Dabis, Azza El-Hassan and Jumana Manna, are discussed.

Palestinian Cinema in Historical Context

Palestinian cinema appears at the intersections of a contested history, an uncertain future, and a present marred by continuing conflict in Israel-Palestine. Since the establishment of the state of Israel, such factors as the continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the relations with global powers and the Arab world, and the complexity of intra-Palestinian tensions have all continued to generate specific and complex geopolitical circumstances on the ground. According to Viola Shafik, specific historical conditions, following the foundation of the state of Israel, and up until the late 1960s, have left the representation, or misrepresentation, of Palestinians to others ("Cinema in Palestine" 518). The defeat of Arab armies in the 1967 war against Israel prompted Palestinian organizations to establish themselves as new forces fighting for national liberation. The articulations of Palestinian identity in this period are marked by a need to create a counter-narrative to the Zionist representations of the conflict (R Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity* 178).

Following the Battle of al-Karameh in 1968, Palestinian film production was established with the support of the nationalist organizations (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 21; Antonius 120), and Fatah, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), as well as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) established their film units in exile. The Department of Photography was founded in 1968 in Jordan and transformed into the Palestine Film Unit (Habashneh) initiating what Gertz and Khleifi distinguish as the "Third Period" of Palestinian film history (*Palestinian Cinema* 12). Fifty-two short and two feature films were produced during this period.[2] With their first film, *La Li-l-Hall al-Silmi*/*Say No to the Peaceful Solution* (1969), Mustafa Abu-Ali, Hany Jawhariyya, and Sulafa Jadallah made the pioneering attempt to bring Palestinian narratives to prominence.

The events of Black September in 1970 generated new conditions for Palestinian cinema. The Palestinian political leadership and thousands of fighters left Jordan, and the Palestinian Film Archive and the Palestinian Film Organization were relocated to Beirut, with key members[3] of the Palestine Film Unit dispersing (Habashneh). Mustafa Abu-Ali's documentary, *Bi al-Ruh, Bi al*-Dam/*With Our Souls and Our Blood*, which concerns Palestinian evacuations from Jordan, screened at the Damascus Youth Cinema Festival in 1971. This was the first Palestinian film to be exhibited in an international film festival (Habashneh). The Film Archive began its work in 1975, conserving copies of films made by the Film Institute, as well as acquiring and storing a collection of films donated by friendly countries and filmmakers (Geertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 26).

The short documentary film became the prime marker of Palestinian cinema. The period between 1973 and 1977 is considered the most productive in this early era of Palestinian cinema (Shafik, "Cinema in Palestine" 519). Palestinian films reverberate with the revolutionary ethos and Marxist-Leninist ideology generated by the conflicts in Cuba, Vietnam, Angola and Mozambique (Geertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 22).

Demonstrating a multiplicity of approaches to documentary form, the principal task of these filmmakers was to articulate the position of Palestinians under the occupation, in exile, and those engaged in revolutionary struggle, in order to to mobilize Arab masses and galvanize international support.[4] These works contemplate the legacy of colonial cinema and reflect upon the cinematic language of the Palestinian Revolution.[5] The first audiences at test screenings were composed of members of revolutionary committees, critiquing films and participating in creative decision-making. Filmmakers compared their work to political and military operations,[6] exposed the consequences of colonial violence, and gave prominence to the charismatic figure of the freedom fighter, the *fida'i*. These films presented testimonies of loss, dispossession and suffering, as well as pledges of return by a new generation of Palestinian exiles.

In this period, Palestinian cinema was distinguished by the vibrant multicultural presence that has remained its most persistent feature, fostering creative collaboration, securing production resources, providing technical expertise, and ensuring the distribution of films among Palestinian exiles in Arab countries, and across the world. Palestinian films were produced by filmmakers who, due to a complex set of circumstances, could not reside, work on, or exhibit their films in Israel-Palestine. Narratives of Palestinian suffering transpired as one of the salient themes in the films of Arab directors such as Tawfiq Saleh, Youssef Shahin, Ali-Abdel Khaleq, Kassem Hawal, Mohammed Malas, Borhane Alaouié, Jean Chamoun, and others, working in their home countries or with the support of Palestinian organizations. Egyptian filmmaker Tawfiq Saleh's *Al-Makhdu'un*/*The Dupes* (1971), a screen adaptation of Ghassan Khanafani's novella *Men in the Sun* (1962 [1978]) which exposes Arab indifference in the face of Palestinian tragedy, was produced by Syria's National Film Organisation.[7] Lebanese filmmaker Borhane Alaouié's film *Kafr Kassem* (1974) commemorates the 1956 massacre of Palestinians perpetrated by Israeli troops. And Syrian

director Mohammed Malas' *Quneitra 74* (1974), a film situated in his deserted hometown in the Golan Heights, reflects on the consequences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, something that remains one of the most persistent thematic concerns in his filmmaking career.

Transnational interest in Palestinian narratives has extended beyond regional boundaries and the Arab world. At a time of political instability and protests against imperialism, racism, sexism and the war in Vietnam, the Palestinian struggle for liberation emerged as an appealing mixture of activism and revolutionary action for writers and filmmakers from the developed world. In 1968, Jean Luc-Godard visited refugee camps in Jordan, and shot material for *Ici et ailleurs/Here and Elsewhere*, an exception amongst French filmmakers in terms of its explicit concern for Palestinian suffering as a consequence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Shlensky 111, qtd. in Chamarette 91). Jean Genet arrived in Jordan in 1970 and spent two years in Palestinian refugee camps, documenting his journey in his inspiring travel narrative, *Un Captif Amoureux/Prisoner of Love,* published in 1986. Koji Wakamatsu and Adachi Masao documented the activities of the Japanese Red Army and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in Lebanon, in *Red Army/PFLP: Declaration of War* (1971), German filmmakers Manfred Vosz, Almut Hielscher and Hans Jürgen Weber co-directed *Palästine* (*Palestine,* 1971), Susan Sontag travelled to Israel-Palestine to make *Promised Lands* (1974), and Roy Battersby and Vanessa Redgrave produced a feature documentary, *The Palestinian* (1977).

Contact with international filmmakers became an important source of inspiration for Palestinian cineastes, but their institutional ties were largely limited to the countries of the Eastern Bloc and the Third World. Palestinian films were screened in refugee camps and national organizations in the diaspora, and exilic populations in the Arab world remained their key target audiences. The former Palestine Film Unit transformed into the Palestine Cinema Institute and began receiving support in training and equipment from Moscow,

Baghdad, Berlin and Havana (Habashneh). The first Palestinian Film Festival, held in Baghdad in 1973, screened 150 films, and two thirds were produced outside the Arab world (Massad, "The Weapon" 35). In the West, the films were screened at cine-clubs, universities, organizations of international solidarity, and small communities of Palestinian exiles, but a chronic lack of funding limited their promotion and distribution, and these works have remained virtually unknown to the mainstream audiences. The Israeli invasion in 1982 rendered the activities of Palestinian filmmakers and institutions in Lebanon impossible. Following the departure from Beirut, the Palestinian leadership was dispersed across the Arab world, the film archive was lost, and the Palestinian Cinema of the Revolutionary Period was over. The necessity to re-evaluate the ideological framework and models of struggle for national liberation has had a profound impact on Palestinian film production, and also on the position of Palestinian filmmakers within national and transnational contexts.

Anchored in the memories of the occupied land, reluctant to delve beyond the limitations of male-dominated discourse and entrenched in generalizations of both Palestinian and Israeli societies (Shafik, "Cinema in Palestine" 522-523), the Palestinian Cinema of the Revolutionary Period demonstrated numerous inadequacies. Since the early 1980s, it has gradually turned away from the universalism of national identity as the new geopolitical situation – the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc, and the collapse of traditional alliances and disillusionment with authoritarian leaderships of the Third World – has caused the erosion of the appeal of revolutionary rhetoric. In this climate, national identity has been increasingly observed from multiple perspectives, repositioning the newly exposed tensions in Palestinian society in the context of historical and cultural hybridity of the postcolonial world. Whilst acknowledging the important legacy of "the cinema of the people" (Habashneh), and its "contribution to documenting Palestinian history" (Shafik, *Arab Cinema* 20), the new Palestinian films, challenged by the particularism of individual concerns, have rejected the

dogmatic representations of national identity and become more inward-looking, drawn to previously unexplored divisions and concealed frictions that form the multilayered strata of Palestinian society.

Palestinian Cinema in Scholarly Literature

The relationship between Palestinian film production, Israeli occupation, Palestinian resistance and the struggle for national liberation plays an essential role in scholarly endeavors to identify the defining features of Palestinian cinema. The standard criteria applied in differentiating a body of films as a national cinema – the established benchmarks of a film industry, institutional framework, active production companies and conventional systems of distribution and exhibition – are not particularly helpful tools in this context. Palestinian cinema is situated in exile, either in the state of Israel, or in the politically and geographically disjointed territories where Palestinians live without defined borders or self-reliant economy, in a colonial status and perpetual state of instability. Palestinian filmmakers often work in harsh conditions, without a stable infrastructure, funding capacities, distribution networks and with barely developed production facilities and training organizations. This situation has prompted Hamid Dabashi to pose a crucial question, at once problematizing and affirming the *modus operandi* of Palestinian cinema: "How exactly is it that a stateless nation generates a national cinema – and once it does, what kind of national cinema is it?" (Introduction 7).

Dabashi's seminal question echoes the broad concerns of academic literature focusing on Palestinian cinema. Following the early writings in Arabic by Guy Hennebelle and Khemais Khayati, Hassan Abu-Ghanimeh, and Adnan Mdanat,[8] the turn of the twenty-first century saw intensified interest in Palestinian cinema across academic literature in the English language. In her study *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation*

(1989), Ella Shohat investigates the historical, cultural, socio-political and industrial contexts of Israeli and Palestinian film productions, establishing that "The boundaries between 'Israeli Cinema' and 'Palestinian Cinema' are clear only to the extent that we endow each one with an overarching nationalist ideology" (273). In *The Rhetoric of Violence: Arab-Jewish Encounters in Contemporary Palestinian Literature and Film* (2005), Kamal Abdel-Malek discusses Palestinian fiction, poetry and selected films, and investigates the scale of encounters, from conflicting to conciliatory, to recognize a shared sense of compassion and humanity. Hamid Dabashi's edited volume of essays and interviews, *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema* (2006), surveys the historical trajectories, the geopolitical, economic factors, and aesthetic concerns in the works of key filmmakers that contributed to the growth of Palestinian cinema from the late 1960s to the present period. The publication of Dabashi's book was followed by the establishment of the Columbia University online database of Palestinian cinema, the first cinema archive of its kind in the United States of America. Tim Kennedy's doctoral thesis, *Cinema Regarding Nations* (2007), anatomizes the main themes, symbols and formal structures introduced by Palestinian filmmakers to enable a stateless community to imagine itself as a nation. Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi's seminal study, *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma and Memory* (2008), concentrates on key periods of Palestinian film history, the main thematic tropes, and the work of key directors – Michel Khleifi, Rashid Masharawi, Ali Nassar, Mai Masri, Elia Suleiman, Hany Abu-Assad and others – who have contributed to the global visibility of Palestinian film in the post-1980 era. Anna Ball's study, *Palestinian Literature and Film in Postcolonial Feminist Perspective* (2012), contemplates the multiplicity of concepts evident from discovering a trajectory of gender consciousness and investigating Palestinian cinema and literature from postcolonial feminist perspectives. Ball points out that in spite of the necessity for liberating alternatives from Israeli occupation, "a significant body of Palestinian creative expression also

demonstrates a desire to interrogate both colonial and gender power structures in order to imagine emancipating alternatives to its current realities" (2). Kamran Rastegar's *Surviving Images: Cinema, War, and Cultural Memory in the Middle East* (2015) situates Palestinian films in the context of a transregional history of conflict in the Middle East and discusses the role of cinematic texts in the changing dynamics of cultural memory, as they illuminate and contribute to the processes of historical interpretation. Inez Hedges' study, *World Cinema and Cultural Memory* (2015), analyzes the ways cinema contributes to the processes of cultural memory within various regional and global contexts and, as one of the case studies in her research, focuses on the memory of the Nakba and the construction of identity in Palestinian film. Kay Dickinson's *Arab Cinema Travels: Transnational Syria, Palestine, Dubai and Beyond* (2016) positions Arab film cultures within wider historical, geopolitical and cultural contexts, examining the impact of travel and mobility in the cinemas of the Middle East. Nadia Yaqub's *Palestinian Cinema in the Days of Revolution* (2018) examines Palestinian films produced between 1968 and 1982, documenting Palestinian encounters with violence, their militant resistance and their unresolved status as 'stateless people,' to bring into frame Palestinian experiences with the liberation movement and create iconic spaces, which serve to constitute a specifically Palestinian, imaginative geography (7).

Scholarly literature highlights distinctions between historical periods separating the early, short documentary films of the Palestinian Cinema of the Revolutionary Period and the films of the post-1980s era. This period is variously described as "New Palestinian Cinema" (Ibrahim 13), "post-revolutionary" (Shafik, "Cinema in Palestine" 520), "the fourth period," and "The Return Home" (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 30, 32). It is distinguished by the rise in cinema production, which, according to Yaqub, emerged from changed political circumstances which "rendered Palestinians visible within the framework of a very different narrative" (*Palestinian Cinema* 10). While most scholars emphasize the lack of an

institutional base (Al-Zobaidi), recent Palestinian cinema is seen as "highly productive" (Yaqub, "*Waiting"* 226). Its cultural vibrancy stands in contrast to the continuing decline of the peace process, which has earned Palestinian cinema the status of "an important contender in the region, producing a significant number of feature films representing the Palestine issue" (Khatib 11).

The pivotal event in Palestinian cinema is the memory of the Nakba or The Catastrophe. This is how Palestinians see the 1948 conflict, and the formation of the state of Israel, followed by loss, dispossession, and exile.[9] Rastegar describes the experience of the Nakba "as a traumatic suspension borne by the fact that the Palestinian catastrophe, an ongoing process, has not found an end point from which closure may be gained" (*Surviving Images* 96). Consequently, as Dabashi points out, "it is around that remembrance of the lost homeland that Palestinian filmmakers have articulated their artistic cosmovision" (11). Absorbed by the traumatic memories of loss, they "invent, document and crystallize Palestinian history and confront the traumatic experience" (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 3). Revisiting the legacy of the past presents them with difficulties and opportunities, because "History cannot be reversed, but it can be re-imagined" (Dabashi, Introduction 18). For Palestinian filmmakers working in the state of Israel, the territories under Palestinian control, and in exile, articulating a sense of national identity is a challenging task. Palestinians endeavor to imagine a community that can be sustained while the geographical and temporal location to which it refers, pre-1948 Palestine, fades into history (Yaqub, "*Waiting*" 200). This simultaneously creates a dilemma for academic researchers, who, according to Livia Alexander, "lack the starting point of spatial and temporal continuity and context from which to discuss and analyze Palestinian filmmaking" ("Is There a Palestinian Cinema?" 151).

Stemming from the traumatic legacy of the Nakba, the most persistent concern of Palestinian cinema is the notion of self-representation. Edward W. Said postulates that Palestinian filmmakers "stand against invisibility," opposing media stereotypes that link Palestinian identity with terrorism and violence (Preface *Dreams of a Nation* 3). In the same vein, Laura Marks asserts that "Palestine barely exists in the limited repertoire of Western representation – and therefore barely exists politically at all" ("The Language of Terrorism" 67). Linda Mokdad establishes that "Palestinian narratives are about the act or gesture of narrating itself" (193) and Refqa Abu-Remaileh identifies and discusses the "tropes of aestheticized resistance," mediated by different cultural and political climates, and their permutations in the visual medium ("The Kanafani Effect" 194). Positioning Palestinian directors within specific geopolitical, social and cultural contexts, Peter Grabher scrutinizes how these filmmakers apply the aesthetic strategies of minor form, reacting to the "Palestinian condition" and engaging with individual and collective trauma (224). Concerned with self-representation, Palestinian filmmakers consider it their key undertaking to expose and subvert the distortions and omissions discernible in the interpretations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and furthermore, to voice Palestinian positions, and to assert their own national and cultural identity.

Transnational connections are crucial for contemporary Palestinian filmmakers. Michel Khleifi, Mai Masri, Elia Suleiman, Ula Tabari, Hany Abu-Assad, Annemarie Jacir, Najwa Najjar, Jumana Manna, and others were born, educated, or began their film careers abroad, and continue to divide their time between Europe, North America, and Israel-Palestine. Some filmmakers, like Rashid Masharawi, Ali Nassar, Nizar Hassan, Sobhi Al-Zobaidi, Tawfiq Abu-Wael, and others, have decided to remain in the state of Israel and the territories under Palestinian control, reinforcing perhaps, the idea articulated by Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami, who observed that, like an uprooted tree, he could not continue

to produce films in a different cultural climate (Cardullo). Palestinian directors use Arab, European, American and Israeli funds, collaborate with production companies, television channels, film festivals, and until recently use predominantly foreign crews, to realize their productions. While the limited presence of their films in movie theatres in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip or at selected Israeli film festivals has symbolic political and cultural value, these works are still largely economically dependent on and disseminated through European and American companies and distribution channels.

Academic scholarship on Palestinian cinema is predominantly concerned with transnational connections in the context of Palestinian Cinema of the Revolutionary Period, and with post-1980 Palestinian films. This underlines the changes in the period during and following on from the First Intifada (1987-1993) and the Second Intifada (2000-2005) and the geopolitical cultural and economic conditions of Palestinian film production in the twenty-first century. Palestinian cinema has been described as "intercultural" (Marks, *The Skin of the Film* 1), "accented" and "exilic" (Naficy, *An Accented Cinema* 14). It has been positioned in the context of "the liminality of *loss* and *disappearance* – of country, of the people, of the Self" (Bresheeth "A Symphony" 73). Sobhi Al-Zobaidi describes independent Palestinian films as "Tora Bora cinema", that is films "driven by artistic impulses to resist, travel and otherwise negotiate the world" (Al-Zobaidi). Seen as "politically charged […] humanist and entertaining" (E Levy "Border Crossings"), Palestinian cinema is frequently the site of debates about deterritorializing and reterritorializing the geographies of divided and occupied land.

Drawing upon the ideas of Al-Zobaidi, who conceptualizes film as a device used by Palestinians to reconstitute themselves "in relation to their changing geographies" (Al-Zobaidi), Helga Tawil-Souri points out that the real and cinematic Palestine cannot be observed through the prism of any fixed categorization of time or territory. Tawil-Souri

proposes that we approach Palestinian cinema's negotiations of different spaces and im/mobilities as engendering a "structure of feeling" that unmoors 'national cinema' and 'Palestine' from the imposed limitations of territoriality ("Cinema as the Space" 172). Patricia Pisters discusses the work of Elia Suleiman against the framework of a Deleuzian "politics of the impersonal," and engages with the critique of Deleuze via postcolonial and political theory, expanding on the relation between the virtual, the actual, and reality in a politically accountable way ("Violence and Laughter"). Dickinson suggests that the need to reterritorialize Palestine is one of the fundamental concerns of academic inquiry, establishing that Palestine and its cinema "is as imprinted as the landscape itself is with travel's partisan politics and often ruthlessly marshalled privileges and limitations" (*Arab Cinema* 82). In her discussion of Palestinian cyberculture in the Lebanese refugee camps, Laleh Khalili asserts that marginalizing one's identity for fluidities of diasporic or liminal interaction may carry the risk of ignoring the central demands of Palestinians to claim identity, not only in political negotiations, but also in something as ordinary as a passport (144).

Transnational connections have also provided opportunities for researching aesthetic and political concerns and for engaging with industry ties to Palestinian cinema. Livia Alexander points out that Palestinian films fit within the aesthetics of European arthouse cinema but are also thematically absorbed by national liberation ("Is There a Palestinian Cinema?" 154). Nick Denes probes the formal and stylistic diversity in the transnationally produced Palestinian films made between 1968 and 1974, suggesting that the militant filmmakers were concerned with issues of cinematic style and its eclectic and experimental modes (221). Dickinson investigates the paradoxical interchange between Palestine, its cinema and the framework of peripherality in Palestinian roadblock movies, set against the background of the Second Intifada ("The Palestinian Road (Block) Movie" 139). Carol

Bardenstein identifies and anatomizes cross casting and mimicry in Palestinian and Israeli films as subversive practices emerging in uneven configurations of power (102).

Furthermore, transnational productions have also laid the ground for understanding the complexity and heterogeneity of Palestinian cinema audiences. Established in exile, without a local audience or distribution networks, Palestinian cinema has never had a continuous following (Mdanat 132; Shafik, *Cinema in Palestine* 522). Due to differences in geographic locations, cultural contexts, economic conditions, and socio-political backgrounds, Palestinian film audiences are perceived as scattered and difficult to categorize. The foreign-based filmmakers, educated at European and American universities, belong to the small minority whose experiences differ to those of the third generation Palestinians, dispersed in refugee camps in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip or the neighboring countries. Aspiring to speak on behalf of those who experience a significant violation of their human rights, live amidst widespread poverty, and have lost hope in the peace process, is a challenging task, yet the overwhelming majority of films produced in a transnational context seek to breach that divide. Balancing different national, religious, cultural and class allegiances, and the expectations of local, exilic and international cinema audiences, raises a host of questions about political, economic and artistic priorities of transnational co-production. How significant is the question of national identity in Palestinian cinema? Are Palestinian films produced for local spectators, for Palestinians in exile and diaspora, for Arab audiences or for global communities of cinephiles and transnational activists? What political, aesthetic, and economic compromises are filmmakers required to make in order to meet the requirements of transnational investors? How do they address the expectations of global cinema audiences in an attempt to maximize the impact of their narratives? And how do they take into account the complexity of Palestinian audiences, and balance their

approaches to religious beliefs, gender bias, class differences, cultural traditions and generational heterogeneity?

Transnational connections channel opportunities for higher budgets, elevated production values, and better market and promotion opportunities. However, they also establish self-imposed creative limits. The acceptance of Arab, Israeli and Western finances can be seen to contradict the premises of Palestinian struggle for national liberation, renouncing opposition to imperialism, or legitimizing Israel's position (L Alexander, "Is There a Palestinian Cinema?" 156). Khleifi, Suleiman, Abu-Assad and Jacir have consistently garnered a larger following in the West than in Arab-speaking countries due to political, economic and other factors, but their films have gradually gained popularity amongst Palestinian cinema audiences. In spite of its limited scope, lack of economic power and absence of political will for backing the alternative narratives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the vitality of Palestinian cinema is manifested in its ability to re-align itself and re-emerge, transforming the pivotal facets of Palestinian film experiences, from radical political cinema to arthouse film and the popular mainstream, thus strengthening its position amongst local and international audiences.

Contextualizing Israeli-Palestinian Relations

This thesis uses a mixed lens approach, positioning Israeli-Palestinian relations within the context of an ethnocratic political system in the state of Israel and contested territories, in the transnational frame of reference characterizing late capitalism, and in the context of relationships between Israeli and Palestinian societies and cultures, existing as separate entities, but also within each other. In his study, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel Palestine,* an Israeli scholar of political and legal geography and urban studies, Oren Yiftachel focuses on the nexus of space, ethnicity and power in Israel-Palestine, and

identifies ethnocracy as a political system facilitating the hegemony and control of one ethnic group over another in contested lands, while maintaining a democratic façade (3). Yiftachel points out that an ethnocratic regime, premised on the project of ethnonational expansion, establishes the ethnically based asymmetrical power-relationships between the dominant Israeli majority and the Palestinian minority, thereby enhancing the processes of Judaization in the state of Israel. He posits that different elements of Judaization, and resistance to it, frame the dynamics of territorial and ethnic conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians as well as the land, development and settlement policies in the state of Israel. Yiftachel situates ethnocracy within multiple contexts, probing the consequences of Jewish settlements and immigration on the constitution of Israeli cities, and ethnically mixed or disputed areas in which different ethnic groups contest for recognition, power and access to resources. His study of ethnocracy underlines the impact of foreign influence, the role of religion, Arab political orientations, fluctuations of Palestinian violence and the gradual change of the Israeli economy from being state-controlled towards globalizing neoliberalism, thus distinguishing Judaization as the pivotal element in shaping the space, wealth and political power in Israel-Palestine (7). In this constellation of power, he contends, Israel has extended and intensified the occupation of Palestinian land, expanding Jewish settlements while placing restrictions on Palestinian development and mobility. Yiftachel sees the emerging political geography of Israel-Palestine as continuing to be typified by Jewish hegemony, the separation of communities, and by an ethnic inequality aligned with the concept of "creeping apartheid" (9).

This inquiry also locates the conflict in Israel-Palestine in a transnational perspective, beyond the confining parameters of national exclusivity, and, where appropriate, within the context of processes which typify late capitalism. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has for decades been seen through the prism of two nationalist agendas. These are, firstly, the Zionist

narratives, which pervade public discourse in Israel and in the West, and secondly, the Palestinian narratives of loss, dispossession and resistance, striving to maintain a sense of identity, strengthened by their experiences of trauma and exile (Sayigh, *Palestinians*; R Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*). The inclination to separate the research of social formations and cultural production in Palestine from the contexts of national exclusivism and position it within the transnational frame of reference, has, in recent years, gradually come to prominence. The scholarship emerging since the late 1980s rejects the doctrines generated by national elites, instead exploring the alternatives to dominant historical narratives, and affording new insights into the complexity of Israeli-Palestinian relationships.[10] In his study *Global Palestine*, John Collins repositions the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within the context of processes that typify late capitalism. According to Collins, two currents re-emerge in the scholarship situating Palestine in the global context. The first is the shift from understanding Israel-Palestine as an ethnic conflict to a corollary of a settler-colonialist project, and a creation of an unjust *fait accompli* with the creation of Israel as a Jewish nation-state. The second is the change in political domain, where positions supporting the one-state solution have replaced those urging territorial partition. According to Collins, the goal of positioning Palestine at the center of this debate is an ethical choice, wherein the individual's "social location" and "angles of vision" (10) inform their idea of the world. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's counter-hegemonic idea of the "tradition of the oppressed" ("Thesis" 257, qtd. in Collins 11), he situates the Palestinian question within a global context, initiating a debate concerning consequences of settler-colonialism and the histories of civilization, as propagated by globalized elites, presenting new narratives and initiating different approaches for interrogating this problem (11-13).

While this inquiry recognizes the importance of space, ethnicity and power, on one hand, and the transnational framework of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the other, it also

acknowledges that the investigation of Palestinian cinema needs to be framed in the context of other narratives (R Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity* 9), which take into account the relationship between Palestinian and Israeli societies and cultures. The concept of "implicate relations," introduced by Israeli geographer, Juval Portugali, in his study, *Implicate Relations: Society and Space in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (1993), is particularly useful in grounding the examinations of social and cultural practices in Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Portugali identifies the society and space as two separate entities, appearing independently and outside of each other, but only within the limits of the explicate realm. While in social theory these terms denote separate meanings of society as a non-spatial entity, and space and geography as passive realms where social events occur, Portugali understands the two entities as enfolding each other and existing within each other to form the co-existing, "implicate relations", indicative of space as not a mere passive entity, but as an actor in social reality.[11] This is important as, for the larger part of this inquiry, political, economic and cultural relations between Israelis and Palestinians are seen in the context of disintegration of multicultural pre-Nakba Palestine, and emerging demarcation lines between the two communities. Acknowledging the implicate relations between Israeli and Palestinian societies and cultures is pivotal to understanding the social and cultural practices in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and in the search for new models of productive cultural expression and collaboration.

Approaches to Transnational Film Theory

This investigation is located within the broader concept of transnational film studies. Transnational studies are generally seen as a body of knowledge integrating research fields across disciplines that recognize the importance of global processes and transformations in the era of late capitalism. The processes of the gradual decline of national sovereignty,

multiculturalism, hybridity, the transnational movement of people, capital and culture, as well as the growth and development of media technologies, all generate conditions for transboundary and interdependent forms of production and the consumption of culture.

Transnational film theory is a growing area within the broader fields of transnational studies and cinema studies. Initial work in this field concentrated on the tensions between the national and transnational, framed by the weakening of national sovereignty, and coinciding with the emergence of the global cultural economy. Over the past two decades, the focus of inquiry has moved to the scales of global, regional and transboundary practices, recognizing postcolonial, exilic and diasporic modes of filmmaking and interrogating the transnational connections in this decentered, hybrid context. In the context of this thesis, transnational film theory is used to investigate Palestinian cinema's contribution to our understanding of national identity, globalization, postcoloniality, ideology, and the political economy of culture and subjectivity.

The universal sense of the term 'transnationalism' and its frequent use may cause generalizations, equivocality and overlap, as it can be perceived to be lacking cohesion or a defined sense of disciplinary boundaries. However, its robustness and flexibility make it pertinent to the study of film and media. Andrew Higson posits in his article "Transnational Developments in European Cinema in the 1920s," that film production and film exhibition have been transnational since the early film screenings in the 1890s (70). On the other hand, throughout the history of the twentieth century, film was frequently recognized as a unifying national and cultural factor, and the initial positioning of film theory in relation to transnational processes was largely concerned with the discussion of the changing paradigms of national cinema.[12]

Since the early 1990s, critical discourse has taken cognizance of the ways in which the production and reception of films are framed by the imagining of national identity. In this

transforming climate, the movements of fluctuating individuals and communities are gradually replacing the anchoring of the nation-state and, as part of the evolving global market, film is seen as blurring the boundaries between national entities, generating regional and international connections, as well as economic and cultural ties.[13] Cinema is perceived to be developing such attributes, or to become 'national,' when speaking for, and to, a nation at moments of political crisis, revealing perplexity, or scrutinizing national identity and values (Christie 25). The purpose of strengthening a sense of national identity is problematized in favor of the diversity of interests among critically minded cinema audiences, increasingly aware that films "do not simply represent the stable features of a national culture but are themselves one of the loci of debates about a nation's governing principles, goals, heritage and history" (Hjort and Mackenzie 4). The necessity to counterbalance official narratives with the voices of subaltern groups has progressively gained more purchase in theorizing a cinematic imaginary.

Attempts to discuss national cinemas from a transnational perspective are marked by polycentric – and often contradictory – tendencies, as well as the need to think of cultural relationships and production in interactive terms, thus bringing to prominence new contexts for discussing transnational processes. In *Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese Cinema*, Yingjin Zhang identifies the need to re-evaluate models of cross-cultural analysis, constructions of national identity and methods of engagement between local and global understandings of film production and consumption (3). Shohat and Robert Stam, in *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality and Transnational Media,* propose a relational approach to the reconfiguration of media studies in new temporal, spatial and interdisciplinary contexts, urging multicultural, transnational and contrapunctual thinking (17). On the other hand, Tim Bergfelder cautions that the reluctance to recognize the processes of cultural

interconnectedness, triggered by anxieties about globalism and fantasies of maintaining 'purity' of national cultures, has caused a delay in scholarship on European cinemas in this field ("National, Transnational or Supranational Cinema" 321).

Early endeavors to align academic research on transnational cinema are typified by attempts to map out disciplinary boundaries, rather than establish specific theoretical models. As Hjort asserts, the scholarly work has been less distinguished by competing theories than by an inclination to use the term 'transnationalism' as an indisputable point of reference ("On the Plurality" 12-13). In "Concepts of Transnational Cinema: Towards a Critical Transnationalism in Film Studies," Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim outline three key approaches to theorizing transnational cinemas (9). The first approach, typified by the tensions between national and transnational, is identified in the work of Higson, who postulates that the anchoring of national traditions and boundaries cannot be ascertained as they are correlated to political and economic processes, cultural practice and conceptualizing identity. Higson locates the transnational in the process of migration and identifies "the degree of cultural cross-breeding and interpenetration, not only across borders but also within them, suggesting that modern cultural formations are invariably hybrid and impure" ("The Limiting Imagination" 19). The second approach, identified by Higbee and Lim, situates the connections between local and global film cultures, production and distribution processes within the contexts of regional connections. Such a position is revealed in the studies of transnational Chinese cinemas (Lu), transnational Nordic cinema (Nestingen and Elkington), and the European set design of the 1930s (Bergfelder et al). Higbee and Lim observe that these groupings may act as substitutes for pan-, regional or supranational typologies, rendering the term 'transnational' redundant. They suggest that Lu's framing of Chinese transnational cinemas undermines the national paradigm and its authority, only to re-establish it as a part of a higher sphere of influence (9).

While I acknowledge the value of these two approaches, I find that a third tendency, evident in discussions of diasporic, exilic and intercultural cinemas, is more pertinent to this study. In these works, the examinations of film representations and cultural identity are used to undermine the ostensible stability of neocolonial constructs of nation and national culture (Higbee and Lim 9). Discussing the films of diasporic and exilic *auteurs*, working outside of the Western mainstream, Naficy distinguishes the "independent transnational film genre", attuned to the conditions of transnationality, liminality, multiculturality, multifocality and syncretism ("Phobic Spaces" 121). Marks' periodization of prominent and ephemeral films made between 1985 and 1995, delineates the concept of "intercultural cinema" in the works of filmmakers who share political convictions, and a sense of displacement and hybridity (*The Skin of the Film* 1-2). Both scholars discuss Palestinian films using substitute terms to denote the attributes of the transnational. However, in his following study, Naficy produces a comprehensive and groundbreaking map of the "accented" film style, operating in "chaotic semiautonomous pockets in symbiosis with the dominant and other alternative cinemas" (*An Accented Cinema* 19).

Acknowledging the early Palestinian cinema's transnational alliances with Third World countries and revolutionary organizations, and its pronounced anticolonial sentiment, it is vital to recognize its alignment with the postulates of Third Cinema. In their manifesto, "Toward a Third Cinema," the Argentine filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, critique the political and cultural authorities that reduce film to a commodity, urging for the "decolonization of culture" and for a distancing from the commercial mainstream (44-64). In his Introduction to *Questions of Third Cinema,* co-edited with Jim Pines, Paul Willemen provides a more inclusive definition of Third Cinema, and produces a global network of politically focused filmmakers, including Hong Kong, Taiwanese, Chinese, but also American and English directors, identifying the strengths and limitations of the concept

("The Third Cinema Question" 9). Recognizing the connections between the works of Palestinian filmmakers and ideas established by Solanas and Getino, this study highlights their opposition to cultural hegemony and to conventions of popular cinema, as well as their pronounced political sentiment which typified the films associated with Third Cinema produced in the 1960s and 1970s in Latin America and around the world that continued to be articulated in various forms in Palestinian film production in the post-1980 era.

These and other approaches[14] affirm postcolonial, global and diasporic perspectives by locating transnational cinema at interstitial sites, outside the production and distribution norms of commercial cinema. By challenging postcolonialism "as an attempt to maintain and legitimize conventional notions of cultural authenticity" (Ezra and Rowden 5) transnationalism provides a robust, comprehensive and flexible methodology for the study of Palestinian cinema and affords more scope and adaptability in navigating the media culture of late capitalism. While this transnational context is open for subverting the traditional representations of national identity and provides scope for the positioning of Palestine as a global geopolitical question, it also allows for interrogating present-day methods of film production and distribution. As Nataša Durovičova points out in the Preface to the collection of critical essays, *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives,* the intermediate and open term 'transnationalism' recognizes the persistent agency of the state in a varying yet legitimizing relationship to the scale of 'nation,' while at the same time implying relations of unevenness and mobility (x). Postcolonial studies do not place an accent on the transient, and asymmetrical ties that lead to the irregular collaborations that are emerging as salient traits of global cultural processes. Transgressing established boundaries and separating the cultural, economic and linguistic fringe from the commercial cinema mainstream can no longer be described using one-directional, top-down models, as this frequently gives rise to unorthodox approaches to screen aesthetics, and to the production, promotion and distribution of films to

previously impenetrable global markets. Deborah Shaw pointedly reveals, evoking Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko's study of contemporary Hollywood, that global Hollywood productions can also be argued to be transnational in their modes of production, dissemination and exhibition, in their multinational collaborations and foreign ownership of major studios, and in their engagement with filmmakers originating from various countries across the world (Shaw, "Transnational Cinema" 295; McDonald and Wasko 6). Rejecting essentialist notions of national purity and adopting hybrid models of film production affords an opportunity to engage in a comprehensive mapping out of the trajectories of Palestinian cinema.

Drawing on Hjort's typology of cinematic transnationalisms, this thesis articulates specific modes of transnationalism in Palestinian cinema. In "On the Plurality of Cinematic Transnationalism," Hjort distinguishes nine different modes of cinematic transnationalism. Her periodization is used to ensure that this investigation is not limited to identifying and scrutinizing economic connections as the singular determining factor for Palestinian minor transnational cinema. This thesis centers on the features of modernizing, cosmopolitan and opportunistic modes of cinematic transnationalism identified and discussed in relation to the work of Palestinian filmmakers. Departing from Charles Taylor's concept of "multiple modernities" (1), and those processes – historical, social, geopolitical, and economic – through which they are generated (Hjort, "On the Plurality" 24), Hjort's theorization provides an analytical framework for the discussion of their impact on cultural policies, production, marketing and distribution of Palestinian films. Hjort's classification highlights the distinctions and overlaps between these co-existing, rather than mutually exclusive transnational modes. However, while the works of Palestinian filmmakers often manifest several transnational modes at once, focusing on particular modes allows for situating their

films in specific historical, geopolitical, cultural and industry contexts and distinguishing their roles in the post-1980 evolution of Palestinian cinema.

Hjort uses the term "modernity" referring historically to both the collapse of ontological hierarchies and the rise of civil society, highlighting the need to identify the intersections of modernity with emerging transnational tendencies. In Hjort's view, a significantly transnationalized film culture becomes a vehicle for boosting – but also for signifying – the processes of modernity within a given society ("On the Plurality" 24). While modernizing tendencies pervade the works of all Palestinian filmmakers covered in this thesis, Hjort's ideas are particularly relevant to the discussion of Palestinian film production in the post-1980 period. During this period, marked by evolving transnational connections, this new generation of filmmakers begins to explore the decline of dominant narratives through changing relationships with the national imaginary, the renegotiating of the national self-image and shifting the accent to the emerging Palestinian subjectivities, to promote the notions of human rights, equality and justice.

Entwined with individual experiences and presented through a blend of national and transnational concerns and postcolonial commitments, cosmopolitan transnationalism is, according to Hjort, embodied by individuals in control of the filmmaking process, and is affected by multiple identities and trajectories of migration in strengthening social imaginaries and issues important for national and subnational communities ("On the Plurality" 20-21). The inquiry into cosmopolitan transnationalism in Palestinian cinema, explored in this thesis, revolves primarily around the work of Elia Suleiman and draws on Hjort's typology in dialogue with Mitchell Cohen's concept of "rooted cosmopolitanism" (480), that is expanded upon in the work of Kwame Anthony Appiah. Appiah's position, which endorses a distinct sense of identity is compatible with universal moral engagement (*Cosmopolitanism* xviii). It also allows for the investigation of Suleiman's exilic subjectivity,

of transnational mobility, and for the examination of the hybrid cultural climate in which he produces his films, and focuses on his engagement with the conflict in Israel-Palestine as an ethical problem affecting global humanity.

According to Hjort, conventional perceptions equate the prioritizing of economic necessities with demoting transnational cooperation with intrinsic cultural value ("On the Plurality" 19). However, the ability to source financial support carries specific weight in the conditions of occupation, and does not necessarily exclude artistic aspirations, merit or political intentions. Drawing on Hjort's theorization of the opportunistic mode of cinematic transnationalism is particularly relevant in the closing chapters of this thesis where the developments in contemporary Palestinian cinema are scrutinized in the context of relationships with the global commercial mainstream. As the term 'opportunistic' may infer pejorative connotations, this investigation places emphasis on the two previously elaborated and sometimes concurrently displayed modes of transnationalism, draws attention to subverting and re-purposing the narrative conventions of commercial cinema, and also accentuates the political value of Palestinian film, which all contribute to creating conditions for the emergence of Palestinian popular cinema.

Discussing the relationship between the transnational and the minor form, it is pertinent to identify the overlaying concern in different modes of Palestinian cinematic transnationalism: its political element. Hjort asserts that transnationalism arrives in diverse forms, promoting economic necessities, as well as artistic, cultural, and political values. In various historical periods, and at different stages of industry development, this may highlight one or a combination of values attributed to transnational production ("On the Plurality" 30). In their dominant form, or in conjunction with other elements, political attributes have remained the most consistent feature of Palestinian transnational film production for more than half a century, distinguishing it as the cinema of the oppressed and marginalized. This

value has been demonstrated through the innovative use of screen language that has gradually evolved and modified itself through different stages of Palestinian cinema history, and its relationship with emerging Palestinian and global cinema audiences. In recent years, the range of economic, cultural and artistic ties which have contributed to the visibility of Palestinian cinema in a transnational context, has prompted re-alignments of its political attributes which have, nonetheless, remained its key constituent. The articulation of this element can be properly mapped out through its interlocking with the minor form, establishing it as a paradigm for the political framework of Palestinian cinema.

The Minor Form and the Political Dimension of Palestinian Transnational Cinema

The political value in Palestinian film narratives is related to the specific geopolitical and cultural contexts in which Palestinian cinema engages with local and international audiences. The question is: how does Palestinian cinema become political, and how is its political value configured in specific cinematic texts? In one of the most influential critical studies that emerged in the film scholarship of the 1980s, the two-volumes of *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (1983 [1986]) and *Cinema 2*: *The Time-Image* (1985 [1989]), Gilles Deleuze reflects upon the relationships between image and thought, or time and movement, as the pivotal elements of his philosophy of cinema.[15] In his works, Deleuze meditates on the convergence of aesthetic, scientific and philosophical modes of understanding "in producing cultural strategies for imaging and imagining the world" (Rodowick 5). In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze invokes the work of philosopher Henri Bergson, in order to discuss the cinematic treatment of time, memory, thought and speech. He postulates that, unlike the classical narration that was always a derivation of images, or the effect of the structure that underlies them, modern cinema is a consequence of the images defined for themselves. Deleuze observes that the

"assimilation of the cinematographic image to an utterance" – a mode of narration, and its operation through resemblance or analogy – is the instance that separates classical from modern cinema, "tearing a real image from clichés" (*Cinema 2* 21). According to Deleuze, at the very moment when the image is replaced by an utterance, it is given its false appearance, and is deprived of its most authentically visible characteristic: movement. (*Cinema 2* 27). He establishes that we do not perceive things or images in their entirety, but as clichés, narrating a political truth or reality that relates to what we wish to see, to our economic status, to our ideological beliefs, and our psychological demands. The only way to see beyond clichés is through "the jams and breaks" in our sensor-motor schemata that will enable us to identify the power relations that underpin social conditions (*Cinema 2* 21). In those moments of realization, cinema, which is no longer seen in terms of the real and the imaginary, "brings out the thing in itself, literally, in the excess of horror and beauty, in its radical and unjustifiable character" (*Cinema 2* 21), and enables a political engagement with the audience.

According to Felicity Colman, Deleuze in *Cinema 2* outlines three frameworks for the relationship between cinema and politics (153). The first is the position of minority filmmakers, or filmmakers from the Third World (Colman 153; Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 215-217). The second is the "critique of the myth," grounded in the new form of political cinema that will overcome an "impasse" in addressing the marginalized, and oppose compromised twentieth century mass art, as well as contribute to the creation of new cinema audiences (Colman 153; Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 226-227). The third is the emergence of modern political cinema, which is no longer constituted from the possibility of evolution and revolution, but in the style of Kafka, from fragmentation and the production of the state of impossibility and the intolerable (Colman 153; Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 226).

The first framework revolving around the position of minority filmmakers is particularly interesting for this investigation and is related to the conceptualizations of minor

form in the works of Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980 [1987]), and *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975 [1986]). In their study of Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari examine minor literature, distinctive for its deterritorialised style – the concept introduced in *Anti-Oedipus*, the first volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* – and distinguished by its dislocation of cultural subjects and objects from a specific space and time. Instead of using binary oppositions, the authors approach Kafka, employing a strategy of "multiple entrances" (*Kafka* 3), to suggest that if the interpreter is an agent of a dominant social code, then the desire to deterritorialize is crucial for minorities wishing to oppose the hegemony of this code.

Most commentators agree that Deleuze's "resolutely antihistorical" approach (Andrew, "The Core and Flow" 902) does not offer scope for the discussions of national identity. David Martin-Jones observes that the creative efforts of marginalized groups to establish a sense of identity have the potential to anchor themselves in minority frameworks but reminds us that scholarly work on this matter[16] is predominantly focused on the capacity of a minor form to problematize a fixed sense of identity rather than to re-establish it (*Deleuze* 6). Deleuze and Guattari point out that, unlike the major literatures which explore Oedipal conflicts, minor literature interrogates the relationship between politics and the individual, which makes it relevant for discussing the cultural production of ethnic, gender and sexual minorities. Their focus on deterritorialized style has emerged as an analytical device in the diasporic, exilic and postcolonial frameworks. Hjort posits that the underprivileged status of small-nation cinemas is linked to the minor form and to the undermining of hegemonic national cultures:

> The term minor points [then] to the existence of regimes of cultural power and to the need for strategic resourcefulness on the part of those who are unfavorably situated

within the cultural landscape in question, be it a national context or a more properly global one. (*Small Nation* ix)

Minor form is also seen as a mechanism for deconstructing the power structures in specific geopolitical, historical and cultural contexts. Since a territorial dispute is the crux of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is not surprising that most Palestinian films are concerned with the Israeli occupation, and with Palestinian displacement. Deleuze writes in *"The Grandeur of Yasser Arafat"*: "From the start, Israel has never concealed its goal: to empty the Palestinian territory. And better, to act as if the Palestinian territory were empty, always destined for the Zionists" (31). Concerned with the dislocation of exiled subjects, seized land and occupied villages, Palestinian cinema emerges as the "'living memory' of displacement and exile" (Hedges "The Nakba"), reflecting "the inhuman condition that Palestinians live in" (Al-Zobaidi), and mobilizing audiences to support their liberation and right of return. According to Naficy, "Because they are deterritorialised, these films are deeply concerned with territory and territoriality" (*An Accented Cinema* 5).

Minor literature is the literature of a minority, produced in a major language. Deleuze and Guattari discuss Kafka as a writer belonging to a national minority, writing in a major language, in a country occupied by a foreign power, and underline the social and political inferences of his formal and thematic innovations (Bogue, "Minor Writing" 105). In the deterritorialised state of language in Kafka's prose, they distinguish three impossibilities that typify a minor form: the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in a major language, and the impossibility of writing in any other way (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 16-17). These conditions that set apart the minor form can be identified in Palestinian films. While the impossibility of not producing film narratives, immanent within the Palestinian desire to present an alternative to a Zionist account of the conflict has already been discussed

in previous sections, the impossibilities of not using the language of the majority, and the impossibility of doing otherwise warrant further elaboration.

Minor form's focus on non-native language, forcing its strangeness or reconfiguration, is according to Colman, applicable to the work of filmmakers using the majority language of the media (156). Tom Gunning has identified it in the framework of the 1980s avant-garde cinema, underlining the celebration of marginal identity as the key constituent of the minor form (3). This is pertinent to understanding Palestinian cinema's endeavors to disrupt the conventional language of cinema. The early Palestinian documentary films are situated outside the mainstream and feature low production values. They evoke Naficy's understanding of accented cinema's intersections with the minor aesthetics, "driven by its own limitations […] by its smallness, imperfection, amateurishness", drawing attention to its "textual richness and narrative inventiveness" (*An Accented Cinema* 45). In the post-1980 period, Palestinian filmmakers continue to oppose the occupation while undermining the traditionally conceived narrative forms and the role of the filmmaker as a proponent of elitist views on national identity. Their resourcefulness gained them access to the commercial networks in the West, opening up new possibilities for destabilizing the mainstream from within. The impossibility of not using the majority language of the media by Palestinian cineastes educated in the West is, in this context, understood like speaking the language of the colonizer, "cut off from the masses" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 16) as, immersed in the language of majority, these filmmakers are simultaneously being excluded from it.

The narrowness of space in which the minor form operates makes politics a ubiquitous presence in Palestinian cinema. Colman observes that the undermining of dominant screen language makes one attuned to the second and third element of minor aesthetics, "the connection of an individual to political immediacy and the collective assemblage of enunciation" (Colman 155; Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 218). Central to the

understanding of Palestinian cinema is the foregrounding of the political value of the minor form, modified to suit the context of Palestinian transnationalism. The political element in Palestinian cinema does not correspond with high production values or other normative elements of mainstream cinema. Immanent within Palestinian film narratives, this form of otherness is often generated through visual and acoustic signs of occupation, such as the impenetrable concrete fences carving up Palestinian lands, Israeli army vehicles and helicopters patrolling deserted towns and the skies above them, the barbed wire and roadblocks, the apparatus of surveillance and control, counterpoised by armed resistance and the protests of Palestinian youth, and others.

However, according to my reading, the political value is not simply recognized through visual and acoustic cues of occupation and violence, although their presence in Palestinian cinema is undeniable. The political element is also detected in the omnipresent sense of *stasis*, in the monotony of small events typifying the daily life of Palestinians under occupation. This type of engagement does not simply imply countering one form of violence with another. According to Deleuze, consciousness, or the passage of one social form to another typified classical cinema, but in modern political film this is no longer the case. We are now witnessing the merging of private and political affairs that does not call for an intermediary in the form of consciousness (*Cinema 2* 224).

The individual's connection to politics in post-1980 Palestinian cinema continues to be anchored in local, regional and global historical and geopolitical contexts. However, Palestinian filmmakers do not replicate old myths to generate juxtaposition and co-penetration between two forms of ethnic violence – Israeli occupation and male-dominated Palestinian resistance – in order to insure their perpetuity. Instead, they connect the old myths to the state of occupation, the oppression of women, youth, and the corruption of national elites, allowing them to expose and destabilize the hegemonic structures within Palestinian

society. Avoiding the mediated transformation from Old to New and proposing a deviation in the form of what Deleuze designates as aberration is essential for re-positioning the Palestinian filmmakers' approach to a critique of the myth and to producing "collective utterances" (*Cinema 2* 229, 230), thereby transforming sensibilities, and creating new cinema audiences.

One of the main differences between classical and modern cinema, according to Deleuze, is that modern cinema creates new audiences: "The acknowledgement of a people who are missing is not a renunciation of political cinema, but on the contrary, the new basis on which it is founded, in the third world and for the minorities" (*Cinema 2* 224). Contemplating the collective dimension of cinema, Deleuze and Guattari postulate that, since national consciousness is in a constant state of instability, the minor form affords the opportunities "to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility" (*Kafka* 17). The minor form no longer designates certain literatures, and instead "describes the revolutionary conditions of any literature" (*Kafka* 18), and the incipient forms of collective responsiveness contributing to the creation of new audiences, the invisible, colonized minorities. Colman points out that this approach enhances the concept of political film constituted by ethical and aesthetic engagement, and is essential for examining cinemas at moments of social and political transformation (158). This makes political value crucial to the analysis of Palestinian cinema, providing a framework for an understanding of its articulation of subjective element, communal values, and establishment of its emergent audiences.

Minor Transnationalism in Palestinian Cinema

The theoretical grounding of this thesis is informed by the ideas of Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih and researchers in the Multicampus Research Group on National and

Transnational Studies at the University of California, as published in their edited volume *Minor Transnationalism*. Their study initiates a new approach to transnational studies, contemplating a "crosspollination of minor voices and rhizomatic relations in an era of globalization" (Eide 498), accentuating discontinuity with the concerns that typified colonial studies, and deconstructing the relationship between centers and the periphery of power. The authors propose an intervention between the two governing formulations of the transnational phenomenon: the utopian "transnationalism from above" celebrating the decline of national sovereignty, hybridization of cultures and the expansion of human rights and democracy, and the dystopian "transnationalism from below" drawing attention to the negative consequences of globalization (Mahler 68; Spivak "Diasporas Old and New" 251; de Certeau; J Scott 189-201). Lionnet and Shih assert that both concepts fail to recognize the creative interventions in the networks of minoritized cultures, both within and across national boundaries, the cultural expressions of subaltern communities and diasporic peoples, and "micropractices of transnationality in their multiple, paradoxical, or even irreverent relations with the economic transnationalism of contemporary empires" (6-7).

The superseded models of transnationalism often locate minorities in a vertical position of resistance or assimilation against the majority cultures. Drawing on the "politics of recognition" developed in the works of Charles Taylor and Nancy Fraser,[17] Lionnet and Shih introduce "cultural transversalism" (8) as a concept of transnationalism that differs from the "arenas of postnational identification" (Joseph 17, qtd. in Lionnet and Shih 8), and nomadic (Appadurai *Modernity at Large*) and flexible (Ong) models of citizenship. They locate it in minor cultural articulations, productive links with major, and minor-to-minor relationships in which the major is bypassed. Unlike the old binary concepts, unconstrained by state control, "minor transnationality points toward and makes visible the multiple relations between the national and the transnational" (8). Instead of fluctuating subjects who

do not invest in their physical space, they situate the minor transnational subjects in their respective geopolitical spaces, as they aspire to receive the rights of full citizenship (8).

Departing from Edouard Glissant's theories of relation, Lionnet and Shih contend that cultures are not monadic spaces enclosed by national boundaries, but entities that have always been hybrid and relational (Glissant; Lionnet and Shih 8-9). They see the politics of retrieval and the politics of exclusion as fundamental to understanding the question of authenticity, cautioning that, while the politics of retrieval enables subaltern groups to regain their cultural identities, it may also revive the pursuit of lost purity and mythical concepts of authenticity. While the differences within given minority groups are repressed with the intention of creating a cohesive cultural front, it is reiterated that minor cultures are products of hybridization and relational processes (9-10). Lionnet and Shih claim that revisiting the politics of authenticity from transnational and relational perspectives in the global context generates the creation of a new field of meanings, and of transcending the limitations of "minority discourse."[18] While they see postcolonial studies as an indispensable contributor to examinations of imperial authority, colonized cultures, decolonization processes, and sociocultural development, Lionnet and Shih are concerned with its inadequacies and lack of flexibility for the study of colonized cultures and minority groups in the context of transnational connections.[19] Instead, they advocate an examination of colonial power structures and propose to explore the complexity of minority cultures, and suggest the horizontal approach for reaching across national borders; they delve into productive comparisons, engage different linguistic formations, and promote dialogue on multiple fronts, thus crossing disciplinary boundaries (11).

Proposing minor transnationalism as the primary framework in my thesis, I acknowledge the lack of recognition of minority culture, typical of political, economic and cultural discourse in colonial and postcolonial societies. Bereft of the right to self-

determination and the right of return, Palestinians have continued to endure the discriminatory policies and denial of basic human rights in the state of Israel, the territories controlled by Palestinians and in exile. Transversal cultural dynamics allows for the inquiry of transnational ties and opens up possibilities for the discussion of Palestinian minor transnational cinema, articulating Palestinian aspirations to receive the rights of citizenship. It simultaneously affords more flexibility in probing the relationships between minor and major modes of cultural production, as well as provides a platform for investigating minor-to-minor connections and scope for scrutinizing interactions between the national and the transnational.

Lionnet and Shih's insistence on hybridity as the key constituent of culture and their cautioning against the quest for lost purity also bears relevance to this project. Palestinian films have, over the past half a century, been mainly supported from sources outside of commercial mainstream. Accentuating the politics of retrieval and politics of exclusion, concerns the Palestinians' claim to identification, but also divulges limiting approaches to cultural authenticity. Lionnet and Shih's departure from the confines of minority discourse will also enable me to explore the Palestinian filmmakers' framing of minoritization in transnational and relational contexts, to recognize shared colonial experiences and understand local and regional specificities, as well as the outcomes of transnational collaborations and processes of cultural partnership. Shifting the emphasis from vertical relationships of power to horizontal transnational connections will afford an opportunity to venture beyond the established dyad of Israeli-Palestinian relations and broaden the area of investigation to accommodate interim transnational connections, and the channeling of funding to Palestinian filmmakers. It will allow for investigation of their aesthetic approaches, marketing, distribution methods, and the examination of their necessary but sometimes uneasy compromises in attempts to engage both local and international audiences.

While the concepts introduced by Lionnet and Shih underpin the theoretical framework of this thesis, it is important to draw attention to the extensions and interventions in applying their theoretical framework in my approach to minor transnationalism in Palestinian cinema. There are three extensions to Lionnet and Shih's theoretical approach which relate to the original contribution of my thesis to the fields of Palestinian cinema and of minor transnational cinema. The first extension constitutes the positioning of Palestinian minor transnationalism in relation to Hjort's typology of cinematic transnationalisms, and draws on modernizing, cosmopolitan and opportunistic forms identified in the works of Palestinian directors. This extension allows for the discussion of Palestinian cinema in a multiplicity of contexts, including globalism, modernity, cosmopolitanism, postcolonial and gender concerns, and for engaging with the aesthetics, politics, production and distribution of Palestinian films, and their appeal to both global and Palestinian audiences. The second extension involves the political value in Palestinian cinema. Pertinent to Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of the minor form, political value is intrinsic to Palestinian cinema. This extension allows for the analysis of the political value in Palestinian cinema, unconstrained by nationalist polarities and the identification of political paradigm, which subverts the structures of power instituted by the Israeli occupation and patriarchal norms, and the establishment of new cinema audiences at the time of social change. The third extension of Lionnet and Shih's theoretical framework is revealed by interconnecting Hjort's classification with Patricia White's concept of women's cinema as world cinema. This extension allows for examining the converging modes of cinematic transnationalism and for their engagement with minor form, the gendered framing of thematic concerns, political elements and stylistic attributes, as well as production and reception contexts in which Palestinian women directors produce and disseminate their films.

This thesis also provides three broader interventions in applying Lionnet and Shih's theoretical framework to minor transnationalism in Palestinian cinema. These interventions are aligned with the *auterist* approach, outlined in this Introduction, and applied in the analyses of the work of Palestinian filmmakers in the context of specific modes of cinematic transnationalism. The first intervention involves the discussion of modernizing transnationalism in the films of Rashid Masharawi, and his destabilization of the ideological underpinnings of nature in representations of national identity. The discussion of Masharawi's films establishes intersectional connections between his ecological concerns and other modes of power relationships in the Israeli-Palestinian context, and allows for an analysis of geopolitical, historical and cultural frames of reference in his work. The second intervention in Lionnet and Shih's theorization concerns the notion of cosmopolitan transnationalism in the films of Elia Suleiman. Drawing on Hjort's typology of cinematic transnationalism and in dialogue with Appiah's appropriation of Mitchell Cohen's concept of "rooted cosmopolitanism" (Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*; Cohen, *The Ethics of Identity*), it allows me to examine Suleiman's films distinguished by his cosmopolitan identities, exilic subjectivity and transnational mobility. Positioning Suleiman's minor transnational subjects in specific geopolitical contexts places emphasis on the articulation of his cosmopolitan identities, informing their worldview, politics and the aesthetics of his films, and articulating his ethical engagement with global humanity in crisis. The third intervention in Lionnet and Shih's theoretical framework is demonstrated by endorsing and re-contextualizing their approach to opportunistic transnationalism, in order to discuss the transnational cultural partnerships of Hany Abu-Assad and his relationship with the commercial mainstream. This approach to the work of Hany Abu-Assad ensures that the investigation of opportunistic transnationalism is not confined to major-minor alliances or financial backing but is attuned to irregular cultural partnerships and results in unconventional approaches to aesthetics,

distribution and the marketing of Palestinian films which maintain a sense of political distinctiveness.

Acknowledging the value of the authorial approach revealed in the early studies of Palestinian cinema, I adopt this framework, concentrating on the works of Palestinian *auteurs* in the first four chapters, and combining it with a discussion of key thematic concerns in the works of present-day Palestinian women filmmakers in the closing chapter of this thesis. Adopting this approach, I firstly recognize Thomas Elsaesser's position that the global author is a figure of contradiction and construct, aligning authorship with other elements of globalization, typified by multiple variables, where conventional modes of linear cause-and-effect have opened up recursive network effects, and our ideas of autonomy are complicated by distributed agency, contingency and mutual interdependence ("The Global Author" 24). Using this approach, I recognize the limiting perspectives on "foreign film" which still situate it within the confines of arthouse cinema and, according to Jigna Desai, view it as ethnographic documents of the "other" (national) cultures, and ultimately representatives of national cinemas (39). Adhering to the complex historical trajectory of Palestinian cinema and challenging the distinction between Hollywood as a site of entertainment, and "foreign film" as the non-commercial site of instruction and edification (Ezra and Rowden 3), I use an *auteur* approach to discuss its aesthetics, production, and distribution methods, and its journey from counter-hegemonic arthouse cinema to its emergence within the popular mainstream.

Here I am also prompted to acknowledge the need to reflect on the presumptions that may underlie the *auteur* approach and the organization of this thesis. I recognize that the discussion of the works of four Palestinian male filmmakers in the first four chapters and the grouping of Palestinian women filmmakers in its final chapter may create a perception that the author proposes that lack of gender parity has been a persistent characteristic of

Palestinian film production throughout the whole period covered by this thesis. This is not my intention, as the final chapter of this thesis allows for the investigation of the crucial role of Palestinian women filmmakers in broadening the range of aesthetic attributes, production capabilities and transnational visibility of Palestinian cinema, as well as contributing to emancipatory currents within the global film industry in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Following the historical trajectory of the post-1980 Palestinian cinema, I decided to examine the works of Palestinian filmmakers who established feature film as the key marker of Palestinian cinema, reaching prominence in the international film festival circuit, and emerging within the global commercial mainstream. While it cannot be denied that the work of Palestinian women filmmakers is not represented in the first four chapters of this thesis, it must be pointed out these male filmmakers expose the futility of nationalist ideology and bring to prominence tensions within patriarchal society, as well as draw attention to the role of women in forging new forms of resistance and transformative processes within Palestinian society.

While cognizant that this framework may impose some limitations, I am also aware that it allows opportunities for identifying what Andrew Sarris, evoking Alexandre Astruc, described as an "élan of the soul" as the distinguishing quality of the *auteur* ("Notes on the *Auteur* Theory" 5; Astruc 32), in adittion to recognizing "a structural hardcore of basic and often recondite motifs" (Nowell-Smith 10) typifying their works. The *auteur* approach offers flexibility in exploring the key elements of cinematic transnationalism, the extensions and overlappings in the films of other Palestinian directors, and in the final chapter, an opportunity to concentrate specifically on the works of women filmmakers. Such an approach also allows for the investigation of the works of Palestinian filmmakers as the nexus of individual and collective voices, and an examination of their individual careers and shared

thematic concerns as part of culturally defined world views that pervade every element of the film's representation (C Saxton 29).

I would also like to address the notion of ethics and its implications for this investigation in the context of minor transnationalism. Exploring the ethics of transnational encounters in the context of the divisions between China and the West, Shu-Mei Shih observes that the negation of privileged positions of the West is frequently shaped by reactive nativist and culturalist reductionism, and has thwarted productive discussion of ethical relationality between different factions ("Toward an Ethic" 75). The frustration with the inability to present an adequate response to Western universalism is often re-directed to subaltern groups, external and internal others (Shih, "Toward an Ethic" 97; Lionnet and Shih 14). Due to imperatives of resistance and its lack of visibility within the international arena, Palestinian cinema is prompted to give preference to nationalist rhetoric, but the inability to launch an effective response to the hegemonic discourse may result in displacing it to stereotypical representations of internal minorities unable to meet the expectations of the nationalist elite, women, youth or Palestinians in diaspora, that have been 'corrupted' by Western values.

Rather than observing the films of Palestinian directors articulating the voices of the oppressed, mediating cultural difference or reducing their subtexts to critique, assimilation or mimeticism of Western discourse, the research into Palestinian films ought to be attuned to discursive disparities. It needs to examine the inequalities, disproportions and inconsistencies in the relationships between West and non-West, in the relationships between majority and minority, and within minority groups in Israel-Palestine and in the West that frame Palestinian cultural production, as well as the debate over *who* can speak for Palestine. Scrutinizing the power of hegemonic discourse and the reactive cultural policies in the context of transnational ties requires sensitivity to paradigms of cross-cultural understanding

and the ability to expose not only the hypocrisy and paradoxes of Western universalism, but also the contradictions and inadequacies of national and cultural exclusivism.

Finally, I am also prompted to acknowledge my alertness to ethical factors and to the role of affect in my position as an Australian researcher of Serbian descent. I grew up in the former Yugoslavia, where, unlike the Western countries, the official discourse favored the Palestinian narrative. However, my national background engendered strong bonds with the Jewish community. In Serbia, these links pertain to the memory of the Nazi atrocities, committed against Jews, Roma and Serbs during World War Two. The debates over ethnic conflicts in former Yugoslavia during the 1990s were often manipulated through the prism of war-generated allegiances. My perspective has been further enriched and complicated by arriving in Australia, where, in the 1990s, Israeli accounts dominated the media discourse while academic and cultural programs were giving prominence to more balanced views of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the past twenty years, considerable shifts have occurred in these positions, primarily in the increased Palestinian presence in the Australian media and the emergence of Palestinian films on the film festival and local distribution circuits. On the other hand, post-Milosevic Serbia has intensified political and cultural ties with Israel. While reflecting on the aesthetics of Palestinian films, I began to contemplate the political and media discourse on Serbia, and the Western stereotypes about the war in the Balkans, as well as the parallels in the role of trauma and the construction of national identity which connect the Serbian narratives with those of Jews and Palestinians.[20] I recognize that these factors have affected my understanding of transnational encounters by encouraging me to reflect on the need for a more nuanced approach, separating Western universalism from cultural reductionism. I am also aware that maintaining vigilance and seeking opportunities for channeling dialogue about creative and ethical ties between subjects positioned in and outside of the West, may

contribute to a potentially more thorough-going and impartial investigation of minor transnationalism in Palestinian cinema.

The Structure of the Thesis

The main body of this thesis is divided into five chapters, and examines Palestinian cinema across different historical periods, political contexts, as well as the social and cultural conditions affecting the processes of film production and distribution. Chapter 1 focuses on modernizing transnationalism in the films of Michel Khleifi and identifies the space of the house as the site where the director examines the relationships between the colonizer and the colonized, destabilizes the superseded representations of national identity and promotes the notion of human rights as central for an understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Khleifi opposes the Israeli occupation, subverts the calcified visions of the past, and scrutinizes the shifts in the social and economic strata of the Palestinian household, placing an emphasis on new forms of Palestinian subjectivity and the struggle of the characters in his films for human rights, equality and justice.

Chapter 2 examines Rashid Masharawi's modernizing transnationalism and his renegotiation of the paradigms of nature underpinning the representations of Palestinian identity. Intersecting the filmmaker's ecological concerns with other categories of social power in Israel-Palestine, this chapter investigates how this filmmaker subverts the homogenizing narratives of Palestinian oneness with the world of nature and expands the role of culture in narrating Palestinian experiences.

Chapter 3 draws on Hjort's periodization of cinematic transnationalism and Kwame Anthony Appiah's concept of "rooted cosmopolitanism," examining the instances of cosmopolitan transnationalism in the films of Elia Suleiman. This chapter investigates

Suleiman's cosmopolitan subjectivity as the key distinguishing element in his narratives of return, focusing on the question of Palestine as the fundamental ethical question of our time.

Chapter 4 investigates opportunistic transnationalism in the films of Hany Abu-Assad, highlighting his approaches to film aesthetics and positioning his work within the commercial cinema circuit. It investigates how, targeting mainly Western audiences, Abu-Assad deviates from arthouse aesthetics and repurposes the conventions of commercial genre film, while maintaining his political commitment and creating conditions for the emergence of Palestinian popular cinema.

Chapter 5 brings Hjort's typology of cinematic transnationalisms into dialogue with Patricia White's concept of women's cinema as world cinema, in examining the works of Palestinian women filmmakers, Najwa Najjar, Annemarie Jacir, Cherien Dabis, Azza El-Hassan, and Jumana Manna. This chapter examines the aesthetics and politics of women cineastes and the emergence of their films in global production and distribution circuits, focusing on key thematic concerns in their films: the transformative and emancipatory processes in Palestinian society, emerging Palestinian female subjectivities in diasporic contexts, retrieving and re-imagining the lost and pillaged Palestinian film archives, and the new Palestinian narratives of return.

The Conclusion summarizes the key points in the main body of the thesis, discussing how Palestinian cinema has expanded its visibility in the global production and distribution circuit thanks to the transnational connections, resourcefulness and adaptability of Palestinian filmmakers and in spite of the deteriorating geopolitical situation, and the ongoing attempts to obstruct Palestinian cultural production. The Conclusion closes by surveying the recent projects that have marked Palestinian cinema's presence in the global production, distribution and film festival arena, as well as mapping out the avenues of future academic scholarship in the field of Palestinian cinema.

Endnotes

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[1] The origin of the term is often ascribed to Syrian scholar Qustantin Zurayq's book *The Meaning of the Nakba*. Egyptian intellectuals and journalists used it in reference to the Palestinian tragedy and in reference to the historical Nakba in Spain. For Arabic terms and meanings, the etymology of the word and range of Arabic expressions used to describe the event and its consequences, see Esther Webman's "The Evolution of the Founding Myth: The Nakba and its Fluctuating Meaning".

[2] Lebanese filmmaker Christian Ghazi's *Mi'at Wajeh Li Yawm Wahed/The Hundred Faces of One Day* (1972) and Iraqi director's Kassem Hawal's adaptation of Ghassan Kanafani's novella, *Return to Haifa* (1981), made with PFLP funding, were the sole two feature films produced during this period (Shafik, *Cinema in Palestine* 520).

[3] Hany Jawhariyya was killed in Lebanon in 1976, at the start of the Civil War and Sulafa Jadalah was seriously injured, requiring medical attention (Shafik *Cinema in Palestine,* 519; Habashneh).

[4] Mustafa Abu-Ali's *Scenes from the Occupation in Gaza* (1973) and *Zionist Aggression* (1973), and Kassem Hawal's, *The Guns Will Never Keep Quiet* (1973) and *Why We Plant Roses, Why We Carry Weapons* (1974), focus on Israeli aggression and Palestinian resistance. Abu-Ali's *They Do Not Exist* (1974) uses the letters from the Nabatia refugee camp, footage of devastation and the quotes of Israeli politicians, denying the existence of Palestine and Palestinians, connecting Zionist ideology to Palestinian dispossession. Ghaleb Sha'ath's *The Key* (1976) and Adnan Mdanat's *A Palestinian Vision* (1977), foreground Palestinian memories of abandoned homes and land, Sha'ath's *Day of the Earth* (1977) engages with the lives of Palestinians in Israel, Ismail Shammut uses his art work in

Memories of Fire (1973) and Samir Nimer follows the revolution in the Arab world in *The New Yemen* (1974).

[5] "Should we address the Arab and Palestinian people with the same approaches that we studied in London and Cairo? Could we express the experience of the Revolution in the traditional manner that was detached from the experience of the Revolution? Should we emulate the traditions that are created and employed by colonial cinema? Or should we develop new methods and a special language that are related to us and to our experience and to the particularities of the Palestinian Revolution?" (Abu-Ghanimeh, "L'Expérience du Cinéma Palestinien" 35).

[6] At the Tashkent Film Festival Afro-Asian Film Conference in 1973, the Palestinian delegation presented a statement pointing out: "A film's success is measured by the same criteria used to measure the success of a military operation." (qtd. in Geertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 23). Mustafa Abu-Ali pays homage to Hany Jawhariyya in his film, *Palestine in the Eye,* citing his colleague's words: "Through still and animated pictures we can spread the revolutionary ideas and keep the revolution alive." (*Palestine in the Eye*).

[7] It was one of six out of sixteen Syrian films produced in the 1970s, focusing on the question of Palestine ("Organization History"; Mohanad Ghawanmeh).

[8] See Guy Hennebelle and Khemais Khayati's *Le Palestine et le cinema*, Hassan Abu-Ghanimeh's *Palestine and the Cinematic Eye*, and Adnan Mdanat's *History of the Speaking Arab Film*.

[9] For accounts of the conflict, see Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-1949* (1987), Issa Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine: Arab Factionalism and Social DisintegrationI* (1991), and Yoav Gelber, *Palestine, 1948: War, Escape and the Emergence of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (2006). The United Nations has estimated the number of displaced Palestinians at 711,000. See United Nations General Progress Report and the

Supplementary Report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, covering the period from 11 December 1949 to 23 October 1950 ("Progress Report"). The number of refugees remains disputed. Palestinians put the number at 900,000, Israeli estimates range between 550,000 and 650,000. For individual estimates, see: Nur Masalha's *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of 'Transfer' in Zionist Political Thought* (1992), Benny Morris's *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (2004), Yoav Gelber's *Palestine, 1948*, and Ilan Pappé's *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2006).

[10] See for example Salim Tamari's *Jerusalem 1948: The Arab Neighborhoods and Their Fate in the War* (1999), and *Montain Against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture* (2009), Beshara Doumani's *Rediscovering Palestine Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900* (1995), Dan Rabinowitz, As'ad Ghanem and Oren Yiftachel, *After the Rift: Emergency Report on Government Policy Towards the Arabs in Israel* (2009), Dan Rabinowitz and Khawla Abu-Baker, *Coffins on Our Shoulders: The Palestinian Citizens of Israel Today* (2005), Ted Swedenburg and Smadar Lavie's *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity,* Ted Swedenburg and Rebecca Stein's *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture* (2005), Oren Yiftachel's *Planning and Social Control: Policy and Resistance in a Divided Society* (1995), and *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (2006).

[11] "European Jews were driven into an identity crisis once their (spatial) Ghetto walls disintegrated and thus became conscious of their nationalist-political identity. And it is this process through which, several decades later, the Arabs in this country were forced into an identity crisis and became conscious of their Palestinian national identity once the Zionists have defined the boundaries of their future Jewish state. It is also the process through which Israelis and Palestinians became engaged in implicate relations" (Portugali, Introduction xiii).

[12] Andrew Higson writes that identifying a national cinema is a homogenizing, mythologizing process centered on the production of one set of meanings and attempts to exclude others, recognized as a strategy of cultural and economic resistance and as a way of asserting a national autonomy by countering the hegemonic influences exerted by Hollywood ("The Concept of National Cinema" 37). Stephen Crofts notes the marked distancing of academic work from the analyses of texts produced within specific nation-states, and proposes a new taxonomy of national cinemas, but also cautions that, like all classifications, this one also affords scope for hybrid relations based on sustaining different modes of production within the territory of a one nation-state (386-389).

[13] Marsha Kinder was one of the first scholars to suggest that the study of national cinemas should take into account the prism of the local/global interface and the growth of world markets in the 1980s and 1990s (7). Sheldon Lu recognizes the outcomes of the globalizing processes of production, distribution and consumption, giving prominence to the blurring of national boundaries in the areas tied by geopolitical, ethnic, cultural and linguistic relations, thereby proposing a larger-scale connection between the cinemas of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Lu).

[14] Okwui Enwezor uses "postcolonial transnationalism" to dissect the social and historical processes from late modernism through to postmodern condition, framing the production of Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC) throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Enwezor; Higbee and Lim 13). Jigna Desai's study of South Asian diasporic or "Brown Atlantic" films, *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film* highlights the flow of global capital, colonialism and migratory practices, interrogating race, gender and sexual politics (Desai).

[15] *Cinema 1* focuses on classical, colonial pre-World War Two film, while *Cinema 2* is concerned with arthouse films from Europe and Japan, documentary films, Third World

films, minority positions, and the establishing of new audiences. This cinematic form introduces the merging of present with past and future, rejects the fixity of time and accentuates its openness. The demarcation between the real and the imaginary, the objective and subjective, the physical and mental, the actual and virtual, which exists in the image, is no longer pertinent to modern cinema where this distinction is both reversible and indiscernible (*Cinema 2* 109). Over the past two decades, this field has continued to expand beyond the initial parameters outlined by the philosopher's writing. Steven Shaviro's *The Cinematic Body* (1993), D. N. Rodowick's *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (1997), Barbara M. Kennedy's *Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation* (2002), Ronald Bogue's *Deleuze on Cinema* (2003), Patricia Pisters' *The Matrix of Visual Culture: Working with Deleuze in Film Theory* (2003), David Martin-Jones' "*Orphans*, a work of minor cinema from post-devolutionary Scotland" (2004), Felicity Colman's *Deleuze and Cinema: The Film Concepts* (2011), Richard Rushton's *Cinema After DeleuzeI* (2012), Laura Marks' *Hanan Al-Cinema: The Affections for the Moving Image* (2015), and others place emphasis on Deleuzian categories in *Cinema 1*: *Movement-image* and *Cinema 2: Time-image* or, alternatively, on his works with Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, and *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Scholars who wish to use Deleuze's work to critically position their research on film, face the dilemma articulated by John Mullarkey, choosing between the Proustian experiencing of the presence of the past, the giving of precedence to commemorative Being and the Virtual in his body of work, and the much more socially specific discussion of bodies and minor audiences, prompting the answer to the question, "*which* Deleuze to follow" (*Refractions of Reality* 107).

[16] See Bill Marshall's *Quebec National Cinema* (2001), Alison Butler's *Women's Cinema: The Contested Screen* (2002), and Martin-Jones' essay, "*Orphan*s, a work of minor cinema from post-devolutionary Scotland" (2004).

[17] While Taylor posits that our identity is partially formed by recognition, or its absence or *misrecognition* of others, with potential to inflict harm (C Taylor, *Multiculturalism & "The Politics of Recognition": An Essay* 4), Fraser describes it as a form of cultural and symbolic injustice, ingrained in patterns of representation, interpretation and communication, and exposed through cultural domination, non-recognition and disrespect (Fraser et al., "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age").

[18] "Not all minorities are minoritized by the same mechanisms in different places; there is no universal minority position as such. By looking at the way minority issues have been formulated in other national and regional contexts, it is possible to show that all expressive discourses (such as music, cinema, autobiography, and other literary genres) are influenced by transnational and transcolonial processes" (*Minor Transnationalism* 10-11).

[19] According to Lionnet and Shih, postcolonial studies focus on the relationship between the dominant and the dominated, and do not provide an adequate framework for the study of colonized cultures, the control of multinational capital or for the study of productive relationship between subaltern groups that are results of their transcolonial and transnational connections but are mainly concerned with the examination of vertical relationships within the boundaries of nation states (11).

[20] See Meir Litvak's Introduction to his edited collection of critical essays, *Palestinian Collective Memory and National Identity* (1).

Chapter 1. The House is Crumbling:

Social Transformation in the Films of Michel Khleifi

The first chapter in this thesis focuses on modernizing transnationalism in the documentary and feature films of Michel Khleifi. According to Mette Hjort, modernizing transnationalism is characterized by a propensity for transnationalized film culture to enhance the processes of modernization and draw attention to the importance of film and cultural production in their particular societies ("On the Plurality" 24). Khleifi holds an important position amongst Palestinian filmmakers because his films mark the emergence of modernizing transnationalism in Palestinian cinema in the post-1980 period. His work is typified by dynamic transnational collaborations and highlights the political element in Palestinian cinema. Drawing on Hjort's periodization of cinematic transnationalisms, this chapter maps out the key characteristics pertinent to modernizing transnationalism, underlining Khleifi's emphasis on the processes of modernization and promoting the role of culture and human rights in Palestinian society. The chapter identifies the key aspects involved in the ethnocratic system of the state of Israel, established on settler-colonial ideology and ethnic citizenship and provides a series of contexts for understanding the conditions of Palestinian cultural production under Israeli occupation. It concentrates on the site of the house in Khleifi's films as a metaphor for the obstructed processes of modernization, and as the site of contested ideological allegiances and impending social change. Engaging with the minor form, Khleifi uses the location of the Palestinian house to articulate the filmmaker's anti-colonial concerns, as well as to subvert the old representations of national identity and promote the notion of individual human rights as the key factor to understanding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, this chapter elaborates on how, in the films of his late phase, Khleifi probes the consequences of Israeli occupation which

continue to shape Palestinian realities and have, in recent times, attained a certain global significance.

Born in Nazareth, Khleifi, like most Palestinian youth, grew up in the politically charged atmosphere of Israeli occupation (Rakha). He emigrated to Belgium, where he studied at the Belgian Institut National Supérieur des Arts du Spectacle (INSAS).[1] In 1978, Khlefi began working for Radio Télévision Belge Francophone (RTBF) on a series of television reports about Palestine.[2] Since the 1980s, when he turned to making feature narratives, working with limited production capacities and facing continuing attempts to block the distribution of his films, Khleifi has acquired the reputation of a critically acclaimed and significant filmmaker, considered as the founder of "The New Palestinian Cinema" (Gertz and Khleifi, "Palestinian 'Roadblock Movies'" 123). Khleifi rejects nationalist ideology and concepts of cultural purity and examines the tensions and contradictions within Palestinian society under occupation. Broadening the ties of Palestinian cinema beyond its alliances with nationalist organizations, he has demonstrated his adaptability in working with transnational funding bodies, television channels and private investors in both Europe and Arab countries and in sourcing financial support for his projects. Khleifi has fostered transnational collaborations working within major-minor partnerships but has also formed minor-minor alliances which suit his projects which are intentionally removed from the commercial mainstream. These partnerships afford opportunities for innovative aesthetic approaches and new models of production and distribution for Khleifi's films, in addition to expanding the visibility of Palestinian cinema in general and for paving the way for emerging generations of Palestinian filmmakers.

Khleifi's documentary and feature films revolve around the recurring themes of loss, dispossession, exile, occupation and resistance. These concepts are closely related to the filmmaker's exploration of obstructed processes of modernization in Palestinian society,

examining the processes of colonization, the tensions within traditional Palestinian family structures and fossilized visions of the past, while highlighting the necessity of social transformation.

This chapter focuses on the issue of modernizing transnationalism in Khleifi's documentary films, *Al Dhakira al Khasba*/*Fertile Memory* (1980) and *Ma'aloul Tah'tafel Bidamariha/ Maloul Celebrates its Destruction* (1985), the feature films marking the middle period of his career, *Urs al-jalil*/*Wedding in Galilee* (1987)*, Le cantique des pierres/Canticle of the Stones* (1989) and *Hikayatul jawahiri thalath*/*The Tale of the Three Lost Jewels* (1995), and films produced in his late phase, *Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel,* (co-directed with Eyal Sivan, 2004) and *Zindeeq* (2009).

Khleifi's Modernizing Transnationalism: A Commitment to the Role of Culture in Enhancing the Processes of Social Change

Michel Khleifi's films demonstrate the emergence of modernizing[3] elements in Palestinian cinema. In her taxonomy of cinematic transnationalisms, Hjort departs from Charles Taylor's concept of "multiple modernities," suggesting that non-Western cultures have modernized in different historical periods in their own way, and that these processes cannot be drawn from Western trajectories and models of modernity (Hjort, "On the Plurality" 24; C Taylor 1). Looking beyond the established parameters of modernity and into the domain of cultural production and distribution, Hjort postulates that the development of film culture aspiring to expand beyond national horizons can become a vehicle to forge the processes of modernization within a given society. Hjort refers to the geopolitical, socio-economic and cultural contexts of Asian and East Asian societies, characterized by dynamic growth, where in recent years attention has been focused on their cultural production (24). However, by applying the concept of modernizing transnationalism to Palestinian cinema in

the state of Israel, the territories under Palestinian control, and those in exile, actually reveals the complex and often paradoxical nature of Palestinian cultural production.

Engaging with the concept of modernizing transnationalism, we first need to acknowledge different trajectories of modernity, and historical and geopolitical conditions that shape the context of Israeli-Palestinian relations and how these affect the conditions of Palestinian cultural production. It is essential to acknowledge multiple or uneven modernities (Randeria 287) located within the global processes of cultural entanglement (Therborn) and to identify and scrutinize the relationships between colonial center and periphery (Bhambra 418) and again how these affect the rise of modernizing tendencies in Palestinian society. These aspects of modernization have been neglected or marginalized in the studies of colonized societies which have profoundly influenced the representation of Arab societies, and public and media discourse in the West. It is consequently important to identify and refute the generalizing assumptions of universalism, irreversibility and linearity that have characterized early accounts of the modernization of the Middle East (Jung 2; Lee 419) which have been adopted by the settler-colonial ideology and which, in different forms, have persisted in Israeli and Western political discourse.

At this point, it is pertinent to position Palestinian cultural production within the context of the political system established in and by the state of Israel, created on ethnocratic principles and based on the legacy of settler-colonialism. The state of Israel, where the majority of Palestinian filmmakers situate their films, is fundamentally an ethnocratic society. Oren Yiftachel identifies settler-colonialism,[4] ethnonationalism and an ethnic logic of capital as the three constitutive pillars of the state, prioritizing ethnicity as the crucial determinant in the formation of socio-spatial relations across an ethnocratic regime (*Ethnocracy* 12). Ghassan Hage contends that Zionist ideology which lies at the core of the Israeli settler-colonial project has created a division between the world of colonists and the world of the

colonized, within a single national space (22). According to Yiftachel, ethnocratic societies forge the model of ethnic, rather than political, citizenship and arrange the distribution of power and resources in accordance with the relationships between hegemonic and subordinated ethnic groups. The dominance of one ethno-national group in Israeli society is premised on exclusion, marginalization or assimilation of other, minority groups (*Ethnocracy* 37). The citizenship rights and labor status of Palestinians have been affected by the policies and practices distributing power and resources based on ethnic citizenship and favoring the dominant, Jewish ethnicity in Israel. Denying its Palestinian citizens basic human rights, and by economically subjugating and culturally suppressing their communities, Israeli authorities have continued to obstruct the processes of modernization through selective implementation of legal, economic, health and educational standards, and opportunities for cultural expression (Lustick; Kretzmer; Peled and Shafir; Davis; Jeenah).

Yiftachel postulates that the processes which shape ethnocratic societies are often enveloped in the discourses of modernity, thereby accentuating the importance of progress and democracy, but also creating different realities at ground level, marked by dispossession and exclusion of minority Palestinians (*Ethnocracy* 38). The essentialist views that dominate Israeli public and media discourse, according to Ilan Pappé, represent Israel as a modern society espousing democratic, progressive values, and Palestinians as a community in transition that can be modernized by its incorporation into Israeli society (*The Idea* 44-45). In this context, by observing the conditions and role of Palestinian cultural production within the state of Israel, and within contested territories under Palestinian control as well as those in exile attains a pivotal role in drawing attention to the effects of occupation upon the lives of subaltern communities and thereby suggesting ways for forging the processes of social change with the notion of human rights at its core.

One of the central features of modernizing transnationalism, according to Hjort's typology, is to evince contributions of specific film cultures within the broader domain of cultural production and to enhance their visibility as well as bring about their recognition within the international sphere ("On the Plurality" 24-25). Hjort draws on George Yudice's theorization of "culture as a resource" developed in his study, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (1). Yudice asserts that in a globalized world, culture is an increasingly important resource for nation states, subaltern groups, non-governmental organizations, invested in it, contesting it, and employing it to achieve social, political and economic objectives. According to Yudice, culture increases opportunities for participation in the era of declining political engagement, strengthens the fiber of civil society, provides foundations for social and economic development, and in the era of immaterialization, affords a crucial role for cultural production, greater than at any moment in the history of modernity (Hjort, "On the Plurality" 25; Yudice, *The Expediency* 1-2, 9-10). Yudice postulates that, in societies where needs are interpreted based on identity factors and cultural difference, culture becomes an important platform for extending a right to groups marginalized on these terms and for establishing their cultural citizenship as a basis for making certain claims ("Cultural Diversity" 113).

Since the creation of the state of Israel, Israeli authorities have recognized the importance of culture as a resource used to express Palestinian identity. Throughout the history of the conflict, they have continued to obstruct Palestinian cultural expression (Tawil-Souri, "The Necessary Politics" 142-143; Jacir, "For Cultural Purposes" 25-26), demolishing and looting cultural and media centers, archives and universities, previously suppressed during periods of peace, and subsequently declared military targets during operations in territories under Palestinian control (Laïdi-Hanieh 42; Bullimore; Merzer). Khleifi is part of a group of Palestinian filmmakers, including Elia Suleiman, Nizar Hassan, Ali Nassar, Hany

Abu-Assad, Muhammed Bakri, and others, who grew up in the state of Israel and whose films highlight the centrality of the occupation to the lives of Palestinians, reiterating the role of culture, narrating the historical experiences of Palestinians along with their present-day reality, and forging the processes of social change.[5]

Khleifi challenges the narrative formulas of the Palestinian Cinema of the Revolutionary Period and delves into the tensions suppressed in the previous era, acknowledging that, to perceive cinema as a mechanism for mobilizing national identity and asserting cultural uniqueness, is becoming untenable. Inspired by the Direct Cinema[6] movement, Khleifi's position on the role of culture in enhancing social change was formed following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, when he began to consider the need to decolonize cultural production from ideological limitations. Khleifi cautions against constrictions that nationalism wields on cultural production, and recognizes film as a tool of modernization, unshackled by religious myths, accentuating the position of an individual, repositioning the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis into the domain of human rights, endorsing the framework of a liberated society, and instigating a change in Arab-Israeli relations ("From Reality" 46). Shifting the debate about the ethnic conflict into the sphere of human rights, he rejects nationalist polarities and reaffirms the value of cultural expression, thereby articulating Palestinian claims for citizenship rights, justice, and equality.

In recent years, more academic scholarship has begun to focus on the relationship between human rights and cinema.[7] Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton in *Film Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters* (2009) assert that different forms of art, including cinema, are imbued with ethical attributes (1). Lilie Chouliaraki's *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (2006) investigates the ethical engagement of the spectator with the representations of the distant sufferer in popular media. The relationship between cinema and human rights has also been discussed in transnational contexts. In *The Media and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Promise*

(2014), Ekaterina Balabanova urges for incorporating different political perspectives in deconstructing the relationship between media, cinema, and human rights. Juan Antonio Gómez García's *Los derechos humanos en el cine espanol* (2017) examines the relationship between human rights and the history of Spanish and Latin-American cinema from transnational perspectives. Maria Cunha and Antonio Marcio da Silva's *Human Rights, Social Movements and Activism in Contemporary Latin American Cinema* (2018) and Mette Hjort and Eva Jørholt's *African Cinema and Human Rights* (2019) reflect upon how cinema represents the questions of human rights, and the need to expand on the question of human rights in the context of present-day society and how this aligns with transnational filmmaking practices. Dina Iordanova establishes that the role of the transnational film festivals is to expose human rights violations, raise awareness, and forge environments conducive to social change ("Film Festivals" 16).

In the context of this investigation, Khleifi's engagement with the notion of human rights concentrates on his examination of the relationships between the Israelis and Palestinians, and the consequences of colonial occupation, as well as on his rejection of the divisions generated by the ethnic conflict, probing the internal tensions and potential for social transformation in Palestinian society. The elements of modernizing transnationalism in Khleifi's films are positioned in correlations between Palestinian cultural expression, progressive politics and the quest for human rights.[8] Khleifi's accentuating of the universalism of human rights should, in this context, not be not erroneously perceived as generated by the West, but rather, as Stephen P. Marks and Susan Koshy suggest, as a project of multinational attributes and the site of unequal struggle that has shaped the West and non-West.[9] The director dissects the consequences of the occupation, reiterating that his endeavors "to undermine the common Arab discourses on the Palestinian question" (Shafik, *Arab Cinema* 181) are inseparable from his "critique of the weakness and paralysis of what

he considers to be an archaic Arab society" (Kennedy "Michel Khleifi"). Khleifi engages with the minor form, "to *reveal* Palestine and to *intervene* in its transformation" (Abu-Manneh, "Towards Liberation" 58). Speaking for Palestine and Palestinians, he evinces his postcolonial concerns, foregrounds his focus on individual human rights, urges his audiences to reject the perpetuity of ethnic violence and to embrace the new representations of Palestinian identity, unconstrained by the dogmatism of nationalist ideologies. The location where Khleifi articulates his aesthetics, where he advocates the notion of human rights and the necessity of social change, and thereby produces a distinct form of political resistance attuned to the sensibilities of incipient cinema audiences, is the space of the Palestinian household.

The Palestinian Household in Khleifi's Films

The scholarly literature on Palestinian cinema highlights the importance of land in Khleifi's work (Gertz and Khleifi *Palestinian Cinema*; Shafik "Cinema in Palestine"; Hedges "The Nakba"), but his films are mainly situated in locations within and around the house. The Arabic words used for the house, *beyt* or *dar*, are synonymous with family, and the space of the household, which is identified as the basic unit of social organization in the Arab world.[10] The space of the house has often featured in discussions about the condition of deterritorialization in Palestinian society.[11] The images of demolished properties, the keys of abandoned households, and the documents verifying the exiles' ownership of their homes, have emerged as common tropes across Palestinian visual arts, literature and cinema. Expanding its domination, the state of Israel has continued to seize contested territories and advance the processes of Judaization (Yiftachel and Yacobi, "Urban Ethnocracy" 689-690), as the displacement of Palestinian families and demolition of their houses have been used to purge the mixed areas from their Arab populations (Khoury "Israeli Arabs"; Adra et al.;

Nassar). These policies intensified following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War[12] and have continued throughout the First and Second Intifada, reaching alarming proportions in recent years.[13] Resistance to forced evictions of Arab residents and widespread demolition of Palestinian households has drawn the attention of transnational peace activists, participating in non-violent actions and attaining heroic status in local communities.[14] In Khleifi's films, the site of the Palestinian household emerges as a metaphor for blocked processes of modernization in Palestinian society, it is the site where the director scrutinizes internal social tensions and allegiances and heralds the imminence of impending social change, but also where he draws attention to the consequences of Israeli occupation and its broader, global implications.

Khleifi's early documentary films revolve around the lives of the Palestinians residing in the state of Israel, those who, to evoke the engraving on the tombstone of writer Emile Habibi, remained in their homes.[15] His documentary subjects are seen as individuals whose indigenous status and histories had been erased, their land expropriated, and who had been discriminated against, economically suppressed, and culturally isolated in their country of origin. Situated in decaying houses and small apartments, his films depict beleaguered survivors whose existence has been reduced to their private domains, seeking justice and equality before the Israeli law, and within the confines of Palestinian society. Identifying the space of the Palestinian household as a contested ideological site, Khleifi's films do not solely focus on the conflict between those implementing and resisting the policies of Israeli authorities but also represent the space where he highlights the notion of human rights in the context of Palestinian society. Seen as cultural artefacts, caught between modernity and tradition (Khatib 64), his films aspire "to expand rather than limit or unify narratives of national identity" (Ball 37) and afford new possibilities for probing gender, class, religious, and political identities, generational rifts, clan allegiances, as well as intercultural, exilic and diasporic experiences (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 75).

Dominated by the traumas of loss, exile and occupation, the films of Khleifi's middle phase expand on his idea that the transformation of Palestinian society will come from within, and they emphasize the position of women and children, calling for the creation of a society based on the principles of human rights, justice and equality. In these films, the filmmaker establishes the location of the household as the site of the destabilizing of old relationships of power, where the agents of patriarchal authority, which are seen as absent or ineffective, are unable to perform their established roles. Promoting progressive and secular values, the filmmaker identifies new articulations of struggle for citizenship rights through a resistance to colonial oppression and traditional norms.

While the microcosm of the Palestinian household provides a framework for the discussion of tensions between the occupier and the occupied and of the instabilities within the traditional Arab family, Khleifi's modernizing transnationalism and commitment to the role of culture, and emphasis on the question of human rights, extend beyond the confines of Israel-Palestine and into the global geopolitical sphere. The films of Khleifi's late phase, located amidst the ubiquitous poverty and violence of Palestinian enclaves, feature the sites of demolished and abandoned Palestinian houses, where he searches for the remains of a multi-ethnic country and delves beyond the established hierarchies, identifying the global processes embedded at the core of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. John Collins' concept of "a Palestine that is globalized and a globe that is becoming Palestinized" (x) re-positions the location of the Palestinian household as the location where the successive and overlapping stages of settler-colonialism frame the "compressed, accelerated and hierarchical nature of globalization" (24). Collins posits that, in time, the processes of settler-colonialism, give way "to more extensive, all-encompassing forms of exploitation, surveillance and social control," and invert the relationship between technology and human beings, transforming the devices used by the colonizer into the forces colonizing humanity (25). The sites of deserted and

demolished Palestinian households positioned in these geopolitical contexts, afford the opportunity to understand how, engaging with the transforming nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the consequences of the occupation, Khleifi's cinematic texts also relate to the declining state of humanity on a global scale.

The Early Documentary Films:
Fertile Memories and Fading Certainties

The beginnings of Khleifi's career coincide with the final decade of what Oren Yiftachel describes as the fourth phase of the Israeli colonization of Palestine, between 1967 and 1993, when, following the occupation of East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank, Israel continued to implement restrictive colonial policies towards the Palestinian population and to build settlements in Jerusalem and the occupied territories ("'Creeping Apartheid'" 13-14). Khleifi's early documentary films are typified by transnational collaborations, with an emphasis on the processes of modernization and political value, highlighting the notion of human rights in Palestinian society. *Fertile Memory* is a Palestinian-Belgian-Dutch-West German co-production, and the first feature-length film shot in the West Bank's Green Zone (Hedges "The Nakba") produced with a transnational crew.[16] It begins with the chronology of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, leading to the creation of the state of Israel, confirming that Khleifi sees Palestinian cinema production as an opportunity to raise awareness about the consequences of Israeli occupation in global context. The film revolves around two Palestinian women of different ages, education and socio–economic backgrounds, who live at different locations and do not know one another. Roumia Farah, a widow from Yefya near Nazareth in the state of Israel, works in a textile factory and continues her court case against the state of Israel, refusing compensation for her land confiscated in 1948. Sahar Khalifeh, a novelist and lecturer at Bir Zeit University, lives in the

West Bank city of Nablus, under Israeli occupation. Following her divorce and the success of her first novel, Sahar invokes a sense of unease in the environment where her decisions to take control of her life are viewed with prejudice.

Balancing postcolonial and gender perspectives, *Fertile Memory* divulges the positions of the two women and their struggle for human rights in a society marred by the forces of occupation and patriarchal norms. These concerns infuse private [*al-Khās*] and public [*al-Ām*] spaces and divulge "the fragmented consciousness common to the transnational minority experience of 'border subjects' for whom the private and the public, the personal and the historical, the real and the fictional, are closely intertwined" (Lionnet and Shih 16). In the larger part of the film, the two women are situated in confined private domains and closely composed shots, using shallow depth-of-field, frames-within-frames, and limited sources of natural light, and implying intimacy with the surroundings and the production crew that could not be achieved outside of their homes. Within these spaces Khleifi gives voice to his subjects who, in a manner similar to the imprisoned Palestinian worker Zuhdi, from Khalifeh's first novel, *Wild Thorns* (1976), might seem to be pleading: "We speak, but they don't hear us. Who can we speak to? For God's sake, who can we speak to?" (85). Like Zuhdi, Roumia and Sahar desperately need to be heard, but their concerns are confined to secluded spaces, and voiced to a small circle of listeners. As Gertz and Khleifi establish, in the society divested of national symbols and land, private and public, individual and communal, current and historical, familial and national, such concerns intersect in domestic spaces, incorporating other identities (*Palestinian Cinema* 78). Situating Roumia in domestic locations, Khleifi hints at the disappearance of public space from the lives of Palestinians living in Israel, who perceive the public domain as controlled by the state, with the intention to marginalize their position (Zraik). Seen walking alone to and from home through the empty streets of Yefya, consumed by her thoughts, Roumia only becomes vocal

within the confines of her house, resisting her son's urges to accept Israeli compensation and guiding the film crew through the room covered with photographs of her relatives in exile.

Recording the testimonies of two Palestinian women, Khleifi hints at what Barbara Harlow, discussing Khalifeh's literary work in "Partitions and Precedents: Sahar Khalifeh and Palestinian Political Geography," identifies as the "gendered arenas of struggle." Harlow locates these arenas of conflict within a political economy reliant on Israel, taking into account the devastated, agrarian society, an exile-based nationalism and the influence of traditional norms, destabilizing the hierarchies of power instituted by the occupation, and intensified by class, religious, and ethnic divisions among Palestinians (Harlow). Seated in her lounge, Sahar reflects on the position of women in patriarchal society as the camera pans across the streets of Nablus capturing figures of Palestinian women in multiple frames. Asked whether she considers herself "a militant Palestinian woman under occupation," she responds: "I lead an ordinary life. Far from any kind of militancy." From her balcony overlooking the city, she ponders on the difficulties of living as a single woman, and the role of religious norms in upholding the established gender roles in Palestinian society: "Women, who constitute half of our society, are clad from top to toe. How can they possibly struggle and take part in social life?"

Khleifi's emphasis on human rights and equality emerges prominently in the interviews with both women who acknowledge economic independence as a factor that decisively impacted on their journeys. Roumia, in frugal terms, describes her marriage, the events of 1948, and her husband's illness and death, but is more engaged reminiscing about her years at the monastery and the textile factory. Sahar asserts that economic independence plays an important role in female emancipation, recalling that working helped her proceed with divorce, irrespective of parental approval. She contends that Palestinians resent social inequality as much as the occupation, implying that, for Palestinian women, working in Israel

was an act of resistance before becoming a financial imperative.[17] Undermining the vision of marriage as a pillar of communal stability, Sahar associates it with repression and economic dependence. In the ensuing scene, we hear the song about unrequited love over the images of women who walk the streets of Nablus or play with children in public spaces, devoid of male company and disengaged from imposed communal roles.

While the circumstances of the two subjects diverge, connections are drawn between their attitudes to human rights, as Roumia's struggle to recover her land and Sahar's striving for equality come to prominence in the film's closing scenes. In his travel prose, Jean Genet asserts: "In Palestine, even more than anywhere else, the women struck me as having a quality the men lacked" (6). In one of the most memorable scenes in Palestinian cinema, Roumia visits her land for the first time in thirty-two years and reflects upon her endeavors to reverse the effects of the occupation. Khleifi's affirmation of her *sumud* (T Kennedy "Michel Khleifi"), and her quest for justice is manifest in the images of Roumia recalling the years of suffering but also rejecting any concessions to the Israeli authorities: "The land remains in its place. Do what you want with them, but I won't sell."

Embracing new perspectives on the previously suppressed female subjectivity in Palestinian cinema, the ending of the film heralds the rejection of traditional values in Khleifi's ensuing works (T Kennedy "Michel Khleifi") and provides a contextual link between the two subjects. Accentuating the prominence of the Palestinian household as the location of social transformation in Khalifeh prose, the filmmaker suggests that the transformation will be realized from within, through new forces, women and children, who are central to the impending struggles for human rights.[18] Roumia's struggle for justice and Sahar's acknowledgement that her endeavors connect her to the wider community of women reveal the need to reformulate their sense of identity and their principles of struggle for liberation. The shots of Roumia and her daughter-in-law soaking and washing wool are

intercut with the slow-motion footage of Palestinian youth engaging in street battles with Israeli soldiers and are then followed by visuals of the land and soundscapes of the demonstrations. Seated in her lounge, Sahar reads excerpts from her prose, describing life "as a miracle of impotence," expressing misgivings about the position of women in a community immersed in the narratives of the past: "The past is no longer a hiding place. Nor is the present. There is escape and there is the struggle. She is stuck between the two." Using slow motion, accompanied by the repetitive sound of blows, Khleifi ends the film with an excerpt from Mahmoud Darwish's poem over a final freeze frame of Roumia: "I congratulate the torturer who has vanquished the blind. Bravo to the conqueror of a tiny village. Bravo to the butcher of childhood."

Marking the beginning of the new era in Palestinian cinema, *Fertile Memory* was screened at The Cannes Film Festival's International Critics' Week and awarded the debutante prize at The Carthage Film Festival. The film's success highlighted Khleifi's ability to engage Western viewers by accentuating the notion of human rights within Palestinian society. It echoed Mariagiulia Grassilli's assertion about film festivals as emerging platforms for advocating human rights issues and her claim that exposure in the festival circuit allows for the promotion of culture in ways that were not available via mainstream means (Grassilli 31). The response to the film in the Arab world was mixed, ranging from popular acclaim, to disapproval of Khleifi's critique of Palestinian society and his decision to continue to hold on to an Israeli passport.[19] Some critics misread *Fertile Memory* as consistent with the nationalist narratives of woman as a symbol of motherhood (Farid 11) while others acknowledged Roumia's and Sahar's quests for justice and equality under Israeli occupation, and within the confines of patriarchal society (Shafik, "Cinema in Palestine" 524). Rejecting colonial occupation, subverting repressive social norms, destabilizing the old tropes of national identity and urging for renegotiation of the premises

of the struggle for liberation, based on principles of human rights, remain *Fertile Memory's* lasting legacies.

Maloul Celebrates its Destruction highlights the location of the household in Khleifi's work as the space where the traumatic legacy of the Nakba intersects with the unfulfilled present and uncertain future of Palestinians living in the state of Israel. Khleifi uses the location of the house to examine the relationships between the colonizer and the colonized, to subvert the old representations of national identity and to highlight the notion of human rights within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Using footage filmed during the production of *Fertile Memory*, Khleifi produced a thirty-minute documentary film about the former inhabitants of Maloul, a village destroyed by the Israeli Army in July 1948. Palestinians expelled from Maloul took refuge in Nazareth and Yafa an-Naseriyye. They were declared 'absentees' and, in spite of remaining within the boundaries of the state of Israel, prohibited from returning to their expropriated houses and land.[20] Khleifi documents their visit to Maloul on Israeli Independence Day, the only day of the year when Palestinians do not need a military pass to enter the area thereby positioning their claim for demolished houses and land within the context of their struggle for justice and human rights.

One of the most persistent goals of Palestinian cinema has been to preserve the memory of pre-1948 Palestine, to reconstruct the landscapes of the occupied land, to record the testimonies of its exiled citizens, and to support the claim for their rights of return. According to Gilles Deleuze, for the modern cinema of time-image, there is no present which is not haunted by a past and future (*Cinema 2* 38). As Richard Rushton suggests, these films have difficulties resolving their key concerns, namely dealing with the problem of evil (60) and delving into the past in order to render it questionable (74). Khleifi problematizes the old representations of national identity and its fossilized visions of the past and locates the memory-scapes of Maloul within the space of a ruined and abandoned Palestinian household.

He repositions the traumas within the collective imaginary in the present, in the form of "a living reality for the internal exilic communities dispossessed of their villages and houses" (Telmissany 78). *Maloul* also emerges as a work of performative memory, or of what Ines Hedges, drawing on the ideas of Paul Recoeur, describes as "a memory employed in order to establish a claim" (Hedgez "The Nakba"). Khleifi underlines the role of cinema in producing a powerful narrative about traumatic accounts of the past and places the notion of human rights and justice at the center of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Connecting the traumatic memories of the past with the disintegration of the Palestinian self, Khleifi divulges the tensions in the representations of national identity and acknowledges the attempts of his minor subjects to envisage a future built on the principles of justice and equality. Khleifi's re-creation of time in Palestinian actuality (Abu-Manneh 58) is brimming with political subtext. *Maloul* opens with images of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, intercut with footage of Palestinian refugees fleeing their villages in the 1948 war, thereby establishing and problematizing continuities in Palestinian experiences of the present and the past. The obliterated area in and around Maloul has been reconstructed and renamed, but on the day when Israel celebrates its Independence Day, Palestinians arrive at Balfour Forest to evoke their memories and claim their ownership of confiscated land. As the refugees wander through the forest, the camera captures the exteriors devoid of human presence and creates a feeling of entering a world abandoned a long time ago.[21] In these eerie natural surroundings, the visitor searches for traces of human suffering, concealed by the humus of the past.

The search by Khleifi's subjects for their demolished homes and their disintegrated country reveals that the connections between their present and the traumatic memories of the Nakba are in a constant process of reconstruction. According to Deleuze, the indiscernibility between the present and the past in modern cinema and the expansion of memory from the

initial perception leads to exposing problematic layers and facets of the past (*Cinema 2* 89; Rushton 80, 91). Concerned with the hegemonic readings of history, Khleifi exposes the contradictions within the Israeli narratives of 1948 and the inconsistencies within the Palestinian memories of Maloul and pleads for renegotiation of the calcified tropes of national identity.

According to Collins, the heightened global awareness of the importance of human rights during the latter part of the twentieth century brought with it the condemnation of settler-colonialism, and the endeavors to diffuse the excesses of colonial history in Israel-Palestine become more evident (34-35). This is manifest in Israeli attempts to incorporate Palestinians into their educational system, while continuing to implement colonial policies. In a history class, we see a Palestinian teacher exiled from Maloul who provides the official explanation for the creation of the state of Israel. On the other hand, commemorating life in pre-1948 Maloul, the former Palestinian villagers engage an artist who uses their reminiscences to paint a mural. They remember the impulse to leave their households and save their children at the time of the invasion, but their efforts to identify the locations in the village reveal inaccuracies in the painting. Khleifi suggests that their traumas have generated what Susan Brison, reflecting on the undoing and remaking of self in the aftermath of violence, describes as a radical disruption of memory, the disconnection of past from present, and an inability to envision a future (*Aftermath* 68). The details of the mural are intercut with archival images of Palestinian women working in the fields and two girls in front of their house, both played in reverse as if trying to turn back time. Khleifi follows children who play hide-and-seek, wandering around the mosque and the church, converted into a stable, but they do not enter the abandoned houses, suggesting it is impossible to re-live or re-create the past.

While Palestinian narratives are centered around the memories of loss and exile, Khleifi also articulates a sense of hope, projecting a possible future for Israelis and Palestinians in a society based on civil equality and human rights. The sixty-five-year-old Abu-Zaid locates his house beside the ruins of his neighbor's home. Khleifi cuts to the classroom, where the teacher explains the main premise of Zionism – to create a home for Jewish people – failing in doing so to account for Palestine's displaced Arab population, and returns to Abu-Zaid who approaches the camera crew, asserting: "The land belongs to Maloul." Fearing imprisonment, he asks for help in the case of police intervention, disclosing that the traumatic events of the past have shattered his assumptions about his safety and self-worth, disconnecting him from the rest of humanity (Brison 40-41). Abu-Zaid accuses Israel and other colonial powers of denying him a sense of dignity, and, regaining his composure, exclaims: "The solution is justice. Let every man respect his neighbor's rights. Acknowledge mine, and I'll acknowledge yours." Abu-Manneh observes that this plea by an individual deprived of his society, property and livelihood, signals an alternative to polarities instituted by colonial rule (63). Expressing his belief in empathy as a way to reach out to other human beings, Abu-Zaid provides a model of co-existence for Israelis and Palestinians in a society based on justice and equality.

Khleifi uses the medium of documentary cinema to alert his audiences as to how cultural expression can be an important platform for subaltern groups in their efforts to document, legitimize, and promote their claims for human rights (Hjort and Jørholt). At the same time, he uses the images of Palestinian children playing next to the ruined Maloul church and a visitor straddling through the forest in the closing sequence of the film to highlight Darwish's reflection on the unrelenting passage of time, making the healing process uncertain and improbable: "If I return, I will not find my childhood. There is no return, because history goes on. Return is just a visit to a place of memory, or to the memory of the

place" (Darwish, qtd. in Beinin and Stein 77). Examining the consequences of the Israeli occupation in his ensuing films, Khleifi highlights the tensions within the Palestinian family and lays emphasis on the location of household as the site of struggle for liberation and human rights.

The Middle Period: Unanchored Domestic Spaces and the Rise of Female Prominence

The middle period in Khleifi's career is characterized by intensified transnational cultural partnerships, forging modernizing tendencies in Palestinian society and accentuating the political element in his films which focus on the decline of the traditional Arab family. In this period, Khleifi turns to feature film and transnational sources of funding from European countries and from within the Arab world. *Wedding in Galilee* was produced seven years after the filmmaker's debut and, heralding a new phase in Khleifi's work, features the compromised agents of patriarchal authority and strong independent female characters, itself suggesting that the liberation of land is closely related to the liberation of women (Khatib 91-92). A Belgian-French co-production[22] shot over nine weeks on locations in Jerusalem, Galilee and the West Bank, *Wedding in Galilee* was made for approximately one-fifth of the budget of a standard European feature of a similar scope (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 56), but the film was still more expensive than most Arab films at the time (Al-Qattan 114). It opened in five cinemas in France (Léclere 19, qtd. in Naficy *Accented Cinema* 294), and was distributed in Tunisia (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 190).

Wedding in Galilee exemplifies the emerging 1980s European model of financing *auteur* films in Western Europe, where the pre-acquisition of TV rights and government quotas of film co-productions for national television networks replaced independent distribution and exhibition (Maule 39). Television networks began to acquire broadcasting

rights during the pre-production phase of roughly two thirds of films produced annually within a country, stabilizing the Canal+ participation in French production over the next fifteen years at approximately 40% (Maule 39, qtd. in Aprá and Turigliatto 75). During this period, marked by a general stagnation in European cinema, supporting a culturally oriented sector of the film industry and containing the Hollywood monopoly through state interventions has remained one of its most salient features (Maule 46). This model has been situated by Naficy in the context of other *beur,* émigré and diasporic films supported by CNC and SOFICA (*Accented Cinema* 58-59). It evokes Peter Bloom's observations about transnational film production, in that they are not solely situated in the realm of social exclusion, but are reliant on state funding and are positioned "firmly within the cracks of French institutional structures" (136).

The production history of *Wedding in Galilee* reveals the somewhat changed position of Palestinian cinema in European geopolitical and cultural contexts but also confirms that securing funding for Palestinian projects which challenge the Zionist conceptions of the conflict remains a challenging task for filmmakers. The French government's support for Khleifi's film about Palestinians living in Israel, with dialogue in Arabic and Hebrew, is an attempt to present a view of the conflict that departs from the narratives that dominated public and media discourse.[23] Unlike previously when the French media was mainly supporting the Zionist narrative, the conflict in the Middle East had become internalized during the 1980s[24] which improved Khleifi's prospects for sourcing support for his project. On the other hand, in spite of qualifying for support as an Israeli citizen, Khleifi did not apply for government funding and refused to screen the film at the Jerusalem Cinématheque (Naficy, *Accented Cinema* 275). Initially, the producers required the participation of well-known actors in order to commit to the film (Hoberman 84), but the final cast was as composite and varied as the project's financial construction (Rosen 52). While the lack of

Palestinian support caused uncertainty, the backing of Arab philanthropists ensured the production of the film, leading to Khleifi's collaboration with British-based producer, Omar al-Qatan (al-Qatan 112-113).[25]

Wedding in Galilee is set in a Palestinian village under Israeli occupation. When the village Mukhtar (Ali el Akili) asks the authorities for the permission to marry his son, the Israeli Governor (Makram Khoury) agrees under the condition that he attends the wedding with his entourage. Khleifi examines the consequences of this pact between the "two kings", one representing a modern, militarized society, and the other, a patriarchal order (M Khleifi, "From Reality" 50). Located in and around Mukhtar's house over the course of one day, the ceremony presents an opportunity to assert both familial and national homogeneity (Layoun), but also unveils the simmering hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians, exposing generational, gender and political tensions in the Palestinian household.

The film is set in the mid-1980s, but the images of a Palestinian village under curfew evoke the period of Israeli military rule (1948-1966), reinforcing composite historical experiences established in Khleifi's previous films. Since Israeli law bans the villagers from their fields and other Palestinian communities, Khleifi follows the members of the wedding party who circulate around the front yard, guest rooms, female quarters, the groom's bedroom, the olive grove and the adjacent fields. In this space, Khleifi divulges how the forces of modernization, shaped by Israeli occupation, serve to destabilize relationships in the Palestinian household. A result of sustained mechanisms of domination, these processes ensure the continuing subjugation of Palestinian community and make it more integrated into the Israeli state and dependent upon its economy. According to Salim Tamari, the gravitation of Arab masses towards urban centers, social differentiation, occupational diversification and the rise of a new intelligentsia educated at Israeli universities identifying itself with Palestinian struggle, emerge as the principal tendencies concurrent with the ongoing

subjugation of Palestinians to Israeli society (*Mountain* 12-13). Palestinian resistance in the periods before and during the First Intifada prompted the decline of patriarchal authority, as the young people engaged in protests spent longer hours outside their households. This was evident in the shifting of power from the private realm to the political sphere, but also produced a counter-reaction in the rise of repressive social forces (*Mountain* 18-20).

Mukhtar's efforts to balance his traditional role with appeasing the Israelis are seen as weak and ineffective. Framed in isolation, he feels comfortable only within the confines of his room or the stable. In the scene that is cross-cut with his return home, Mukhtar anticipates a foreseeable sequence of events, imagining the empty room with arranged chairs and coffee cups, prior to the family gathering. According to Kennedy, Khleifi's placement of the camera and his use of body language in the governor's office are contrasted by the meeting in the Palestinian house, where various speakers are given equal emphasis ("Michel Khleifi"). This notion becomes more apparent when the groom's uncle refuses to attend the wedding and a group of teenagers pledge to kill the governor.

While the autonomy of the Palestinian household was in the films of the Palestinian Cinema of the Revolutionary Period only disrupted by the intrusions of the Israeli army, Khleifi dramatizes the decline of patriarchal authority in the spaces in and around the house as the prime source of instability within the Palestinian family. Filmed from the inside of the house and highlighting the "images of emasculation and loss of virility" (Shohat, *Israeli Cinema* 275), the arrival of the governor's cavalcade is seen as a symbolical penetration into the private realm. Khleifi draws a distinction between the old generation of Palestinians and the young militants but also reveals their shared sense of helplessness. The old Palestinian reminisces about the brutality of the Ottoman and British officers, echoing present-day frailties in the face of Israeli oppression, while the guerilla leader, Ziad (Wael Barghouti) cuts his finger on a knife, drawing first blood before the beginning of the ceremony. Young rebels

pledge there is "no dignity under the army's heel," but remain passive witnessing a man forcing himself on a woman in one of the storerooms of the house. When Mukhtar's thoroughbred, the symbol of his pride, later strays into the minefield, he is forced to seek the help of the Israelis to save the animal.

Khleifi's domestic spaces are infused with a sense of heterogeneity (M Khleifi, qtd. in Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 89), placing emphasis on "actively subversive female figure" (Abu-Remaileh, "The Kanafani Effect" 196), who rejects the fantasies of honor and defies the limitations imposed by the traditional society. Palestinian women are, unlike their male counterparts, seen in active roles, diffusing violent situations, and maintaining a sense of composure and vitality. The Old Woman, branded senile by Mukhtar, recalls the charismatic horseman who dwarfed the present-day men. Mukhtar's daughter Sumaya (Sonia Amar) mingles with boys, causing him concern, and warns her brother Adel (Nezih Akleh), disturbed by the presence of the Israelis, to choose between his bride and his patriotism.

Khleifi insists that the women's role is pivotal in articulating new approaches to resistance, struggle for human rights and equality. The filmmaker uses nudity, which is unusual in Arab film[26] in the scenes of washing the bride (Anna Condo), and highlights female presence through colors, song, and dance, but employs frames-within-frames and negative space to remind the audience of their social standing. Standing naked in front of the mirror, Sumaya tries on Mukhtar's *kufiyya*, but sees no lasting appeal in it. When Samia proclaims friendship for her, Sumaya replies: "If you're my friend, you'd help me out of here." But while Khleifi's female characters assert their desire to leave these confined settings in their search for stable and positive environments, their quest for *another* Palestine, conveyed through the prism of gender and generational identities, is yet to be articulated.

Wedding in Galilee accentuates the women's role in deconstructing Orientalist stereotypes and exposes the formulaic perceptions of Palestinian women in settler-colonial

society. The Governor praises "eastern cuisine" in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon and instructs his female staff member: "You should pray to the God of Israel that he let you taste the food in Aleppo one day." The Israeli woman collapses in heat and is taken to the female quarters of the house. A soldier follows her, but Sumaya denies him entry: "We're going to eat her alive after the ritual […] If you want to dance with us, take off your uniform." Palestinian women reverse the hierarchies within the strictly defined spaces of settler-colonialism, as, according to Shafik, "The aggressive male power that she has symbolized hitherto is absorbed by the 'female' interior of the Arab house" (*Cinema in Palestine* 525). The Israeli woman falls asleep, surrounded by whispers and scents, and when she awakes, we see her dancing in Arabic attire, with Palestinian women, in a form of trance.

The feminine bonds created outside male control evolve into a hope of averting hostility, but also assume some elements of patriarchal authority. The guests await the announcement that the marriage was consummated but taking place within the bridal room of the house, this is marked by Oedipal overtones, with Adel failing to perform his conjugal duty and threatening to kill his father. Reversing established gender roles, Samia decides to deflower herself, salvaging the family's honor, and validating Khleifi's conviction in the power of resistance that he identifies with Palestinian women (Hedges "The Nakba"). Despairing, Mukhtar asks his sleeping son: "Are your dreams like mine?" The answer arrives in reminiscences of the old Palestinian woman who, speaking about her husbands to her granddaughter, uses battlefield rhetoric to convey her sense of female resilience: "The first ran off. The second died before our wedding. I was an impenetrable fortress." However, Khleifi reminds his audiences that the frictions within Palestinian society cannot be observed in isolation from the problem of occupation. In the closing scene, humiliated Israeli soldiers depart through a cordon of angry Palestinians who throw rubbish at them, as the space of the Palestinian house, rife with internal tensions, emerges as the site of a new form of resistance

and struggle for human rights, justice and equality. This scene also signifies the director's acknowledgement of fresh energies and emerging sensibilities evident in Palestinian cinema audiences and signals their engagement in the process of any future social transformation.

The enthusiastic critical reception of *Wedding in Galilee*,[27] its admittedly limited distribution in the USA, and circulation through the home video market, created a positive climate for Palestinian filmmakers and more opportunities in the global film and media market. However, the outbreak of the First Intifada changed the conditions of Palestinian film production. The insurrection, described by Edward W. Said as "one of the great anti-colonial uprisings of our times" (*Culture and Imperialism* 311) exposed the limits of Israel's policies and, by unmasking the consequences of its disengagement from the peace process, alerted the world to the new forms of Palestinian resistance.[28] The uprising was eventually reduced to street battles between Palestinians and the Israeli army, but its corollaries became visible in social and economic spheres and prompted a pronounced interest in Palestinian culture. While local filmmakers created valuable transnational contacts[29] their projects were habitually 'balanced' with the funding and production of Israeli films and throughout the last decade of the century proved consistently uneven and flawed (Al-Qattan 117).

Canticle of the Stones fuses the poetic, dialogue-driven *kammerspiel* in classical Arabic, and the documentary approach to the dramatic events at the time of the First Intifada. This transnational co-production was realized through a collaboration between Sourat Films and European funding bodies and television channels, La Centre de l'Audiovisuel à Bruxelles (CBA), The Radio Télévision Belge Francophone (RTBF), Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF) and British Channel Four Films. Immersed in reliving the history of Palestine through individual recollections, the film follows a reunion between two former lovers after twenty years of separation. Exploring the themes of occupation, dispossession and exile, *Canticle of*

the Stones draws attention to the decline of patriarchal authority, and the role of women and youth in the struggle for human rights at the time of popular uprising.

Released from prison, The Man (Makram Khoury) finds employment in the organization assisting Palestinian peasants, but the outbreak of the First Intifada disrupts his work. After years of living abroad, The Woman (Bouschra Karaman) returns from the United States of America to research the myth of sacrifice in Palestinian culture at the time of the popular uprising. In the manner of "accented cinema," Khleifi combines intimate recollections with the narratives of exile and diaspora (Naficy 31, qtd. in Kennedy "Michel Khleifi"), drawing attention to the liminality and fragility of his characters. His minor transnational subjects are situated outside of their domestic locations, in the streets of Jerusalem, hotel rooms, rooftops and the refugee camps in the Gaza Strip, as they reflect on the "the essence of a shattered, displaced, and scattered nation" (Abu-Manneh 66), the passage of time and the history of Palestine. Khleifi problematizes their visions of the past and highlights their realization that the concept of homogenous national history is marred by inconsistencies. The Man presents the dissolution of Palestine in cinematic fragments and recalls the images of his abandoned home: "They kicked them out by force. They had to abandon furniture, clothes and memories. Behind them the smells and the dust floated on the rays of light rushing in from outside." Disconnected from her family and yearning to make up for lost time, The Woman fears separation from the land and its people, and searches for physical and emotional links with Palestine in her academic research.

Canticle of the Stones reiterates Khleifi's conviction in the potential of women and youth to act as the catalysts of social change. Unlike his previous films, private and public domains in this film permeate one another, the barriers created by the authorities have dissolved, the space of the house becomes restrictive, and streets emerge as the frontline in the struggle for human rights. The Woman reflects: "There is no more outside, there will be

no more inside." The camera lingers on shots of deserted streets, closed windows and locked roller doors on houses and places of business, detecting human figures behind doorframes and windows, and suggesting that the two domains infuse one another. The tightly composed shots of the two lovers are contrasted by the visuals acquired at locations in Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, using hand-held framing to convey the sense of immediacy. The filmmaker gives prominence to the images of children in street-battles between Palestinian resistance and Israeli soldiers, filming in hospitals, narrow alleyways and behind police cordons, and approaching children and youths who roam the streets, play with bullets and defy imposed martial law. Khleifi rarely enters Palestinian households and when he does, it is only to record the testimonies of the parents of young victims who testify to the invasions of their homes by police and settlers, followed by indiscriminate acts of violence.

While the Woman's recollections divulge the exilic disappointment of return – a recurrent motif in Palestinian literature (Abdel-Malek 144) – she also reflects upon the displays of *sumud* and articulates a sense of continuity with Khleifi's other female subjects. We follow her observing an elderly woman, the descendant of a family of dispossessed Palestinian landowners, whose lonely existence somewhat resembles her own. Surrounded by the Israelis who expropriated her land, The Old Woman continues to live a productive life, maintaining healthy stoicism about one's fate. According to Kennedy, her determination to remain in her home is juxtaposed with the Israeli concept of house as a commodity, subsidized to encourage immigration ("Michel Khleifi"). Using the testimonies of women of different ages and backgrounds, the high school students who protest the closure of their school by the Israeli police, and the mother recalling the injuries of her son, Khleifi highlights their resilience at the time of the uprising. As Abu-Manneh points out, the Intifada thus becomes not only the condition of the Woman's return to Palestine, but "a pre-requisite of her own expression as well" ("Towards Liberation" 68).

Khleifi's historical narratives and intimate recollections merge and permeate the unstable space of the transnational, evoking different modes of engagement with the minor form examined in Kathleen McHugh's essay "Giving 'Minor' Pasts a Future," as the director refashions and remobilizes the tropes, images and stereotypes, associated with Palestinian culture in an innovative and critical fashion (158). In her discussion of Japanese-American video artist Rea Tajiri's film, *History and Memory,* McHugh identifies "the specters of traumatized silence" rendering the coherence of national history as illusory and divulges "the ghosts, the absences and the gaps in the national history to which this abstraction gives rise" (165). The acts of Palestinian resistance are filmed in open spaces and The Woman's recollections of domestic abuse are narrated in the hotel room, taking the form of an emotional reconciliation with the past. While The Man reminisces about the aftershocks of the 1967 defeat, The Woman identifies it with the emancipatory tendencies within Palestinian society and the newly acquired freedom of women in public spaces. As her affectionate memories are taken over by recollections of violence perpetrated against her by her father and brothers, The Man draws correlations between the atrocities which pervade public spaces, and cruelty occurring within the confines of The Woman's home: "How can they burn you when the country is aflame?" This realization that her return to Palestine is triggered by the unspoken traumas of her past is balanced with The Woman's desire to experience and participate in the new forms of resistance, aspiring to transform her country into a society based on principles of justice and equality. It also reiterates Khleifi's idea that recognizing the new vitality and sensibility of emerging cinema audiences, Palestinian films need to articulate their visions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a matter of human rights.

The film ends with the demolition of a Palestinian house, as the bulldozer tears down the walls of the house while the inhabitants wait to save some of their belongings. The family camps around the debris, with the Palestinian flag at its center, echoing The Man's

reminiscences of his childhood, as Khleifi focuses on the fragments of their physical world: a pair of slippers, buckets, discarded pots. The ensuing series of shots, recorded on the streets of Jerusalem, is enclosed by the images of land, the house, and the Woman's reflections on love and sense of hope: "I am here to look for a lost faith. I have come carried by an overflowing emotion. I have come to smell the wetted earth. I have come to escape a love, abandoned in Jerusalem, the city." While Khleifi's subjects are unable to find closure in their desperate search for home, the film's closing scene – their embrace on the Jerusalem rooftop – emerges as a homage to Palestinians of all generations facing the challenges of occupation and exile.

Canticle of the Stones was screened at The Cannes Film Festival's *Un Certain Regard*, but was largely ignored by distributors.[30] Kheifi's screen adaptation of Jean-Luc Outers' novel, *L'Ordre du Jour* (1993), also met with lukewarm responses. Expanding his transnational ties in collaboration with the European Community's Med-media program, he developed a training package for the Palestinian technicians apprenticed to their Belgian colleagues on the set of his ensuing feature film.[31] Initially conceived as a television film, *The Tale of the Three Lost Jewels* was co-produced by Khleifi's and Al-Qattan's Sindibad Films, the European television network ARTE/Sept and the Belgian Ministry of the French-Speaking Community. The beginning of the production was marred by security problems as it coincided with the Ibrahimi Mosque Massacre,[32] but the film was completed in less than two months, with the participation of transnational crew and some emerging Palestinian talent.[33]

During the final decade of the twentieth century, it is evident that exclusion has become the defining condition of the denationalized Palestinian minority, experiencing the gap between the rhetoric of human rights and the reality of refortified Israeli sovereignty, denying them the freedom of self-determination (Benhabib *The Rights of Others*, qtd. in

Collins 43). Khleifi continues to examine the consequences of Israeli occupation, highlight the position of women and children and the new forms of resistance in the struggle for human rights and the transformation of Palestinian society. Resembling a fairy tale (Khatib 128), *The Tale of the Three Lost Jewels* is a coming-of-age story about a twelve-year-old boy, Youssef (Mohammed Nahnal), who resides in the Gaza refugee camp. Surrounded by Israeli checkpoints and separated from the beach by barbed wire, Youssef's existence is contained to overcrowded spaces, amidst the poverty and violence of the refugee camp. He searches for alternatives in his dreams and within the nearby world of nature. Similar to his mother, who reminisces about the days at the beach before the occupation, and blind Abou-Iman (Makram Khoury), who imagines giant maritime creatures, Youssef loves animals and the sea. In his dreams, he encounters the legendary warrior Saladin who rides a white horse on the Gaza beach, and hands him a gun to liberate Palestine. However, rather than celebrating the connections between past and present, their encounter reveals a modern consciousness, implying that the events and figures from the past have lost their original meaning and, in being observed from the new perspective, are seen as an illusion.[34]

The absence of male characters reiterates the decline of patriarchal authority in Khleifi's films. Youssef is alienated from his imprisoned father, and his brother Samir (Mohammed Sheikh) is part of the rebel group hiding in the nearby oasis, Abu-Iman awaits the news from his sons, Sheikh Attar is surrounded by his bodyguards, and Saleh's father's business does not leave enough time for his family. The lack of male companionship is substituted by a newcomer in his life, Aida (Hana' Ne'meh), gypsy girl with a close relationship with her father (Mohammad Bakri) and grandmother (Um Fayez), who understands the workings of supernatural powers. As Aida draws Youssef to previously unknown worlds, their bond assumes the contours of a mentor-protégé relationship. Aida acts as a mediator between Youssef and the world of the past, but her modern sensibility also

opens up new avenues for understanding the position of Palestine in transnational contexts. When the grandmother announces that the one who wants to marry Aida must find the three missing jewels from the necklace lost in South America, Youssef learns about geography, visits travel agents, and speaks to UN and Israeli soldiers, beginning to realize the fragmentation of his country and the restrictive regime of international borders. Looking at his atlas, Youssef tells his mother: "There are so many borders in the world. If only I could fly. I could cross all these borders." Youssef's friendship with Aida becomes crucial for accomplishing his mission. Her defiance of Israeli soldiers points to new forms of resistance and she emerges as the key figure in Youssef's transition from childhood to adulthood: "I have to marry you. I have to grow up."

The ending of Khleifi's film highlights the power of imagination in the struggle for human rights and equality for young Palestinians growing up in refugee camps. During the Israeli curfew, Youssef attempts to escape Gaza and falls asleep hiding in an orange container. He dreams of a scene in the oasis, where Abu-Iman, appearing as a wise man, explains that God created the three borders, time, space and flesh, to contain the human soul from perfection, and describes them as his jewels. When Youssef wakes up and leaves the container, soldiers follow him and shoot him. Discovered by Aida, he miraculously wakes up, surrounded by his family, with the necklace and three jewels recovered. Aida's search for a different Palestine and Youssef's return from the dead, enhanced by a better understanding of the world around him re-enforce the role of children as agents of social change in Khleifi's films. But as Telmissany contends, the traveler who comes back to the land in *Canticle of the Stones* and a dreamer who never leaves it in *The Tale of the Three Lost Jewels* reveal that in Khleifi's films the witnesses of disempowerment are bound to take the limited number of possibilities that they face (79).

Screened at Cannes, *The Tale of the Three Lost Jewels* was distributed in two Arab countries, Tunisia and Jordan (Gugler 190). Al-Qattan places the film's lukewarm reception in the context of the Oslo Accords (44), and Kennedy sees it as the sign of times when the "peace process" became a convenient syntagm used to circumvent acknowledging the continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the ground ("Michel Khleifi"). On the other hand, this largely neglected film foreshadows Khleifi's positioning of the occupation of Palestine within a global context among the films of his late phase.

Revisiting "the dialectic between modernity and tradition" (L Alexander "On the Right") in his BBC-produced documentary, *Forbidden Marriages in the Holy Land* (1995), Khleifi engages with the theme of inter-faith marriages in Israel-Palestine, and the possibilities of love and co-existence in a multicultural society. The space of the house where he interviews his minor transnational subjects, an Iranian-Jewish-Kurdish communist who has moved to Israel to live with his Arab wife, and other Jewish-Christian, Arab-African, Muslim and non-Muslim couples, is seen as the location of peace and stability. This sphere harbors families uninhibited by nationalist or religious agendas, defying the regimes of exclusion, enforced by occupation and patriarchal norms. Isolated by their communities and ostracized by their families, they sustain the idea of not merely cohabitating, but of *simultaneously existing* as Jews and Arabs. This idea evokes the writing of anthropologist Daniel Monterescu, who, drawing on the ideas of Zachary Lockman[35] and Yuval Portugali, posits that "the two groups and their identities were constituted in a series of dialectic oppositions and homologies which not only *opposed* each other, but at the same time dialectically *created* each other, in dynamic but constantly asymmetrical relations of power" (175). In this, perhaps most forward-looking of the films of his middle period, Khleifi highlights the positions of his female subjects, contesting preconceptions about mixed marriages that were fabricated during the early stages of the Israeli occupation – that only

Jewish communist women marry Arab men (L Alexander "On the Right"). One of his interviewees, Chaya Toma, asserts that the Arab defeat contributed to the rise of feminine openness within the Palestinian community, while Israeli society is experiencing a reverse process with the resurgence of a masculine nationalist culture.[36] Her assertion reinforces Khleifi's idea that a society based on principles of assimilation and exclusion cannot guarantee individual human rights to subaltern groups nor to those espousing multiculturalism and a peaceful coexistence.

Khleifi's Late Films:
A Lament for Vanished Country and Lost Home

Khleifi's return to filmmaking after nine years is marked by low-budget films produced through transnational collaborations in which he explores the consequences of long-term occupation, places emphasis on the notion of human rights and the connections between the conflict in Israel-Palestine and the global state of humanity. Following the expansion of Jewish settlements and the rise in political tensions, the Second Intifada was marked by an escalation of atrocities amongst the Palestinian population and combatants, Israeli soldiers and civilians. This period saw a number of peace initiatives, the Camp David (2000) and Taba (2001) summits and The Road Map for Peace (2002) that failed to resolve the questions of Jerusalem and Jewish settlements as successive Israeli governments continued to extend territorial gains and to reduce Palestinian autonomy (Pressman).

In his late films, Khleifi, searches for old Palestine, reflects upon the disintegration of its multicultural fabric and probes how Palestinians and Israelis come to terms with their histories, present conditions, and their fragmented perceptions of otherness. In these films, the location of the Palestinian house disappears altogether off the map, or drifts onto the

margins of the colonial narrative, waiting to be demolished, redeveloped or converted into a refuge for internally displaced Palestinians or returnees searching for remnants of their pasts.

Khleifi traverses the modernized, technologized and militarized Israeli society based on ethnocratic principles and immersed in the processes of securitization. According to Collins, securitization pervades all spheres of life in the state of Israel and the relationship between Palestine and global modes of colonization. Prompted by subaltern resistance, securitization defines the world typified by the politics of (en)closures: nuclear enclosure, neo-liberal enclosure, and enclosures facilitated by communication, acceleration and violence (55-56). Collins asserts that, anchored in the policies of sovereignty and permanent war, the logic of exceptionalism and elimination, colonial society defends itself against a real or imaginary other, using pretexts of necessity and emergency, claiming the moral high ground and its right to ignore international law (57-58). In this context, the role of Palestinian cinema becomes important not only for alerting audiences to the conflict in Israel-Palestine, but also for exposing the global decline of civil liberties, human rights and democracy itself.

In the summer of 2002 Khleifi and Israeli filmmaker Eyal Sivan began the filming of their 270-minutes-long documentary road-movie *Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel.* They journeyed along the border of the United Nations' Resolution 181, passed by the General Assembly in 1947, but never implemented, which proposed dividing Palestine into Jewish, Arab and international sectors. Produced by Sivan's Momento, Sourat Films, WDR and ARTE, *Route 181* is presented in three parts, South, Centre and North, mapping out Israel's contested topographies, following encounters with Palestinians who remain in Israel and Jews living on the land once inhabited by Palestinians. The filmmakers capture the concealed histories of colonial violence, visit present-day border crossings, guarded by the symbols of Israeli sovereignty, museums of Zionist settlement, immigration centers, and parks built on the sites of abandoned Arab villages. During this period, the

expropriation of Palestinian houses and land continues and the mixed neighborhoods in cities and towns are becoming extinct (Hass; JTA and Reback), giving way to ethnically segregated zones, and the remaining Arab residents who are pressured to leave or sell their land. The site of the Palestinian house projected for demolition or redevelopment prompts Israelis and Palestinians to reflect upon the repercussions of conflict concealed by an induced sense of homogeneity based on the nation-building myth and by indoctrination (Skop and Edelman). Khleifi and Sivan document their subjects' reflections upon the legacy of the Nakba, examine their visions of otherness and uncover hybrid elements of Israeli and Palestinian cultures and identities.

Route 181 opens at the building site of the future marina, with the two young Bedouin land surveyors who, supervised by their Kazakhstani-born Jewish manager, partake in the process of creating new landscapes, and erasing traces of a Palestinian presence in Israel. The interview highlights the conformist facet of growing up under occupation as the Bedouin confess that Palestine does not mean much to them, evade questions about the fate of the former inhabitants of Nabi Yunis, now living in refugee camp in Gaza, and feel more comfortable talking about their plans to join the army or to emigrate. This pervading sense of unease in the portraits of Palestinians living in Israel is evident in the conversation with an elderly Arab woman and her son in their house in the region of Masmiye, now renamed to Bnei Re'em. Recorded on the front porch of the house – as if preparing to leave – they reflect upon their lonely existence and upon being intimidated by the authorities, pressuring them to sell up in order to build a road over their property. They vow to remain on their land but gloomily predict that their house will eventually be confiscated and demolished by the state.

Along the route surrounded by billboards with patriotic slogans, Khleifi and Sivan record a scale of opinions from discreet support of ethnic coexistence to endorsements of Zionist policies. The woman at the roadside food stall asserts that she is not opposed to living

with Arabs, and a local grocer confirms he can still speak Arabic, learnt in his childhood in Iraq. Other interviewees support the separation of Israeli and Palestinian communities and the policies of exclusion and assimilation of the Arab minority. Surrounded by Israeli flags and photographs of fighter pilots, the owner of a roadhouse acknowledges that the area was once inhabited by Palestinians but urges the authorities to raze their homes: "They should be demolished. They shouldn't be left because the old people come looking."

Khleifi and Sivan visit the sites where Zionism obscures historical evidence, substituting it with the narratives of an unblemished past, and use long and unedited moments of silence in encounters with custodians of official history, thus highlighting the film's political dimension. An elderly tour guide at the museum of Kibbutz Yad Mordechai claims that Zionist settlers planted trees in the land without people: "There was nothing. It was empty." A moment later, he admits that following the departure of Gazan workers the old vineyards in the region have died. Attending the citizenship ceremony at the Lod Integration Centre, Sivan and Khleifi film the absent-minded Jewish-Ethiopian immigrants, unengaged by the major's acclaim for the local officials who "put Zionism into practice." The participants of the joint Jewish-Christian prayer for peace agree it is not realistic to expect the return of Arab refugees. One of the American participants, arriving from another settler society, asserts that his parents' survival of the Holocaust decisively shaped his life, but fails to draw analogies with the suffering of the exiled Palestinians.

The elderly survivors of the Nakba mourn the disappearance of their country, reflecting on the passage of time and the diminishing probabilities of return. The local barber reminisces about the tragedy of the Lod ghetto, asserting that the loss of home eventually leads to the fading of one's sense of belonging. But the Palestinian woman who claims she can still remember the prickly pear near her house in Sajavah, fifty years after her deportation, longs for the day of return: "I'm dying to smell its scent." Using a mobile

camera, Philippe Bellaiche[37] separates sections of the journey with shots taken through the car's rear mirror, as if attempting to retrieve the past, implying that suppressing the chapters of shared history is used to widen the gap dividing the two communities. However, Khleifi and Sivan suggest that the traumatic memories of the past should not obscure the present-day developments in Israel-Palestine and their transnational implications.

The third part of *Route 181* begins by traveling along kilometers of the barrier that separates Israel from the Palestinian territories which according to Collins evokes transnational associations with the Berlin Wall and other monuments to segregation in the history of settler-colonialism (49). The wall is surrounded by building machinery, dwarfing the figures of itinerant Arab, Thai and Eastern European workers who left their economically devastated countries to partake in fortifying Israeli sovereignty. The filmmakers encounter people from both sides of the conflict who challenge these policies, Bethlehem Arabs who circumvent the blockade to attend a family gathering, and the Israeli army tank driver who guards a Palestinian town under curfew, reading Kafka's *Before the Law*. However, their interviews with the two veterans of 1948 reveal the deep divisions separating the two communities. A former soldier in the Iraqi army remembers that, following the drawing of the border, his family's house remained in Israel while their land seceded to Jordan. Asked what happened to the houses of the Arabs expelled from their villages, the Israeli veteran of Operation Matateh replies: "Nothing. It was the people who were in the way." When he translates the name of the operation ("Broom"), the interviewer reminds him of the wisdom of Solomon ("Split means killing"), but the veteran begins to question his agenda.

Route 181's exhibition history confirms Khleifi's and Sivan's premise that understanding the legacy of the past is the starting-point in the dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. This process also demonstrates the difficulties faced by filmmakers embarking upon an intercultural dialogue and alerting their cinema audiences to the notion of human

rights in Israel-Palestine. The film's screening at Le Festival du Cinéma du Réel was cancelled because of co-sponsors' concern for "a risk to public order" and for fostering "anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish statements and acts in France" (Porton "Roads"). In the United States of America, where *Route 181* was not distributed, at the time of its screening The Film Society of Lincoln Centre published Harlan Jacobson's review in *Film Comment,* critiquing the film's "nostalgia for an illusion," the portraits of Israelis ranging from disappointed to grotesque, and of Arabs, uniformly seen as benign victims (Jacobson). Other reviewers acknowledged "skepticism towards received wisdom and entrenched authority" (Porton "Roads") and the filmmaker's attempts to disengage from the conflict by divulging "the divide of the physical landscape and that of the humans that inhabit it" (Murphy "Review: *Route 181*"). While the film's success in the festival arena did not match that of Khleifi's earlier work, the attempt to initiate dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians by evoking the traumas of joint history and shared elements of their cultures remains its most significant and lasting achievement.

Conceived as a low-budget feature film, the Palestinian-Belgian-United Kingdom-UAE co-production *Zindeeq* revolves around the journey of The Filmmaker (Mohammed Bakri) who returns to Israel-Palestine to make a documentary film about the memories of the Nakba. *Zindeeq* takes place over one day and one night as The Filmmaker journeys between the towns along the fortified, eerily deserted highways and curls around the wall separating the two communities, connecting with his subjects, family, and acquaintances. The title, an Arabic word meaning atheist, heretic, or renegade, conveys the multiple complexities of the central character who encounters a fragmented and subjugated community marred by obstructed processes of modernization, violence and poverty. Merging the critical perspective of a returnee with an exile's attachment to the land, The Filmmaker observes the signs of

social decline and the ways in which the occupation of Palestine intersects with global processes of colonization.

Khleifi's minor transnational subject reflects upon the shame of his parents who avoided retelling their experiences of the Nakba, as their silence beyond the grave hinders his sense of closure and his connections with Palestine. Frustrated by a lawless and decaying world and detached from certain family rituals, he recognizes "the dislocation of Arab society, the weight of the past and the difficulty of reinventing oneself" (Khleifi, qtd. in Crousse) but continues to reflect upon the traumatic legacy of loss, dispossession and exile. Denied a hotel room in his hometown, we see him returning to his car to review footage and retreat to the world of memories. Khleifi acknowledges that immersing oneself in the past is one of the key factors contributing to the paralysis of Palestinian society: "There is a healthy relation between mourning and the need to separate from the symbolic and material inheritance of the past in order to reorganize our relation to the present" (Khleifi, qtd. in Nusair "Between Reality").

While with every step of his journey, the physical and psychological barriers separating the Israelis and Palestinians become more evident, Khleifi also divulges the repercussions of the processes occurring in Palestine at the global level. Drawing on Paul Virilio's concept of "infinite preparation for war" (Virilio 28), Collins sees securitization as a globalized process beyond the sphere of politics, prompting everyone to think like a settler or a native, and contributing to the transformation of executive power, impacting on law, civil liberties and human rights (Collins 70-72). Intercepting The Filmmaker on a deserted freeway, the patrolman asks: "Do you want to die?" implying the visitor should accustom himself to the polarizing nature of settler society and choose a side. The Filmmaker replies in French, the language of the former colonial rulers, and explains that he drove fast due to

being afraid of the terrorists. Acquainting the passenger with the logic of exceptionalism and elimination, the policeman responds: “This is Israel. There are no terrorists.”

Collins describes Palestine as a laboratory for processes based on acceleration and power (81) and urges that in order to grasp the idea of becoming “Palestinized,” one needs to look beyond the actors, resources and intentions, and consider the developments that evade the limits of human control (84). While the symbols of Israeli sovereignty featured prominently in Khleifi’s earlier films, they are now substituted by invisible forms of colonization. When The Filmmaker visits Virgin Mary’s spring in Nazareth, he learns that it has dried up, and the Israeli water company sells the church its water.

The violence and tensions tearing at the fabric of Palestinian society are outlined through disturbing revelations relayed with numbing acquiescence, invading not only the territories inhabited by Palestinians but also their corporeal world. Witnessing violence against a homeless man, The Filmmaker is chased away when he tries to help. He discovers a key buried under a stone and lets himself into an old house to discover a group of Gazan children brought in for organ-trade – an ominous sign for the subjugated minority in a society based on the logic of exceptionalism. Once occupied by an exiled family, the abandoned Palestinian household is now used as a base for an invisible criminal network engaged in organ-trade.

Khleifi draws attention to the position of women and children who reject the concepts of honor and revenge and diffuse male-dominated violence, acting as voices of mediation. Caught amidst a family feud, The Filmmaker is sent away from his hometown with his sister’s reminder that “running away is three quarters of manliness.” His assistant Racha (Mira Awad[38]) appears in his dreams as a lover and a Biblical figure as her questions about his fixation with the past begin to gain more ground. In a dream-like scene, his mother remains silent about her decision to stay in the occupied country, recalling concerns for the

well-being of her family. Mugged by a group of criminals, The Filmmaker is helped by a homeless boy from Rafah whose father is in Hamas prison. He reciprocates by saving the boy from his Palestinian bosses and later, as the boy hides behind a demolished house, from the Israeli police. Contrasting the dystopian tone of the film with a sense of hope, Khleifi uses these vignettes to accentuate the position of women and children as carriers of modern consciousness, immersed in the present and promoting solidarity and coexistence. The film's closing sequence emanates a sense of optimism, as The Filmmaker, recognized by a childhood friend, affirms the resilience that sustains Khleifi's characters in a world contaminated by exploitation and violence: "We are from the same neighborhood. We don't belong to time. We are beyond time." Defying the passage of time and paying homage to their childhood memories, Khleifi suggests that the stoicism and empathy of his characters remain the last line of defense against the brutality of colonial occupation.

Zindeeq was screened in competition at the Dubai International Film Festival, but its limited presence on the festival circuit[39] was marked by negative responses to the Biblical allusions (Murphy "Film Review: Surreal"), "pseudo-oneiric" scenes (Llorens), blurred symbolism and objectified female characters (Morsi) in Khleifi's film. However, returning to the motifs that marked his earlier work – obstructed processes of modernization, the notion of human rights, and the role of women and children as the agents of social transformation – and drawing correlations between the colonization of Palestine and the state of global humanity, suggests that this film will continue to be examined as an important work in Khleifi's opus.

Conclusion

Michel Khleifi's films are typified by transnational cultural collaborations, modernizing transnationalism and pronounced political element. This chapter has identified the elements of the ethnocratic political system, and provided the initial context for a

discussion of obstructed processes of modernization for the Palestinian minority within the state of Israel. It has defined the key elements of modernizing transnationalism and placed an emphasis on forging the processes of modernization and promoting the role of culture and human rights in Palestinian society as reflected in Khleifi's documentary and feature films.

From his early documentary films to his middle period, which is dominated by the feature form and in his late work, Khleifi has situated his subjects in the geopolitical context of the Israeli occupation. As a filmmaker, he has consistently used the site of the Palestinian household as a metaphor for the obstructed processes of modernization, and for the location of contested ideological allegiances and the forces of impending social change. Engaging with the minor form, Khleifi uses the site of the house to elevate his postcolonial concerns, to destabilize representations of national identity and to highlight the notion of human rights as key to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Exploring the location of the house as the space of impending social change, he distinguishes new forms of Palestinian subjectivity, and in his late phase, identifies the correlations between the colonization of Palestine and the future of global humanity.

Khleifi's early films focus on the lives of Palestinians living in the state of Israel and the West Bank and scrutinize the effects of the Israeli occupation as well as underline the Palestinian quest for human rights, equality and justice. Highlighting his political commitment, the filmmaker observes the space of the Palestinian house as an ideologically unstable location. His cinema deconstructs the relationships of power between the occupier and the occupied and stresses the resilience of his subjects yet also prompts his audiences to re-evaluate the immersion of Palestinians into the narratives of the past. He anatomizes class divisions, gender roles, and subverts the old perceptions of national identity. Underlining the subjective positions of his characters and their struggle for justice and equality, he reveals the decline of the traditional family and foreshadows the position of women and children in his

ensuing films, identifying the site of the house as the space of impending social transformation and new forms of political resistance.

In the middle phase of Khleifi's career, which is marked by feature films and dynamic transnational collaborations, the Palestinian house is transformed into a space of declining patriarchal authority and of a rising female prominence. Positioned in unstable domestic locations, Khleifi's female characters expose the inadequacy of the agents of traditional power and challenge the old representations of national identity. These women reject nationalist rhetoric and act as voices of moderation, demonstrating new modes of resistance to occupation and patriarchal authority. Furthermore, Khleifi draws attention to the role of children who seek refuge outside of their domestic spaces, realizing that the *other* Palestine is possible but unable to find safe and nurturing environments within these alternative worlds, and in the process discovering that acceptance and love are the sole anchoring values through which to navigate their distressing circumstances. Subverting the archaic representations of national identity and framing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through an emphasis on the problem of human rights, the director highlights the political element in his films and recognizes new sensibilities, thus bringing about the constitution of the emerging cinema audiences.

Traversing the borders of the occupied land in the films of his late phase, Khleifi sketches the fragments of the pre-Nakba Palestine and the society built upon on Zionist ideology and the logic of essentialism and elimination. In these minor films, produced through transnational partnerships, he exposes the barriers separating the Israelis and the Palestinians, examines their visions of a traumatic history and their perceptions of otherness, and identifies the connections between the colonization of Palestine and the crisis of humanity at large. The director deconstructs the foundational myths of settler-colonial society amidst the endemic poverty and violence of Palestinian enclaves, emphasizing the decline of

human rights and evinces that Palestine has become a testing ground for emerging forms of colonization. Unlike his previous films, the location of the house is now in these later films relegated to the margins of Khleifi's narratives, awaiting expropriation, demolition and redevelopment, housing the surviving Palestinian families who are victims of invisible processes of global colonization, and returnees searching for fragments of their pasts. While Khleifi's vision is dominated by pessimistic overtones, he occasionally unearths the memories of communities living side-by-side in multi-ethnic Palestine and draws attention to the gestures of those who, stranded between the disturbing narratives of the past and a bleak, unappealing present, search for a resilience necessary to imagine and perhaps project a better future.

Endnotes

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[1] For details of Khleifi's biography, see Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma and Memory* (2008). Khleifi's graduation thesis at INSAS focused on existing forms of cultural expression in Palestine, proposing avenues for promotion and development of Palestinian culture ("Michel Khleifi").

[2] Khleifi directed five television documentaries: *The West Bank, The Palestinians' Hope?* (1978), *Israeli Settlements in the Sinai* (1978), documentary series *Achrafieh* (1979), *Peace and the Palestinians* (1979), and *The Road of El-Naim* (1979).

[3] The multidisciplinary scholarly literature on modernity extends beyond the scope of this discussion of Khleifi's work. While endeavors to define it would render this attempt partial or inadequate, focusing on Hjort's discussion of modernizing transnationalism, I draw on the theorizations of modernity by Marshall Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (1983), David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989) and Stephen Kern's *The Culture of Time and Space* (1983), and the studies by Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern* (2006) and Dietrich Jung, *Muslim History and Social Theory: A Global Sociology of Modernity* (2017), placing emphasis on multiple, entangled and successive modernities as alternatives to Western universalism.

[4] Introducing the concept of *settler society*, Oren Yiftachel evokes the definition of Daiva Stasilius and Nira Yuval Davis in *Unsettling Settler Societies,* who define settler societies as established on the colonial legacy of European migration to other contested territories in order to gain political control and access to resources (Stasilius and Yuval-Davis*;* Yiftachel and Yacobi 677). Settler societies may be "external" implying the organized movement across the borders as in the era of European colonization, while "internal" settler societies involve the states' manipulation of local ethnic geography to forge the interests of

the dominant ethnic group (McGarry; Yiftachel "The Internal Frontier"; Yiftachel and Yacobi 677).

Placing Israel-Palestine within a transnational frame of reference, John Collins observes there is no universally accepted definition of settler-colonialism but identifies the important cases of resemblance between the operations of shared structural logic in settler-based societies. Firstly, settler-colonialism is "a distinctly modern phenomenon, rooted within the modern dynamics of state formation, racialization, capital accumulation and genocide (30). Secondly, the ideological justifications of settler-colonialism often resemble an index of imperial thought, and the modernity of settler-colonialism or, as Collins notes, drawing on the ideas of Patrick Wolfe, the "logic of elimination" and violence (Wolfe; Collins 30-31). Thirdly, Collins draws on the ideas of historian Fredrick Jackson Turner, identifying "the logic of exceptionalism," and uniqueness, constructed by settler movements as one of the constitutive pillars of settler-colonialism (Turner; Collins 33).

[5] "How can we create a culture that could retain within itself its originality and specificity, while still being universal? How can we create a cinema, which could carry the Palestinian human experience, vertically (historically) and horizontally (on the basis of people's daily reality)? Is there really a culture of the poor, and if yes, how to protect it?" (M Khleifi, "From Reality to Fiction" 46).

[6] Direct Cinema is a documentary movement that originated in Canada and the United States of America between 1958 and 1962 and was developed by French filmmaker and anthropologist Jean Rouch. Typified by minimalist crews, lightweight equipment, hand-held cameras, and live, synchronous sound, this movement reflected an authorial intent to capture reality without mediation, while questioning the relationship between reality and cinema (Ian Aitken, *Encyclopedia of Documentary Film* 12).

[7] The concept of human rights has evolved through history. The primary framework informing the use of this concept is the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, which has been developed in a number of national and global treaties ("Universal Declaration"). Human rights can be defined as "internationally agreed values, standards or rules regulating the conduct of states towards their own citizens and towards non-citizens" (Baehr 1). For an account of philosophical aspects of the meaning of human rights, see Nickel W. James, *Making Sense of Human Rights: Philosophical Reflections on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and J. Shestack, "The Philosophical Foundation of Human Rights."

[8] See David Palumbo-Liu's essay, "Rational and Irrational Choices: Form, Affect and Ethics," where he elaborates on the link between storytelling and validating shared value of justice, referring to the form of modern novel.

[9] Susan Koshy, "Globalization Theory and the Subject of Ethnic, Area and Postcolonial Studies," and Stephen H. Marks, "Emerging Human Rights: A New Generation for the 1980s?"

[10] During The British Mandate, ethnographer Tawfiq Canaan researched the features of the Palestinian house, and documented local sayings concerning the sanctity of home in Palestinian folklore in his book, *The Palestine Arab House: Its Architecture and Folklore* (1933). In her study, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (1979), Rosemary Sayigh draws attention to the social and economic importance of the family collective and consciousness, underlining the roles of children, domesticity, solidarity, subordination, and lays emphasis on the resilience of Palestinian families in refugee camps, in spite of their severance from the land (20-25).

[11] In recalling his own displacement from his three childhood homes, in his memoir *Out of Place,* prompted Edward W. Said to describe the region in which his family resided as susceptible to discontinuity and evanescence (261).

[12] According to the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), the Israeli Civil Administration has demolished 55,000 Palestinian homes in the Occupied Territories since 1967. At the same time, Jewish settlements and outposts, deemed illegal by international law continue to expand onto Palestinian land (Demolitions, "December 2019 Demolition and Displacement Report," qtd. in Halper, "Israel's Demolishing Palestinian Houses Policy of Ethnic Cleansing").

[13] The Middle East Institute for Understanding reports that in recent years, the annual numbers of Palestinian homes destroyed and of families displaced by Israel has continued to rise to more than four hundred and fifty per year, mostly through being built without construction permits, which are almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain, with Bedouin citizens evicted from their homes, and more than 13,000 pending Israeli demolition orders – including forty schools – against Palestinian structures in the West Bank (*Palestine: 2018 in Review*). For an analysis of the recent campaign of demolitions, see Jeff Halper, "The Meaning of Israel's Massive Housing Demolitions in East Jerusalem," Daniel A. Roth, "'Our Whole Lives are Here. Where Can We Go?'', Gideon Levy, "What Israel's Demolition of 70 Palestinian Homes Was Really About" and *Middle East Eye*, "Israel Destroys Palestinian Homes in Biggest Demolition Push Since 1967."

[14] The death of American activist Rachel Corrie in 2003, trying to protect a Palestinian home in a Rafa refugee camp from demolition became an iconic case of transnational solidarity. Corrie was part of a group of eight American and British activists acting as human shields and trying to stop Israeli military bulldozers. See Harriet Sherwood's article "Rachel Corrie Death: Struggle for Justice Culminates in Israeli Court."

[15] The inscription reads: "Emile Habibi – Remained in Haifa" (Greenberg).

[16] They included cinematographers Yves van der Meeren, and Marc Andre Batigné, who will go on to work on Elia Suleiman's films, and the Tunisian editor and film director, Moufida Tlatli.

[17] Khalifeh contends that while the Israeli occupation brought political and economic catastrophe, for Palestinian women working in Israel it was not merely motivated by financial necessity, but an act of newly acquired freedom and insubordination towards patriarchal power structures ("Who Is Hidden Beneath the Burqa? An Appeal to the West").

[18] Harlow writes that, Khalifeh's positioning of women in *Wild Thorns,* set in post-1967 war Nablus, "on thresholds, in doorways, at the outskirts of the novel's scenes, indicates their emergent role as decisive agents in the recasting of the Palestinian national narrative." ("Partitions and Precedents: Sahar Khalifeh and Palestinian Political Geography" 116).

[19] For criticism of Khleifi's early work by Khayria al-Bashalwi and Wassim Abdallah, and for the opinions of Samir Farid, Abed al Wahab, and other critics who defended his decision to work in Israel, see Gertz and Khleifi (*Palestinian Cinema* 38-39).

[20] Some 150,000 Palestinians, Muslims and Christians remained within the borders of the state of Israel, in May 1948. Israeli historian, Hillel Cohen argues that the pressure from international community and the significance of Nazareth blocked Israeli plans to cleanse the Arab population from this region. The city was occupied, hosting thousands of refugees from Saffuriyya, Al-Mujaydil and Maloul who became internal refugees in Israel. See Episode 4 of the documentary film series, *Al-Nakba,* directed by Palestinian filmmaker Rawan Damen and produced by Al-Jazeera English and Arabic (2008).

[21] Probing the erasure of memory within Israeli public discourse, Mark Kaplan and Heidi Grunebaum use similar approaches to visual composition in their documentary, *Village*

Under the Forest (2013), visiting the remains of the Palestinian settlement of Lubya, buried under the South Africa Forest Plantation.

[22] The co-production included Belgian Ministry of the French-Speaking Community, German television ZDF, Q. A. Production London, and Marisa Films. The Belgian and European sources contributed 60% of the film's budget of 7.42 million French franc. The remaining 40% was funded by the French public sector and through private investors (Naficy, *Accented Cinema* 294).

[23] An agency of The French Ministry of Culture, La Centre Nationale de la Cinématographie (CNC) provided just over half of the total French investment, and the additional sources included Les Sociétés de Financement du Cinema et de L'Audiovisuel (SOFICA), Canal+, Avidia Films, and the distributor Lasa Films (Naficy, *Accented Cinema* 294).

[24] Myriam Benraad writes that from the early years after the creation of the state of Israel until the Arab-Israeli War in 1967, the Palestinian cause was seldom part of French public debate. The French backing of the Zionist project, and their support for Israel in the 1967 war, was marked by memories of the Holocaust, The Suez Crisis in 1956, the Algerian War of Independence, and the repatriation of the Pieds-Noirs. A number of attacks on Jewish targets occurred in France during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and Israel's invasion of Southern Lebanon, including the bombing of the Rue Copernic synagogue in Paris, in 1980, and the attack on the Goldenberg restaurant in the Marais neighborhood of Paris, in 1982 ("France's Fascination with Israel and Palestine").

[25] Khleifi and Al-Qattan co-founded Sourat Films in 1988, which in 1993 became Sindibad Films. They produced five films together, *Canticle of the Stones, L'ordre du jour*, *Tale of the Three Jewels, Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel*, and *Zindeeq*.

[26] The role of Samia was played by Armenian-born actress, Anna Condo, and the role of Sumaya was performed by Sonia Amar.

[27] *Wedding in Galilee* which screened at Cannes in *La Quinzaine des Réalisateurs* (Director's Fortnight), received *Le Prix de la Critique Internationale*, and additional prizes at San Sebastian and Carthage, and Khleifi was compared to Roberto Rossellini (Shohat "Wedding in Galilee").

[28] See, for example, Mazin B. Qumsiyeh's account of resistance in Beit Sahour that included ceasing the payment of taxes to authorities, discarding Israeli-issued ID cards, and a new striving for self-sufficiency by the local Palestinian population (*Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment* 143-150).

[29] Livia Alexander discusses the interactions of Palestinian filmmakers with foreign agencies, access to equipment, formation of media companies and training opportunities as the positive outcomes in this era ("Is there a Palestinian Cinema?" 155). For lists of transnational co-productions, see Al-Qattan (117), and Livia Alexander ("Palestinians in Film" 319-320).

[30] See Al-Qattan's discussion of negative responses to the film (117).

[31] Khleifi's career as a film pedagogue started in the early 1980s at The Belgian Institut National Superiéur des Arts du Spectacle (INSAS), where he became the Head of Film Department in 1987-1988.

[32] The Cave of the Patriarchs Massacre, or the Hebron massacre, are other names used to refer to the assault committed by American-born Israeli Baruch Goldstein, a member of the far-right Kach movement, who murdered 29 and wounded 125 Palestinian worshippers inside the Ibrahimi Mosque on 25 February 1994 in Hebron, on The West Bank.

[33] They included producers Omar Al-Qattan and Pierre Chevalier, cinematographer Raymond Fromont, editor Marie Castro-Vasquez, and composer Jean-Marie Sénia. Ehab

Assal's credit as a camera assistant lead to his subsequent roles of cinematographer and camera operator in the films by Rashid Masharawi, Elia Suleiman, and Hany Abu-Assad, and his work in other international co-productions.

[34] Ismail Xavier discusses allegory within the context of the modern sensibility, pointing out: "Allegory when viewed as an expression of modern sensibility, moves away from its traditional image as conventional art concerned with pedagogical effects. It becomes a sign of a new consciousness of history where the appeal to analogies and to a vivid memory of the past is now taken not as the celebration of an identity connecting past and present, but as an experience able to teach us that repetition is always an illusion, and that old facts, like old signs, lose their 'original' meaning when looked at from a new perspective" ("Historical Allegory" 349).

[35] See Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948.*

[36] For an analysis of how the mainstream media in Israel positions the story about a mixed marriage between an Arab man and a Jewish woman between the discourses of "human rights" and "Romeo and Juliet," as part of the democratization of Israel, and "assimilation," implying a threat to the Jewish state, see Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui essay, "Sleeping With the 'Enemy': Mixed Marriages in the Israeli Media."

[37] Bellaiche also collaborated with Annemarie Jacir, Avi Moghrabi, Shimon Dotan and other Palestinian and Israeli filmmakers.

[38] Mira Awad is a singer, actress and songwriter, a child star of Israeli TV sit-com *Arab Labor,* who has also appeared in a number of theatre roles as diverse as an IDF soldier in *Another Place, a Foreign City*, and a Palestinian refugee in *Return to Haifa*. Awad was the first Palestinian to represent Israel in the Eurovision Song Contest of 2009, provoking mixed reactions among the Palestinian population and her fellow artists.

[39] *Zindeeq* received The Muhr Award for Best Arabic Feature Film at The Dubai International Film Festival 2009, but the film did not repeat the international success of Khleifi's early films.

Chapter 2. Bereft of Nature:

Renegotiating National Identity in the Films of Rashid Masharawi

The second chapter in this thesis concentrates on destabilizing and renegotiating the representations of national identity in the films of Rashid Masharawi. This chapter draws further on Mette Hjort's idea of modernizing transnationalism and provides a framework for the discussion of Masharawi's dislocation of the established paradigms of nature in Palestinian cinema. What sets Masharawi's minor transnationalism apart from films by other filmmakers covered in this thesis is his concern for one of the most detrimental consequences of the Israeli occupation, namely the disconnection of Palestinians from the realm of nature and natural resources. Positioning the filmmaker's engagement with ecology in a transnational context, what follows will provide a theoretical grounding for understanding how his narratives about life in refugee camps subvert the ideological underpinnings of nature in old representations of national identity. Masharawi's films evince intersectional connections between his environmental concerns and other modes of power relationships in Israeli-Palestinian geopolitical, historical and cultural frames of reference, as much as they accentuate the role of culture in promoting and enhancing the processes of modernization and of narrating Palestinian experiences. Furthermore, this chapter also elaborates on how Masharawi's transnationally produced films engage with the minor form, identifying the emerging Palestinian subjectivities, forging the political element in his work and cultivating new cinema audiences.

Spanning over thirty years, Rashid Masharawi's career has centred on narratives of occupied Palestine, situated in and around his native Gaza Strip, and the West Bank. Masharawi grew up in a Palestinian family exiled from Jaffa, in the Shati Refugee Camp (Gertz, "The Stone" 24). His rise as a filmmaker has influenced Palestinian cinema in two important ways. At the time when Masharawi began his filmmaking career, he was the only

contemporary director who had grown up in a refugee camp and in the Gaza region (Yaqub, "Waiting" 199), as well as being the first Palestinian to make his films within the context of the Israeli film industry[1] (Kronish and Safirman 14). This is important because drawing attention to the life in refugee camps, Masharawi locates Palestinian cinema within a specific geopolitical, historical and cultural context, and emphasizes the time and place where Palestinian narratives of displacement and exile are situated.

Working on his short films within the context of the Israeli film industry, Masharawi set the ground for other Palestinian filmmakers filming on locations in Israel-Palestine, engaging with the Israeli production companies, funding bodies and film festivals, and in so doing, rejecting the separation imposed on the two communities based on nationalist ideologies. Most of Masharawi's films have been produced under harsh conditions, imposed by the Israeli authorities. His early short and documentary films, *Te'udat Ma'avar/Passport* (1986), *Ha Miklat/The Shelter* (1989), *Long Days in Gaza* (1991), *Daro-w-Dour/House, Houses* (1991), and *As-Sahr/The Magician* (1992), heralded the director's concerns with the experiences of Palestinian refugees and life under Israeli occupation, that will go on to mark his filmmaking career.[2]

The recurrent and most prominent themes in Masharawi's feature films include life in Palestinian refugee camps, loss, occupation, dispossession and exile. The filmmaker is also concerned with internal tensions, generational divides, gender relationships and mental health within Palestinian communities. Similar to other Palestinian and Arab filmmakers from the region, he became drawn to transnational sources of funding as the only means of realizing his projects (Shafik, *Arab Cinema* 39). Initially backed by European funding bodies, television channels and production companies, Masharawi began to obtain support from Arab sources and to establish connections with European producers developing their transnational portfolios. With limited distribution in Arab countries and some exposure in the West, where

his films were confined to screening at film festivals, and on specialized television channels dedicated to multicultural content, his early work was consigned to Palestinian and Arab audiences or viewers with specific cultural backgrounds and interests. Following the initial success of his films, Masharawi made attempts to move to Europe, eventually deciding to return to Palestine (Armes 245). His move from The Gaza Strip to Ramallah allowed him to contribute to Palestinian cultural life, film production, distribution, and the organization of training programs for aspiring filmmakers.[3] Cultivating transnational ties has over time enabled Masharawi to aspire to more ambitious projects, higher production values and wider distribution of his films.

This chapter concentrates on Masharawi's feature films *Hatta Ishaar Akhar*/*Curfew* (1994), *Haïfa* (1996), *Ticket to Jerusalem* (2002), *Attente/Waiting* (2005) *Eid milad Laila*/*Laila's Birthday* (2008) and *Falastine Stereo*/*Palestine Stereo* (2013), placing an emphasis on elements of modernizing transnationalism and the director's dislocation of the paradigms of nature in representations of Palestinian identity. What follows intersects the director's ecological concerns with other categories of social power under Israeli occupation and focuses on the role of cultural production and exchange in communicating Palestinian narratives of occupation and exile to the world.[4]

Masharawi's Modernizing Transnationalism: Dislocating the Paradigms of Nature in Representations of National Identity

In the opening chapter of this thesis, modernizing transnationalism is identified as a tendency to relate Palestinian aspirations to the established benchmarks of modern society and accentuate Palestinian achievements within the domain of cultural production. In her classification of cinematic transnationalisms, Hjort posits that specific concerns and effects motivate transnational modes of cinema production ("On the Plurality" 15). Palestinian

communities located in the state of Israel and within the fragmented and socially and economically subjugated enclaves living under Israeli occupation and blockade have been continually devoid of the basic standards of living and human rights and have been prevented from engaging in the key processes of cultural production and exchange.

Masharawi uses his films to draw attention to the living conditions within the refugee camps in The Gaza Strip, a densely inhabited enclave in a perpetual state of instability, and territories under Palestinian control in in the West Bank and focus on the lives of communities disconnected from the world of nature. The filmmaker suggests that speaking for Palestine and Palestinians means encouraging his cinema audiences to reflect upon the ideological underpinnings of nature and the superseded representations of national identity. Masharawi identifies the interdependency of his environmental concerns with other systems of subjugation within the geopolitical context of Israel-Palestine and embraces cultural production as a mechanism to enhance modern values and impart Palestinian narratives to the world.

According to Oren Yiftachel, land and settlement constitute one of the key bases of the ethnocratic society, as do ownership, use and development of the land, planning and settlement policies which are all shaped by the state's project of extending control over its territory (*Ethnocracy* 36). Assuming control over sections of land and prohibiting and restricting the movement of Palestinians within the occupied territories has been one of the pivotal elements of Israeli policies since 1948. The Gaza Strip was under Israeli occupation between the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and the 1993 Oslo Accords. The land and sea blockade, economic sanctions, and building of settler communities were all aimed at reducing the living space for Palestinians. Instituted in the 1990s and enhanced by a system of checkpoints and the blockade of Gaza and other territories, the permit system was intended to reinforce segregation, make the enclaves uninhabitable, and to deny Palestinians the right to self-

determination ("Report on UNCTAD"). Following the transfer of power to the Palestinian Authority, Israelis continued the blockade of Gaza and the expropriation of Palestinian land in The West Bank. The early decades of twenty-first century saw the living conditions in Gaza, including population growth, lack of infrastructure, access to resources, water, sanitation and health services, deteriorate, forecasting a decline in securing human rights as well as a dignified, secure and healthy life for the Palestinian population ("Gaza in 2020")

Masharawi's move to The West Bank coincides with the beginning of the fifth phase in the development of Israel's ethnocratic regime, which according to Yiftachel, takes place between the signing of the Oslo Accords and the present stage, typified by the new phase in Zionist expansionism, the building of settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, and intensifying the process of Judaization of colonized territories ("'Creeping Apartheid'" 14). This era also coincides with the initial consultations dedicated to creating a physical barrier between Palestinians and Israelis in the mid-1990s. Creating a wall-and-fence-complex was instituted as a mechanism for managing the overall socio-cultural stalemate by establishing the new logic of "Maximum Separation" (in Hebrew: *hafrada*), polarizing and radicalizing the two communities, and slowing the processes of expropriation of Arab land, while maintaining military and political superiority ("'Creeping Apartheid'" 15). The concrete barrier was aimed at restricting the entry conditions, making the Palestinian enclaves uninhabitable (Report on UNCTAD), and further assuming the Israeli control over territory and natural resources. The first sections of the Wall were built in 2003, and by 2012, two thirds of its planned length was completed, resulting in loss of land, suffocating communities, economic decline, as well as diminished human rights and social services ('Study"). While the strategies of Israeli military domination have changed to "a complex matrix of discrimination, dispossession and colonization" (Pappé, *The Idea* 43), the construction of the Wall, and the annexation of land and the expansion of Jewish settlements ("United Nations"),

have all transformed Palestinians into victims of "serious and systematic environmental injustice" ("Barrier Impacts"; "Environmental impacts"; Pontin et al. 78).

Since the turn of the century, academic scholarship has made salient contributions investigating how environmental issues are reflected through the medium of film, drawing attention to the interdependency of environment and cinematic images, but have been largely focused on representations of nature in American film production.[5] According to Adam O'Brien, one direction of academic scholarship in eco-cinema has been aligned with progressive politics and extends the scope of investigation from filmic to broader media contexts.[6] The other direction examines how we respond to the film's engagement with environmental issues in the way the medium also reflects upon female body, historical narrative, national identity, childhood and other concerns.[7] Positioning the ecological concerns in Masharawi's films within the field of transnational cinema, this discussion provides a framework for probing the connections between his examination of ecological issues with other modes of power-relationships within the Israeli-Palestinian context.

In their edited collection of essays, *Transnational Ecocinema: Film Culture in an Era of Ecological Transformation* (2013), Pietari Kääpä and Tommy Gustafsson postulate that Hollywood cinema has long dominated the cinema studies of eco-criticism and propose to engage with environmental questions through a range of positions on film production and cultural concerns from around the globe. Kääpä identifies two re-orientation points for synergizing eco-critical scholarship and transnational cinema studies. He firstly proposes delving beyond the binary oppositions instituted by Hollywood and national cinemas and re-positioning the investigation of eco-cinema across a range of transnational frameworks, including content, production, distribution, exhibition, and reception. A secondary concern foregrounds an analysis of ecological questions within a wider context by identifying the

connections with other social groups and modes of oppression ("Transnational Approaches" 22).

In the same vein, Anat Pick and Guinevere Narraway in *Screening Nature: Cinema Beyond the Human* (2013), draw on the body of scholarship reflecting ecological concerns in the medium of film and the interdependencies between critical, identity and social categories of power in the form of an intersectional approach.[8] Pick and Narraway suggest this approach may open avenues to a range of investigations, including race, ideology, class, gender, sexuality, justice, politics, and aesthetics. These two interventions are important for positioning Masharawi's ecological concerns within a transnational frame of reference and for establishing intersectional ties between his engagement with ecology and other structures of power-relationships within Israeli-Palestinian geopolitical, historical and cultural contexts.

The opposing nationalist ideologies supported by the Israeli and Palestinian political elites have emphasized belonging to the land and oneness with the world of nature as the key postulates of their programs. The narratives celebrating Zionist attachment to the land are central to the ethos of settler-colonialism. As Said and Barsamian posit, Zionist ideology was based on the vision of pioneers who came to a desert and dealt with the nomads who could be driven away, dispossessed and discarded (*Culture and Resistance* 20-21). The successive Israeli administrations continued to restrict and deny endeavours to recognize Palestinian connections to the land actively supporting the policies of expropriation and erasure.[9] These administrations began to cultivate a new paradigm of national identity, transforming the diasporic character of Jewish immigration that originated in Europe, accentuating connections with the land being inhabited.[10] As Mitch Goldsmith points out, the Zionist constructions of "nature" and "human nature," in reference to themselves and to Palestinians, have continued to inform and articulate their destructive environmental policies, to block the flow of materials and capital resources between Palestinian communities and other nations, to

persist with environmental degradation, the destruction of farmland and olive groves and to contribute to the ecological impact of occupation upon Palestine ("From the River" 17-18).

Palestinian political and cultural elites emphasize the connections between people and nature and natural resources as one of the key markers of national identity. One of the most enduring tropes of the Palestinian Cinema of the Revolutionary Period is the evocation of the connections of Palestinians to their land prior to the creation of the state of Israel. Revolving around the charismatic male figures of the *fedayeen*, these gendered visions of the land, seen as a symbol of fertility, used Third-World, anti-colonial rhetoric to challenge the dominant postulates of Zionist ideology, providing foundations for the Palestinian narratives of resistance, liberation and return. They professed that a peasant, a freedom fighter and a soldier of the global revolutionary movement, with his organic connections to the land and its people, was capable of homogenizing the nation and standing up to the colonial power.[11]

Masharawi's films identify the tectonic shift in understanding the Palestinian sense of identity, altered by the Israeli occupation, and policies of discrimination and erasure. His cinema uncovers the problematic undercurrents in the old narratives which celebrate the ethos of Palestinian peasant revolutionaries and commemorate their oneness with the realm of nature. Set amidst an acute environmental crisis, Masharawi's films do not adhere to Naficy's classification of the homeland's utopian chronotopes of nature, generated by the exilic emphasis on territoriality. Unlike the majority of exilic films, his cinematic narratives, which are also concerned with the disappeared homeland and the impossibility of return, do not search for the irrevocable authority and certainty situated in the world of nature, and its timelessness, boundlessness, reliability, stability and universality (*An Accented Cinema* 155-156).

Living amidst the endemic poverty of refugee camps, devoid of nature and natural resources and witnessing the ongoing decline of their living spaces and conditions,

Masharawi's characters are consigned to their daily existence permeated by sense of frustration, disorientation, and declining hopes in the peace process. The romanticized evocations of the pastoral simplicity of the pre-Nakba period and the heroic tales of resistance and proximity to the world of nature are seen as distant tropes inapplicable to the conditions in refugee camps where the measures meted out by successive Israeli governments ensured the subjugation of refugee communities. Masharawi does not renounce, negate or marginalize the physical and emotional ties and claims of the Palestinian people to their land. Instead, the filmmaker prompts the viewer to reflect upon the tensions and disconnections within the national imaginary, and upon the interdependency of his ecological concerns with other modes of subjugation in the context of Israel-Palestine.

Masharawi's films use the language of mainstream cinema and engage with the minor form to emphasize their political element and identify new forms of subjectivity in communities in the refugee camps along the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Set in bleak, oppressive environments and impoverished conditions, his low-budget films are distinguished by limited production capacities and technical imperfections. Described by Gertz and Khleifi as a "desperate cinema" (*Palestinian Cinema* 112), Masharawi's films are often driven by the modest aspirations of his characters, getting through the day under the Israeli curfew, organizing a film screening, or returning home to a child's birthday. But, while their concerns may seem insignificant in the broader context of Israeli-Palestinian relations, for Palestinian audiences, these small acts acknowledge a sense of resilience, of dignity and of a will to survive. Identifying new forms of Palestinian consciousness, Masharawi does not romanticize the position of his minor subjects. Acknowledging the responsiveness of cinema spectators, he accentuates the need to renegotiate the established tropes of national identity and participates in the formation of new Palestinian and global cinema audiences.

In Masharawi's feature narratives, the centrality of cultural production and exchange has assumed an increasingly prominent role for exilic Palestinian communities. The filmmaker reiterates his position on cinema as a vehicle to advance the processes of modernization, claim cultural citizenship and transgress the limitations of colonial rule. He sees cultural production and exchange as resources to alert global audiences to the problem of Palestinian communities under occupation ("Rashid Masharawi"). While the narratives of his deterritorialized subjects occupy the centre-stage of Masharawi's films, the filmmaker refuses to yield to competing Zionist accounts of the conflict as his sole undertaking.[12] Positioning Masharawi's work in geopoliticial, historical and cultural contexts, it is important to note that he was the first director standing beneath the Palestinian flag at the 1996 Cannes Film Festival's premiere of *Haifa* (Roffey et al.) highlighting the role of cinema in opposing the forces of imperialism and colonial hegemony.[13] Masharawi reaffirms the anti-hegemonic potential of cinema, reminding audiences that, during the Israeli military occupation, filmmaking was seen as political activity (Armaly), and that in cinema, Palestine exists as a nation, "with culture, language and art, with negative and positive sides" (Rastegar, "Rashid Masharawi" 54). He concentrates on the lives of Palestinian communities devoid of nature, accentuates the modernizing element in his narratives, and urges for re-negotiating the superseded representations of Palestinian-ness, reflecting on the construction and articulation of such identities and values.

Curfew:

Confined and Disconnected from the World of Nature

Set in the Gaza refugee camp and shot at the time of the First Intifada, Masharawi's feature film debut was co-produced by Ayloul Film,[14] Argus Film Produktie Holland, WDR and ARTE, and with the support of The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, the

Dutch public broadcaster AVRO, The National Postcode Lottery, and the Municipality of Nazareth. *Curfew* premiered at the International Critics' Week of the Cannes Film Festival, toured the international festival circuit, and received the Best Feature Film of the Year Award from the Arab World Institute. It also marked the debut of producer Peter van Vogelpoel, who will continue to collaborate with Masharawi as part of his growing transnational portfolio.[15] In spite of bringing together a number of different stakeholders from the European countries in which Palestinian cinema was virtually unknown at the time, Masharawi refuses to immerse his project in oppositional values and concentrate on competing with the Zionist narrative. Instead, he uses this transnational collaboration between production companies, national and pan-national television broadcasters and government bodies to construct a narrative about the experiences of a Palestinian family under curfew and to articulate his ecological concerns.

Produced in the wake of the Oslo Accords, *Curfew* signposts a contrast between the hopes created by the peace process and the shared sense of frustration and missed opportunities on the ground. Recognizing the PLO as a partner in peace negotiations and establishing the Palestinian National Authority with limited self-governance, The Oslo Accords failed to produce a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the right of refugees to return to their homelands. Following the signing of the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian position continued to deteriorate due to settlement expansion, the Israeli blockade and the control of borders and waterways. Visiting the Gaza Strip, Edward W. Said described it as the space of misery, programmed oppression, confinement and racial discrimination (*The Politics of Dispossession*, 194). Masharawi's characters in *Curfew* are seen as "victims of peace" (Roffey et al.), since the fragmentation and reduction of their physical and temporal worlds are reflective of the conditioning and deterioration of the Palestinian communities due

to the processes of colonization and exile, thereby reinforcing their powerlessness and vulnerability.

The film's production history suggests that completing this low-budget project moored in minor aesthetics was in itself already a substantial achievement. The panoramic shots were acquired from the rooftops of the Gaza Strip, the street scenes were filmed in the Jenin refugee camp on the West Bank, and the interiors were shot in a house in Nazareth, in Israel (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 104). This symbolic link between the isolated territories inhabited by Palestinians prompted some critics to describe it as the first Palestinian feature film (Farid 81). Furthermore, the locations where *Curfew* was filmed and the manner in which the material was acquired suggest that, in Palestinian communities, film production is seen as a tool for alerting worldwide audiences to the consequences of Israeli occupation, the lack of basic living standards, and the state of human rights in Israel-Palestine.

Curfew opens with a close-up of a boy, Radar (Younis Younis), followed by his point-of-view shot of a deserted street, and of panoramic shots of the refugee camp's horizon of corrugated iron rooftops. The Abu-Rajis gather for a reading of the letter from their son, studying in Germany, who plans to spend his holidays in the Alps – something inconceivable to his family and other Ghazans, deprived of any access to their own schools, farms or the beach. The reading is interrupted by the announcement of the curfew, and Masharawi follows the events in the Abu-Raji household over the ensuing 24 hours, providing an account of Palestinian life under blockade.

Even though the presence of Israelis in *Curfew* is scarce, Masharawi implies that they exercise absolute control over the subjugated Palestinian community. Intensifying this sense of confinement, the camera rigidly follows the protagonists' movements rather than linking the areas of the household spatially. The ailing patriarch, Abu-Raji (Salim Dau), spends most

of his time in bed, or talking to his sons, Akram, (Mahmoud Qadah) and Raji (Assem Zoabi), while Um Raji (Na'ila Zayaad) and Amal (Rana Sa'adi) are occupied with housework. Radar completes errands for his parents and siblings, and secretly speaks to the girl next door. The spectator follows them as they retire to their respective areas and congregate in the living room, trying to maintain a sense of normality. The gradual disintegration and fragmentation of their living space is emphasized by group shots containing characters within the same frame, suggesting that even the slightest movement from one space to another carries considerable emotional weight.

Masharawi dislocates the ideological underpinnings of nature in representations of national identity, urging that his audiences need to be alert both to what is visible and to what is physically absent from his visual composition. Pick and Narraway, evoking Timothy Morton's reflections on "an all-encompassing ecological dimension" in *The Ecological Thought* (Morton 1)*,* assert that, even at its most political, cinema studies marginalizes the interplay of their historical, ideological and social concerns with the environment in which they arise and which they constitute (7). Masharawi probes the dominant representations of national identity, foregrounding the sense of frustration and imprisonment of his characters and their disconnection from the world of nature, while placing equal emphasis on his characters, on *mise-en-scene,* and on visual elements evacuated from their immediate surroundings. There are no uninterrupted panoramic shots of the sky and the sea; Gaza's beaches and gardens are visually excluded from the film and replaced by dark, suffocating interiors, locked doors and obstructed views of his characters. Besieged by a modern and highly technologized Israeli army, Palestinians are imprisoned and ghettoized and revert to basic strategies of survival and self-preservation.

These diminishing natural resources are directed to sustenance and protection, outdoor activities are relocated to the congested interiors, and the food and water supplies are

rationed. Um Raji shares lemons with the neighbour, and onions are used to guard against gas attacks, while Raji worries about the vegetables rotting away in his delivery truck. The rooster struts across the lounge where Radar practises his soccer skills, and the family use 'curfew clotheslines,' out of sight of the patrolling Israeli soldiers. Attuned to the signals from the outside world, Radar can discern the sounds of bullets and the wheezing of tear gas, while, deprived of real experiences, Amal obsesses about her self-image.

Masharawi invites the viewer to recognize the gaps and contradictions within the national imaginary as, disconnected from the world beyond their immediate vicinity, the Abu-Rajis are, unlike the charismatic heroes of the Palestinian Cinema of the Revolutionary Period, paralysed by fear, apathy and a sense of powerlessness. There are no evocations of the idyllic life in the pre-Nakba period, or commemorating oneness with the realm of nature typical of documentary films celebrating the Palestinian revolutionary ethos. The memories of their houses and land, the agony of defeat and exile, and the narratives of resistance, heroism and sacrifice are absent from their dialogue, divested of all references to the realm beyond their immediate space of captivity. "We're just sitting around anyway," Abu-Raji reminds his sons, keen to see some change. The Palestine of the past and the prospects of peace negotiations are light years away (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 107).

Besieged by the Israeli army, barricaded in their small, overcrowded households, and disconnected from the narratives of liberation and return, Masharawi's characters are reduced to their individual interactions within the confined space of their private dwelling. The filmmaker focuses on uneventful fragments of their everyday life, and the ubiquitous sense of monotony and apathy. Akram is engaged in resistance and his sister Amal is unwilling to comply with marriage and family as the sole approved pathways for a young woman; however, they seldom express dissent or show initiative. Their father only exercises his freedom to act independently when trying to maintain his position in the family hierarchy.

During a power outage, he decides to give Radar a haircut. When the boy refuses, Abu-Raji responds: “I don’t care. We have nothing better to do.” Attempts to assert his authority indicate not only the decline of the patriarchal order, but the collapse of meaningful communication between family members. The effects of captivity are even more evident in the scene in which Radar and Akram realize that the oil lamp has caused a fire in their bedroom. Resigned to their destiny, they fail to immediately put out the flames, taken aback by the opportunity to spring to action.

The rhythms of everyday life are substituted by cycles of imprisonment. Set at night, the foreboding scene of the round-up ends one phase of confinement only to begin yet another, as the Palestinian men are crammed into trucks and taken to a detention centre. Returning to the house, Akram finds Raji’s wife crying, and angrily exclaims: “What’s the difference if Raji’s in prison? The whole camp is one big prison. Or do you think you’re free!?” A moment later, the family are told that their neighbor gave birth to a dead baby girl. The following morning, the camera pans around the living area as the family gathers to listen to Radar, who finishes reading out the letter, but the off-screen voice announces the curfew, introducing another cycle of detention. Amidst silent indignation, the camera pulls out from the Abu-Rajis, and, matching the opening scene, cuts to the panoramic shots of Gaza’s rooftops, closing off this confining film, and affirming the protagonists’ resilience and desire to endure and survive. Abandoning restrictive and claustrophobic interiors in his following film, the filmmaker explores the colonized landscape of Gaza refugee camp and the entrenched representations of nature dominating the national imaginary.

Haïfa:

Colonized Landscapes and Dreams of Return

Produced in the aftermath of the Oslo Peace Accords, *Haïfa* premiered in the *Un certain regard* program of the Cannes Film Festival, received awards in Rome, Tunis, Cairo, Jerusalem and Barcelona, and became one of Masharawi's most critically acclaimed films. Situated in the Gaza refugee camp, it features a group of Palestinian exiles disconnected from their villages and land and immersed in the memories of the pre-Nakba Palestine and the narratives of return, awaiting for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In *Landscape and Film,* Martin Lefèvbre establishes that, "in investigating landscape in film one is considering an object that amounts to much more than the mere spatial background that necessarily accompanies the depiction of actions and events" (xii). Masharawi uses colonized landscapes as a conduit through which to map out traumatic memories of exile and dispossession, dislocate and subvert the established paradigm of nature in the national imaginary and to make a plea for renegotiation of the key tropes of Palestinian identity.

Haunted by the memory of his cousin Latifeh, Nabil (Mohammad Bakri), a local fool nicknamed Haïfa connects the characters and situations in Masharawi's fragmentary narrative. Haïfa links the traumatic memories of defeat with the bleak and forbidding Palestinian reality, remembering Palestinian dispossession and exile through the prism of individual loss (T Kennedy, *Cinema Regarding Nations* 65). The children of Haïfa's aunt (Mariam El-Hin) are dispersed in exile, Ziad (Fadi El-Ghoul) hides from the Israeli police, his brother Said (Mahmoud Qadah) is in prison, and his father, Abu-Said (Ahmad Abu Sal'oum), once a policeman for the Palestinian National Authority, runs a sweet cart for local children, while middle-aged Abbas (Khaled Awad) hopes to return to his hometown of Yaffa following the signing of the peace agreement. Discussing her plans with Ziad, young Sabah

(Nawal Zaquot) seems to be the only carrier of the new imaginary, projecting her dreams onto the future.

The sense of imprisonment in Masharawi's first feature film is reinforced by the discontinuities in this film's narrativization of the Palestinian experience of dispossession, "the construction of living historical sequence and the freezing of the past in the present" (Gertz and Khleifi, "Chronicle" 193), in his second. Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner, in Introduction to their edited volume, *Cinema and Landscape*, observe that, "cinematic landscapes, while obviously part of a continuum, and equally composed of frames, can also be considered conduits of memories, and a form of time that transcends cinema itself" (19). This is evident in Masharawi's use of landscape and his innovative approach to the trope of madness, creating a "schizophrenic displacement of Haïfa, the city" (Dabashi, Introduction 18), and the composite memories in his film render a "'living memory' of displacement and exile" (Hedges "The Nakba").

Haïfa's central role, appearance and interactions with other characters in the film afford an opportunity to reflect upon the postcolonial and gender ramifications of the environmental injustices inflicted against the Palestinian population. His name does not convey a sense of belonging to a specific location as the exiles from Haïfa were rarely relocated to Gaza – something most Palestinian audiences would be familiar with (Armaly). Cordoned off by barbed wire and Israeli checkpoints, Palestinian exiles are separated from the nearby farmland and beaches. Ehab Assal's camera registers small vegetable patches, makeshift fruit stalls, trees, shrubs and domestic animals, but remains fixed on Haïfa, who, sitting in the shell of the broken-down vehicle on the camp's outskirts, pretends to navigate his way into the unknown. Masharawi suggests that, besieged by the Israeli army, and neglected and forgotten by the world, Palestinian refugees, surrounded by the detritus of modern civilization, still dream of returning to their houses and land.

In *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin suggest that inspecting colonial relationships of power, articulated through relations to the land, reveals a range of manifestations of ecological imperialism, biocolonialism and discursive and material racism (3-4). Divulging interdependencies between Masharawi's ecological concerns and the subaltern status of Palestinians as victims of colonial injustice is demonstrated through the construction and depiction of emasculated figures of refugees, devoid of land, disconnected from the world of nature and profoundly incapacitated to changing their dismal circumstances. Marching down the camp's main street, Haïfa entertains local shopkeepers and passers-by, exclaiming the names of the cities that were once home to Palestinian refugees: "Yaffa, Haïfa, Akka!" His clownish appearance, in a torn uniform and armed with a wooden rifle, evokes different constructions of Israeli and Palestinian identities and bodies, framed by their relationship to the land and to natural resources. As Meira Weiss demonstrates in *The Chosen Body: The Politics of the Body in Israeli Society*, Zionist ideology not only included a return to the land of Israel, but a return to Biblical heroism, to nature and to physical strength, subverting the caricatured constructs of the male Jew.[16] The Zionist representation of the key figure of the settler-colonialist project required the construction of a Palestinian other. Drawing on Weiss's arguments, Mitch Goldsmith deconstructs the Zionist projections of the Israeli body in juxtaposition to the constructions of nature and the emasculated and disempowered Palestinian body, claiming that possession of the land re-inscribes a dominant Israeli embodiment while the dispossession of land creates an emasculated, disempowered Palestinian/Arab body (17).

Masharawi links the disconnection of Palestinian exiles from the realm of nature to the prevalence of uncertainty, and to a sense of frustration and despair of his characters. Ziad speaks of the distances between Gaza, Jerusalem and Jericho with local youth, but for him and the majority of Palestinian refugees, the action never moves away from the camp. Their

imaginary journeys, Abu-Said's reassignment to police force, the return of the aunt's children, and Haïfa's reunion with his beloved, all gradually transpire as distant hopes, similar to the anticipated outcome of the peace negotiations. Ironically conjured via Haïfa's rants, placed in the sequence with the legacy of colonial masters, the idealized projections mark the passage of the time and the protracted sense of confinement, ending the chain of humiliating defeats with a Palestinian return to natural splendour: "The Turks came, built mosques and left. The English came, built camps and left. The Jews came, stole the country and built more jails. What about the Palestinians? Will they build gardens?"

Haïfa's dreams of return to the land reveal the tensions and discontinuities within the nostalgic evocations of the past of the older generation of exiles and are used to reaffirm the sense of national belonging, contrasted with the experiences of the younger generation of Palestinians. Reflecting upon the reminiscences of the older generations, Masharawi observes: "What can I miss of a refugee camp? The Israeli occupation? Those houses? The difference between my generation and our parents is that they missed Jaffa, real houses, real gardens" (Masharawi, qtd. in Armaly). While it is evident that the Palestinian refugees exiled from their homes "do not long not for wasteland, but for paradise" (Darwish, *Journal* 7), in Masharawi's film, the new generation of exiles, bereft of nature, perceive their obsession with the past as a burden, gradually revealing their modern sensibilities. Frustrated by betrayed promises and by a lack of opportunities, they create new spaces of personal growth, beyond the limitations of old narratives or the confines of traditional order. Ziad is cynical and rebellious while his parents eagerly await the release of prisoners and the end of peace negotiations. His sister Sabah (Nawal Zaquot), a talented artist who wishes to continue her education, secretly meets a boy who tells her stories and inspires her to paint, defying the idea of arranged marriage (Armaly). Sabah's disregard for social norms, her desire for emancipation and her attempts at articulating her inner world through painting, herald a trope

in Masharawi's ensuing films, in which artistic expression and cultural exchange take central place within the modern Palestinian imaginary.

Consistent with the articulation of the realities of his deterritorialized characters, the filmmaker reiterates the urge to continue with the struggle for justice. Following the White House summit between Yasser Arafat, Yitzhak Rabin and Bill Clinton, the camp's residents realise that their situation will remain unchanged. Paralyzed after his stroke, Abu-Said is finally sent a re-admission offer, but cannot re-join the Palestinian police force. Abbas (Khaled Awad) acknowledges that his return to Yaffa will never come true, Haïfa's aunt receives the news about the death of her son, and Haïfa learns that Latifeh is happily married and now lives in Beirut. Released from prison, Said sees a demented elderly woman who, offered a lift by a taxi driver, ponders: "Where should I go?" He observes her through the rear window of the departing car, standing at the crossroads, suggesting the absurdity of the Palestinian position, but also revealing that the traumas that afflicted the first generation of exiles still besiege the new generation of Palestinians growing up in refugee camps.

In the closing scene of the film, Said's homecoming coincides with demonstrations staged by Palestinian youths. Accompanied by his brother and father, Said encounters Haïfa, leading the funeral procession for his aunt in the opposite direction. The groups merge and split again, leaving Haïfa unsure of which direction to take. Kennedy asserts that the swivelling of his eyes between the two parting columns, one representing the loss of the past, the other the ongoing struggle for the rights of the dispossessed, convey Haïfa's dilemma, torn between accepting that the dreams of the past are irretrievably diminished, and recognizing the finite status of Palestinians as refugees (*Cinema Regarding Nations* 232). In this final scene, set amidst the barren landscape of the refugee camp, Masharawi prompts audiences to reflect upon the limited choices of Palestinian exiles, acknowledging their continuing resistance to the status quo. In his ensuing film, the director explores his

characters' endeavours to transgress colonized landscapes, contemplating the role of culture in claiming citizenship rights and in narrating Palestinian experiences.

Ticket to Jerusalem:
Transgressing Colonized Landscapes

Ticket to Jerusalem was co-produced by Cinema Production Center, van Vogelpoel's Argus Film and Silkroad Productions[17] and supported by ARTE France[18] and SBS Independent (SBSi) Australia,[19] expanding Masharawi's cultural partnerships with transnational backers. Masharawi uses his resourcefulness and initiative to draw attention to Palestinian film production in the regions where commercial cinema viewers, festival and television audiences were largely unacquainted with the works of Palestinian cineastes. The filmmaker enhances his ongoing partnership with a major pan-European television channel and emerging production companies through his collaboration with an Australian multicultural broadcaster's independent commissioning branch in the production of his new film, shifting the focus on life in impoverished and fragmented West Bank enclaves.

Jaber (Ghassan Abbas), a projectionist from the Kalandia refugee camp, lives with the ambulance nurse, Sana (Areen Omary), and travels to nearby towns to screen films to Palestinian children. Inspired by the Jerusalem teacher Rabab (Reem Ilo), he decides to organize a screening in the Old City. Arriving from the West Bank, Jaber needs a special permit to get to Jerusalem. The viewer follows him, journeying through the territory carved out by Israeli checkpoints, to accomplish his mission.

The oppressive, confining spaces in which his minor films are located, accentuate the political element in Masharawi's narratives and expose the new environments and conditions in which his characters are situated. Applying close-ups and mobile framing, typical of the broadcast media's coverage of the conflict, Masharawi articulates the agonizing state of

densely populated, closely monitored Palestinian enclaves, divested of peace, stability and natural beauty. The visual compositions are dominated by small rooms, crowded hospital corridors, narrow streets, tightly framed roads enclosed by industrial debris, and congested checkpoints, devoid of panoramic shots or natural beauty. Baudoin Koenig's documentary-style coverage and attention to visual detail make some of these settings un-locatable, as the volatility of life at the time of the popular uprising leaves little time to contemplate or immerse oneself within the environments populated by Masharawi's subjects. Enhancing the sense of captivity, these environments also reflect the hopelessness of the projectionist's position; screening films to Palestinian children without recognition or compensation, he is often unable to reach them and spends most of his time at roadblocks (Gertz, "The Stone" 27). While Masharawi signposts the rise of modern sensibilities and the centrality of culture in a world bereft of natural beauty, articulating new models of resistance to colonial repression, he also identifies the problems encountered by the projectionist. Jaber and Sana live in a small apartment without natural light, crammed with film reels, and he is pressured by his family to find a 'proper job' or, like his brother, emigrate to Canada.

However, the projectionist's passion should not be reduced to defending "the honour and necessity of moviegoing in times of political emergency" (A O Scott "Wherever He Goes"). Jaber's modernizing endeavours to transmit culture between Palestinian communities (Kennedy, *Cinema Regarding Nations* 229) assist Palestinians in their attempts to reconstitute themselves "in relation to their changing geographies" (Al-Zobaidi "Tora Bora Cinema"). They promote the understanding that, as Amilcar Cabral pointedly suggests, "the liberation movement must, on the cultural level as well as on the political level, base its action in popular culture" ("National Liberation" 59).

Masharawi also accentuates the pedagogical role of film literacy, as Jaber connects with the new generation of Palestinian cinema enthusiasts and helps them shape and

articulate their artistic sensibilities, as well as project their visions of a future Palestinian society. By screening feature and animated films – often from the countries opposing Palestinian self-determination – to children, Jaber urges them to embrace other cultures and to transgress the limitations of colonial repression. He encourages them to guard their individual autonomy and to foster a hybrid and tolerant society in addition to a spirit of resistance within the newly constituted modes of cultural interaction and exchange.

These acts, vital for affirming the role of culture within a colonized society, are inspired by strong and independent female characters, unanchored in domestic environments, Rabab and her mother Um Ibrahim (Naja Abu Al-Hejah) enduring the intimidations by the Jewish settlers, who have seized part of their building, and Sana, who saves lives during the Intifada. Jaber also encounters other Palestinians, articulating new modes of *sumud*, and supporting his mission. When they learn that one of the screenings has been cancelled due to a power outage, Sana and Jaber arrive at the venue to find an *oud* player performing in a small room, lit with candles, and without an audience. Living in Palestinian enclaves plagued by conditions imposed by the continuing blockade, violence and poverty, makes Masharawi's characters' support of local cultural activities even more engaging.

The intention to organize a screening in Jerusalem, the physical and spiritual centre of the Palestinian national imaginary, is announced with a sense of pride, but Jaber's and Kamal's (Imad Farageen) journey is divested of natural splendour or nationalist zeal. Circumventing roadblocks, pushing the projector over the gravel roads and traversing the streets of the Old City reveals the volatility of conditions in which Masharawi's characters are situated and the instability of colonial myths which assert one nation's supremacy over another. Restrained, yet content, Jaber acknowledges that for a moment during the screening, Um Ibrahim's courtyard becomes the location where Palestinians can – observed from a distance by the Israeli settlers – claim their cultural citizenship and temporarily proclaim their

national and cultural identity. The outcomes of this modest victory are disrupted in the closing scene of the film in which Jaber's car navigates the narrow road surrounded by Jewish settlements, reminding the audiences that the lives of the majority of Palestinians are still profoundly affected by the occupation.

Waiting:
A Shared Sense of Evanescence

In *Waiting*, Masharawi follows a traveling media crew trying to reconnect with Palestinian exiles in refugee camps and help them reclaim their sense of cultural identity. The announcement that the National Theatre in Gaza is to be opened with the support of the European Union, prompts the director, Ahmad (Jordanian director Mahmoud al-Massad), cameraman Lumiere (Youssef Baroud), and journalist Bissan (Areen Omari), to travel across the region, conducting auditions with prospective actors.

This transregional docudrama road-movie is based on the filmmaker's personal experience. Blocked at the Jordanian-Israeli border on his return to Ramallah, Masharawi decided to ask Palestinians to improvise on the theme of waiting. When his recordings were presented as part of the installation at Dokumenta Festival in Kassel, Germany, Pierre Chevalier, the Director of Fiction at ARTE decided to launch the film (Roy). Co-produced by Masharawi's Cinema Production Center, Silkroad Productions and 2M Télévision (Morocco), *Waiting* was scripted by Oskar Kronop and Masharawi, and shot in Bakaa, Amman, Damascus, and Shatila. Connecting the Palestinians in their homeland and in exile, this complex transnational collaboration allows them to travel back (Masharawi, qtd. in Yaqub, "*Waiting*" 200), examining different perceptions of Palestinian identity. Masharawi filmed in urban centers and refugee camps, and cast actors from various countries in the region, thereby

engaging with the multiplicity of relations between the national and the transnational and conveying a sense of heterogeneity within Palestinian exilic communities.

Following the Oslo Accords, Palestinian territories attained some attributes of national sovereignty, but the occupation continues under the auspices of the peace process. Its effects are evident in the sense of disconnection and fragmentation of Palestinian communities devoid of land and resources, existing in declining living conditions, with a lack of human rights and freedom of movement, and the unresolved question of refugees' right to return. Masharawi probes the exilic consciousness of his minor transnational subjects caught in a geopolitical limbo, and scrutinizes their multiple identifications (Appadurai and Breckenridge 7), their fractured recollections and fluctuating identities (Vertovec, "Conceiving and Researching" 449-450). He explores the heterogeneity of the Palestinian community through the relationships between the crew and refugees and draws attention to discrepancies in their memories of Palestine and their attachment to the land, while recognizing similarities in their joint sense of deterritorialization and evanescence.

Masharawi's minor film emphasizes the political element in the representation of subaltern communities in exile. When they reach the Palestinians in refugee camps and begin auditions for the National Theatre, the media crew legitimize themselves as bearers of official narratives, promoting a homogenized view of Palestinian culture espoused by a national elite. Conducting the sound test, Bissan reiterates the clichéd statements of Palestinian and Israeli political representatives in relation to the peace process, but the view of nationhood as unitary muffles the polyphony of voices from this heteroglot culture (Shohat, "Post-Third-Worldist" 43). The opinions of refugees and their reminiscences of the country they left behind reveal intricate and fragmented visions of Palestine. They demonstrate that living in exile and in refugee camps has shaped a new form of subjectivity that escapes generalized assumptions of national identity. As Stuart Hall postulates:

> Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed, in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power (394).

Lumiere, who has left the country for the first time, discovers that the refugees remember and imagine Palestine as more beautiful than he knows it. In the airport scene at the start of the film, the Israeli customs officer discovers a stone in Ahmad's suitcase. The resentful filmmaker wants to take a 'piece' of his land, something that Palestinians can only dream of (Masharawi, qtd. in Prot), but the irretrievably lost homeland can only be fetishized in a symbolic stone he takes with him (Kennedy, *Cinema Regarding Nations* 204). This position is demonstrated by consistent camera framing of Masharawi's characters whose obsession with belonging to the land takes different forms. Even when they are intent on leaving Palestine, the media crew are filmed using tight framing and a lack of deep focus, suggesting entrapment rather than any sense of liberation (Yaqub, "*Waiting*" 201-202).

Consistent with the tropes of minor form, Masharawi's "fiction film rendered in documentary languages" (Dickinson, *Arab Cinema* 87), combines audition footage and material acquired in refugee camps, drawing attention to the ubiquitous political element in his narrative. The crew use the theme of waiting to prompt the improvisations, but waiting leaves the actors unresponsive, as they feel uncomfortable recounting their daily life (Armes 249). Accustomed to being silenced when speaking about dispossession, they refuse to follow the script approved by the international community (Abunimah), instead choosing to send messages or offering to do anything to return to Palestine with the crew. The European officials' insistence on achieving concrete outcomes within strict deadlines is in sharp contrast with their inadequate reactions to the acts of violence or continual breach of human rights inflicted by the Israeli authorities. Moreover, the refugees are also becoming

increasingly disengaged from the rhetoric and inaction of the Palestinian bureaucracy, represented by the largely unseen Abu-Jamil (Abderrahman Abou El-Qassem).

As it becomes increasingly evident that the project is doomed to fail, the members of the media crew begin to adopt the sceptical positions of their subjects. The blockade affects all members of the crew. Following the media reports that the building of the theatre has been destroyed in an Israeli attack, Lumiere's affair with their guide, Anouar (Shukran Murtaja) is unlikely to continue because of visa problems, and Ahmad is prevented from returning to Gaza by Israeli bombing. While their journey reveals the futility of official narratives to promote the values and principles of national and cultural elites, it still allows Ahmad to recognize the shared sense of liminality and the importance of narrating Palestinian experiences. The crew's goal is not accomplished, but the transformation of the central character offers the cinema audience a sense of hope, as Ahmad, initially unwilling to participate in the assignment, finds his voice, "not within the framework of this foreign-based project but in the behaviour of ordinary Palestinians" (Yaqub, "*Waiting*" 204).

Waiting was screened widely on the global festival circuit, including the Venice, Toronto, London, Jerusalem and Dubai film festivals, and broadcast by ARTE France (Gertz and Khleifi, "Chronicle" 193). However, prior to the film's launch at the 2006 Chicago Palestine Film Festival, Masharawi was, in a manner similar to the fictional media crew in his film, denied the opportunity to promote his work. He was refused a visa to the United States of America and his participation in the discussion with the audience was facilitated by Annemarie Jacir, via video link, from Paris (Abunimah).

Laila's Birthday:

Devoid of Land, Devoid of Justice

Laila's Birthday was co-produced by a transnational alliance of production companies and funding bodies, including Masharawi's Cinema Production Center, Mohamed Habib Attia's Tunisian CineTelefilms,[20] Peter van Vogelpoel's Sweetwater Pictures, and Wouter Barendrecht's Fortissimo Films,[21] with the support of the French Ministry of Culture, Centre Cinématographique marocain (CCM), and Palestinian Television, in addition to the participation of a largely international crew.[22] This major-minor mode of cultural partnership, with the involvement of local and regional production companies, with particular interest in promoting non-English speaking film, and with the support of French and Moroccan government bodies, exemplifies the hybridity of transnational collaborations behind Masharawi's later projects. *Laila's Birthday* premiered at Toronto International Film Festival, screened at San Sebastian, London, and Abu Dhabi, and was awarded the Best Asian Film at the 2009 Singapore International Film Festival. Distributed by Kino International, it also had a limited release in the United States of America.

In this dark comedy, Masharawi continues to examine the effects of occupation on Palestinians living in crammed urban zones, separated from their homes and villages and detached from nature, witnessing the disappearing of their houses and agricultural land, and overwhelmed by settlements, military installations, and checkpoints (Melhem "West Bank"). The filmmaker departs from his previous work in his choice of the character and location, focusing on a Palestinian middle-class family. Following a long stint abroad, Abu-Laila (Mohammed Bakri) returns to Ramallah amidst the Second Intifada, accompanied by his wife (Areen Omari) and daughter Laila (Nour Zoubi). He is offered the position of judge in the newly established Palestinian Ministry of Justice, but due to budget cuts, most employees are

forced to take on a second job, and, waiting for his appointment to come through, Abu-Laila uses his brother-in-law's car to work as a taxi driver.

Restricted to urban scenery, the film's visual composition is more revealing in what it does not show. With its regulated traffic, modern housing and urban lifestyle, and adorned with the symbols of national sovereignty, Ramallah seems secluded from the other arenas of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nevertheless, the film's opening in the middle of the night sees Abu-Laila in his apartment, disturbed by the mysterious noises of Israeli planes, which dispels the illusion that life in Ramallah is any different to any other parts of Palestine. While Palestinian institutions supposedly safeguard the remnants of autonomy guaranteed by the peace process, daily life in Ramallah demonstrates the gap between the ostensibly functioning national bureaucracy and the unchanged situation at ground level. In one of the early scenes in the film, a newsreader reports to his listeners the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, the Arab League's disingenuous condemnation of the situation, and the protests of the Palestinian representatives, followed by the Israeli Prime Minister's avowal that the occupation will continue.

Seventy-one minutes long, steeped in minor aesthetics, and shot on video, *Laila's Birthday* returns to claustrophobic spaces previously depicted in Masharawi's earlier films. The filmmaker defies the idea of a cohesive national space, prompting cinema audiences to identify the tensions that pervade these confined locations. Ramallah is a city in the grip of shortages and economic crisis, plagued by partocracy, corruption and political tensions. The scenes set in the taxi are dominated by close framing, as Abu-Laila traverses the city to make it to his daughter's birthday party, thus revealing the tensions that pervade this confining space. Disconnected from the world of nature and natural resources but also devoid of serenity and justice, Abu-Laila's customers are frustrated by the reduced freedom of movement, poor social and health services and the lack of empathy shown by the

international community. Similar to the characters in *Curfew*, his customers are incapacitated by inertia and fear, caused by the protracted occupation. An elderly woman with heart problems wonders whether she should first go to the hospital or visit her husband's grave. A distraught man, almost run over by Abu-Laila's taxi, exclaims he wishes he had died in the accident. A group of people in a café argue whether the men in military uniforms mistreating civilians in a television report are Israeli or Palestinian, until one of them realizes they are American soldiers in Iraq. A released Palestinian prisoner claims he spent time smoking in an Israeli jail, but when we see him again, enjoying his freedom, he looks passive, and is still smoking. These small, everyday events, typifying Masharawi's films, provide access to the fragile mental state of his characters, and their inability to look beyond their immediate discontent.

Unlike in the majority of Palestinian films, *sumud* is not directed at Israelis, but instead displayed by Abu-Laila's obstinate following of the rules of law (Murphy "Laila's Birthday"). Contrasting the driver's stance with the lack of co-operation and scepticism of his passengers, Masharawi ponders the impact of occupation and the traditional norms upon the blocked processes of modernization. An elderly man refuses to confer the divine legitimacy on the political order of the Palestinian authority, exclaiming: "Justice is in the hands of Allah only!" The passengers enter the taxi carrying guns, ignore the 'no smoking' sign and question the driver's sense of belonging when asked to put on their seat belts: "It is as if you are not from here." Following Abu-Laila's attempts to instil respect for law and order, Masharawi suggests the need for modernization and for the abandonment of a "one-man-system" (Alaa Tartir "Why Palestinians") that has dominated the Palestinian political spectrum and endorses the building of an inclusive and functional system that could develop the transformative potential of Palestinian society.

The only instance when Abu-Laila experiences a moment of reflection occurs when he decides to break his own rule of not driving to the checkpoints, and takes a nun, journeying to a prayer service in Jerusalem, to Kalandia. Driving by the settlement housing, built on nearby hills, they stop at the crossing. This moment reveals the ultimate chasm in ideological constructions of the land, between the expansionist project of the Zionist settlers, connecting the occupied territories and the desperate attempts of the colonized to piece together their fragmented geographic, temporal and cultural realities, as well as any continuities with the past. Abu-Laila observes the nun slowly walking towards the concrete barrier, which incites a menacing presence, surrounded by a clearance, enclosed by barbed wire, obstructing the view of the refugee camp and Palestinian villages behind it. This moment of reflection is an opportunity to imagine life on the other side of the Wall, itself, a monument to colonial supremacy and mastering of the land. It also marks the realization that Abu-Laila's pleas for justice and equality cannot be met while Palestinians are the victims of colonial violence and environmental destruction.

Following the return to the congestion and heat of Ramallah, Abu-Laila takes up a police loudspeaker and begins to regulate the traffic and instruct passers-by, until he raises his voice at the unseen helicopter patrolling the skies above the city. This represents the sole occasion when the Israelis, conspicuously absent from the rest of the film, are directly addressed: "We know you have planes, tanks and very smart missiles! You are the toughest occupiers in the world! But we want to live! We want to raise our children! We want to sleep!"

In spite of acknowledging the tensions along social, political and generational lines, Masharawi seems to diffuse the internal divisions within the Palestinian community as the all-consuming sense of oppression sets apart the problem of occupation as his pivotal concern. Abu-Laila's plea for justice reiterates that the difficulties besieging Palestinian

society cannot be addressed separately from the problem of occupation. His arrival at his daughter's birthday party in the closing scene of the film is followed by a celebration sheltered from the outside world. This self-contained scene is safely imbedded amidst an urban middle-class milieu and appears seemingly distant from the continuing violence, poverty and despair of refugee camps. Nevertheless, it still echoes the point made in all of Masharawi's previous films, namely, that those confronting oppression can conceivably reclaim their sense of dignity and humanity with small acts of kindness and compassion.

Palestine Stereo:
Leaving Palestine

Palestine Stereo was co-produced in partnership between Masharawi's CinePal Films and Abed al-Salam Abu Askar's CineTelefilms, with the support of the Gaza Media Center, a Ramallah-based independent investment company, the Palestinian Investment Fund, a group of transnational production companies as well as various government bodies,[23] and with the participation of a local and international production crew.[24] The $1.5 milion dollar budget was one of the highest for a Palestinian film at the time, with a large proportion dedicated to the post-production phase, which was completed in Italy (Browning).

The detachment of Palestinians from their land plays a central role in this satirical piece that explores the country through the eyes of those intending to leave it. *Palestine Stereo* tells the story of two brothers, Stereo (Mahmoud Abu-Jazi) and Sami (Salah Hanoun). We encounter Stereo and Sami in their makeshift tent amidst the detritus of the Jenin refugee camp as they make the decision to emigrate to Canada. Stereo, a popular wedding singer, has been unable to return to work following the Israeli bombing that killed his wife. As a result of the air attacks, his younger brother, Sami, was left a deaf mute. Still in love with his fiancé, Leila, Sami believes that his injury has rendered their relationship impossible.

The journey of the two brothers to Ramallah is marked by picturesque images of the countryside, rarely canvassed in Masharawi's work. However, in the panoramic shots which place an emphasis on natural beauty, the landscape is presented without associated narrative attributes, or as Martin Lefèvbre describes it in his essay "Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema," as "space freed from eventhood" (22). Arriving in Ramallah, Sami and Stereo learn that they need to deposit ten thousand dollars in order to qualify for a visa. The two are faced with the prospect of selling their father's olive grove, their last physical connection to the land, in order to meet the required amount and migrate to the country that does not recognize their right to sovereignty. They reject the notion and begin to operate sound at various functions and political rallies in Ramallah and the surrounding area.

Masharawi uses comical situations with dark undertones to challenge the assumption that the Palestinian illusion of statehood can alleviate the effects of the occupation. Sami and Stereo transport their equipment in the ambulance vehicle, riddled with bullets, and get into trouble when Sami fails to register a microphone dysfunction at a political gathering. Suggesting that it is impossible to create a cohesive national space, the director ridicules the symbols of Palestinian sovereignty, pervading public discourse. At a return function for prisoners, Stereo who cannot find a CD with the Palestinian anthem, is forced to improvise, playing the tune with fork and glass, while the crowd continues to enthusiastically sing and wave flags. On another occasion, the two receive their Palestinian passports and are immediately made aware that they will soon have to renounce them in order to apply for Canadian citizenship. The brutality of the conflict is the only certainty emanating from Stereo's and Sami's journey towards the realization that the Israeli occupation will continue (Armes 252). Receiving the news that the Israeli army and the settlers are digging up the olive trees in Jenin, they return to join the protest, but are shot at, and the trees are uprooted, thus severing their last link to the land of their ancestors.

Masharawi creates symbolic continuities in the representation of nature in *Palestine Stereo,* connecting the early images of the journey to Ramallah with the uprooting of the olive trees later in the film, as reterritorializing his characters and their relation to the land emerges as the turning point in the narrative. While Masharawi's dislocation of the paradigms of nature in representations of national identity emerges as one of the salient motifs in his work, the filmmaker reminds us about the attachment of Palestinians to the land and the prominent place of their ecological concerns in preserving cultural memories. According to Irus Braverman, as pine trees have become synonymous with Zionist settlers' policies of afforesting the "desolate" land of Israel, olive trees have become emblematic of the Palestinian resistance against the occupation and struggle for national independence (10). Uprooted by the Israeli army and Jewish settlers since 1967, olive trees have over time acquired the status of global significance, symbolising Palestinian attachment to land, and have become a testament to colonial devastation of natural resources.[25] Masharawi honours olive trees as the symbol of national heritage, and places the resistance of his characters within the context of preserving Palestinian identity and cultural memory.

In spite of highlighting the agonizing realities of the conflict, the film's coda reiterates Masharawi's idea that small individual actions, love, solidarity and support may help the minority group regain their hope and dignity. With their visa approved, Sami and Stereo realize that the functions where they have earned the required amount, such as anniversaries of massacres, prisoner association functions, and the funerals of martyrs, represent a record of disasters in the occupied territories. When they join another protest, the recording of the anthem finally works, but their friend is shot and killed by the Israeli army, and the sound equipment is lost. Devastated, they return to their dwelling, and find Leila's graffiti drawn across their room, reminding Sami that it is more difficult to remain in Palestine and resist colonial oppression, than to leave it forever. The camera hovers over Leila's message left in

the confined private space where one's freedom can still be reasserted, reminding the audiences that coming to terms with their unresolved status remains the penultimate question confronting Palestinians today.

Palestine Stereo premiered at 2013 Toronto International Film Festival, screened in Dubai, Hong Kong, Lyon, Seattle, and Cleveland, receiving mixed reviews and failing to reach wider audiences. The film's American reviewers were critical of Masharawi's "tacky banality" (Young), asserting that its political subtext, soapy narrative and TV-style look would compromise its appeal beyond the Arab world and partisan festivals (Simon). Other reviewers recognized the filmmaker's attempt to engage with the paradoxes of Palestinian daily existence (D'Arcy), his critique of the Israeli occupation, of nationalist rhetoric, and his overall indirect challenging of the Palestinian government (Kassendorf).

Conclusion

Anchored in the geopolitical, historical and cultural contexts of Israel – Palestine, and concerned with life in refugee camps, loss, occupation, dispossession and exile, Rashid Masharawi's films highlight the elements of modernizing transnationalism, refuting nationalist ideology and dislocating the established paradigms of nature in representations of national identity. The first Palestinian filmmaker to emerge from the refugee camps in the Gaza Strip, Masharawi uses transnational partnerships to secure funding for his films about life in Palestinian exilic communities and he draws attention to the links between Palestinian views of nature and old representations of national identity. Masharawi's mediation of environmental concerns is located within a multiplicity of transnational contexts, including content, production, distribution, and reception, and he uses an intersectional approach to identify connections with other categories of social power in the Israeli-Palestinian context. His films are typified by a distinct political element, identifying the ecological consequences

of Israeli policies for the Palestinian population living in refugee camps and territories under Palestinian control, and rejecting the old matrices of national identity entrenched in the narratives about the Palestinian proximity to the world of nature.

Masharawi upholds that the emerging forms of subjectivity differ from the superseded representations of Palestinian attachment to the land that long assumed the key place in the narratives of liberation and return. He does not deny or negate the connections of Palestinian people to their land and to natural resources, but, rather, articulates the emerging geopolitical realities that give rise to new forms of Palestinian-ness amongst the refugees living in the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian enclaves on the West Bank and in exile. At the same time, Masharawi recognizes the role of cultural production, and in particular, that of cinema, in enhancing modern sensibilities, in promoting a hybrid and tolerant society, and in cultivating new audiences as well as relaying Palestinian narratives of occupation and exile to the rest of the world.

Produced in transnational collaboration with European television channels, funding bodies and production companies, Masharawi's early films engage with the minor form to explore the conditions within refugee camps, where Palestinians live separated from their land and natural resources. Confined and isolated from the outside world, the Palestinian family in *Curfew* is disconnected from the old representations of natural transcendence and proximity to the land and is, instead, immersed in their pressing existential concerns. In *Haïfa*, Masharawi reveals his ecological concerns and explores the world of Palestinian exiles who evoke memories of loss and dispossession, and dream of returning to their houses and land, amidst the colonized landscapes and devastation of the refugee camp. He investigates the intersectionality of the environmental policies, implemented against the Palestinian population, and their subaltern status as victims of colonial injustice, giving prominence to the films' fragile and emasculated figures, disconnected from the world of nature and natural

resources. The filmmaker exposes the tensions between the idealized projections of the pre-Nakba past and the experiences of living in refugee camps, and accentuates the emergence of a modern sensibility amongst the young generation of exiles. However, as their aspirations of return are crushed by the failed peace process, he also contemplates their coming to terms with their refugee status as the key marker of Palestinian identity.

Following his move to the West Bank, Masharawi continues to develop transnational ties with European television channels, production companies and government bodies, as well as non-European multicultural independent broadcasters. His films engage with the lives of communities in enclaves with some degree of autonomy, highlighting the importance of Palestinian cultural production for his characters, disconnected from the land and deprived of natural resources. Masharawi identifies the new articulations of Palestinian subjectivity in response to Zionist constructions of nature, aimed at erasing Palestinian identity and cultural memory. In *Ticket to Jerusalem,* Masharawi draws attention to the importance of culture for transgressing colonized landscapes, for enhancing individual autonomy and a sense of communal belonging, cultivating emerging cinema audiences and thereby generating new models of resistance to colonial rule. In *Waiting*, the director scrutinizes the connections between a visiting media crew and Palestinians living in refugee camps across the region, identifying the different facets of identity, various memories and visions of Palestine, and discovering a collective sense of loss and evanescence as common denominators to their experience.

Aspiring to elevated production values in his late films produced with the assistance of government bodies and production companies from Europe and the Arab world, Masharawi continues to narrate the experiences of Palestinians in West Bank enclaves, where a local population with limited scope of self-governance has no ability to alter the stalemate at ground level. Striving to impart the rule of law amongst his fellow-citizens, the judge-

turned-taxi-driver in *Laila's Birthday* realizes that, devoid of land or freedom, Palestinians cannot aspire to modernize their society and that colonial rule is the major threat to any social order**.** Separated from nature and surrounded by the Wall and by a network of Israeli checkpoints, Masharawi's minor subjects confront disasters in their daily lives, and make every effort to withstand their agonizing circumstances. The director foregrounds the urgency of Palestinian concerns as, faced with Israeli oppression and destructive environmental policies, the characters in *Palestine Stereo* refuse to sever their last physical connection with the land of their ancestors and sell their olive grove in order to leave their country forever. While acknowledging the unenviable position of his characters, disconnected from the world of nature, Masharawi recognizes the physical and emotional ties and claims of the Palestinian people to their land, placing a pronounced emphasis on their tenacity to endure and to resist the repression imposed by colonial occupation.

Endnotes

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[1] Prior to his first directorial attempts, Masharawi worked as an actor, appearing in Israeli films, Amos Gutman's *Drifting* (1983) and Eitan Green's *Into the Night* (1985), and as a set designer, on Uri Barbash's *Beyond the Walls* (1984) and *Unsettled Land* (1987).

[2] *Passport* features a Palestinian man caught without travel documents, in *Shelter,* an Arab construction worker spends the night in a shelter, and in *The Magician,* a Palestinian man becomes invisible to Israelis.

[3] Masharawi founded the Cinema Production Centre (CPC), the Mobile Cinema Group, launched a children's film festival, and initiated workshops for screen production and directing.

[4] See Eliot V. Kotek's interview with Masharawi, "Rashid Masharawi Talks 'Palestine Stereo' at Tiff'13."

[5] Some of the prominent studies in this field include Gregg Mitman's *Reel Nature: America's Romance With Wildlife on Film* (1999), David Ingram's *Green Screen* (2000), Pat Brereton's *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema* (2005), Cynthia Chris's *Watching Wildlife* (2005), Robin L. Murray and Joseph K Heumann's *Ecology and Popular Film: Cinema on the Edge* (2009) and *Gunfight at the Eco-Corral: Western Cinema and the Environment* (2012), and Sheldon Lu and Jiayin Mi's *Chinese Ecocinema in the Age of Environmental Challenge* (2009).

[6] O'Brien identifies Roberto Forns-Broggi, "Ecocinema and "Good life' in Latin America" (2013), Sidney Dobrin and Sean Morey's *Ecosee: Image, Rhetoric, Nature* (2009), and Stephen Rust, Salma Monani and Sean Cubitt's *Ecomedia: Key Issues* (2016) as examples of scholarship engaged with the wider media context (A O'Brien 8-9).

[7] According to O'Brien, a number of recent studies, including Nadia Bozak's *The Cinematic Footprint: Lights, Camera, Natural Resources* (2011), Adrian Ivakhiv's *Ecologies*

of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature, Environmental Humanities (2013), Scott McDonald's *Adventures of Perception: Cinema as Exploration* (2009), Kristi McKim's *Cinema as Weather: Stylistic Screens and Atmospheric Change*, (2013), and Anat Pick and Guinivere Narraway's *Screening Nature: Cinema Beyond the Human* (2013) focus on "films' particular and distinctive engagement with natural environment" (A O'Brien 9).

[8] Pick and Narraway evoke different articulations of intersectionality. Jennifer Nash describes intersectionality as "the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality (2). According to Richard Twyne, an intersectional approach "attempts to outline interdependencies between social categories of power" ("Intersectional Disgust?" 398). Articulating the dominant positions in feminist studies and sociology since the 1990s, Gita Mehrotra identifies intersectionality as "a primary framework for thinking about multiple identities and the interconnectedness of various systems of oppression" (Mehrotra 417, qtd. in Pick and Narraway 7).

[9] Irus Braverman contends that the actions of successive Israeli governments and the Jewish National Fund advanced the construction of Zionist environments and cultural memories atop indigenous Palestinian villages (*Planted Flags: Trees, Land, and Law in Israel/Palestine*).

[10] According to Israeli architect Ram Karmi, the *sabra* generation sought to "transform the Diaspora Jew into a man growing out of the land," whose identity develops as a result of organic connections to territory rather than adherence to foreign ideas (Karmi, qtd. in Nitzan-Shiftan 91).

[11] Mustafa Abu-Ali's film *Zionist Aggression* (1973) highlights the small village community's life in harmony with nature prior to the 1972 attack of the Israeli Air Force. In *They Do Not Exist* (1974) Palestinian families are shown in their gardens in Nabatia camp. In the sequence titled "A Commando: Abu-Alabed," the *fedayeen* are interviewed in natural

environment implying that although ill-equipped and fighting the imperialist invader, they have a powerful ally in their struggle.

[12] Masharawi asserts that he does not deem cinema necessary because of the creation of the Palestinian state (Armaly) and would consign reports about the intifada to the CNN (Gheith).

[13] See "Rashid Masharawi-Arab Film Festival Malmo," where, following the screening of *Letters from Al-Yarmouk,* Masharawi speaks about the importance of conveying Palestinian perspectives to the world.

[14] Ayloul Films was founded in 1990 by Masharawi and Hany Abu-Assad.

[15] At the time, Peter van Vogelpoel produced two Lars von Trier's films: *Breaking the Waves* (1996) and *The Idiots* (1998), and collaborated with emerging directors from Jordan, Iran, and Holland.

[16] See Meira Weiss, *The Chosen Body: The Politics of the Body in Israeli Society* (2004).

[17] The following decade saw Silkroad Productions France engaged in projects with Michael Winterbottom, Yeşim Ustaoğlu, Bahman Ghobadi, Bakhtyar Khudojnazarov, and other cineastes attuned to minorities.

[18] The Franco-German television network ARTE had also supported the projects of other Palestinian filmmakers, including Michel Khleifi, Elia Suleiman, Hany Abu-Assad, Najwa Najjar, Azza El-Hassan, and others.

[19] SBS Independent (SBSi) was the commissioning house for Australia's multicultural public broadcaster the Special Broadcasting Service between 1994 and 2007. During this period more than 810 feature films, animations, television dramas, documentary films, comedy, variety and reality programs were commissioned by this body ("SBS Independent").

[20] Since its foundation in 1983, CineTelefilms has been one of the leading production companies in Tunisia and the Arab world, producing more than fifty documentary and twenty feature films, distributed worldwide and receiving awards at major film festivals. CineTelefilms has supported mainly Arab filmmakers, including Syrian doyen Mohamed Malas and Tunisian cineaste Moufida Tlatli who also collaborated with Palestinian directors and funding bodies (CineTelefilms).

[21] Producing approximately fifteen films annually, *Fortissimo Films*, based in The Netherlands, France and the United States of America, secured its key position in the development of the new Asian cinema at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Its transnational portfolio includes the works by Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Tony Ayres, Pen-ek-Ratanaruang, Zhang Yang, Larry Clark, Ed Lachman, and others (Coonan and Rooney).

[22] They included cinematographers, Tunisian-born Tarek Ben Abdallah and Argentinian-born Néstor Sanz, French editor Pascale Chavance, a frequent a collaborator of Benoît Jacquot and Catherine Breillat, Franco-Tunisian composer Kaïs Sellami, and others.

[23] Amongst others, they included Sorfund (Norway), Ape & Bjorn (Norway), New World Cinema Fund (France), Mille et Une Productions (France), the Dubai Film Market Enjaz (UAE), and Produzione Straordinaria (Italy). The film's financial construction was closed following the screening of the rough-cut to transnational financiers, ensuring the funding of the post-production in Italy that comprised almost 25% of the budget (Goodfellow).

[24] The production crew included twenty-six locally trained Palestinian members. See Eliot V. Kotek's interview with Masharawi, "Rashid Masharawi Talks 'Palestine Stereo' at Tiff'13."

[25] Since 1967, more than a million trees have been uprooted by Israeli soldiers or burned by West Bank settlers. See Cezar Chelala, "Palestinian Olive Trees: Destroying a Symbol of Life."

Chapter 3. The World as a Microcosm of Palestine:

Elia Suleiman's Ethical Engagement With the Question of Palestine

This chapter examines the instances of cosmopolitan transnationalism in the films of Elia Suleiman, a filmmaker whose aesthetics has become synonymous with Palestinian cinema's presence on the global film festival circuit at the turn of the twenty-first century. What sets Suleiman's work apart from other Palestinian directors discussed in this thesis is the cosmopolitan element of his transnationalism and his engagement with the conflict in Israel-Palestine as a Palestinian filmmaker and as a citizen of the world. Drawing on Hjort's classification of cinematic transnationalisms and in dialogue with the concept of "rooted cosmopolitanism" developed by Mitchell Cohen ("Rooted Cosmopolitanism"), and expanded by Kwame Anthony Appiah (*Cosmopolitanism*), this chapter focuses upon Suleiman's cosmopolitan subjectivity as the key distinguishing element in his films. The filmmaker's cosmopolitanism is discussed in relation to his multiple and co-existing identities, his exilic subjectivity, his transnational mobility, as well as the hybrid and relational cultural climate in which he produces his films. Suleiman highlights the subjective position of the recurring central character in each of his films, engages with the minor form underlining the political element in his narratives and suggests that coming to terms with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the important ethical imperatives of our time. This chapter also elaborates upon Suleiman's aesthetic and reception of his films. By outlining his stylistic alignments with European and non-European arthouse *auteurs* and how he departs from the narrative formulae established by other Palestinian directors, this chapter highlights the filmmaker's formal and innovative approach as well as his cultivation of emerging cinema audiences in local and transnational contexts.

Elia Suleiman was born in 1960 in Nazareth and migrated first to Europe and then to the United States, where he spent twelve years, between 1981 and 1993. During this period,

coinciding with the First Intifada and the Gulf War, Suleiman started making films without a formal screen education. Following his return to Israel-Palestine and his residencies in European countries, Suleiman has continued to broaden his transnational networks with production companies, to obtain support from government organizations, television channels and festival programs and to form complex models of financing to ensure the realization of his projects. His short, experimental and feature projects that have emerged as the key markers of Suleiman's output, have served to help raise the international profile of Palestinian cinema, in that they testify to his innovative aesthetic approach, and to his resourcefulness and adaptability to the transnational conditions of film production and distribution.

Suleiman constantly emphasizes that he belongs to global community of artists and filmmakers shaped by multiple identities, that are first and foremost interested in sharing their aesthetic visions and ethical concerns with cinema audiences.[1] Suleiman's films explore the themes of loss, occupation, exile, loneliness and return. The filmmaker highlights the complex connections between fractured subjectivities and their geopolitical and historical contexts, dominated by dispossession and violence, and marked by particular enduring paradoxes and contradictions. Evoking traumatic histories and events that shape the daily existence of Palestinians under occupation, he expresses solidarity with the Palestinian community, but at the same time rejects concepts of national purity, and instead highlights the importance of cultural expression in forging modernizing processes within Palestinian society.

Suleiman's modernizing concerns and his understanding of the role of culture are consistent with the prevailing sentiments amongst his predecessors and contemporaries in Palestinian cinema whose work is discussed elsewhere in this thesis. Like the majority of Palestinian cineastes, Suleiman is an exilic filmmaker, and as such, is biographically, socially

and cinematically (dis)located (Naficy, *Accented Cinema* 4). Suleiman postulates that cinema was not designed to fortify a national image or perpetuate negative projections of the other, and he also rejects the archaic formulations of nationalist ideology that connect the perceptions of collective identity to a specific location (Bourlond 96). Suleiman uses cinematic narration as a platform to draw attention to the suffering of Palestinian people, to establish a form of cultural resistance to colonial hegemony, and to articulate the sensibilities of new cinema audiences by ethically engaging with the conflict in Israel-Palestine as a way of engaging, in general, with humanity in crisis. This chapter investigates the key elements of cosmopolitan transnationalism in Suleiman's short, experimental and feature-length narratives: *Muqaddimah Li-Nihayat Jidal/Introduction to the End of the Argument* (1990), *Harb El Khalij – wa baad/Homage by* Assassination (segment of *The Gulf War: What Next?* [1991]), *Segell ikhtifa/Chronicle of a Disappearance* (1996), *Yadon ilaheyya/Divine Intervention: A Chronicle of Love and Pain* (2002), and *The Time That Remains: Chronicle of a Present Absentee* (2009).

Suleiman's Cosmopolitan Transnationalism: The Problem of Palestine as an Ethical Question

Examining Suleiman's film narratives through the prism of cosmopolitan transnationalism, this investigation will now draw attention to the pivotal questions of his aesthetics: Who can speak for Palestine and Palestinians, and how can one engage with the conflict in Israel-Palestine as an ethical question of global significance? Where and how does Suleiman's transnational cosmopolitanism manifest itself, and how does he articulate various cosmopolitan impulses in his work? Scholars in sociology and cultural studies have invoked a range of theoretical concepts addressing cosmopolitan cultural competences generated by transnational lives. Cosmopolitanism has been identified as an unstable category, often

characterized and framed through the construction of meaning in different social and cultural contexts (Skrbiš and Woodward 730). It is generally seen as an aspect of the globalized world (Hannertz 45; Delanty 8), and distinguished by "a sense of openness and mutability in the cultural processes of migrants and ethnic minorities" (Vertovec, *Transnationalism* 72). There have been multiple endeavors to identify the key elements that distinguish cosmopolitan subjectivity. Arjun Appadurai describes a cosmopolitan as an individual whose understanding and vision of the world delve beyond the limitations of one cultural identity ("Cosmopolitanism"). Ulf Hannerz identifies the main catalysts that prompt individuals to profess their cosmopolitan allegiances which include aspiring to redefine the nation, distancing themselves from their national identity, or claiming allegiance to some other kind of imagined, global community (90). John Tomlinson distinguishes the elements as typifying one's sense of cosmopolitan identity: belonging to the wider world and experiencing a "distanciated identity," a reflexive awareness of the world as one of many cultural others, as an ongoing dialogue, and as an ability to live at the same time in both the global and the local spheres (*Globalization and Culture* 194).

In recent years, a body of scholarly knowledge has evolved using cosmopolitanism as a conceptual framework to engage with cinematic texts and film cultures. James Mulvey, Laura Rascaroli and Humberto Saldanha distinguish four directions of academic research in this field. The first area is identified in the works of Tim Bergfelder, Ib Bondebjerg, Maria Rovisco and others, who are concerned with the representational aspect of film narratives about alterity, the marginalized other, and migrant subjectivities.[2] The scholarly work of Jane Mills and Dimitrios Eleftheriotis focuses on mobile characteristics of creative and artistic crews, cosmopolitan auteurs and movie stars.[3] Dina Iordanova, Marijke de Valck, Vanessa R. Schwartz, and others focus upon the cosmopolitan articulations of film culture and global film appreciation, mediated by film language and institutions.[4] The fourth area of research

encompasses the examination of cinematic language, the adoption of global styles, establishing an aesthetics of acquiring global visibility, as well as identifying a specific aesthetic at a local level in addition to promoting a transformation within national culture, all of which is expanded in the scholarly work of Adrián Pérez Melgosa, Angela Prysthon, and Motti Regev.[5] While all four areas of scholarly work open up avenues for a broad discussion of cosmopolitan attributes in Palestinian film production, for the purposes of this analysis, the most pertinent are the first two aspects of academic scholarship, specifically centering on the representation of marginalized, exilic and diasporic subjectivities, and transnational mobility of cosmopolitan filmmakers. These topics are often seen as having a special relationship with the authorship of particular filmmakers and emerge as the main distinguishing features in their films (Eleftheriotis, "The Foreignness" 340). Contextualizing Suleiman's work, particular emphasis is placed on the filmmaker's cosmopolitanism, his Palestinian and global identities, his exilic subjectivity, his transnational mobility and the hybrid cultural climate in which he develops his transnational collaborations.

In her typology of cinematic transnationalisms, Mette Hjort positions the "cosmopolitanism of the particular individuals who exercise executive control over the filmmaking process" at the center of cosmopolitan transnationalism ("On the Plurality" 20). Demonstrating his sense of cosmopolitanism through his films, personal philosophy, essays, and appearances in public and media discourse, Suleiman identifies himself both as a Palestinian filmmaker and as a citizen of the world, acknowledging the global impact of the crisis in his home country.[6] Suleiman's multiple and coexisting identities are made manifest through his exilic subjectivity, and his transnational mobility. These factors are also evident in the filmmaker's rejection of essentialist concepts of culture and in his working in a hybrid cultural climate in which he generates transnational collaborations. Central to this discussion is Suleiman's vision which is expressed through his sense of "rooted cosmopolitanism,"

connecting his individual concerns with his communal and global identities and commitments.

Mitchell Cohen articulates his dialectical concept of "rooted cosmopolitanism," placing emphasis on "a multiplicity of roots and branches and [that] rests on the legitimacy of plural loyalties, of standing in many circles, but with common ground" (480; 483). David Hollinger in *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*, reiterates Cohen's theorization and observes its manifestations through the sense of communal belonging, cultural affiliations, and "in the context of today's greater sensitivity to roots." (3-4; 5). Drawing on a range of disciplines, including philosophy, literature and history, Kwame Anthony Appiah, in *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in the World of Strangers*, draws special attention to the relationships between one's sense of individual and collective identity, indicating that our obligations to fellow human beings reach beyond allegiances of family, culture, and citizenship, and points out that cosmopolitanism is not an abstract concept, but one that pertains to individual lives (Appiah *Cosmopolitanism*). In *The Ethics of Identity*, Appiah scrutinizes the claims of individuality and broader abstract social categories of identity, contemplating the seemingly paradoxical idea of "rooted cosmopolitanism." Appiah claims that affirming individual freedom to establish self or conceive a "life project" should not be perceived as incompatible with one's sense of collective identity and proposes that we understand "rooted cosmopolitanism" as "a composite project, a negotiation between disparate tasks" (232). He envisions a hybrid society in which individual values and collective allegiances are continually negotiated, and which does not sacrifice the polyphony of individual voices to the abstract notion of homogeneity. Opposed to competitive individualism, he pledges his support for minorities but remains cautious of identity politics, entrenched as it is in minority discourse, or the idea of a regimented society based exclusively on one set of indisputable values: "I might be skeptical about the virtues of such a

homogenized society as a place for myself (even if the values it was centered on were in some case mine)" (*The Ethics of Identity* 269).

Suleiman's film narratives are distinguished by the dynamic relationship between the individual concerns and collective allegiances of the filmmaker. It is evident that – to use Appiah's formulation – Suleiman's "life project" – that is, his filmmaking career – and his cosmopolitan subjectivity are inseparable from his intense sense of belonging, from a history of dispossession and suffering, and the legitimate aspirations of Palestinian communities living under Israeli occupation. Hjort establishes that multiple belongings linked to ethnicity and trajectories of migration form a cosmopolitan transnationalism that is oriented toward film as a medium capable of strengthening social imaginaries and exploring issues relevant to particular communities in national and subnational locations, to which the cosmopolitan *auteur* has privileged access ("On the Plurality" 20). Suleiman's "rooted cosmopolitanism" evokes what Jeremy Waldron has identified as the connections between minority cultures, that are resisting discrimination and assimilation, and the cosmopolitan alternative articulating these concerns (Waldron). At the same time, Suleiman's cinematic cosmopolitanism also places an emphasis on the notion of borders and mobility. This is manifest in what Maria Rovisco distinguishes as articulating borders and mobility in film – as both text and cultural practice – important for how we experience and imagine our experiences of difference and identity, and of political conflict and social change (5-6). This characteristic allows him to voice his postcolonial concerns and opposition to occupation, to express solidarity with subaltern groups, and to pledge his support for universal values of human rights and tolerance (Tkatch; Rose; Jaafar "*The Time That Remains*").

Acknowledging the importance of one's sense of belonging (Ericson), the director is not constrained by identity discourse or cultural exclusivity and underlines the universal relevance of his cinematic narratives (Khader, "Interview" 24). Suleiman does not conform to

the preconceived notions of an *auteur*, committed to the struggle for self-determination and the depiction of national culture, acknowledging that belonging to the Palestinian community does not constitute the unique, but rather one of many perspectives on his *oeuvre* as a cineaste of plural identities. Suleiman works in a hybrid cultural climate, travelling extensively and exhibiting his films at film festivals and educational institutions in his country of origin and around the world. Suleiman's decision to return to Israel-Palestine and establish the Department of Film and Media at Bir Zeit University in Ramallah with the assistance of the European Commission, was an important act of support for a local film base and for Palestinian culture generally. He has retained his position at the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland, and has continued to divide his time between France, his home country, and the global arthouse circuit. Suleiman's transcultural connections are distinguished by a dynamic interplay between the national and transnational, by his reluctance to anchor himself in one location, and by his insistence on an elusive sense of residence (Chamarrete 87), thus enabling him to retain the imbricated statuses of both insider and outsider (Cutler), which are persistently explored in his films.

Using his resourcefulness in generating cross-cultural relationships with major and minor transnational partners, Suleiman mobilizes the support of Arab, Israeli, European and American funding bodies, television channels and film festival funds to support narratives that voice his discontentment with his country's fractured history and its neuralgic crisis, forging empathy for oppressed communities, and a sense of solidarity across the film world. Recognizing that the insistence on binary oppositions has demoted concerns for universal justice and human rights in favor of nationalist conflict, Suleiman pledges allegiance to an inclusive society in which the political differences are mediated through openness, dialogue, and an absence of fear.[7] This approach allows him to unmask the conduits of hegemonic discourse, in order to probe beyond hypocrisy and intolerance, encouraging cinema audiences

to contemplate new avenues for understanding Palestinian narratives as a form of ethical engagement with the world at large.

Suleiman's films revolve around the journeys and encounters of his central character, E. S. (Elia Suleiman), who meditates upon and returns to his country of origin under occupation. He reveals the cosmopolitan subjectivity, exilic attributes and transnational mobility of his protagonist, but also demonstrates his postcolonial concerns providing wider geopolitical contexts for his narratives of homecoming. E. S. is seen as a cosmopolitan individual, distanced from the narratives formulated by the national elites, and old perceptions of Palestinian identity. At the same time, it is evident that Suleiman's returnee cannot reside anywhere else but in Palestine, because the crisis in his home country reflects humanity's problems on a global scale: "I'm trying to use Palestine as a microcosm of the world, but maybe the world is a microcosm of Palestine" (Suleiman, qtd. in Gozal).

Palestinian communities in Suleiman's films are seen as subjugated and living in a perpetual state of decline, but also as complex, heterogeneous and brimming with internal tensions. As the evidence of Israeli occupation never entirely disappears from his films, in a manner typical of the minor aesthetics, Suleiman amplifies the sense of unease within the locations in which his narratives are situated, and explores an omnipresent sense of loss and disenfranchisement, making political subtext a key element in his journeys of return. Suleiman implies that, the suffering of Palestinian communities must be understood as a litmus paper for empathizing with oppressed communities in other arenas of conflict around the world. As drawing on John Collins' theorization of a "global Palestine" (Collins), Kay Dickinson observes: "To become Palestinized in this context is to answer a call to the world to acknowledge our role, wherever we are in settler-colonialism, and to understand Palestine as a node in the greater struggle against such injustices" (*Arab Cinema* 83).

Suleiman's work affords opportunities for understanding his sense of cosmopolitanism and the transnational partnerships he strikes up in relation to his creative influences, as well as the production and reception of his films within transnational contexts. Suleiman attained global prominence alongside the emerging generation of other directors from the Middle East who have altered the preconceived notions of regionally produced films amongst Western arthouse and international festival audiences, attesting to Orhan Pamuk's claim that, "cultural influences work in both directions with complexities difficult to fathom" (316). Scholars have drawn parallels between Suleiman's films and the aesthetics of certain European masters, such as Robert Bresson, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Tati and others (Bresheeth "A Symphony of Absence"; Chamarette 88; Rastegar, *Surviving Images* 97), even though the filmmaker himself has denied familiarity with the work of these auteurs (Geertz and Khleifi *Palestinian Cinema*; Cutler; Indiana). A closer look at his output reveals a complex set of interconnections with the non-European directors, Yasushiro Ozu and Hou Hsiao-Hsien, who influenced the generation of present-day *auteurs* (R White 40), but also Suleiman's deviation from the narrative formulas created by other Palestinian filmmakers, and their penchant for causality and didacticism (Mokdad 195). A closer examination also points towards transcultural and transnational ties that typify Suleiman's films, being supported by French production companies and government institutions, invoking a broader sense of geopolitical and cultural relations across the cinemas of Europe and the Middle East (Chamarette 88).

Working within specific geopolitical and cultural contexts, Suleiman subverts the hegemonic narratives of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, rejects cultural reductivism and archaic concepts of purity, but still encounters obstacles, trying to communicate his vision to wider cinema audiences in the West and the Arab world. Rejecting the simulation of the Western canon, Suleiman maintains the position of a filmmaker whose

career has been marked by cosmopolitan subjectivity and hybrid cultural influences, thereby promoting a transcultural exchange in multiple contexts and directions, articulating and cultivating the sensibilities of Palestinian and global audiences. In this regard, Suleiman's cosmopolitan transnationalism, and antihegemonic yet inclusive stance, attain new significance, proposing to engage with Palestinians and Israelis not merely as a way out of the Middle-Eastern conflict, but equally important, as a model of ethical vision and engagement with the world and its diminishing sense of humanity.

Introduction to the End of the Argumen:t

The Cacophony and Silence of Colonial Supremacy

Co-directed with Jayce Salloum, Suleiman's debut film, the forty-five minutes-long *Introduction to the End of the Argument* exposes the Western media's racial prejudices and cultural bias, dissecting the representations of a demonized other. This transnationally produced film, a collaborative effort between an emerging Palestinian director and a Canadian-Lebanese conceptual artist, demonstrates the concerns of two cineastes with cosmopolitan attributes for the representations of the marginalized groups in the Middle East, and their presence within a global context.

According to Felicia Chan cosmopolitan cinema "enables articulations of encounters with difference" (*Cosmopolitan Cinema* 6, qtd. in Mulvey et al. 3). Growing up in Israel and spending a decade in the United States of America, confirmed Suleiman's belief that Palestinians and Arabs in general are deprived of balanced media representation in the Western world, and that, despite the abundance and ostensible diversity of media sources, "there is," as Said has articulated, "a qualitative and quantitative tendency to favor certain views and certain representations of reality over others" (*Covering Islam* 45). Aimed at arthouse and film festival audiences, Suleiman and Salloum's film reveals the aim of the two

co-directors to expose the language of cultural supremacy as well as the use of mainstream media to divulge racist misconceptions and prejudices, generated and synchronized with the policies of colonizing the Middle East.

Suleiman and Salloum infuse the film with cosmopolitan attributes, accentuating their exilic subjectivity and transnational mobility, journeying between locations and coming across the fractured histories and geographic contexts of the Middle East. As Maria Rovisco pointedly reveals, cosmopolitan cinema can be seen as both a mode of production and a cross cultural artistic practice. On one hand, cosmopolitan cinema generates structures of feeling and empathy in identifying and denouncing the violations of human dignity, and on the other, it initiates a dialogue and critical engagement, where the other is not perceived solely as an object of sympathy or depleted agency (7). Suleiman and Salloum present an assemblage of excerpts from Western films and media reports, ranging from seemingly neutral and objective to fictionalized accounts of encountering the other, unanchored in any specific locations or political milieux, thereby exposing strategies of demonizing the indigenous Arab population of the Middle East.

Suleiman and Salloum are not interested in maintaining a cohesive narrative sequence or in observing the unities of time, space and action, and they deliberately position their film within a transnational dichotomy which Ezra and Rowden draw between "Hollywood's domination of world film markets – and the counterhegemonic responses of film-makers from former colonial and Third-World cinema countries" (1). The images and sounds are extracted from thematically, historically and geographically divergent, but globally recognizable films, produced during the Classical Era of Hollywood,[8] the American news reels and television reports, and are combined with short excerpts from home movies, all of which initially create a sense of discontinuity and cacophony. The newsreels showing Zionist immigrants arriving in Palestine, to find "a hostile land, filled with swamps and snakes, and

scorpions and Arabs" are followed by the sequence of fictionalized and heavily distorted accounts of colonial history on screen. The excerpts from *Exodus* (Otto Preminger, 1960), *Lawrence of Arabia* (David Lean, 1962*), Black Sunday* (John Frankenheimer, 1977), *The Little Drummer Girl* (George Roy Hill, 1984), *The Delta Force* (Menahem Golan, 1986) amongst other films expose continuities in Hollywood and Western misrepresentations of the Middle East as exotic, picturesque and populated by dangerous and untrustworthy inhabitants, thus unmasking the methodology and construction of colonial narratives.

The two filmmakers dissect Hollywood's legacy as the global archive of cultural memories, examining the repercussions of fabricating and imposing the grotesquely prejudiced views of subjugated minorities upon worldwide audiences. In network news reports, Palestinians are seen demonstrating, whereas the causes of their frustration and anger are ignored and left unexplained, implying that Arabs are innately aggressive and inclined to support terrorism. Denying the voices of the oppressed other obstructs the possibility of any political mediation. As Akhram Fouad Khater contends, "In the case of the Palestinians, this torrent of fabricated images drowns out any dissenting voices and precludes the possibility for dialogue in shaping the future of the Middle East" (1263). What transpires from this cacophony of audio and visual excerpts, is, argues Dabashi, the new register of the absurd; reconfiguring Arabs as violent, primitive, erotic and exotic, and problematizing the formulaic representations of the other, the filmmakers deconstruct the psychopathology of those responsible for the unrelenting succession of propaganda images in the mainstream media ("In Praise" 150).

Suleiman and Salloum direct our attention to the colonial agenda of negating the existence of indigenous population in the territories occupied by the hegemonic powers, refusing these people the right to represent themselves. They invite their cinema audiences to ponder on the mechanisms and effectiveness of media demonization, questioning who can

speak for the colonized Arab population, and reflecting upon the scope of imperial strategies within the other arenas of colonial domination. Exposing such instruments of media manipulation and these tropes of cultural supremacy, the filmmakers destabilize the hegemonic language of the majority from within and repurpose it in the form of compelling political statement.

Salloum and Suleiman mimic the processes of political and cultural colonization and take visual excerpts out of their narrative contexts in order to expose the deterritorialized state of the language of mainstream media, whose meaning and function are reduced to the singular purpose of alienating the other. Compelled to disrupt the conventional narrative models of imagery and ideology within popular culture, the filmmakers reveal their connections to supremacist strategies and foreground the strangeness in the language of the majority, reconfiguring it to alert their audiences to the formation and sustaining of colonial discourse. This stylistic approach reflects the disposition to the modes of political elocution typical of minor film aesthetics and the filmmakers' cosmopolitan approach, heralded in Salloum's short film, *Once You've Shot the Gun, You Can't Stop the Bullet* (1988), which uses intertitles and combines sourced and video footage, shot on multiple locations in the United States of America, Canada and the Middle East, engaging with the marginalized other. In a marked discrepancy from the fictionalized accounts of the situation in the region, these sourced images are mixed with footage of substandard quality, accentuating cross-border mobility and intense, subjective overtones. This visual material is acquired in public and private spaces, from moving cars, by using hand-held cameras, and is devoid of narrative context.

Some commentators have criticized the film's separation from the specific geopolitical conflict, suggesting that its subversive approach and assemblage of media materials is unfocused and confusing. Khater argues that the absence of an overall historical

context, "weakens the film's argument" (1263). But he fails to take into account that, refusing to confine themselves to a specific arena of territorial dispute and using non-linear narration – a narrative device Suleiman will continue to employ in all his future feature films – they alienate their spectators and draw their attention to the actual processes of filmmaking in the form of political commentary, rather than align themselves with official narratives of national allegiance and cultural exclusivity. The two filmmakers depart from the narrative strategies typical of Arab and Palestinian cinema, infusing their cinematic narrative with the images and sounds of the marginalized other, working within a range of cultural contexts. They expose the continuities in the distortions and misrepresentations enacted to facilitate the subjugation of the indigenous Arab population of the Middle East and effectively deconstruct the language of the mainstream media from within, unmasking the politics and strategies of colonial domination and alerting audiences to its global consequences.

Homage by Assassination:
Immobilized by the State of the World

Commissioned to participate in the transnationally funded *porte-manteau* project, *The Gulf War…What Next?* Suleiman worked on a short film, *Homage by Assassination*, along with a group of filmmakers from Lebanon, Tunisia and Morocco: Borhane Alaouié, Néjia Ben Mabrouk, Nouri Bouzid and Mustafa Darkaoui. *Homage by Assassination* was produced by Channel 4 and Cinetelefilms, and with the backing of the Hubert Bals Fund Rotterdam[9] and the New York State Council of the Arts.[10] Partaking in the major-minor partnership between the British commercially funded public broadcaster, back then in its first decade of transmission, and a Tunisian production company, and realized with the support of Dutch and American funding bodies, this film attests to the filmmaker's resourcefulness and adaptability to the pathways of transnational production.

According to Abu-Remaileh, *Homage by Assassination* establishes many of the stylistic foundations that became hallmarks of Suleiman's feature films ("Elia Suleiman" 78). This, his first individual directorial attempt, examines the themes of identity, loneliness, exile and dispossession, permeated with subjective voices and unease with regard to the agonizing state of the Palestinian community living in exile and in the state of Israel. Placing prominence on the cosmopolitan subjectivity of the central character, the film introduces one of the recurring thematic motifs in Suleiman's films, in the form of "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place" (Said, "Reflections on Exile" 173).

The 25 minute-long film takes place over one night in the New York apartment of a Palestinian filmmaker, E. S. (Elia Suleiman), and is presented in the form of a diary. The choice of New York, Suleiman's home base at the time, as the location, is indicative, because of its status as one of the cosmopolitan centers of the Western world, where artists have sought refuge from war and oppression throughout the twentieth century. Coinciding with the beginning of Operation Desert Storm in 1990, the film's opening hints at the continuation of violence in the Middle East, the enduring political turmoil in Israel-Palestine, and the escalation of conflict and its global repercussions. Distanced from his immediate surroundings and immersed in media images of the Arab world, E. S., in his isolation, somewhat ironically subverts the city's cosmopolitan appeal, and its aura of openness and diversity. While the director places emphasis on his exilic subjectivity and transnational mobility, he chooses to ignore the New York cityscape and its citizens throughout the film. Locked in his small apartment E. S. rejects all communication, suggesting that his state of "permanent exile" (Kaufman) correlates with the enfolding global crisis.

Suleiman's engagement with minor form is evident in the low production values of his film, its 'uneventful,' fragmentary narrative, limited to one location and one character, and with scenes dominated by an absence of dialogue, separated by intertitles, but also in the

director's focus on Palestinian exile, as we observe this reclusive character, struggling to find his voice in a cosmopolitan urban center. Dislocated to another country and immersed in the world of the Palestinian household (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 10), Suleiman's narrative condenses the physical world of E. S. to his own private residence, where we encounter him absorbed by reminiscences of Palestine. Located in minimalist settings, detached from the outer world, he is positioned within multiple frames, "as an eternal outsider" (L Alexander, "Let Me In" 163), and seen in static, lingering shots and low-key lighting, engaged in repetitive actions, and torn between his solitary existence, and the realities of the ongoing, protracted conflict in the Middle East. E. S.'s presence highlights the unremarkable moments of everyday life, or what Ella Shohat, discussing Mona Hatoum and Suleiman's autobiographical films, describes as a "de-romanticizing solitude in minor literature" and as re-writing "the connections between different parts of the self in order to make a world of possibilities out of the experience of displacement" ("The Cinema of Displacement" 85-86). At the same time, the hybrid identities of the Palestinian artist in exile also unequivocally point to the centrality of experiences of occupation and dispossession from the perspective of his own fragmented, cosmopolitan subjectivity.

According to Rovisco, cosmopolitan cinema is predicated by intense negotiations between self and other, us and them, subverted and re-articulated through cosmopolitan discourse (8). Suleiman separates the visuals from the mainstream media reports from snippets of E. S.'s domestic life, directing the audience's focus to fragmented and disconnected spatio-temporal fragments of the Palestinian history of dispossession. The filmmaker uses intertitles in Arabic and the languages of the colonial rulers, English and French, drawing attention to the different articulations of the other and perceptions of the Arab world framed by hegemonic Western discourse. On the walls of his apartment, the clocks show times in Nazareth and New York, the black-and-white family photographs

feature scenes from the old Palestine, and the camera captures a toy TV set with the word "Isreal" (sic) scribbled over it. E. S. is continually reminded of what he has lost or left behind, the ubiquitous realities facing the Palestinian people in Israel and in exile, their disintegrated communal and personal histories, and the unchanging reality of the occupation.

Detached from the rest of the world, E. S. is paradoxically immobilized and rendered mute by its current state. The radio presenter fails to get a response from him, the television transmission is interrupted, and all telephone lines to Israel are disconnected. E. S. observes an argument between a man and a woman on the street but does not interfere. He retreats to the interior of his apartment and ties his shoelaces, but does not leave, remaining seemingly indifferent to his surroundings, and all attempts to contact him. According to Marks, Suleiman, in the manner of minor aesthetics, laments the impossibility of speaking as a Palestinian (*The Skin of the Film* 58). E. S. is compelled to use modern technology and media, seen as siding with the Zionist narrative, but remains positioned outside the hegemonic discourse. He is profoundly incapable of articulating his sense of belonging, and his Palestinian-ness is reduced to brief evocations of a calcified past, displayed souvenirs and old photographs, and his meaningless maneuvering of the remote-controlled toy car, bearing a miniature Palestinian flag as it moves across his apartment.

All E. S.'s contacts are prompted by the start of the Gulf War, seemingly distant from the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, but his reactions are pervaded by fragmented narratives of loss and dispossession. Enveloped by long and poignant silences, his telephone conversations with his friends with cosmopolitan allegiances, or those trying to critically distance themselves from the dogmatic concept of national identity, are reduced to the protracted messages left by the callers from different geographical locations and cultural backgrounds, cognizant he can hear them, but also that he will not respond. A message from his friend Samir[11] ends with a sardonic joke about Palestinians who appear before God, are

first sent to Hell, and then to Heaven, only to be finally displaced to a refugee camp. In her fax message, Ella Shohat reminisces about growing up as an Iraqi Jew, recalling her family's migration to Israel, and the suppression of identity within her adopted country. Echoing common experiences of suffering and memories of discrimination, these messages leave E. S. unresponsive, evoking Michel-Rolph Trouillot's idea that the production of silences has occurred concurrently with the creation of official narratives.[12] These testimonies articulate the impossibility of engaging with the traumas of displacement, or of speaking to and for the dispossessed, and encourage the viewer to seek connections with the conflict in Israel-Palestine beyond the fixed geopolitical and historical frameworks, or outside of a sense of national identity. As the narratives of Palestinian loss and dispossession morph with the prospect of yet another looming conflict in the Middle East, it becomes evident that E. S.'s isolation is connected to the ongoing suffering in his country of origin, as well as to his concern for the agonizing state of humanity.

Chronicle of a Disappearance:
What Remains of Palestine?

The production history of *Chronicle of a Disappearance* divulges the complexity of the relationships and obstacles faced by the Palestinian filmmakers who mobilize the support of national, supra-national, and inter-governmental organizations and funding bodies for their transnationally funded projects. Suleiman's feature debut film was co-produced by Assaf Amir (Norma Productions) and Suleiman and supported by the Israeli Fund for Quality Films.[13] While *Chronicle of a Disappearance* was the first Palestinian film to be supported by the Fund, Suleiman is by no means the first or the only Palestinian director accepting Israeli support in this period.[14] Suleiman received only part of the money dedicated to the film, describing it as an act of confronting the apartheid (Suleiman, qtd. in Ericson). This, in

turn, raises questions about Israeli investment in Palestinian film productions, the limitations and the compromises Suleiman and other Palestinian filmmakers have had to make, and the reception of his films amongst Palestinian and Arab audiences in Israel, the region and around the world. This complex network of cultural partnerships demonstrates Suleiman's dexterity in securing support from a range of transnational sources, including the French La Centre national de la cinématographie (CNC), German public-television broadcaster ZDF,[15] the American Independent Television Service (ITVS)[16] and the MEDIA Programme of the European Union,[17] which, during its second multi-annual plan increased support for feature-length films, and was instrumental in the film's distribution. This also demonstrates his resourcefulness in negotiating and overcoming creative restrictions in order to successfully complete the project.[18]

Chronicle of a Disappearance re-positions Suleiman's sense of identity in a more subjective, intimate context. The film is dedicated to his parents or as he describes them in the end credits, "his last homeland." The film's title combines two words, one indicating a record of events – the Arabic word *segell*, used in all three films of the trilogy – and the other, *ikh-ti-faa'* – which conveys a multiplicity of meanings, namely, an act of disappearance, vanishing or kidnapping, a probability of a crime, as well as something disputable or unresolved, with ominous consequences. The title points to the perennial question at the center of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the disappearance of Palestine as a geopolitical entity, and the dispossession and exile of its indigenous Arab population, but it also directs the audiences' attention to the motif of return and transnational mobility at the center of Suleiman's feature narratives.

Palestinian literature, theatre and film are immersed in the narratives of return, and are concerned with the suppressed memories of humiliation, loss and defeat.[19] For the young generations of Palestinians born in exile, these acts of returning are often seen as defining

experiences, confronting the traumas of dispossession and asserting one's sense of national and cultural belonging, while for the older generations of refugees, they are seen as "rituals of return" and final farewell (Elmusa 41). Produced two years following Suleiman's return to Israel-Palestine, this film revolves around a narrative of homecoming, placing an emphasis on exilic experiences and on the notion of transnational mobility which have characterized Suleiman's early work. Aligned with the expectations of international arthouse audiences, the film is presented in fragmentary form and anchored in the minutiae of everyday life, revolves around E. S.'s personal experiences connected by the themes of loss, occupation, and loneliness. Blurring the narrative stratagems of fiction and documentary film (Abu-Remaileh, "Palestinian Anti-narratives"; Hedges, *World Cinema* 72, Rastegar, *Surviving Images* 97), Suleiman uses a loose non-linear structure, "to avoid a centralized, unified image that allows only a single narrative perspective" (Suleiman, "Cinema" 97). The film features Arabic, Hebrew, English, French and Russian as spoken languages, separated by the intertitles in Arabic, highlighting Suleiman's cosmopolitan sentiments, and retaining the persona of the silent filmmaker as its central character.

E. S. is not a protagonist in the classical sense, but a returnee mediating the narratives of the occupied land to cinema audiences. An outsider with a cosmopolitan outlook and a citizen of Israel-Palestine, he personifies fragmented subjectivity in a world devoid of fixed national allegiances or cultural identity, while at the same time urging the audience to engage with the Palestinian narrative's global relevance. E. S.'s background or intentions are unclear, and the director encourages the audience to work harder and make sense of his encounters in Palestine (Campbell). E. S. has been compared to Handala (Dabashi, "Elia Suleiman's") – literally, a "bitter plant" in Arabic – the recurring character in the works of Palestinian cartoonist Naji al-Ali.[20] Ostensibly disengaged from the conflict, the protagonist is confined to the role of the silent onlooker,[21] besieged by an intense sense of liminality. At the same

time, as Patricia Pisters argues, describing Suleiman's aestheticized approach as a form of "impersonal performance" ("Violence and Laughter" 206), it is evident that the filmmaker refutes the idea of simply representing a reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and is more concerned with examining wider political and ethical implications of Palestinian invisibility:

> The political accountability of these images is necessarily situated on the level of their power to do something (if only to affect us and cause debate *to* reality, rather than on the level of accurate representation *in or as* reality. For the filmmaker, this implies that he should not try to *represent* a people, but his fabulating films can contribute to the *creation* of a people ("Violence and Laughter" 208).

Unlike the overwhelming majority of exilic and diasporic directors whose films are set in transient locations, Suleiman positions his characters in spaces purported to evoke a sense of familiarity and stability, apartments, cafés, souvenir stores, automotive workshops, in his hometown of Nazareth and other locations in Israel-Palestine, investigating the evolving forms of Palestinian subjectivity under occupation. Divided into two parts, "Nazareth: Personal Diary," and "Jerusalem: Political Diary," the film opens with an elderly Arab woman on her way to pay condolences to her neighbors. Positioned in front of the camera, she begins to disparage them without reason, and ends her tirade with a warning: "It's better if one stays silent and doesn't say anything." The filmmaker uses frivolity (Dabashi, "In Praise" 135) following the daily regime under occupation and representing Israelis and Palestinians as the "two parallel universes disregarding each other" (Bresheeth, "Telling the Stories" 38). Suleiman reverses the stereotypes entrenched in Western media, portraying Israelis who obsess about their daily activities and lack individualism (Khatib 126) and Palestinians as a community in crisis, unmotivated, tense and immersed in cyclical activities. As Bresheeth observes: "While the Israelis are seen to evaporate through manic

and absurd hyperactivity, Palestinians are shown as static, almost to the point of disappearance" ("A Symphony of Absence" 74).

Suleiman uses his central character's cosmopolitan subjectivity to frame the experiences and conditions of a subaltern community under colonial rule. E. S.'s ability to verbalize his thoughts has disappeared along with the country he was hoping to find. His dispassionate gaze is not reserved for the historical landmarks of Palestine, but for the uninspiring daily routines of its citizens. Using mainly static framing, cinematographer Marc-André Batigne distances his camera from the iconic locations in Nazareth, focusing on seemingly unimportant events, and producing a numbingly banal view of everyday life. Suleiman repeatedly uses the same intertitle, "The Day After," denoting the realities of the Israeli occupation while static visual compositions convey a sense of stagnant life in the manner of snapshot theatre. The clicking of an aunt's heels, the smoking of shisha, a father's heavy breathing, the toll of church bells, the falling and re-arranging of displayed objects at the souvenir shop, are used by the editor, Anna Ruiz, to underline what Suleiman describes as "living in a claustrophobic state of stasis, an impotent inability to change the face of their reality" (Suleiman, qtd. in J Wood 217).

Suleiman re-purposes the images, sounds and music of mainstream media to evoke and subvert global obsession with Palestine, and contrasts its simplifications with a sense of the stagnation in the country under colonial rule. The radio presenter reports the confronting details of the war in Bosnia but ignores the tense and surreally quiet situation in Nazareth. The images of the Holy Land on postcards are contrasted to lethargic moments in front of the tourist shop where they are displayed. The parading of jet skiers on Lake Galilee, composed in the style of holiday advertisements, is juxtaposed with bitter reflections of the Orthodox priest on his loss of faith and the tourist invasion polluting and trivializing holy places.

While E. S. is distinguished by his sense of cosmopolitan otherness, his status and position divulge some comical resemblances to the situation in his country of origin. Introduced as a Palestinian director who returns "to make a film about peace," he is never seen re-drafting his scripts, negotiating with producers, scouting for locations, casting actors or working on set. As he blends in with the community that spent half a century agonizing about the solution to the problem of occupation, we realize that E. S.'s experience of dispossession may have somehow equipped him for the extended periods of waiting that constitute an inherent part of the filmmaking process. E. S.'s encounters suggest that what is left of Palestine are these snippets of mundane daily existence. One would assume that E. S. ponders on what has become of his people, and his fragmented and economically devastated country after half a century of occupation. Whether the dream of free Palestine and the voices demanding justice and appealing for international solidarity, once exciting and evocative in capturing the world's imagination, are still relevant, possible or even imaginable?

The second part of the film, dominated by the use of mobile camerawork is set in Jerusalem, the city of international fascination, reflecting the cultural contradictions and syncretisms of the postcolonial era (Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism* 42). Suleiman highlights his central character's experiences of journeying and return, opening the second part of the film with a descent into the Old City accompanied by the song performed by Natacha Atlas, *Leysh Nat'arak/Why We Fight?* pleading for love and reconciliation: "We've come a long way, you and I/Why do we fight, we were friends once" (Atlas). Nevertheless, Suleiman suddently dislocates the viewer, positioning the camel adorned with tourist regalia in the middle of the road, and blocking the car's passage. The trivial conversations in the French café, at the American Colony, resound with the outdated syntagms describing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as "a reality […] which is extremely difficult to grasp," and a corollary of nationalist rivalries, rather than the geopolitical crisis

brought about by colonial violence and dispossession. Suleiman urges that to ethically engage with the root causes of suffering in Palestine is to reject the omissions and distortions generated by old colonial rulers and sustained by prevailing Zionist narratives.

Chronicle of a Disappearance displays solidarity with the community under siege, but refuses to be constrained by a minority discourse, exposing the hollowness of traditional values and the hypocrisy of those who pretend to speak for the Palestinian community. Inquiring over the telephone about renting a flat in East Jerusalem, Aden (Ula Tabari) is subjected to intimidating questioning by Jewish landlords. Aden also encounters prejudice when an Arab real estate agent counsels her to protect her honor in marriage before renting an apartment in Jerusalem. Suleiman rejects ideas of national homogeneity, even when they are based on common language (Campbell). E. S. is invited to address the local dignitaries at a Palestinian function and is pompously introduced as a filmmaker who has returned from the "voluntary exile in New York." But he cannot deliver his speech, first because of the problems with the sound system, and then because he is unable to engage the audience which is preoccupied by their mobile telephones.

Using slapstick and sardonic humor, the filmmaker exposes the instability of power-relationships between the colonizer and the colonized. In a comical scene, we see a group of Israeli soldiers who urinate against the wall, before running off to catch their van. Suleiman suggests that, even when police launch massive security operations, the two communities remain separated, implying that the 'disappearance' and invisibility of Palestinians, like humor, can also be used to their advantage. When the police break into his home, unaware of their presence, we see E. S. pacing the corridors in his pajama, a hilarious antithesis of the globally renowned image of 'the violent Palestinian' imposed by Western and Israeli media. Adan disrupts the communication between Israeli security services, reversing the worn-out phrases used by local and international politicians to obstruct the peace process: "Jerusalem is

no longer an inseparable city […] Jerusalem is nothing special." When police descend on the house that she shares with E. S., Adan escapes. The police 'arrest' a mannequin in female clothes, described in their communication as an "unknown woman" and hastily stuff it into the trunk of police car. Rather than operating within the constraints of minority discourse, Suleiman rejects didacticism and uses humor to articulate his visions of Palestine to global audiences: "It's not about getting people to learn about Palestine, because I think they learn about Palestine when they laugh. They become a little bit Palestinian just by that" (Suleiman, qtd. in Brooks).

Suleiman's appeal to ethically engage with the question of Palestine gains prominence in the closing sequence of the film as E. S. slips into the lounge of his parents who have dozed off in front of the television set. At the end of the transmission, the small screen features the Israeli flag, accompanied by the national anthem. In line with his cosmopolitan vision, the filmmaker destabilizes the ubiquitous reality of the occupation, hinting at the irrelevance of the concept of national sovereignty, imposed by force and based on systemic violence rather than on promoting societies established on compassion and built upon human rights.

This politically charged ending to the film, featuring the Israeli flag, was, along with the problem of Israeli funding, the reason that *Chronicle of a Disappearance* was seen as an act of collaboration and boycotted by audiences and critics in the Arab world (Ericson; Farid 78, qtd. in Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 40-41; Ibrahim "A Look"). The film was not released in Israel either, as Channel One, run by the Israel Broadcasting Authority, refused to broadcast it (Geertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 41). *Chronicle of a Disappearance* was eventually screened in Israel, as the award for Best Debut Feature at the 1996 Venice International Film Festival and the backing of the European Union fund ensured its promotion through the international network of film festivals receiving MEDIA

Programme's support. Following the film's limited theatrical distribution in the United States of America in 1997, and its VHS and DVD releases in the USA, France and Canada, some critics praised it because it "avoids the ideological commentary on the conflict" (Adams). Others described it as "dryly observant […] schematic and abstract" (Maslin), and dismissed it on political grounds, judging Suleiman's use of the term Palestine to refer to the cities located in the state of Israel, "inappropriate" (D Schwartz). On the other hand, a group of Israeli film critics voted *Chronicle of a Disappearance* the best Israeli film of 1996 (D Sontag) acknowledging that it was one of the most devastating films produced on the theme of Israeli-Palestinian relations (Ericson), thus confirming Suleiman's status as a globally recognized *auteur* who explores life under occupation in a distinct and innovative manner.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Suleiman participated in and conceived a small number of film projects in which he reaffirms his cosmopolitan vision and appeals for ethical engagement with the conflict in Israel-Palestine, placing an emphasis on notions of exilic identity and transnational mobility. Suleiman's appearance with the Israeli filmmaker Amos Gitai in *War and Peace in Vesoul* (1997), an eighty-minute documentary shot on 16mm, became the first collaboration between an Israeli and a Palestinian director. It follows their journey to a film festival in Eastern France and traces the filmmakers' recollections of their growing up in Haifa and Nazareth, of acquiring their foreign passports, and of travelling abroad in the context of the conflict in the Middle East. It was followed by Suleiman's two short films in which he continues to focus on the themes of dispossession and exile. *Al Hilm Al'Arabi/Arab Dream* (1998) explores the effects of the Israeli occupation on the shrinking of universal, pan-Arabic spaces to demarcation lines penetrating both public and personal domains in the lives of Palestinians (Gertz and Khleifi*, Palestinian Cinema* 178). In *Cyber Palestine* (2000), Suleiman adapts the story of Mary and Joseph to modern day Palestine, suggesting continuity with a long line of Palestinian poets and artists who use religious

imagery as a symbol of human suffering and injustice.[22] Suleiman uses some of the narrative stratagems employed in his later films (Abu-Remaileh, "Elia Suleiman" 79, 94), maintaining that central to the Palestinian narrative is "that it could never be told" (Dabashi, "In Praise" 155). However, by continuing to examine the intimate world of his central character, and by counterbalancing the slow pacing and conventional visual compositions in his narratives, he begins to place more emphasis on the power of visual imagery, re-purposing the conventions of commercial cinema to highlight the political element in his films.

Divine Intervention: A Chronicle of Love and Pain

Amidst Occupation, Apathy and Despair

Divine Intervention: A Chronicle of Love and Pain was realized through the transnational convergence of production companies and funding bodies, including ARTE France, French companies Ognon Pictures and Gimages, Israeli Ness Communication & Production Ltd., German funding from North Rhine-Westphalia Film und Median Stiftung, Cologne-based Lichtblick Film-und Fernsehproduktion GmbH[23] and Moroccan television, Soread-2M. Suleiman's aptitude in generating transnational collaborations between Israeli, German and European pan-national, state and regional television channels, funding bodies, production companies, producers and film festival executives, demonstrates that transnational partnerships and global circulation of cultural goods are implemented to test markets and generate innovative creative and economic approaches to cultural production (Acciari, *Indo-Italian Screens* 211). *Divine Intervention* was the second project for Remi Burah, co-produced with Suleiman in the same year as his documentary film debut for ARTE France, Nicholas Philibert's, *Être et avoir/To Be and to Have* (2002). The actor-turned-producer, Humbert Balsan's Ognon Pictures had continually supported eminent Arab filmmakers, including Youssef Chahine and Yousry Nasrallah, while collaborating with Western directors

like James Ivory and Lars von Trier. The following year, Balsan was a member of the jury at the 2003 Berlin International Film Festival and three years later at the time of his death, held the position of President of the European Film Academy.

The support of film festival executives and prominent film producers for Suleiman's second feature-film project indicates that his idiosyncratic aesthetics and cosmopolitan sensibility pervading his films generated a much wider appeal in European filmmaking circles than any of his predecessors in Palestinian cinema. *Divine Intervention* features an Israeli and Palestinian cast and film crew,[24] as well as an assemblage of music composers and performers, Egyptian-Belgian singer Natacha Atlas, Indian composer A. R. Rahman, Lebanese electro-pop band *Soapkills*, and Afghan-Italian Swiss record producer Mirwais Ahmadzai. In a peculiar way, Suleiman also challenges the assumption that, due to the often sensitive political nature of their films, Palestinian filmmakers are unable to engage major international movie stars, while still reminding the audience of how Palestinians strive for global visibility. The breathing of Santa Claus in the opening scene of the film is officially credited to the French screen icon, actor Michel Piccoli, but his face remains invisible to the audience.

Dedicated to Suleiman's father, *Divine Intervention* is a surreal black comedy, expanding on the themes of return, loss, exile, occupation and loneliness. In the opening scenes, the viewers are presented with a series of fragments surveying everyday life in an occupied country that are connected by markedly violent resolutions. The filmmaker departs from the ethnographic approach to representing the marginalized other, and presents a different view of community under occupation, ostensibly devoid of empathy or solidarity. A group of Palestinian teenagers chase and murder the man dressed as Santa Claus, a driver randomly abuses passengers on the road, locals squabble over parking spaces, throw garbage into their neighbors' yards, damage property and assault one another over minor

disagreements. Suleiman's cosmopolitan approach is deliberately distanced from misrepresentations and distortions in Western media, but also from romanticized visions of Palestinian life, as he introduces us to a brutalized community living under colonial rule. Using minimal dialogue and static camerawork, the filmmaker conveys, "through a dark and wry ludicrousness, how habitually invested a Palestinian can become in the minutiae of a shrunken daily repertoire" (Dickinson, "The Palestinian Road (Block) Movie" 145).

Suleiman continues to underline the centrality of the minor form for the political element of his transnationally produced narratives, as the reduced personal spaces are perceived as the only locations where, crushed by the ferocity of the occupation, his characters still cling on to the last vestiges of individual autonomy. Amidst this "absurdist-vaudeville proscenium" (Indiana 29), we encounter a Palestinian returnee E. S. (Elia Suleiman), and follow him on hospital visits to his father (Najef Fahoum Dahewr), who has lost his job to Israeli creditors, and forced to close down his mechanical workshop, has also suffered a heart attack. Concentrating on the intimate world of his minor transnational subject, Suleiman's cinematographic style combines psychological acuteness with stylistic economy and a sense of dramatic pace. His uncompromising use of close-ups conjures what Darcy O'Brien, evoking Gilles Deleuze in his discussion of Ingmar Bergman's cinematic style, describes as enforcing a coalescence of the human face with the void (D O'Brien). As Babli Sinha points out, in a colonial context, close ups allow the cinema audience to get a closer view of the body and become intimate with the character's mindset, or as Walter Benjamin has pointedly suggested "to focus on hidden details of familiar objects" ("The Work of Art" 15, qtd. in Sinha 29). These protracted shots are permeated with silence and project an incapacitating sense of apathy that dominates all spheres of life under Israeli occupation, clearly pointing to Suleiman's postcolonial concerns.

Traversing the occupied land, Suleiman's central character encounters a paralyzing sense of apathy and shares a collective sense of immobility experienced by Palestinians at Israeli checkpoints and roadblocks. E. S. secretly meets the Woman (Manal Khader) from Ramallah at Al-Ram checkpoint's parking area. The two silently sit in their cars for hours exchanging glances while witnessing the intimidation of Palestinians by Israeli soldiers. As night descends on the checkpoint, the traffic subsides, and the only sign of affection between the two are their curled hands, shot in extreme close-ups, combined with their unemotional facial expressions. What remains in E. S.'s world of reduced possibilities and lowered expectations are the moments frozen in time, enduring long hours in his ailing father's hospital room, or sharing the sense of misery and loneliness with his lover.

These fragments are interspersed with farcical scenes of colonial arrogance, brimming with absurdity, in which Palestinians, at least for a brief moment, challenge the forces that control their everyday existence. Wanting to visit the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, a tourist asks an Israeli policeman for help. The policeman brings out the Palestinian prisoner from his van, who, tied and blindfolded, directs the tourist in the right direction. Clogging the hospital corridor, the parading column of chain-smoking Palestinian patients is ignored by visitors and staff, in what appears as an absurd, yet therapeutic attempt to regain some semblance of individual freedom. Re-contextualizing the conflict in Israel-Palestine as a global problem, the filmmaker maintains that these scenes transcend their geopolitical context, prompting his audiences to engage with the suffering caused by colonial oppression, and underpinning its ethical repercussions: "Your Nazareth is a lot like my Los Angeles. In Montreal they felt they were seeing something of their own. If we talk about brutality, it's the ambience of brutality we're living in all over the world" (Indiana 31).

While Suleiman's uneventful narratives largely evacuated of visual appeal, are infused with a close attention to visual detail and a lack of verbal expression, they also

contain moments of escapist fantasy (Gugler 28). With their distinctive production values, these scenes are, in accordance with Suleiman's propensity for the minor aesthetics, re-purposed to stress the political element in his films. Using the conventions of commercial action films, martial arts pics, and comedies, hitherto absent from Palestinian cinema, he reconnects with the early promises of cinema as the first genuinely transnational medium, that in its "pre-national" period captured the audience's imagination, relying on visual imagery (Danan 74). In these self-contained miniatures, he draws on the narrative conventions of mainstream cinema in order to deconstruct the hierarchies of power in geopolitical and cultural contexts and thereby animate his audiences. This reliance on the effectiveness of visuals, described by Tom Gunning as "the aesthetics of attraction," does not seek to entangle the spectator in its fictional world, but rather "solicits a highly conscious awareness of the film image engaging the viewer's curiosity" ("The Cinema of Attraction" 66). Appropriating this mode of cinema aesthetics affirms Suleiman's view that the status quo in Israeli-Palestinian relationships is unsustainable, and that the two polarized communities continue to fuel tensions and keep conflict alive.

Suleiman returns to the power of cinematic spectacle in randomly spaced intervals, using different generic approaches throughout the film. Introduced almost thirty minutes into the narrative, E. S. is seen driving down a local road and eating a peach. He casually throws the pip through his car's window and destroys an Israeli tank parked by the road, followed by a massive explosion. Exposing the instability of relationships between the colonizer and the colonized, this parodic rendering of an Israeli 'defeat' is not intended to entice nationalist zeal, but engage the cinema audiences in contemplating the 'normalization' of violence in media representations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and is followed by a series of mundane scenes from daily life under occupation.

Using the conventions of popular cinema, Suleiman expands on one of the most frustrating experiences of life under occupation, articulating the Palestinian perceptions of borders and im/mobility. In the scene at the Al-Ram checkpoint, the woman that E. S. loves marches through the Israeli barricade, catwalk-style, ignoring the soldiers' warnings and pointed guns. The soldiers run for cover, and as their watchtower collapses what remains on the road is the shapeless mass of steel and concrete. Presenting the scene in the manner of a commercial movie, the filmmaker relies on the power of cinematic images to engage Palestinian and global audiences. The scene provoked an extraordinary reaction amongst Palestinian spectators at the screening in Ramallah. The audience, accustomed to enduring the permanent state of blockade and hours of waiting at Israeli checkpoints applauded after the breaking through of the barrier and continued to euphorically clap following the collapse of the watchtower (J Wood). Resonating also with international viewers, this moment has, over time, emerged as one of the most iconic and globally recognized scenes in Suleiman's *oeuvre*.

Suleiman continues to traverse imposed barriers and to connect the shattered fragments of his homeland in the scene titled, "I am crazy because I love you" in which E. S. sitting in the car with his girlfriend, releases the red balloon bearing the image of Yasser Arafat into the skies above Jerusalem. The filmmaker uses the particular dynamic of visual imagery, accompanied by a dramatic musical score, conjuring a sense of the magical and inexplicable and suggesting that the power of imagination can circumvent the boundaries imposed by colonial rule. The Israeli soldiers request from their headquarters permission to destroy the balloon which glides over the Mount of Olives, the Western Wall and nearby Christian holy sites, and affixing itself to the dome of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, symbolically reunites the city and its historical landmarks.

The parodic re-framing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in line with commercial genre films, culminates in the scene with a group of Israeli soldiers wearing T-shirts with the logos of the political movement Peace Now, who practice their target shooting using targets clad with Arab attire. One of the targets refuses to succumb and transforms into a veiled Palestinian woman who begins to fire slingshots, throw stones, and defends herself using a shield in the shape of the Palestinian state. The fully clad female figure downs helicopters, confronts Israeli soldiers, and evokes the idealized visions of the Palestinian super-heroine, created with a comic effect in mind (Porton, "Notes" 24), but subsequently returns to the passivity and silence by once again becoming a target.

In the closing sequence of the film, Suleiman once again returns to the rhythms of daily life under occupation and his characters' ubiquitous and petrifying sense of inertia. E. S. and his mother in their kitchen observe a whistling kettle on the stove. The water is boiling, but they do not react, maintaining silent, unexpressive faces, until the mother finally utters: "That's enough. Stop it now." However, both characters remain still. Imparting the despair and immobility of those whose lives have been irrevocably altered by the occupation, Suleiman infers that they are not different to other victims of global injustice, and that standing up for Palestine means eventually engaging with the world and its suffering.

Divine Intervention premiered at the New York Film Festival in 2002, and was nominated for the Palme d'Or, but problems with the film's distribution revealed numerous obstructions affecting the promotion of Palestinian films within the international arena. The film's application for nomination for the 2003 Oscars was refused by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences on the basis that Suleiman, a citizen of Israel, was a stateless individual (Dabashi, Introduction 8). Humbert Balsan authorized the American distributor to contact the Academy about the film's candidacy in the Best Foreign Language Film category. However, the Academy refused the application because Palestine was not a state recognized

by the United Nations, although nominations from Taiwan and Wales had been successfully submitted in previous years (Doherty and Abunimah).

Divine Intervention was awarded the Grand Jury Prize and the FIPRESCI Prize at the 2002 Cannes Film Festival, where in that year three other Palestinian films were also invited to be screened at different venues (Dabashi, Introduction 8). This did not only secure the film's successful run but furthermore, a certain visibility of Palestinian cinema within the international film festival circuit. The film's reception in the Palestinian territories was poor, as Suleiman was repeatedly accused of accepting Israeli financial support (Mokdad 194), but *Divine Intervention* was included in *Film Comment's* list of Top Ten Films of 2002, as yet unreleased in the US ("Film Comment's"). *Divine Intervention* received the *Screen International* Award at the 2002 European Film Awards, and an official invitation was extended to the filmmaker to join the Cannes International Film Festival Jury in 2006. His third feature film premiered at the same festival three years later, thus reinforcing Suleiman's position as the most recognizable Palestinian filmmaker on the international film scene.

Affirming his allegiances to the international community of filmmakers, Suleiman directed a short film *Irtebak/Awkward* as part of *Chacun son cinéma: une déclaration d'amour au grand écran/To Each His Own Cinema* (2007), which was commissioned on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Cannes Film Festival. This compilation of short films featured thirty-six filmmakers, including Manoel de Oliveira, Theo Angelopoulos, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, David Lynch, Jane Campion, and Olivier Assayas, amongst others, thus cementing Suleiman's place in the transnational circuit of cineastes with a global reputation.

The Time That Remains: Chronicle of a Present Absentee

Return to the Palestine of Then and Now

The Time That Remains: Chronicle of a Present Absentee was completed through the partnership of twenty-seven production companies, European programs, government bodies and television channels from Israel, France, United Kingdom, Italy and Belgium, including France 3 Cinema,[25] Radio Télévision Belge de la Communauté Française (RTBF),[26] and the financial support of Euroimages and MEDIA Programme of the European Union. In spite of the international success of his previous film, which was unprecedented for a Palestinian director, Suleiman was still facing an uphill battle to secure backing for this project. Only weeks from production, the financing structure collapsed but the project was salvaged by London-based Saudi entrepreneur Hani Farsi and the French film-distribution company, Wild Bunch (Jaafar *"The Time That Remains"*). *The Time That Remains* was filmed on locations in Israel and Ramallah, on a budget of $6.5 million dollars.[27] Released for only three weeks in the United States of America, it grossed just over one million US dollars worldwide (*"The Time That Remains"*).

Inspired by the diaries of his father Fuad (Saleh Bakri), and tracing the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, *The Time That Remains* brings forward the filmmaker's attempt to bridge the spatial and the temporal divides separating his central character from the events of the Nakba. The film's "cautionary title" (Haider) makes a plea for ethical engagement with the consequences of the Palestinian tragedy, but also denotes a historical and legal category used to describe the status of Palestinian refugees. Expelled from their places of residence at the time of the creation of the state of Israel, they remained within its borders following armistice, but were not allowed the right of return to their homeland.

According to Hjort, cosmopolitan transnationalism is not limited by the subjective experiences of the filmmaker but reflects their movements, and national, transnational and

postcolonial concerns and opportunities, to which these trajectories give rise ("On the Plurality" 21). Suleiman diffuses his preoccupation with non-linear narration (Cutler) connecting the experiences of his central character and the events in the past to the present-day era and positioning his protagonists amidst the historical events that will determine the destiny of Palestine and Palestinians in the second half of the twentieth century.

Suleiman again gives prominence to the Palestinian traumas of exile and experiences of cross-border mobility. *The Time That Remains* opens with E. S.'s arrival at Ben Gurion airport – the first in his films – a small, uneventful moment of return which subverts its prominence in Palestinian culture and highlights the climate of disillusionment in the state of Israel. When the taxi driver, Menashe (Menashe Roy) lays E. S.'s suitcase in his car's boot, behind him, we see a tourist advertising poster with a caption in Hebrew reading *Eretz aheret* ("A different land"). Disregarding the ongoing crisis which has persisted since the formation of the state of Israel, the advertisement is more indicative of what it tries to conceal, namely a society that has continued to deny human rights, inclusivity and plurality to its Palestinian citizens.

E. S. indeed returns to a different country, transformed by the policies of dispossessing its indigenous Arab population, but also experiencing the rising tide of Israeli disillusionment with the promises of progress and equality. As they ride through the stormy night towards Nazareth, Menashe informs his call center: "Long trip ahead. Disappearing until further notice. Don't try to find me." The driver laments the decay of settler enthusiasm and Zionist egalitarianism, that supposedly characterized the early years of the state of Israel: "We're lost. How can we return home?" However, Menashe remains silent about the dispossession of the Palestinian minority, the economic segregation as well as the decline of living standards at the time of market liberalism (Johnson). The filmmaker foregrounds Israeli readiness to join the rest of the world, voicing their disappointments with the fiasco of

the liberal dream, but alludes to the gaps in the official narrative and exposes a certain overall reluctance to re-consider the idealized visions of the past, to re-assess the nationalist myths and to recognize the suffering that has accompanied the realization of the Zionist program:

> A lot of people don't want to talk about 1948. But some are willing to take the pain of what happened – and not just accept some kind of dream sequence of the creation of the Israeli state, which is a nonsensical story. It's a big lie (Suleiman, qtd. in Rose).

The Time That Remains follows the historical sequence of the loss, dispossession and exile of Palestinian people. The film dramatizes the events in Nazareth during the Arab – Israeli war of 1948, the activities of the resistance movement, the 18-year-long period of Israeli military rule 1948-1966, and the establishment of colonial authority and its moves to disenfranchise the Palestinian population, connecting them to the contemporary era through the subjective cosmopolitan viewpoint of the returnee.

While most Palestinians would be familiar with the historical events and phases of the conflict, the central character's return is an opportunity to 're-live' the tragedy of 1948 through the eyes of his Palestinian parents and give them universal meaning. Suleiman approaches this task motivated by an ambition to preserve the memories of the Nakba (Suleiman, qtd. in Abu-Remaileh, "Elia Suleiman" 83), and re-purposes the form of the period drama, transporting his audience to the time and place of the war that will affect the lives of generations to come of Palestinians. The filmmaker rejects didacticism, and, engaging with the minor form, subverts the aspirations of 'authenticity' typical of a more mainstream approach to historical fiction. Instead, he challenges the notion of the totalizing cinematic reconstruction of Palestinian history, articulated by national and cultural elites: "Opting for non-linearity in the film's narrative mode fits in a perfect synchronization with my intention to challenge the linearity of the story of Palestine" (Suleiman, "A Cinema of Nowhere" 97). Evoking the Deleuzian concept of "juxtaposition or compenetration of the old

and the new which makes up an absurdity" (*Cinema 2* 118) in his discussion of *The Time that Remains*, Peter Grabher argues that Suleiman's layering of historical occurrences creates a specific form of co-temporality and subverts the vertical constructions of historical sequences and national myth as a response to trauma and loss (Grabher 245). The filmmaker presents events in fragmentary form, relying on static camerawork, combining poignant and graphically violent scenes with humorous episodes to destabilize the monopolizing of speaking to and for Palestine and Palestinians or of creating a monolithic reading of one of the most critical periods in its national history. Similar to Suleiman's previous films, this approach may have alienated Israeli and Western spectators, cautious of his decision to plunge deep into the tragic history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also disengaged audiences across the Arab world, for whom the filmmaker's departure from the official narrative may have caused confusion or skepticism.

The conflict is presented as brief, brutal, and farcical. Entering Nazareth, the Israeli army does not encounter serious opposition, as the outnumbered Arab forces' attempts to resist the invaders resemble the slapstick scenes from films of the silent era. The war ends with the unconditional, humiliating capitulation of the Palestinian elite to the group of Israeli officers, seen through the lens of a military photographer, 'flashing' his backside to the locals while capturing a portrait of the victors. Suleiman observes that it is also the moment when the ethnic and religious diversity of Palestine was irretrievably lost to the colonial rulers, drawing attention to the other conflicts within the international arena where imposing the supremacy of one ethnic community had tragic consequences and blocked the development of hybrid societies and cultures. Misunderstanding and masquerade are often associated with comedy, but Suleiman re-purposes them, entwining them with significant moments of defeat, humiliation, personal loss and exile, reversing and subverting the conventional function of these tropes in mainstream cinema. Thus, comical confusions amongst the inexperienced and

poorly armed Arab conscripts lead to catastrophic defeat, and the Palestinian woman who, unaware of the ploy, welcomes the Israeli soldiers dressed as Arab fighters, is mercilessly executed on the street.

Underlining his ethical engagement, Suleiman accentuates the defining moments in the lives of ordinary Palestinians, trying to preserve their self-respect under occupation. The beating of Fuad in the silence of the olive grove and a friend's reading of Abdelrahim Mahmud's 1937 poem *Shaheed* to the Israeli troops – followed by his suicide – transform the tone of the film to dark and foreboding. Like most Palestinian filmmakers, Suleiman draws attention to the reactions of the besieged community to the degradation of colonial rule, and the emerging effects of post-conflict denial. Fuad's friend arrives to let him know that he is leaving for Jordan, "for a couple of days, until things become clearer." As the crisis in Palestine gradually becomes a regional and also global problem, E. S.'s mother continues to write letters to her family in Jordan which describe the patterns of everyday life in Israel. Suleiman infers that the ongoing conflict does not only perpetuate the fragmentation of Palestinian lives in Israel and in exile, but permeated with universal meaning, draws parallels with other geopolitical flashpoints: "The Arab-Israeli conflict is the world's conflict and vice-versa, so I don't know what is a microcosm of what anymore, because globally, Palestine has multiplied and generated into so many Palestines" (Suleiman, qtd. in Haider).

Suleiman exposes the silences accompanying the dominant Zionist narratives, and follows the gradual subjugation of the Palestinian minority. When an Arab school choir receive the prize for their performance at the celebration of the Israeli Independence Day, the dignitary, congratulating them, reiterates the "willingness to pass on the values of democracy and equality to all our pupils." However, echoing his debut film, Suleiman shows a group of Arab children watching *Spartacus* (Stanley Kubrick, 1960) with bated breath, while beneath

the school staircase, the principal criticizes E. S. for denouncing America as a colonialist country.

Beneath the veneer of everyday life, the occupation infringes on all aspects of human existence. Suleiman emphasizes the fragmentation of Palestinian lives as Fuad's fishing trips are regularly disrupted by Israeli patrols, and soldiers and medical staff fight over patients at the local hospital. The private space is reduced to writing letters, visits from the family, the doctor, and protracted moments of silence around the kitchen table, which are occasionally disrupted by Aunty Olga's rants. Communal life is also seen in perpetual decline. The Arab paper boy says to E. S. and his friends, gathered in front of the souvenir store: "No more *Nation*. What's left is *All the Arabs*" Preserving one's personal autonomy is largely dependent on retaining human contact. Fuad stops his Arab neighbor from dousing himself in kerosene, following Nasser's death, and saves an Israeli soldier from a burning vehicle. When we see them next, recovering, side by side in their hospital beds, the soldier asks Fuad if he was the one who saved his life. Fuad replies in Hebrew: "Are you OK?"

When E. S. finally arrives home, we expect to see Nazareth through the eyes of the outsider, but everyday life has hardly changed. The apartment is furnished in the same fashion as it looked in previous scenes, his aging friends meet in cafes frequented by him and his father, Palestinian youth confront the Israelis on the same streets as before, and patrolling soldiers continue to disturb the fishermen and young people, dancing at night clubs. At the same time, Suleiman also searches for what Kathleen Newman articulates as evidence of equality among and between people confronting the hierarchies of capitalism (9). E. S. notices that transnational migration of labor has somewhat altered the dynamics within Israeli society, and in his family, too, infusing them with a sense of heterogeneity. E. S.'s mother (Shafika Bajjali) is assisted by the Filipina maid (Elisa Mariano), who uses the Hebrew word *ima* (mum) to address her, sings the karaoke songs from *Titanic*, and makes efforts 'to

belong.' One can register a sense of cosmopolitan understanding and solidarity between the returnee and a migrant worker, as their otherness is persistently scrutinized by both Palestinians and Israelis. Furthermore, it is suggested that the progress of colonial societies has rarely any trickle-down effects for the subjugated minorities. The modernization and technologization of Israeli society has only contributed to the developing of more sophisticated systems of monitoring and repression of its Arab citizens. We see a Palestinian youth leaving his home, speaking on his mobile telephone, closely followed by the barrel of the Israeli tank.

Expanding upon the series of vignettes evoking Palestinian experiences of mobility in the finale of the film, the filmmaker uses the force of imagination and his own sense of humor to subvert and transcend colonial repression. This is highlighted in the scene in which E. S. faces the concrete barrier, one of the globally recognized symbols of segregation, and pole-vaults across the Wall, paying homage to the efforts of Palestinians trying to overcome the Israeli blockade, and exposing the absurdity of any and all concepts of national sovereignty. Indicatively, the director compares the accomplishment of making a film, with his ultimate sense of hope for the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, pointing out:

> I think by *de facto*, that the very act of the making of a film, is an act emerging from hope. So questions that surround hopelessness are in contradiction to the actual fact that there is a film […] There is only hope. Otherwise I wouldn't be making films (Suleiman, qtd. in Haider).

The closing film of the trilogy, like the two works preceding it, ends on a subjective note, with the returnee's silent, evocative interaction with his family, a reminder of the lives affected by occupation, dispossession and exile. Filmed in minimalist, symmetrically aligned, multiple frames, E. S. and his mother conjure a special kind of relationship, evoking moments frozen in time within a condensed space that they have occupied as a family since his

childhood. Sitting motionless on the terrace, his mother is unresponsive to the outer world, and is not even engaged by the fireworks seen across the panorama of Nazareth. Later on, in her hospital room, when E. S. arrives to visit her, we see her holding a photograph of Fuad, sitting in the same chair she has occupied. Reiterating his plea for ethical engagement with the conflict in Israel-Palestine and with universal meanings of Palestinian narratives of loss and suffering, Suleiman suggests that our innermost feelings and the ability to engage with others are the only way to preserve one's sense of humanity amidst the enduring circumstances of oppression and degradation.

Conclusion

This discussion of Elia Suleiman's films focuses on cosmopolitan transnationalism in his work. Using Mette Hjort's idea of cosmopolitan transnationalism in dialogue with Kwame Anthony Appiah's concept of "rooted cosmopolitanism" this analysis has concentrated on the filmmaker's cosmopolitan subjectivity as the key distinguishing element of his poetics. Suleiman's cosmopolitanism is evinced through his preoccupations with his Palestinian and global identities, narratives about the exilic other, his transnational mobility and working within a hybrid cultural climate. Accentuating the filmmaker's engagement with the minor form, the analysis also has placed emphasis on the political element in his films and the understanding of the conflict in Israel-Palestine as an ethical problem affecting global humanity, forging the sensibilities of new global and Palestinian cinema audiences.

Suleiman uses his idiosyncratic approach to elevate concerns for minority rights, prompting domestic and global audiences to consider the distortions and omissions that accompany the production of narratives concerned with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Establishing key facets of his poetics in his early films, scrutinizing the silences and cacophony in the dominant narratives in Western popular culture, he examines the complex

and converging cosmopolitan identities of his characters, their exilic subjectivities and sense of transnational mobility, and divulges the strategies of colonial and cultural supremacy, asking who and why can speak for Palestine and Palestinians. Suleiman's early films are concerned with exposing the tropes and formations of hegemonic discourse which have been constructed with the function of alienating the other, blocking minority voices, and suppressing the production of alternative narratives. The visual materials acquired in the Middle East and excerpts from globally recognizable films as well as popular media are, customary to minor form, re-purposed, alerting the audiences to various tropes of cultural domination. Immersed in the cosmopolitan subjectivity of his minor transnational subjects, Suleiman explores the narrative devices that will typify his film aesthetics, the "small movies" looks combined with non-linear narration, and the use of intertitles and non-dialogic forms of expression that will continue to evolve in his feature films, revolving around the persona of an exiled Palestinian filmmaker. Demonstrating his flexibility in navigating the increasingly complex, fragmented realms of transnational collaboration, Suleiman succeeds in bringing together the major and minor modes of cinematic production, connecting production companies and government bodies, regional institutions and funding programs from Israel, Europe, the Middle East and the United States of America, in order to muster financial backing for his feature films. Suleiman uses the devices of the minor aesthetics and, revolving around the experiences of the Palestinian returnee, continues to explore the distortions and omissions associated with the creation of hegemonic narratives, highlights the mundane and insignificant events in the lives of his characters, and encourages viewers to engage with the question of Palestine and its ethical consequences. His feature films highlight the microcosm and fractured subjectivity of Suleiman's central character through repeated experiences of return to Israel-Palestine and via his encounters with the local Palestinian community. Immersed in his daily routines, E. S. retains his liminal status, as these journeys

and encounters, mediated by his cosmopolitan persona, reveal the underlying tensions and evolving forms of subjectivity in his homeland under occupation, and the postcolonial concerns of the filmmaker.

Suleiman's cosmopolitan vision of Palestine, unparalleled in its emotional intensity, is oppositional yet inclusive. The filmmaker rejects the occupation and refutes restrictive nationalist ideologies as inadequate for mediating the political differences between Israelis and Palestinians and continues to seek avenues to address the ethical challenges facing humanity on a global scale. Approaching the traumatic moments in space and time in his narratives, Suleiman suggests that one must engage with the problems of repression and injustice, crucial for understanding the connection between the crisis in his homeland and its global consequences. In spite of attempts to block the distribution of his films, and their standing to qualify for international film festival awards, and the boycotting and critical rejection of his output in the Arab world due to his acceptance of Israeli funding, Suleiman's works have taken Palestinian cinema to new levels of international prominence, paving the way for emerging generations of directors who use transnational networks to obtain support for their projects. Compelling viewers to look beyond the limiting historical and geopolitical frameworks and engage with the silences and omissions in his films, Suleiman's brooding, emotional films resonate deeply not merely amongst Palestinian but international audiences. He is not only asking who can speak for Palestine, but also how can Palestinians endure the confines of the colonial establishment, and ultimately by what values and standards can humanity possibly live by, ignoring the ongoing misery and degradation of its fellow human beings.

Endnotes

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[1] In his conversation with Elia Suleiman, based on John Berger's *Bento's Sketchbook* and the writings of Baruch Spinoza, Berger meditates on art, politics, and history, and articulates these ideas concerning the experience of spectatorship and an ethical engagement with the audience:

> "Now at this moment, if we imagined that somebody seeing that film or reading that book is very, very slightly modified, changed by the experience of that reading or that watching or that following the story, what does that mean? It means that very slightly that change will lead that person to sometimes make slightly different decisions than they would have made without that experience. And that decision probably involves an action or refusal to act. And that action or refusal to act would have some effect on another person. And so on, and so on" (Figgis).

[2] According to Mulvey, Rascaroli and Saldanha, this area of research includes the works by Tim Bergfelder, "Love Beyond the Nation: Cosmopolitanism and Transnational Desire in Cinema" (2012), Ib Bondebjerg, "Cosmopolitan Narratives: Documentary and the Global Other" (2014), Maria Rovisco, "Towards a Cosmopolitan Cinema: Understanding the Connection Between Borders, Mobility and Cosmopolitanism in the Fiction Film" (2013), and Dimitris Eleftheriotis, "Cosmopolitanism, Empathy and the Close-up" (2016). The authors also cite studies of identity transformations: Laura Rascaroli's "Home and Away: Nanni Moretti's *The Last Summer* and the Ground Zero of Transnational Identities*"* (2010), and discussing the problems brought about by the process of globalization, in Maria del Mar Azcona's "'Don't Stop Me Now': Mobility and Cosmopolitanism in the Bourne Saga" (2016), and other works (Mulvey et al. 3).

[3] Mulvey, Rascaroli and Saldanha cite the works of Jane Mills, "Sojourner Cinema: Seeking and Researching a New Cinematic Category" (2014), Demitris Eleftheriotis' "The

Foreignness of Jules Dassin: Notes on Cosmopolitan Authorship" (2012), and Brian Hu, "Star Discourse and the Cosmopolitan Chinese: Linda Lin Dai Takes on the World" (2010), as key examples of work in this area of research (3).

[4] This area of research is typified by the works of scholars focusing on film festival culture, Dina Iordanova, "The Film Festival Circuit" (2009), Marijke de Valck, "Screening World Cinema at Film Festivals: Festivalisation and (Staged) Authenticity" (2018), and Vanessa R. Schwartz, *It's so French! Hollywood, Paris, and the Making of Cosmopolitan Film Culture* (2007). The authors also cite academic research of film consumption, such as Dudley Andrew's "Time Zones and Jetlag: The Flows and Phases of World Cinema" (2010), and Martin Roberts' "Film Culture" (2005) (Mulvey et al. 3).

[5] The fourth area of research, according to Mulvey, Rascaroli and Saldanha includes Adrián Pérez Melgosa's, "Cosmopolitan Nationalisms: Transnational Aesthetic Negotiations of Early Latin American Sound Cinema," Angela Prysthon's "Do tercero cinema ao cinema periférico: Estéticas contemporâneas e cultura mundial," and Motti Regev's "Cultural Uniqueness and Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism" (Mulvey et al. 3).

[6] Suleiman highlights the responsibility of Palestinians to stand with the oppressed and demonstrate international solidarity: "I think that true Palestine extends beyond its borders and to be a Palestinian is to have a moral and ethical stance against injustice anywhere in the world – whether it involves race, color, or gender, this is what Palestinian resistance should be about" (Suleiman, qtd. in Khader 24).

[7] In his interview with Drake Stutesman, Suleiman identifies fear as one of the key issues facing contemporary intellectuals: "So many people have lost their humor and are leading a tragic existence, censoring themselves. Fear is ruling today's world." (Suleiman, qtd. in Stutesman).

[8] Most excerpts in this experimental film are sourced from the Classical Hollywood Cinema, the period between 1910s until 1960s when Hollywood became the dominant and pervasive style of filmmaking within a global context (Bordwell et al. 1-59). During this period American films, according to conservative estimates, occupied 70-90% of available screen time in Europe and South America (Schatz 12).

[9] Established in 1988, the Hubert Bals Fund has continually supported filmmakers from Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and parts of Eastern Europe. In its early stages, the Fund supported a number of Arab directors, such as Nouri Bouzid, Ferid Boughedir, Mohamad Malas, Moufida Tlatli, Jean Chamoun, and special projects and production workshops in the Middle East.

[10] The New York State Council of the Arts was established in 1960 and is dedicated to awarding grants to arts, cultural and heritage non-profit projects, determined to make the arts accessible to all citizens of New York State: "We aim to support worthy artistic and cultural activities that serve traditionally underserved communities or populations" (*New York*).

[11] Samir Srouji worked as Art Director and Production Designer on Suleiman's films.

[12] In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot points out: "The play of power in the production of alternative narratives begins with the joint creation of facts and sources for at least two reasons. First, facts are never meaningless: indeed, they become facts only because they matter in some sense, however, minimal. Second, facts are not created equal: the production of traces is always also the creation of silences" (29).

[13] The Bill for the Promotion of Israeli Quality Films was established in 1954 with the task to provide funds to locally produced films. Since the 1990s, it has operated under two different names, The New Israeli Fund for Film and Television (1993) and the Bill for Cinema (1998), under the auspices of the Israeli Ministry of Industry and Trade. (Grinsberg

and Lippard 212). In spite of initial speculation, the Fund did not use censorship to curb critique of the conservative government (Ben-Shaul 215).

[14] The early films by Rashid Masharawi, Ali-Nassar's feature films and Nizar Hassan's documentary projects, have also been supported by Israeli funding organizations and television channels continuing to finance a limited number of Palestinian films (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 57).

[15] Founded in 1991, Film-und Medien Stiftung NRW is the most powerful state funding institution in Germany with numerous state and industry stakeholders. Its shareholders include the public-broadcasting institution WDR (Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln), the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia, as well as ZDF, RTL and the state media authority, the Landesanstalt für Medien (Film und Medien Stiftung).

[16] The American Independent Television Service (ITVS) has been funded by The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), which in the early 1990s began to finance documentary and drama programs for American public television (ITVS).

[17] The MEDIA Programme of the European Union was jointly run by the European Commission Directorate – General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) and the Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency (EACE) (Media Sub-programme of Creative Europe).

[18] In his conversation with John Berger, Suleiman discusses money as being at the heart of the filmmaking system, pointing out that film financing comes with restrictions and obligations. The filmmaker speaks of "a certain diplomacy, strategy and tactics" when negotiating financing, using an Arab proverb: يدك تاكل عنب او يدك تقتل الناطور ؟ – *Bedak takol 'aenab o bedak taktol alnatour?* ("Do you want to eat grapes or you want to kill the watchman?") (Figgis).

[19] The most emblematic Palestinian narrative of return, Ghassan Kanafani's novella, *A'id Ila Haifa*/*Returning to Haifa* (1969), follows Palestinian refugees Said and Safeyya, who, having fled Haifa in 1948, return twenty years later to find their home occupied by Miriam, an Israeli war-widow, and their son Khaldun, renamed Dov, an officer in the Israeli Army.

[20] Handala is a ten-year old Palestinian boy in rugged clothes, who is seen observing the scenes of everyday life under occupation, silently turned away from the audience. Naji al-Ali was raised in the refugee camp Ain al-Hilweh, in Lebanon. In the late 1950s, his talent was discovered by the Ghassan Kanafani. He migrated to Kuwait, and continued his career as a cartoonist, emerging as a powerful symbol of Palestinian resistance, until his death in 1987 (Al-Ali).

[21] E. S.'s role of a silent onlooker evokes a number of instances where Palestinian representatives and organizations were silenced in the international arena. The Palestinian Liberation Organization was recognized by the UN General Assembly in 1974, granting it observer status in various organizations, including UNESCO, but without the right to speak. (Said and Hitchens 249; Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism* 35).

[22] Paying homage to his collaboration with Hani Jawhariyyeh, Vladimir Tamari lists renowned Palestinian poets and artists using religious imagery to convey the tragedy of the Palestinian people, amongst others, Ismail Shammout's painting *Palestine on the Cross*, Mahmoud Darwish's poem "Kitaba bi-l-fahm al-muhtaraq"/"Writing with Charred Coal" and Sliman Mansour's painting *The Camel of Burdens* ("Remembering My Friend, Hani Jawhariyyeh" 22).

[23] Lichtblick Film and Television Production GmbH is a German television and film production company based in Cologne. It was founded in 1991 by producers, Joachim

Ortmanns and Carl-Ludwig Rettinger, and produces documentary and feature films for cinema and television (*Lichtblick Film*).

[24] The Israeli line-producer, Avi Kleinberger, has remained one of Suleiman's close collaborators, and one of the most talented contemporary Palestinian filmmakers, Basil Khalil, then a student at Edinburgh Film Academy, was credited with the role of Second Assistant Director.

[25] France 3 is the second-largest public broadcaster in France. It broadcasts national and international news and cultural programming with a particular focus on regional content and the francophone world in general (*France TV/France 3*).

[26] Established in 1930, Radio Télévision Belge de la Communauté Française (RTBF) is the public broadcaster of the French community in Belgium and is situated in Brussels (*Radio Télévision Belge de la Communauté Française*).

[27] The film's budget was slightly lower than one of the acclaimed English-speaking arthouse films of the year, Tom Ford's 2009 *A Single Man,* and thirty percent lower than the budget of the American-born Palestinian, Charlene Dabis' 2009 feature film debut, *Amreeka* ("*A Single Man"*; Mitchell).

Chapter 4. Entering the Commercial Mainstream: Transitioning to Production Standards and Narrative Conventions of Popular Cinema in the Films of Hany Abu-Assad

The fourth chapter of this thesis concentrates on the rise of the opportunistic element in Palestinian minor transnational cinema and the films of Hany Abu-Assad, the first Palestinian filmmaker to successfully penetrate the global commercial mainstream market. While Abu-Assad's documentary and feature films covered by this analysis are also distinguished by modernizing and cosmopolitan attributes, the opportunistic element in his work bears hallmarks that warrant special elaboration. Hjort's periodization of cinematic transnationalism provides a framework for the discussion of Abu-Assad as a precursor of, and crucial contributor to, the ascent of opportunistic transnationalism in Palestinian cinema. According to Hjort, opportunistic transnationalism is identified by "giving priority to economic issues where monetary factors dictate the selection of partners beyond national borders" ("On the Plurality" 19). Highlighting the centrality of the economic element, this introductory section also draws attention to Abu-Assad's artistic accomplishments, commercial potential and to the political element in his work. The chapter elaborates on the transformation of the global role of Hollywood, the launch of media institutions and infrastructure in the Gulf states and the region, and the advent of new technologies at the start of the twenty-first century as key factors impacting upon the dynamics of transnational partnerships, and the opening of new prospects for Palestinian filmmakers. This chapter also acknowledges Yuri Lotman's concept of the formation of and interchange between different culture systems (Lotman) and Tom O'Regan's contextualization of Lotman's ideas to cinema studies (O'Regan). Lotman's concepts provide a framework for the initial discussion of an interchange between national cinemas or subaltern cultural communities with other cultures, creating conditions for the emergence of a Palestinian popular cinema. Finally, this chapter

highlights Abu-Assad's deviation from prevailing arthouse-cinema aesthetics that characterize the work of most Palestinian directors, and his re-purposing and destabilizing the narrative conventions of commercial mainstream while outlining his political commitment, typical of minor cinema aesthetics.

Hany Abu-Assad carries Israeli citizenship and identifies himself as a Palestinian "working on Palestine-in-Israel outside" (Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema* 276). He is a native of Nazareth which is also the birthplace of Michel Khleifi, Elia Suleiman and Nizzar Hassan and other Palestinian directors. Like Suleiman, Abu-Assad was born in the later days of military rule and educated in the state of Israel thus becoming "embedded in an artistic *modus operandi* implicated in the fragmented lives dating back to 1948." (Shohat, *Israeli Cinema* 277). Abu-Assad decided to leave Israel for the Netherlands, where in 1990 he founded Ayloul Films with Rashid Masharawi. His short film, *To Whom It May Concern* (1991), examining Palestinian allegiances at the time of the Gulf War received The Best Short Film Award at the Arab World Institute in Paris. Abu-Assad's following short film, *Paper House* (1992), was produced for the Dutch Broadcast Foundation (NSO) and centers on a Palestinian boy's endeavors to rebuild his home which has been destroyed by the Israeli army. These films demonstrate the filmmaker's engagement with the geopolitical context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and also reveal Abu-Assad's examination of the heterogeneity and internal tensions in Palestinian community. Expanding his portfolio, he contributes to transnationally funded projects by other Palestinian filmmakers: as an assistant director on Masharawi's *House, Houses*, as a producer on *Long Days in Gaza* and *Curfew*, and as line producer on Suleiman's *Chronicle of a Disappearance*.

Abu-Assad demonstrates his desire to produce and exhibit his works within, but also beyond the arthouse and film festival circuit, typically reserved for his predecessors, as well as desire to connect with his cultural contexts and produce films within the industry

frameworks of his domicile countries. His feature film debut, the Dutch middle-class comedy, *Het 14e kippetje/ The Fourteenth Chick* (1998), co-written with Arnon Gromberg, failed to achieve artistic or commercial success (Gugler 18). Two years later, Abu-Assad co-founded Augustus Films with scriptwriter Bero Beyer, and their partnership marked the transitional phase in his career towards feature film.

Abu-Assad's documentary and early feature films have evolved as a combination of major-minor and minor-minor partnerships. Initially reliant upon European and Arab funding sources, the filmmaker continued to strengthen his ties with government organizations and production companies in the West and the Middle East. His critical and popular success has led to an engagement with major production and distribution companies, establishing Abu-Assad as the first Palestinian director in the global commercial arena. Navigating the various economic realities of film production, Abu-Assad's career combines aspirations to popular success with international, Arab and Palestinian audiences, as he strives towards bringing about commercial success, artistic recognition and global visibility for Palestinian cinema in the twenty-first century.

The recurring themes of occupation, resistance, loyalty, religious extremism and the conflict between the modern and the traditional are manifest in Abu-Assad's films which are explored in a variety of social and geopolitical contexts recognizable to Palestinian, Israeli and global audiences. Set in familiar locations, Abu-Assad's minor transnational films revolve around the lives of Palestinians within the state of Israel, on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as these people navigate life under occupation, confronting poverty and oppression. In their desperate attempts to evade the constraints of colonial repression, Abu-Assad's characters participate in active resistance or are coerced into collaborating with the security services ever unable to escape the quagmire of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Challenging the monolithic perceptions of Palestinian culture, Abu-Assad investigates

conflicts within refugee and resistance groups, gender and generational tensions, and differing visions of the struggle for national liberation.

Examining Abu-Assad's films as indices of opportunistic transnationalism, this chapter focuses on four feature and two documentary films that have brought this filmmaker global recognition, *An-Nassira/Nazareth 2000* (2001), *Al qods fee yom akhar/Rana's Wedding* (2002), *Ford Transit* (2002), *Al Jannato-I-An/Paradise Now* (2005), *Omar* (2013) and *Ya tayr el tayer/The Idol* (2015). The analysis highlights Abu-Assad's transnational partnerships and his ability to maintain focus on minority identities while observing the production standards and narrative conventions of commercial cinema. This chapter examines his transition to the production and distribution of mainstream cinema and his positioning within the market context as parts of his filmmaking career which is distinguished by innovation, robustness and flexibility.

The Rise of Opportunistic Transnationalism:
Expanding Global and Regional Opportunities

Opportunistic transnationalism points to the economic element vital for expanding industry networks, production, marketing, distribution and exhibition models, and other avenues for filmmakers sourcing support for their projects. According to Hjort, this mode of cinematic transnationalism does not place any emphasis on forging social networks ("On the Plurality" 19). Working under restrictive conditions, with limited resources, and often confronted by attempts to obstruct the production and distribution of their films, Palestinian filmmakers living in Israel, in territories under Palestinian control and in exile use their transnational partnerships and opportunism to facilitate the ongoing continuity of Palestinian cultural expression. Transnational cultural collaborations, articulated through major and minor and minor and minor forms of partnerships, are distinguished by hybridity and

irregularity, and are economically motivated. Nevertheless, the term 'opportunistic' here does not carry a pejorative meaning or aim to berate the artistic aspirations of these filmmakers, relegating them to the lower echelons of 'artistic hierarchies' or dismissing their works as purely commercially driven, and deprived of political relevance, or critical edge.

The preceding chapters in this thesis have examined the modernizing tendencies and cosmopolitan attributes of Palestinian minor transnational cinema. Prominent since the emergence of Michel Khleifi, the modernizing tendencies highlight the importance of processes of social transformation in Palestinian society by drawing attention to the notions of individual human rights and placing an emphasis on the importance of culture as a resource for forging the processes of modernization. These tendencies are evident in the concerns of Palestinian filmmakers covered by this thesis, including Abu-Assad, who rejects nationalist ideology, but maintains a critical stance towards the dominant narratives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Western cultural supremacy, and the hegemony of Hollywood.[1] They emphasize the notions of human rights, of opposition to patriarchal norms and religious extremism, and they advocate the processes of cultural interchange. The filmmaker's multiple cultural identities, concern and solidarity for subaltern communities resisting colonial oppression, and his transnational mobility have all characterized Abu-Assad's film career, shaping his *modus operandi* as a director working in a hybrid and relational cultural climate.

In my reading of Hjort's classification, opportunism does not stand in opposition to the other elements of cinematic transnationalism, but, concurrently with them, generates a mixture of unconventional, innovative approaches to filmmaking, evident in short, experimental, documentary films, and feature narratives with multiple investors and widespread appeal. It is important to reaffirm that the transnational collaborations and opportunistic transnationalism have characterized Palestinian film production since its early days. Amidst the ongoing state of instability, scarce financial support, lack of infrastructure

and training opportunities, filmmakers have embraced transnational ties, "looking to turn adversity into advantage as a snub to the occupation." (Dickinson, *Arab Cinema* 101).

According to Lionnet and Shih, thanks to the increased volume of migrations and the global reach of innovations, the binary models of opposition and assimilation have been replaced by a horizontal communication amongst subaltern cultural groups and transversal cultural partnerships which incorporate "minor cultural articulations in productive relationship with the major" (Lionnet and Shih 7-8). The positioning of economic priorities at the heart of opportunistic transnationalism points to the ties of Palestinian filmmakers with Arab, Western and Israeli funding bodies, television channels, production companies and dissemination networks that have marked the first decades of the twenty-first century, motivated by specific creative, marketing, distribution and financial prospects. In this regard, we can identify three key developments that distinguish the rise of opportunistic transnationalism in Palestinian cinema. They include the transformation of the Hollywood film industry and the global dynamics of transnational cultural ties, the inauguration of film markets, international film festivals, and government bodies in the Gulf states, as well as the technological innovations facilitating an increase in Palestinian film production.

The transformation of the Hollywood film industry at the turn of the twenty-first century had substantial effects on the global dynamics of transnational connections and the positioning of national film productions. Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko list the factors that have contributed to this process, including the conglomeration, diversification and transnationalization of industry markets and the ownership, the broadening of production possibilities and distribution outlets, as well as the growth of the global freelance market for creative and craft labor (4). Some of these factors unequivocally point towards the homogenizing outcomes of the processes of globalization, but others reveal "the resilience of home cultures and the mutual benefits of transnational flows and symbolic commodity

exchange" (Fradley 81). The expansion of financing opportunities, exhibition and distribution networks at a transnational level was accompanied by the relaxing of Hollywood connections to national contexts (McDonald and Wasko 6), which itself facilitated the presence of internationally produced films in the global arena, and opened up possibilities for employing directors, in addition to cast and crew from other countries (Shaw, "Deconstructing" 53). The budding transnational ties prompted filmmakers to respond "to available economic opportunities at a given moment in time and in no wise about the creation of lasting networks." (Hjort, "On the Plurality" 19).

The launch of film markets, international film festivals, and government bodies in the Gulf states afforded a range of opportunities for filmmakers in the Middle East, including Palestinian cineastes. Launched in 2004 as a "film market" the Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF) has begun to cultivate new initiatives, targeting project development, funding and post-production support, pairing talent with investors, and introducing distribution programs (Dickinson, *Arab Cinema* 121). The opening of this institution was followed by the launch of The Royal Film Commission Jordan (2008), Dubai's production and post-production program, Enjaaz (2009), and Abu Dhabi Film Fund, Sanad (2009). The launch of the Doha Film Institute, inaugurated in 2010 as a not-for-profit cultural organization for funding, training and development ("The Institute"), was followed by Qumra, the initiative for emerging filmmakers from Qatar and the rest of the world, and the Youth Film Festival, Ajyal (2014). To a greater or lesser extent, these institutions, film festivals and programs have been vital in providing developmental support, production funding and exhibition platforms for Palestinian films, and for expanding their visibility, artistic and commercial appeal.

Alongside these developments, the technological innovations at the turn of the twenty-first century enabled easier access to equipment and lowered the cost of production,

distribution and marketing of screen content. The outcomes of transnational collaborations in the post-1980 period were relatively modest, until the advent of cheaper technology and improved access to equipment in the 1990s allowed for an increase in Palestinian film production (Shafik, "Cinema" 521). The multiplication of platforms also enhanced the role of global and regional niche markets. This opened up new lines of collaboration between subaltern groups, facilitated access to films beyond specialized TV channels, DVD editions and the film festival arena, and created new opportunities for Palestinian filmmakers, facing a complex, challenging task. Namely, how to extend their transnational ties beyond the vertically constituted, major-minor modes of partnership with European, Arab, and occasionally Israeli sources of funding, and also how to diversify their narrative approaches, while continuing to focus on the real-life problems of occupation and exile?

In *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, literary scholar, cultural theorist and the leading researcher of Tartu-Moscow semiotic school, Yuri Lotman, investigates the formation and interchange between different culture systems. Lotman's research demonstrates that the codes in culture systems are more intricate than those identified in phonological systems. According to his typology of cultures,[2] the multiplicity and interchange of cultural codes, ideas, genres, texts and styles within the global context, reveals that they give rise to intersections, contrasts and hybrid forms of cultural production. Positioning Lotman's ideas in the context of cinema studies, Tom O'Regan suggests that they affirm cinema as a global form of cultural production, and that national cinemas and national or subaltern cultural communities are involved in the processes of interchange with other cultures (285- 289).

This interchange between the transnational and the local negotiations of cultural transfer is crucial for identifying what separates Abu-Assad from other Palestinian filmmakers; his opportunistic transnationalism, and his role in the formation of Palestinian

popular cinema. It gives rise to the dynamic interplay between Abu-Assad's commitment to the marginal identities of his subjects, his departure from the arthouse aesthetics typical of most of his contemporaries, and his innovative adoption and adaptation of stratagems of genre film, distinctive of minor cinema aesthetics. Following in a historical lineage[3] with Palestinian directors who have achieved international prominence, Abu-Assad, in a "creative, parasitic fashion" (Gunning, "Toward a Minor Cinema" 3), destabilizes and re-configures the generic formulas of commercial cinema, targeting global spectatorship and enhancing the popular appeal of his film narratives.

Abu-Assad demonstrates a certain robustness and flexibility in establishing partnerships with European, Arab, Israeli and American production and distribution companies, investors and government bodies, and continues to build on the elevated position of Palestinian cinema within the global context. Cognizant of the production standards of the popular mainstream, the filmmaker uses absorbing narratives, enhanced by the presence of local performers, to produce films that Palestinian and international viewers are willing to see. Articulating transnational connections between subaltern cultural production and global cinema mainstream, Abu-Assad contributes to the expressions of new forms of political subjectivity and to the growth of emergent cinema audiences, as well as providing new conditions for appreciating Palestinian film in global context. The filmmaker thus confirms that, rather than exclusively assuming the arthouse form as a hallmark, speaking to and for Palestine can adopt and re-purpose the familiar models of popular cinema, and draw in audiences from within the Arab world and from across the international exhibition and distribution circuit.

Nazareth 2000:

Beyond the Narrowing Divides

Seen through the perspectives of two Palestinian petrol station attendants, Abu-Maria, a Christian, and Abu-Arab, a Muslim, Abu-Assad's transnationally produced feature documentary film *Nazareth 2000* explores the problems of an Israeli city with the majority Palestinian population approaching the new millennium. The film follows the municipal plan to build one of the largest squares in Nazareth at the Biblical location of Mary's Well, to accommodate the masses of Christian pilgrims on the occasion of the Pope's symbolic visit to the city in 2000. The project meets opposition from Muslim protesters who occupy the site where Saladin's nephew, Dhibab al-Din, is believed to have been buried.

Abu-Assad highlights the importance of expanding the visibility of a subaltern group while at the same time examining the heterogeneous character and internal tensions within the disenfranchised minority – rarely examined by local filmmakers – balancing the interests of younger and educated Palestinian audiences along with Western viewers, targeted by the Dutch broadcaster, VPRO, which backed the project.[4] This transnational partnership enabled Abu-Assad to scrutinize the tensions between Nazareth Muslims and Christians living under Israeli occupation, displaying concurrent modernizing and opportunist features. The filmmaker interrogates life under occupation, the conflict between the modern and the traditional, and the role of religious extremism in obstructing transformative processes and polarizing Palestinian society. He exposes the ghettoization of the refugee groups which engulfed Nazareth from the surrounding towns and villages, following the Israeli-Arab conflicts of 1948 and 1967 respectively, and explores the rift between these militant subcultures and urban middle-class Palestinians, dissatisfied with the stalled processes of modernization.

The film's prologue establishes the conflict between the modern and the traditional as the central axis of the narrative, as the filmmaker exposes the vague, often misleading nature of national symbolism. A girl recites a poem about honor and resistance by the Palestinian poet Tawfiq Ziad, but asked whether she understood it, responds: "Not at all." The interviews with Abu-Assad's grandmother, mother and Yasser Arafat stress the importance of family ties and national identity, but his conversations with younger Palestinians reveal their concerns regarding the lack of infrastructure and social equality, as well as the need for education, diversity and cultural exchange. When Abu-Maria and Abu-Arab explain the film's subject matter to one of their customers, he eagerly lists the names of Arab and international movie stars. At the same time, Abu-Assad's sister describes the situation in Nazareth as worsening, asserting that, rather than another city square, the city needs a university, cinemas, and libraries.

The interviews with the mayor of Nazareth, Ramiz Jaraisy, and the Islamist movement leader, Abu-Nawaf, bear witness to a deep sense of mistrust within the Palestinian community. The ghettoized groups of Arab refugees arriving in 1948 that gave Nazareth's suburbs the names of the villages they were forced to abandon remain entrenched in their attitudes. But their symbolic gestures defying the occupation stand in contrast to the anguish of the local Palestinian population with their political and religious leaders, who show no concern for the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the increased cost of living, or for the social alienation and division within the Palestinian community. Christians who used to comprise half of the Palestinian inhabitants of Nazareth, base their claims on the Biblical origins of the city, and Muslims, making up over two thirds of the city's Arab population, oppose what they see as a Christian conspiracy. The impact of these divisions is evident in the growing rift unravelling between Abu-Maria and Abu-Arab.

Abu-Assad discloses the simmering tensions in the community, weaving a complex network of relationships between opposed Palestinian factions and the Israeli authorities. The authorities' agenda is gradually disclosed as crucial for understanding what is at stake in this conflict. In a scene which the director has described as a sign of colonial subjugation (Abu-Assad, qtd. in Pinto), Abu-Maria and Abu-Arab attend a professional development session delivered in Hebrew. While Palestinian factions declare their opposition to the Israeli occupation, footage of violent protests shows that the passivity of the police allows the Muslim groups to vandalize property fostering further conflict amongst Palestinians of different denominations.

Abu-Assad's stylistic choices point to his involvement and control of the filmmaking process, appropriating the language of the documentary cinema and thereby accentuating the necessity for social change. Applying the facets of the performative documentary mode,[5] one that would be readily recognizable to audiences, Abu-Assad is seen recording his participation in events, interviewing his subjects and disclosing his affiliation with the progressive viewpoints of the film's subjects. Thwarted by the Israeli bureaucracy and snubbed by Arab demonstrators, he uses the girl interviewed at the start of the film to articulate his own disapproval of religious extremism. The girl observes to camera that the optimal solution for Nazareth would be an earthquake, because after an earthquake in Turkey people started caring more for each other. She immediately qualifies her view by saying that "That's what Hany thinks," so as to frame the opinion and make it her own at second remove only.

Abu-Assad's position becomes more prominent in the anti-climactic finale of the film, featuring a sequence of millennial festivities, the opening of the city plaza and the reconciliation between the Palestinian factions, accompanied by Goran Bregovic's cacophonic brass music score. Seen at the local reception hall, and jaded by the celebrations

of the New Year, he shares his sense of dreariness with Abu-Maria and Abu-Arab, the former disappointed by not being allowed to approach the Catholic prelate, whose symbolic visit to Nazareth has not altered the ubiquitous reality of the Israeli occupation, and the latter, exhausted by the routines of his newly opened fast-food café. While the film's opening scenes present the friendship between two petrol station attendants in the context of secular coexistence in the city with a rich spiritual tradition and long history of suffering, its closing sequence shows the film's subjects disconnected, but equally disillusioned. Engaging with the spectrum of intra-Palestinian tensions that hark back to the creation of the state of Israel and to the subjugation and fragmentation of Palestinian communities, Abu-Assad reflects upon the state of the displaced minority that is not only traumatized by its unresolved status, but also perplexed and divided over its future direction in the twenty-first century.

Rana's Wedding

In Praise of Defiance, Determination and Hope

Abu-Assad's first feature film, *Rana's Wedding,* also known as *Another Day in Jerusalem*, was shot in Israel, produced by Augustus Films, and funded by the Palestinian Film Foundation of The Ministry of Culture of the Palestinian National Authority, with support from the Gulf states (Gertz and Khleifi, "A Chronicle" 189). Partaking in a major-minor mode of transnational production, Abu-Assad here demonstrates his opportunism acquiring support from the Palestinian authority and regional sources, to produce a film that is considered his true cinematic debut. *Rana's Wedding* is set over one day in Jerusalem and Ramallah at the time of the Second Intifada. It features seventeen-year-old Rana (Clara Khoury) who is confronted with an ultimatum from her father Abu-Ziad's (Zuher Fahoum) to choose a husband from the list of suitors who have asked for her hand prior to a 4pm deadline, or to depart with him for Egypt that same afternoon and continue her studies. Rana

journeys to Ramallah to find Khalil (Khalifa Natour), and the two return to Jerusalem to marry before time runs out.

Collaborating with Palestinian novelist, Liana Badr, and Egyptian filmmaker, Ihab Lamey, Abu-Assad produced a plot that again targets young audiences, both Palestinian and Western. He identifies the emerging forms of political subjectivity in Palestinian society and articulates the modernizing elements in his film along with its opportunistic features. Abu-Assad positions a wedding, one of the main events in the Arab social milieu, at the center of the narrative, following a privileged young woman from a middle-class family who confronts the Israeli occupation and patriarchal constraints in an attempt to salvage her personal freedom.

The film opens with the sounds of piano practice and the girl's voice, saying: "Mama, I'm lost." Following the progression of Rana's mother's illness, the piano's flow improves, and the music becomes more sinister. Rana's father's off-screen voice relays the difficulties of bringing up the girl alone, however, he remains invisible in the early scenes of the film. Following his stern ultimatum, delivered in written form, Rana is seen in extended tracking shots, meandering through the streets of Jerusalem like a *somnambula*, her inner voice echoing defiance, determination, and hope: "What can happen to me? I don't want to be afraid anymore." Rana's hearing of her own voice as if it were someone else's and speaking like the voice of an other is the device that re-emerges throughout the film, indicating the filmmaker's innovative approach to articulating fragmented Palestinian subjectivities on screen, and representations of resistance, attuned to the mindset of a younger generation of cinema audiences.

The opportunistic element in Abu-Assad's film is further rendered through the hybrid form of a Palestinian "checkpoint genre"[6] and certain elements of privileged Hollywood genres, namely the thriller and romantic comedy, here appropriated to the geopolitical context

of the Second Intifada. Elaborating on the models of narration in transnational contexts, Deborah Shaw posits that national identity is one of the factors determining the approaches in films that combine Hollywood canons with local traditions. She reiterates the importance of content and narrative devices that make them accessible to spectators in various parts of the world ("Deconstructing and Reconstructing" 54). The situation during the Second Intifada profoundly affects the visual style of the film. Rana's walk through the empty markets and deserted streets of Jerusalem, populated by Israeli soldiers, is followed by scenes at checkpoint crossings, exposing the brutality of colonial oppression, hence suggesting that "every step towards the realization of the wedding is a successful circumvention of Israeli authority" (Yaqub, "Palestinian Cinematic Wedding" 68). Rana eludes the clashes between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian youths and running between the two groups picks up a stone and throws it at the occupying forces.

Gertz and Khleifi note that, at the time of escalating conflict the tropes of the "checkpoint genre" hinder the filmmakers' efforts to create a cohesive space on the one hand, and to, at the same time, deconstruct it (*Palestinian Cinema* 153). This reluctance to divulge the subaltern community's internal tensions is evident in Rana's inability to evade the limitations imposed by her father but the situation becomes even more telling when she arrives in Ramallah and finds Khalil sleeping in an empty Al-Kasaba Theatre. Located in this symbolic space with its rich history of culture and legacy of colonial violence,[7] the encounter between the free-spirited theatre director, positioned outside the traditional category of 'respectable men,' and a woman resolved to save her love, sets the scene for the union of two kindred, rebellious souls. But, Khalil's reaction to Rana's uneasy appearance is indicative of preserving the auspices of the patriarchal order, as he first pronounces her insane, and then later embraces the idea of marrying Rana in order to pacify her, asking himself: "Why did I fall in love with a mad woman?"

The filmmaker's innovative adoption and adaptation of the conventions of genre cinema is evident by means of destabilizing and appropriating the elements of the thriller and romantic comedy, previously not utilized in Palestinian feature films, by anchoring them in the geopolitical context of the Second Intifada. Contrasting the elements of the double world – which, according to film historian Martin Rubin constitute one of the formative features of the thriller genre[8] – he builds on the anxiety and determination of his central characters and uses their race against time, alternating between nervous anticipation and comical relief, in order to produce an overall effect of suspense.

Rich in juxtaposition, *Rana's Wedding* highlights the sense of existential fear at the time of the Second Intifada. The journey to Jerusalem takes a different turn when Khalil's friend, Ramzy (Ismael Dabbag) uses an alternative route to circumvent Israeli roadblocks and take Khalil and Rana to the city. There, the two must accomplish a series of tasks within a given timeframe – finding a registrar, receiving Rana's father's approval, buying a ring, and certifying identity papers – before they finally get married. Their plans are thwarted by violence, roadblocks, and bureaucratic procedures. They witness the funeral of a Palestinian teenager and the dismantling of an explosive device on a busy Jerusalem street, and Rana's anxiety soars when, overhearing her father's approval of her choice she is overwhelmed by the prospects of raising a family under occupation. She observes the demolition of a Palestinian house and, seeing a man who searches for his belongings in a pile of rubbish, exclaims: "They're demolishing the house on the day I want to build one."

Abu-Assad's use of the conventions of romantic comedy[9] is reflective of romantic comedy's links with the thriller genre (Martin 20), its increased global popularity, its crossovers with other genres, and its contemporary re-positioning (Krutnik). While the tropes of romantic comedy are by no means pervasive in *Rana's Wedding*, they are appropriated to the Palestinian social context and embedded in the relationship between Rana and Khalil,

who experience some comic and life-affirming moments by upholding their conviction to stay together. Their journey to Jerusalem is infused with romantic teasing and jealous bickering. During the meeting with the Registrar (Walid Abel Elsalam), Rana refuses to consider marrying any of the suitors from her father's list, praising Khalil's talent and integrity, and promptly discounts his rivals. While resting on a Jerusalem street, the two are filmed by the security camera. Khalil hugs Rana to help alleviate her anxiety, and then begins to clown around for the camera, imitating well-known international movie stars, mocking the colonial system of surveillance and demonstrating an alternative, non-violent way to challenge Israeli authority. Later in the film, in a scene referencing the conventions of Hollywood romantic comedy, Rana confesses her love for Khalil to her bedridden Grandmother (Bushra Karaman). However, the Grandmother's acquiescence, expressed in the spirit of female solidarity, does not exclusively adhere to the tropes of romantic comedy, bridging the gap between past and present, and "identifying love as something from a long lost era that needs to be rediscovered in the modern world" (Krutnik 140). It is presented acknowledging the limited options available to Palestinian women who stand up against traditional norms and colonial subjugation, praising their resilience in trying to regain their citizenship rights.

Following the news that the Registrar is kept at the roadblock, the wedding ceremony is conducted under 'exceptional circumstances,' confined to a taxi parked at the Israeli checkpoint. But, unlike Masharawi's characters who, amidst confined living spaces, assert their struggle for basic human rights through small acts of solidarity, the closing scene of the dancing celebration at Al-Dahla checkpoint accompanied by Mahmoud Darwish's poem "The Stage of Siege" stands as homage to the optimism and thirst for freedom. Transcending the binary oppositions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and combining the tropes of the "checkpoint genre" with elements of the thriller and romantic comedy, *Rana's Wedding* still

achieved modest box office results.[10] However, its life-affirming coda emerged as a tribute to the defiance, determination and hope of its female protagonist, and contributed to the film's artistic success and popular appeal amongst local and international audiences.[11]

Ford Transit:
The Polyphonic Voices of Palestine

Abu-Assad's documentary film, *Ford Transit*, co-written with Bero Beyer and produced by Augustus Films with the support of Dutch funding bodies, explores the complex relationships pervading the geopolitical climate of Israel-Palestine. Once owned by the Israeli Army, following the signing of the Oslo Accords, Ford Transits were converted to taxis. During the Second Intifada, a network of white minibuses began to negotiate roadblocks and Israeli security restrictions, and rapidly became one of the popular modes of transport in the territories inhabited by Palestinians. Blending the auspices of modernizing and opportunistic transnationalism and combining the form of a documentary film with the re-configured tropes of the road movie[12] Abu-Assad follows Rajai Khatib and his passengers on the journeys between Ramallah and East Jerusalem, bringing to the fore the importance of political dialogue and affording audiences a heterogeneous view of Palestinian society.

Situated in the occupied territories, *Ford Transit* presents a new slant to the popular trope of the road movie. Road movies are customarily informed by the relationship between modernity and tradition, negotiating between utopian and nightmarish visions of society and culture (Hark and Cohan 3) while most Palestinian documentary films are perennially affected by the relationships of power between the occupier and the occupied. According to Kay Dickinson, Palestinian films of the Second Intifada place roads – and also roadblocks, curfews and checkpoints, making their production and distribution extremely difficult – in the center of the national imaginarium (*Arab Cinema* 97). In these films, the advent of modernity

and the expansion of road networks in the state of Israel are often perceived as occurrences parallel to the system of the progressive fragmentation of Palestinian territories. These developments and their ultimate goal, the segregated zones inhabited by Israeli and Arab populations, preventing the integrative processes in an ethnically and culturally heterogeneous society, have transformed the majority of Palestinian travelling narratives into stories about the inability to travel. Permeated with political subtext, Abu-Assad's documentary film appropriates and reconfigures the conventions of the road movie, presenting a disturbing, but engaging and ultimately optimistic vision of negotiating life under occupation.

According to Timothy Corrigan, road movies position historical events and contexts in opposition to the characters on the road, concentrating on protagonists who identify with the mode of mechanical transportation, and who are almost exclusively male (145-146). When the Ford vehicles were too old to be reliable and used by the Israeli Army, they were distributed to former Palestinian collaborators. The minibuses that were once used to facilitate a modernized, militarized society's subjugation of the local populace, were, ironically, re-purposed by the nation without citizenship rights, resisting any curbed freedom of movement. Palestinian drivers would use their skills and imagination to evade Israeli restrictions, to react promptly to conditions on the road, to take risks and ingeniously carve out alternative pathways through the fragmented West Bank landscape.

While Rajai's testimonies match the male fantasies of freedom and escapism in Hollywood road movies, they also reveal that the Palestinian driver's viewpoints are deeply entrenched in a local geopolitical context. He places his job in the context of evading colonial injustice and resisting Israeli authority: "Palestinians are like ants. They find a way around any roadblock […] If they found out one [trick] we'll invent a hundred more." Rajai's boasting about excursions to the seaside cities and towns deep into Israeli territory reveals his

empty bravado, but a number of scenes filmed at checkpoints confirm his claims about the futility of restrictive measures. Subverting the masculine fantasies fueling the conflict on both sides of the ethnic divide, Abu-Assad alerts his spectators to the blurring lines between reality and fiction and infuses doses of humor throughout his documentary film, heralding the stylistic choices in the director's feature projects, and helping cultivate the new sensibility of his Palestinian audiences.

Recording a variety of opinions in Arabic, Hebrew and English, Abu-Assad suggests that, rather than solely transporting his subjects across the occupied terrain, the Fords should be seen as public platforms for opposing Israeli occupation as well as subverting the fantasies of Palestinian homogeneity. The dialogue across a range of passengers reveals different perspectives on any number of contentious topics, from Israeli policies over to suicide-bombings, and offers divergent viewpoints on the position of the Palestinian minority. Melamed writes that the minivans "encapsulate the micropolitics of Palestinian society, emerging as a space of social interaction and debate, a mobile public sphere" (398). Palestinian politician Hanan Ashrawi and documentary-maker B. Z. Goldberg ponder the political climate in Israel while an unnamed Muslim cleric urges the passengers to consider the causes of violence prior to condemning it. Most passengers engage in dialogue and vocalize their views, but even when they act seemingly disinterested, their silence may also be perceived as a form of political expression.

Following screenings of the film in Israel, the controversies revolving around Abu-Assad's use of fiction and documentary material in *Ford Transit* came into the focus of public attention. In Abu-Assad's conversation with Goel Pinto, it was disclosed that Rajai was not a minibus driver but worked for an Arab radio station, that he had a minor role in *Rana's Wedding*, and that some scenes in the documentary film were staged (Pinto, qtd. in Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 49). Confirming that he directed his subjects, Abu-

Assad stated he was conscious that these events occur on a daily basis, asserting that his films are "100 percent documentary and 100 percent fiction." (Rastegar and Pahwa 154). Abu-Assad's destabilization of the basic principles of the non-fiction canon has been described as a way of sidetracking, law bending, as well as inciting and provoking debate (Melamed 397), allowing the director to liberate himself from the narrative patterns of Western cinema and find a distinctive voice for Palestinian film expression (Klein "Better Than Fiction"). Kay Dickinson positions the blurring of demarcation lines between documentary and fiction precisely within the complex geopolitical terrain of Israel-Palestine, suggesting that, "reluctant to commit to discourses of solid truth as the only means of 'arrival', they acknowledge the reality of such blocked landscape" (*Arab Cinema* 101). Abu-Assad's narrative strategy also re-affirms that considering subaltern cultural production in specific frameworks, we must understand it not exclusively as a process of empowering individuals, but as Antonia Darder, discussing subaltern sensibilities and the politics of voice, suggests – an ethical and political effort to decolonize interpretative methodologies and the ways in which we comprehend issues of difference, as well as our place in the world in respect to others" (Darder). Abu-Assad's refusal to pledge his allegiance to the postulates of the documentary canon suggests that, in promoting *Ford Transit* within the international arena[13] the director was more concerned with paving the road for his audiences' understanding of the complex conditions in which Palestinian films are produced, the polyphonic voices they endorse, and the fragmented worlds they explore.

Paradise Now:
Towards the Commercial Mainstream

Abu-Assad's thriller, *Paradise Now*, which follows the last forty-eight hours in the lives of two Palestinian suicide-bombers, brought the director global prominence, emerging

as the transitional moment in his progression towards feature film, and the key marker in his film career. Prior to the attacks of 11 September 2001, only a limited number of films, engaged with the problem of terrorism, were concerned with the phenomenon of suicide-bombing.[14] Mindful of the global interest in radical Islam, Abu-Assad began to explore the connections between religious fundamentalism and the terrorist mindset[15] and continued to re-purpose and destabilize the stratagems of popular cinema, examining the ethical quandaries faced by the Palestinian minority under Israeli occupation.

Paradise Now was shot in the Nablus, Belata and Al'ahain refugee camps, on a budget of $2 million US dollars. The director succeeded in mobilizing the European funding bodies, production companies and television channels in a transnational constellation of major-minor and minor-minor partnerships to assure his film's financial backing. The film was co-produced by Augustus Films (Holland), Razor Film Produktion (Germany), Lumen Films (France) and Lama Films (Israel), and supported by Euroimages, ARTE France Cinema, two German regional film funds, Filmstiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen and Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, and Nederlands Fonds voor de Film (Holland).

Abu-Assad's ability to attract investors did not extend to Israeli companies, which were hesitant to support the project. The Second Intifada was marked by an increase in the number of suicide attacks[16] provoking unanimous condemnation across Israeli public discourse, and also criticism within the Palestinian community.[17] Seeking Israeli financial backing for a film concerned with the themes of occupation, resistance, extremism and loyalty, one that incites us "to think about, and reflect on what might have led someone to become involved in making such a terrible choice" (Hawker), became a challenging task for Abu-Assad's production team. Tel Aviv producer, Amir Harel, who was involved with the project from its early stages, recalls applying to a number of funding bodies and facing "the mental 'brick wall'" of Israeli consciousness when it came to the topic of suicide-bombing

(Harel, qtd. in Pinero; Friedman 84). An Israeli company, Lama Films, which decided to support the project, was at the time collaborating on some of the Israeli films touring the international festival circuit, and following the success of *Paradise Now* continued to work with Palestinian and Arab filmmakers.[18] For the European co-producers, Remi Burah, Roman Paul, and Gerhard Meixner, *Paradise Now* marked the beginning of their engagement with not only Arab but also other regionally produced films.[19] The Palestinian actors residing in Israel were cast in the roles of Said (Kais Nashef), Khaled (Ali Suliman), Said's mother (Hiam Abbas), and Abu-Karem (Ashraf Barhom), alongside Belgian actress Lubna Azabal who appears in the role of Suha, while the production roles were mainly assigned to Europeans.[20]

Abu-Assad demonstrates a certain flexibility traversing from the relatively uncontested creative freedom in his documentary projects, across to the restrictive conditions on his feature-film projects which entail higher budgets and tackle politically sensitive themes. In collaboration with Palestinian and European scriptwriters, he aspires to tell a story unhindered by nationalist fervor in order to engage global audiences. The production of the film's script was affected by the large number of stakeholders and the diversity of potential target audiences, and it took Abu-Assad, Bero Beyer and Pierre Hodgson[21] five years to advance it to the shooting stage. According to Tony Shaw, the early draft of the script, titled *In Between Two Days*, written by Abu-Assad, Beyer and Palestinian novelist Adana Shibli underlined the Israeli army's brutality and the resistance movement's religious zeal, employed absurdist humor, and portrayed the two suicide-bombers as young, impressionable teenagers whose off-screen detonation ends the film (248). The final shooting script toned down the scenes of Israeli oppression as well as Palestinian religious sentiment, re-creating the main characters as modern, crisis-ridden subjectivities, open to Suha's moderate views, and closing the film with Said preparing to detonate himself on an Israeli bus.

The militarization and fragmentation of Palestinian society during the Second Intifada minimized the presence of women in public spaces, rendering the female population excluded, passive and marginalized.[22] Cognizant of these developments, Abu-Assad opens the film with Suha's return to her hometown of Nablus. The daughter of the famous freedom fighter, she was born in France and grew up in Morocco and emanates otherness and dissent. Suha's first contact with the occupation is the silent, tense face-off with the Israeli soldier guarding the Hawara checkpoint, but she is equally perturbed by the Arab taxi driver's questions about her marital status. Suha's presence evokes the desire to belong, but similar to the depiction of women in Khleifi's films, she exudes the potential for resistance stripped of ideologized prejudices and the desire to distance herself from a society that alienates and oppresses women.

While the signs of Israeli oppression are largely absent from *Paradise Now*, the visual cues in the early scenes with Said and Khaled at a mechanical workshop reflect a climate of frustration and despair, and one conducive to fostering the male-dominated culture of the readiness to die.[23] In the second half of the film, images of the destitute refugee camp are contrasted with "the gleaming skyscrapers, bikini-clad holidaymakers and adverts for the latest consumer goods in Tel Aviv" (French), encountered by the two would-be suicide-bombers. It is not surprising that, by observing modernity through the lens of the Israeli occupation, the two men commonly display signs of aggression and intolerance. When Said visits her prior to his mission and they start talking about cinema, Suha names her favorite genres, but he recalls the burning of the Rivoli cinema as a protest against the policies of the Israeli government. To her bewildered question, "Why cinema?" Said replies: "Why us?" – implying that rage can be turned against anyone in response to the traumas and humiliation incurred by the defeat of their grandparents' generation. Suha's contention that "Resistance can take many forms" is not regarded seriously but Said gradually begins to challenge the

authority of the cell's leaders and to oppose Khaled's principles, until he finally refuses to board the bus with Jewish settlers and activate the bomb.

The filmmaker, in his interview with Philippa Hawker, identified the stylistic elements of the thriller genre in American, French and Egyptian cinemas, a mode that uses suspense, visual composition and comedy to create tension, as particularly important to his work (Hawker). Appropriating the conventions of the thriller to the geopolitical context of the Palestinian West Bank enclave, he builds suspense using juxtaposition and humor as key stylistic devices in his narrative. Drawing upon Frantz Fanon's ideas of race in the context of colonial relationships of power, Shohat and Stam point out that racial stereotypes stem from the "powerlessness of historically marginalized groups to control their own representation" (*Unthinking Eurocentrism* 184). Abu-Assad re-purposes and destabilizes the conventions of the thriller genre, oscillating between the preconceptions of Western and Arab, Palestinian and Israeli audiences. The director syncopates the rising tension in the scenes leading to the suicide mission with humorous episodes, demythologizing the Palestinian resistance fighters (Nashef "Demythologizing the Palestinian") and presenting "a counter-narrative to both the Western mass media and to a jihadist cult of martyrdom" (Bronstein).

The use of humor is effectively interspersed with the somber tone of the film. When the camera fails to capture his farewell speech, delivered in Modern Standard Arabic, frustrated at noticing that the other members of the group hardly pay attention, Khaled reverts to colloquial Levant Arabic and reminds his mother to buy cheap water filters. Abu-Assad also departs from the clichéd portrayals of fearless resistance leaders, celebrated in Palestinian public discourse and exaggerated by the Western media. Commander Abu-Karem briefly arrives to meet the suicide-bombers, uses pills to control his temper and when the mission takes a disastrous turn, reveals his hypocrisy and incompetence. While they remove the suicide belt from his body, Khaled asks whether something else could have been used to

affix it and receives Jamal's (Amer Hiehel) deadpan response: "We never thought we'd have to remove it." These comical vignettes exposing the male-dominated values that have pervaded and sustained the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, climax when the Arab taxi driver tries to convince Said that there is a settler conspiracy to poison the water and reduce the Palestinian population, assuring him that they cannot affect his virility: "But they could use rat poison, and it still wouldn't hurt my sperm."

Abu-Assad underlines Said's shame of living as the son of an executed Israeli collaborator. Seldom explored in Palestinian cinema, this phenomenon is also a novelty for audiences in the West, accustomed to representations of Palestinian terrorists as "soulless and programmed to kill without emotion or regret" (Krusch). At the local video store, the execution videos of Palestinian traitors are more popular than footage of the farewell messages of martyrs, testifying to the futility of the terror campaign and to the Palestinian desire to compensate for the degradation and suffering imposed by colonial rule. Following his return to the West Bank and the aborted attempt to cross over to Israel, Said's didactic speech, aimed primarily at international audiences, provides a "rationale for what is frequently in the United States represented as an irrational, exotic cult of death" (Allen), and foreshadows the unexpected reversal of positions in the closing sequence. Initially opposed to Suha's views, Khalid begins to question the use of violence and backs off. The final tracking shot reveals Said seated on the local bus, surrounded by the Israeli soldiers, readying to complete his operation. Balancing the expectations of Arab and Israeli cinemagoers, the filmmaker suggests that, devoid of appealing options, his two protagonists end up in different positions to those held at the start of their mission, but they still fail to take control over the forces that have shaped their destinies.

While the poster and trailer promoted *Paradise Now* as "a call for peace" ("*Paradise Now Movie Poster*"; "*Paradise Now Trailer #1*"), both the Israeli and Palestinian media

remained entrenched in their pre-established positions, dubious about the director's intentions. The film attracted only 20,000 movie-goers in Israel-Palestine over the winter of 2005-2006, and the European conservative press described it as pro-Palestinian propaganda, and even anti-Semitic (T Shaw 261-262). Nevertheless, following the announcement of the 63rd Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film, and the first Palestinian feature film to be nominated for an Academy Award as Best Foreign Language Film, the film's release was marked by an unmatched promotion of Palestinian culture within the international arena. After some deliberations, the Academy decided to use the neutral term, "Palestinian Authority" to describe its provenance as endorsed by the U. S. State Department.[24] When Will Smith finally announced the submission from the "Palestinian Territories," *Paradise Now* began to make history, receiving numerous awards at various film festivals[25] and was edging into the domain of commercial cinema. Distributed by Warner Brothers Independent Pictures, the film made over $3.5 million dollars worldwide, opening on just four screens in the United States of America, and within only four weeks, in late November 2005, reaching sixty-five screens.[26] It became the first feature film by a Palestinian filmmaker to convey the subaltern narratives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to mainstream audiences in the West, generating what Charles Acland distinguishes as a sense of cultural simultaneity and global synchronicity, based on the co-temporal experience of cinema going (237). This synchronous experience prompted Palestinian and Western audiences to engage with the subject matter, but also forged novel approaches to understanding how Palestinian life under occupation is narrated to a global cinema spectatorship.

The success of *Paradise Now* had considerable bearing on transnational perceptions of the film, as well as its world-wide marketing, the reactions of government bodies and distributors. Following the Blue Angel Award for the Best European Film at the 2005

Berlinale, the Israeli Film Fund confirmed that it would provide the distribution support afforded to locally produced films prior to their debut in Israel to *Paradise Now* (El-Fassed). In Australia, where the longest serving Foreign Minister in history, Alexander Downer, had endorsed the term "homicide bombers,"[27] it was the first Palestinian film to appear in the secondary school curriculum.[28]

The Israeli mainstream media accused *Paradise Now* of humanizing terrorists to global viewers, while the movie theatres in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv "routinely employ guards to prevent the attacks of precisely the sort that the film portrayed" ("Humanizing Terrorism"). The alternative Israeli media saw *Paradise Now* as a step towards dialogue and reported about attempts to block its screenings by Israeli right-wing organizations (Khoury "Acre"). Some Palestinians criticized granting prominence to Said's guilt and desire to redeem himself rather than accentuating the issue of Israeli occupation, his political convictions or the Palestinian peaceful resistance, as a failed alternative completely ignored by the West (Allen). Indicatively, their dissatisfaction with the cinematic portrayal of would-be-suicide-bombers, as "less than heroic and godless, hesitant in their missions," (Daraghmeh), occasionally took precedence over more positive reviews in Western media. And while Abu-Assad's critically and commercially successful film did not intend to close the gap between the two communities, his dexterity in engaging audiences on both sides of the divide marked the first successful attempt by a Palestinian filmmaker to initiate a global debate around this sensitive topic.

As part of the *Stories on Human Rights* series, commemorating the 60th anniversary of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and commissioned by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and a non-governmental organization, Art of the World, Abu-Assad in 2008 directed a short film, *A Boy, a Wall and a Donkey*. Playing with a young boys' obsession with guns on screen, this film appropriates the conventions of

genre film and creates a poignant and humorous miniature about growing up under the Israeli occupation. Abu-Assad contrasts scenes of high suspense with comical vignettes showing Palestinian boys who clown around with toy guns in front of their home's security camera and repeating their game before the cameras monitoring a concrete barrier, thus provoking the arrival of the Israeli patrol. The central idea driving the narrative – a homage to Abu-Assad's cinematic style – is that cinema belongs to everyone, and that genre film can be re-purposed to any geopolitical context or cultural background rather than remain tightly regulated by the commercial machinery of Hollywood – is a concept denied by the Israeli occupation, intruding into all pores of Palestinian life.

In 2011, Abu-Assad directed *The Courier*, an American action film with Jeffery Dean Morgan, Til Schweiger and Mickey Rourke. Disconnected from the recurring themes and geopolitical contexts pervading his work, produced by Michael Arata and distributed by Well-Go Entertainment, specialized in circulating Asian films in North America, the movie demonstrated the filmmaker's capacity to work within the Hollywood system and with prominent movie stars. However, persistent problems with the screenplay and production values – most of the action was green-screened (Toro) – affected the film's commercial potential, and *The Courier* was released directly to video.

Omar:

A Bleak, Unchangingly Polarized World

Realized through the Palestinian-American company ZBros., with the support of Palestinian financiers and Enjaaz Film Initiative, *Omar* was produced by Waleed Zuaiter, an American-Palestinian actor-producer known for his appearances in the Emmy-winning television series *Homeland,* businessman Waleed Al-Ghafari, and Canadian production manager, David Gerson (Roxborough). The director continues to generate and expand

productive transnational partnerships and to use his connections in the film and television industry to help navigate the production and exhibition of commercial mainstream cinema. Abu-Assad's thriller in Hebrew and Arabic was shot in Nazareth, Nablus and Far'a refugee camp on a budget of $1.5 million dollars (N Alexander). He formed a team of the emerging local talent, casting the debutants, Adam Bakri, a graduate of Tel Aviv University who also trained at the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute in New York, and a seventeen-year-old Nazareth-born Leem Lubany, alongside actors with a global reputation, and included Ehab Asal in the role of the director of photography and Eyas Salman as editor in the making of this transnationally produced Palestinian film.

Set in Nablus, *Omar* centers on the story of a Palestinian baker (Adam Bakri), who is taken into custody following the murder of an Israeli soldier. Tortured by the Shin Beth agent, Rami (Waleed Zuaiter), Omar is forced to become an informer. He begins to navigate between the Israeli police and the increasingly suspicious Palestinian community, placing at risk his relationship with his girlfriend Nadia (Leem Lubany) and jeopardizing his friendship with Tarek (Eyad Hourani) and Amjad (Samer Bisharat).

Abu-Assad's opportunistic adeptness and flexibility in blending the conventions of popular cinema with the Israeli-Palestinian geopolitical contexts allows him to engage with international audiences while affording a unique opportunity for Palestinian cinemagoers to experience and reflect upon the power of locally produced film with global commercial appeal. Set in the fragmented West Bank enclave, against the backdrop of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict which is still not showing signs of subsiding, *Omar* focuses on the themes of occupation, resistance and loyalty. The repressive methods of Israeli authorities ("MPCID Investigations"), upheld by official policies and actually escalating during this period ("'Trigger Happy'"; M Khalidi 18) are reflected in a number of scenes which show human rights abuse more prominently than in any of the Abu-Assad's previous output.

The film opens with Omar's crossing of the Kalandia Wall on the way to his friend's house. Abu-Assad shows the marginalization of Palestinians who, subjugated by the colonial apparatus, live confined to their private dwellings and within the neighborhoods of the old city. Omar and his friends do not communicate with the Israelis, apart from the soldiers enforcing the occupation. They do not follow the Israeli media or speak Hebrew, the cafes they frequent are raided by Israeli forces and their social life is limited to contacts with families and friends. None of them have travelled abroad or have visited the other regions inhabited by Palestinians, and, apart from Nadia, none of them studies. Jokingly planning their future honeymoon, Omar proposes Mozambique or Paris, but it is revealed that Nadia visited Hebron only once, and that he has never stepped outside of Nablus.

Condemned to elementary survival between waves of ever-increasing violence, Palestinian society is seen as moving away from modernization. Consistent with the idea that occupation impedes progress, Abu-Assad portrays Palestinians forced to use low-tech and primitive means of resistance. They secretly meet in cafes and alleyways, pass on written messages, use old rifles, public phones and other simple means, desperate to avoid Israeli surveillance. Their conversations are devoid of political opinions, debating the peace process, or the question of a future for Palestinian society. These topics are substituted by small talk, frivolous jokes, and physical aggression, overhauling all forms of interaction, evident in response to the sadistic beating of Omar by the Israeli patrol – Amjad's assassination of the unarmed Israeli soldier.

Interweaving the main plot with the developments in the love triangle, Abu-Assad acknowledges that evading the constraints of patriarchal control is somewhat comparable with the outmoded methods of Palestinian resistance. He suggests that the male-dominated culture of honor and revenge is instrumental for the continuation of conflict, as the brutality inflicted by colonial authority seems congruent with violence enforcing traditional rules and

imperatives. Rami affirms that the Israelis "don't let soldier-killers off the hook," and warns that they can use Nadia's secrets against Omar: "We can make her our bitch whenever we want." On the other side, fostering an air of mistrust and retribution, Tarek proclaims that "Everyone is a suspect" and orders the execution of the Israeli informant. Later on, Tarek is told that Nadia is pregnant with Amjad, and wishing to protect his family's honor, is accidentally killed by his best friend.

Described as "a cross between *Paradise Now* and *The Battle of Algiers*" (T Shaw 171), *Omar* highlights the sense of paranoia in a community under siege, "a world from which all trust has vanished, where every relationship carries the possibility – perhaps the inevitability – of betrayal and where every form of honor is corroded by lies" (A O Scott "Treachery Thrives"). The scenes set inside the detention center reveal the tensions within the prison population. Deceived by a Palestinian inmate who secretly records their conversation, Omar is released from prison on condition of surrendering Tarek to the authorities. Rami offers him to "choose between his friends and his life" but in return for 'freedom' Omar continues to live in fear, shadowed by the Israeli secret service and suspected by his friends and his own community.

Omar evokes Giorgio Agamben's elaboration on the notion of state sovereignty and its relationship to the individual in the *State of Exception*. Debated in the contexts of civil war, insurrection and resistance (2), the "state of exception" formulates the condition where the sovereign uses absolute power against the individual and all laws are suspended. It consists of two structures, normative and juridical, as well as anomic and meta-juridical, in which "law blurs at every point with life" (80). In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben cites Walter Benjamin's letter to Gershom Sholem, in which he points out that a scripture which is not law, is "life as it is lived", and describes it, evoking Kafka's prose, as life "in the village at the foot of the hill on which the castle is built" (*Homo Sacer* 36;

Scholem and Benjamin 135). A number of scholars locate Agamben's postulates within a Palestinian context.[29] Following on Albert Memmi's[30] theorization of settler-colonialism, David Lloyd points out that the suspension of law in the face of the indigenous people's presence and resistance, is a pivotal, constitutive element of every colonial society, inflecting all its relations (71-72). Providing a supplement to Agamben's model, Lloyd claims that the declaration of emergency in Israel-Palestine is enforced less by absence, or sheer absence, or suspension of law, than by legal and quasi-legal protocols, used to regulate the state of exception (75).

Abu-Assad uses the narrative convention of the thriller genre, identified by Charles Derry as "the-innocent-on-the-run"[31] and re-purposes it to the Palestinian geopolitical and cultural context. The film's narrative features an innocent character denounced of wrongdoing and forced to catch the real culprit using his wits, making the authorities recognize he was wrongfully accused. But re-purposing this model to the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Abu-Assad urges that what is lacking from Omar's world is a sense of justice, as the Israeli authorities use the presumption of guilt against Palestinians and therefore his innocence will never be accepted. Even though he is aware that Omar is not a murderer and has not confessed the crime, Rami continues to blackmail him in order to penetrate the resistance network.

Omar is excluded from the community, tortured, placed outside the law, but still faces legal obstacles and arbitrary acts of repression applied to control the colonized population. Forced into collaborating with the authorities, he finds himself on the run through the neighborhoods of the Old City. Conveying a sense of existential insecurity and fear, Abu-Assad is equally comfortable in developing compositional tension via static shots and using mobile framing in fast-paced chase sequences across the Nablus rooftops and alleyways. Pursued by the Israelis, assaulted by prison inmates, and betrayed by his friends, Omar begins

to believe that everyone is controlled by the secret police. He loses Tarek's trust, discovers a connection between Nadia and Amjad, and is gradually consumed by paranoia.

The filmmaker again uses juxtaposition and comic relief to enhance tension, revealing surprising facets of his characters' personalities and unexpected twists in the narrative. Amjad's impersonation of *The Godfather* signposts his duplicity, Nadia's reassuring lines suggest she hides a dark secret, while the comic episodes are used to remind the audience of the futility of masculine fantasies about domination and ethnic purity. Speaking on the telephone from his office, Rami is exasperated by mediating between his wife and his mother, and exclaims he is "stuck in the middle of the fucking West Bank." Rami's conversation with Omar divulges that occupation creates fear and paranoia on both sides. Impressed by his command of Arabic, Omar asks Rami whether he is an Arab. Rami retorts, asking about Omar's Hebrew, and learns that the prisoner recognized two words in his telephone conversation, one denoting his *faux* sense of machismo, and the other betraying his true dependence: Superman and Mum.

The film's ending reveals a pessimistic vision of an unchangingly polarized world where the occupier and the occupied are locked within a cycle of violence and betrayal. Following Tarek's death, Omar proposes to Nadia on behalf of Amjad, but as they march in the seemingly homogeneous, all-male Palestinian funeral procession, pledging revenge, he vows not to see Amjad ever again. Two years later, Omar is approached by the Jerusalem Brigades inquiring about the murder. He keeps his secret, however, when Rami visits his bakery assigning him to a new task, Omar realizes there is no way out. Burdened by a sense of guilt, he cannot cross the wall. His visit to Nadia reveals that Amjad lied about the pregnancy and that she still loves him, but it is too late. Prior to 'betraying' Rami by killing him with his own gun in an absurdly comical twist in the closing sequence of the film, Omar recalls Amjad's unfinished story told just before his arrest, asking the agent whether he

knows how the monkeys are caught in Africa**.** As this tale of intrigue, entrapment and duplicity ends with Omar's demise and the death of his torturer, none of the sides in the conflict see an end to violence, while ironically, the original collaborator remains its sole survivor.

The release of *Omar* resulted in the filmmaker achieving his second Academy Award nomination under the banner of Palestine, a move facilitated by the upgraded standing of the Palestinian territories at the United Nations Assembly, from an observer status to a non-member observer state (Zahriyeh, qtd. in Hedges, *World Cinema* 81). However, this success also demonstrated the limits of opportunist dexterity, revealing some of the obstacles faced by Israeli-based Palestinian artists and filmmakers. Israel selected another film concerned with the themes of loyalty and betrayal, Yuval Adler's directorial debut, *Bethlehem*, as its candidate for the Oscar in 2013.[32] The scenes of torture in *Omar,* perpetrated by Shin Beth agents prompted demands for the film to be banned – revealing a double standard towards narratives that represent Palestinians as victims of Israeli state violence.[33] *Omar* was awarded the Special Jury Prize in the 2013 Cannes' International Film Festival's *Un Certain Regard* section, the Berlin International Film Festival's Blue Angel for Best Film, Best Director and Best Film awards at the Dubai International Film Festival, and the Asia Pacific Film award. It was distributed by Adopt Films in the United States of America, Soda Films in the United Kingdom and by Pretty Pictures in France. Screened at twenty-three international film festivals and released in more than thirty countries, *Omar* afforded global audiences the opportunity to re-engage with recurring tropes within Abu-Assad's work and his critique of male-centered world dominated by aggression and violence, which struck a chord with prominent film critics in the West.[34]

The Idol:

Triumph in the Face of Adversity

This chapter has centered on Abu-Assad's transnational partnerships and the articulations of opportunistic transnationalism through his adaptability to different generic forms of popular cinema and television, appropriating them to Palestinian social and cultural contexts. *The Idol* is based on the journey of a young Palestinian singer, Mohammed Assaf, from the Gaza Strip, who won the second season of the *Arab Idol* 2013 reality-television series, capturing the imagination of Arab audiences around the world. In this instance, Abu-Assad departs from his previous films in genre, subject matter and choice of character, and tackles the most complex transnational co-production of his career. Filmed in the Gaza Strip, Jenin, Amman, Beirut and Cairo (McNary), *The Idol* was co-produced by Gulf-based and European production companies, television stations and government bodies: The Image Nation of Abu Dhabi, Enjaaz Film Market, and the Dutch producer September Films, with financial support from the Hubert Bals Fund, the Doha Film Institute, the Netherlands Film Fund as well as the Middle-East Broadcasting Center (MBC), the first independent pan-Arab channel, and one of the most prominent media companies in the Middle East and North Africa.[35]

The decision to dramatize Assaf's journey demonstrates Abu-Assad's grasp of the funding realities within the transforming global and regional frameworks of cinema and television production, his connection with the emerging generations of Palestinian and Arab audiences and his understanding of commercial potential of new television formats. Apart from Hollywood blockbusters, Abu-Assad watched Egyptian films, Turkish melodramas and Bollywood musicals in his youth, and shared in the frustrations of Palestinian spectatorship, starved of locally produced content (Bryant; "An Evening"). Based on the popular British show *Pop Idol*, and recorded in Beirut, *Arab Idol* enjoyed massive following in the Middle

East and within its global diaspora. Abu-Assad saw the show as providing a platform for a 'feel good' story about Palestinian triumph in the face of adversity, accompanied by musical numbers which were popular across the Arab world. Rather than abstaining from the recurring political concerns in his films, the director decided to bypass divisive, potentially controversial elements in Assaf's story and to appropriate the themes of occupation and resistance to the form of biopic, reflecting on the experiences of Palestinian youth in the Gaza Strip.

Mohammed Assaf grew up in the Khan Younnis refugee camp, performing at public events, concerts and television shows (Kuttab "Mohammed"). During his appearance on *Arab Idol*, details of Assaf's biography were circulated by Arab and global media, and his passage from the Gaza Strip to Egypt to attend the auditions for the reality-show contest, became central to his story. His stage name, 'The Rocket,' was given to Assaf by one of the judges, the popular Lebanese singer, Ragheb Subhi Alama. Assaf has been compared to the Egyptian singer Abdel Halim Hafez, which earnt him yet another nickname, 'Hilm Falastine' (in Arabic: *Palestine's Dream*) connecting his performances to the aspirations of Palestinian people everywhere. Assaf's selection of songs about Jerusalem and the right to return, his support for Palestinian prisoners, an episode in the care of the Beirut hospital during the contest, his performance of the Palestinian rendition of the Iraqi song, *Aali El Kuffiyeh/Raise your Keffiyeh* in the finals, and the ensuing celebrations on the streets of cities and towns inhabited by Palestinians following the announcement of his victory, all contributed to the popular appeal of the film and its association to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The first section of the film, which Abu-Assad co-wrote with Sameh Zoabi[36] revolves around a group of refugee children growing up amidst the blockade and experiencing poverty in the Gaza Strip. The second part of the film follows the protagonist's journey to stardom. Rebekah Brammer writes that audiences watching a biopic accept that the private elements in

one's life are as 'true' as the dramatizations of public events, and with the dramatic license woven into biopics, historical sequences are frequently skewed, or compressed to suit the narrative (70). Re-purposing the narrative conventions of the biopic, and "having a foot in both camps" (Brammer 70), Abu-Assad blurs the line between fiction and non-fiction, narrating the story of a group of young Palestinians whose love of music puts them at odds with the occupation and the traditional norms within their own community. Filmed in the wake of Operation Protective Edge, *The Idol* sent a stern message about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The decision to cast the local children – all first-time actors and residents of the Gaza Strip – was aimed at positioning the coming-of-age section of the biopic within the same context as all other films from occupied Palestine. In recent years, other transnationally co-produced films used similar strategies to strengthen their connections to source materials exploring alternative perspectives to other global flashpoints.[37]

The scenes of growing up in the Gaza Strip revolve around the relationship between Mohammed (Qais Attallah) and his sister Nour (Hiba Attalah), the passionate guitar player who braves serious illness and discrimination and emerges as the band's leader and manager. The narrative follows the children, as they sell fish, trying to acquire instruments, and endure the beating-up by a local criminal who cheats them out of their savings. When they finally begin to build a reputation, performing at local wedding parties, Nour's death of kidney failure ends their dreams. The scenes from family life and Nour's death are fictionalized and are used to connect the two sections of the film, as the memory of the deceased girl becomes an inspiration for Assaf's return to music.

The second half traces the events leading up to and during Assaf's participation in the contest. It begins in Gaza in 2012, where we see him working as a taxi driver. Casting Tawfeek Barhom, the young Israeli-Palestinian actor, in the role of adult Mohammed Assaf was intended to make *The Idol* marketable to Arab audiences and acceptable to Israeli

viewers.[38] Barhom claims that, when he first met him, Abu-Assad was considering making a film without music (Aftab "Hany Abu-Assad"). However, he ended up using the voice of the singer throughout the film and the face of Assaf in the closing sequence, along with the video footage of the celebrations in Palestinian territories, which also features one of the two cameo appearances made by the filmmaker.[39] While Abu-Assad attunes the narrative to the expectations of emergent Arab cinema audiences, his 'rags to riches' story evokes the Abdel Halim Hafez Egyptian films from the 1950s, which depict the desperate, poverty-stricken singer who somehow makes it big in spite of incredible difficulties (El-Shimi). Merging the formulas of popular Arab cinema with the format of a reality song contest provides the director with the opportunity to engage wider audiences and realize the commercial potential of this story.

On the other hand, *The Idol* places more emphasis on Assaf's troubled endeavors to enter the contest than the actual course of the competition. His appearance in the qualification round via a video link is marred by logistical problems caused by the Israeli blockade, and the lack of appropriate technical support. Later in the film, speaking to Amal (Dima Awawdeh), Nour's hospital friend and his love interest, about taking risks to cross over to Egypt and participate in the show, Assaf reiterates that his participation is a way of contributing toward change in their subjugated position: "Our voice must be heard. No one knows that we are refugees and not allowed to go home." Assaf's mission is seen as a modernizing endeavor and an opportunity to re-educate the radicalized Palestinian youth in relation to the futility of violence, and the importance of popular culture as a resource and an alternative mode of resistance. Mohammed's childhood friend, Omar (Ahmed Al-Rokh), a leader of an Islamic paramilitary group, refuses to assist him with obtaining an Egyptian visa. Omar claims that singing is *haram*, and contributes to making profits for the rich, while diverting from the Palestinian struggle. Omar eventually helps Mohammed cross the border,

but, rather than reflecting on the causes for the radicalization of young Palestinians as he did in his previous feature and documentary films, Abu-Assad opts for drawing in broader audiences, and portraying his central protagonist as a figure of mediation between the Palestinian masses and Islamic radicals.

The Idol gives prominence to individual action as a way of professing Palestinian national and cultural identity. In the first part of the film, we see Mohammed and Nour, who dream of performing at the Cairo Opera House chanting: "We'll be big, and we'll change the world!" When Assaf finally reaches the venue, another Palestinian contestant decides to give away his ticket, and he enters the competition. The stages of the contest are disproportionately short to the rest of the film, as the filmmaker suggests that the very act of competing is already a major achievement for the young Gazan singer, and rather than extending tension built into the announcement of the results, or detailing each of its phases, the narrative moves to the scenes of Palestinian street celebrations. While *The Idol* reiterates Abu-Assad's opposition to the Israeli occupation and to the constraints of religious fundamentalism, it also speaks at a more universal level about asserting one's cultural identity and evoking the collective sense of national pride, not usually associated with reality-television programs.[40]

Abu-Assad created a sense of anticipation amongst film distributors, and amongst Palestinian and global audiences prior to the film's premiere at the 2015 Toronto International Film Festival, where Eone's Montreal-based arthouse branch Seville sold *The Idol* to twenty territories.[41] In interviews, he continued to minimize its political element in an endeavor to draw in a wider spectrum of distributors: "This is the first movie I've done with a happy ending, and not about politics" (Tartaglione). *The Idol* continued a trend in Abu-Assad's films that achieve popular success while sustaining their openness and commitment to alternative narratives about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, while it cemented

Abu-Assad's presence within the commercial arena, *The Idol* did not ultimately alter pre-conceptions about Palestinian artists who continue to face difficulties promoting their work, as Hiba Attalah, who played Nour was denied a visa for the Toronto premiere of the film (Aftab "Hany Abu-Assad").

Abu-Assad's return to Hollywood confirms his intention to continue to, with varied frequency, make films within the industry context of his domicile countries. Produced by Chernin Entertainment and the 20th Century Fox, Chris Weitz's adaptation of Charles Martin's novel, *The Mountain Between Us* (2017), a romance-disaster movie starring Idris Elba and Kate Winslet, marked yet another step towards entrenching his status as the most prominent Palestinian director in the global mainstream. Replacing Mexican director Gerardo Naranjo, Abu-Assad shot the film on a $35 million-dollar budget, which was unprecedented for a Palestinian director. Following problems with work on the screen adaptation, casting and shooting schedule, *The Mountain Between Us* premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2017. The reviews were reserved, and the box office results were not impressive by Hollywood standards. However, premiering on 3088 screens in North America, *The Mountain Between Us* was set to compete against the anticipated premiere of Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049*, positioning Abu-Assad against one of the stars in this film, the most renowned Palestinian actress, Hiam Abbass, in the race to top the American box-office.[42]

Conclusion

Hany Abu-Assad's films epitomize the ascent of opportunistic transnationalism in Palestinian cinema. While dynamic and irregular transnational collaborations have typified Palestinian cinema since its inception, the rise of opportunist transnationalism was facilitated by the radical transformation of the Hollywood film industry, re-shaping the conditions of

global production and distribution, the launch of film markets, film festivals, and government institutions in the Gulf states and the region, and innovations and developments within the sphere of media and communications at the turn of the twenty-first century. Contributing to the expansion and intensification of transnational connections, these factors opened up new prospects for filmmakers in an era when feature film became Palestinian cinema's key marker. They created new pathways for the production and dissemination of transnationally funded films, expanded the processes of interchange between national cinemas and subaltern cultural communities within a global context, and opened up avenues for a diversification of aesthetic approaches, generating conditions for the emergence of a distinctively Palestinian popular cinema.

Abu-Assad's opportunism is reflected in his innovation and adaptability to irregular and asymmetrical modes of transnational co-production, navigating the economic imperatives as well as aspiring to popular success with Palestinian and global audiences, while maintaining political engagement and aiming for artistic recognition. According to Abu-Assad, these aspirations are not mutually exclusive from his vision of Palestinian cinema as a cause, revealing the shared concerns of local filmmakers about their nation's struggle for justice, their Arab culture, their language, their sense of humor, and in a wider sense, Palestinian cultural identity and values (Haider "Palestinian Cinema").

In his early documentary films, *Nazareth 2000* and *Ford Transit,* and in his feature debut, *Rana's Wedding*, concerned with the Palestinian subjectivity in crisis, Abu-Assad articulates the experiences of his minor transnational subjects living under the Israeli occupation. He asserts the political attributes of his films by exposing human rights abuse and discrimination, and by engaging with polyphonic voices in Palestinian society, while also remaining vigilant about the problems caused by nationalist rhetoric and religious fundamentalism. He explores the internal tensions within the Palestinian community,

destabilizes and appropriates the canons of documentary cinema as well as the conventions of popular film genres, revealing the uniquely complex conditions of a minority group under occupation and shedding light on new modes of political subjectivity, corresponding to the sensibilities of the emerging Palestinian cinema audiences.

The following period is dominated by Abu-Assad's feature films gaining global prominence through critical recognition, and presence in a commercial circuit. In *Paradise Now,* the film which marked his transition to the feature-film, the director uses his opportunist resourcefulness to destabilize and re-purpose the popular form of the thriller genre, blended in with narrative stratagems and the local geopolitical context. He focuses on the life of the Palestinian community, addressing the themes of occupation, resistance, loyalty, and conflict between the modern and the traditional, opportunistically balancing the interests of various stakeholders in addition to Palestinian and global spectators, anchored in pre-established formulas depicting ethnic conflict. Abu-Assad maintains the political commitment in his critically acclaimed films, forges the creation of a new responsiveness amongst Palestinian spectators engaging with locally produced commercial cinema narratives, and opens up avenues for international audiences to connect with the problem of occupation from alternative perspectives.

In his films *Omar* and *The Idol*, Abu-Assad uses transnational partnerships continuing to subvert and appropriate the conventions of popular film genres, unveiling the potential of Palestinian filmmakers to engage with emerging television formats and to produce narratives with global commercial appeal. Working in Hollywood, this filmmaker has also endeavored to produce films disconnected from the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At the same time, anchored within the popular mainstream Abu-Assad persistently returns to the crisis in his country of origin and in a robust, yet adaptable manner, explores new possibilities for advancing the presence of Palestinian film within the commercial arena. In doing so, he

demonstrates how asserting one's cultural identity provides a model of popular success that can, to some degree, ameliorate the detrimental effects of occupation.

Endnotes

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[1] Drawing on Shohat and Stam's *Unthiking Eurocentrism*, the term "Hollywood" is, in this context, not used "to convey a kneejerk reaction of all cinema, but rather as a kind of shorthand for a massively industrial, ideologically reactionary, and stylistically conservative form of 'dominant' cinema" (7).

[2] In *Universe of the Mind,* Yuri Lotman proposes a taxonomy of five stages, from importing and receiving culture, to transmitting and directing its products to other areas of the semiosphere (Lotman).

[3] "Michel Khleifi opened a path that had not existed earlier, Rashid Masharawi distributed the gravel, Elia Suleiman paved it and I drive on it at 120 kilometers per hour" (Abu-Assad, qtd. in Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 136).

[4] Established in 1926 as a Protestant broadcasting corporation, VPRO gradually demoted its religious mission in favor of liberal and avant-garde programing. The organization's mission statement highlights new ideas that encourage thinking, craftsmanship, creativity and innovation ("Organization").

[5] According to Bill Nichols, the filmmaker's appearance in this documentary mode, suited to representation of marginalized groups, allows for open discussion of their perspectives and an interaction with their documentary subjects in the form of debate, wherein they can openly assert their viewpoints (*Introduction to Documentary*).

[6] Codified by Gertz and Khleifi, "checkpoint films" articulate one of the salient experiences of Palestinian life under occupation, marked by disrupting their social, economic and cultural connections, and the fragmentation of their living spaces (*Palestinian Cinema*).

[7] Originally opening in Jerusalem in 1970 for theatrical purposes, it was renamed the Shawk Theatre in 1984 and became a multipurpose space. It was re-launched as Al-Jameel

Cinema in Ramallah in 1998, intended to host Palestinian playwrights, actors and filmmakers. During the 2002 invasion, the theatre was ransacked by the Israeli Army.

[8] Film historian Martin Rubin positions thriller between a proper genre and a meta-genre, placing an emphasis on the binary positioning of sensations (humor and suspense, fear and excitement) that form the core of its engagement with the audience. In *Thrillers* (1999), Rubin distinguishes the thriller via convoluted plots and within physically constrained spaces where it is difficult to move, and places "a vulnerable character drawn into a maze of danger and conspiracy" at its narrative center (17).

[9] For the purpose of this analysis, Brian Henderson's definition of "romantic comedy" refers to "those films in which romance and comedy are the primary components" (12). It is useful for discussing romantic comedy in a transnational climate because Henderson expresses doubts about the attempts to treat romantic comedy as a self-contained genre, acknowledging its hybrid nature.

[10] *Rana's Wedding* earned $10,604 after the first year of release ("*Rana's Wedding*").

[11] Screened at Critic's Week at the 2002 Cannes International Film Festival, *Rana's Wedding* was awarded at Cologne, Montpellier, Marrakech film festivals and received the Golden Anchor Award at the 2003 Haifa Film Festival.

[12] For the purposes of this discussion, I use Timothy Corrigan's definition of road movies as "movies about cars, trucks, motorcycles, or some other motoring self-descendant of the nineteenth-century train" (*A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture after Vietnam* 144).

[13] *Ford Transit* screened at the 2002 International Festival of Documentary Film Amsterdam (IDFA), Sundance, New York and other film festivals. It was awarded the FIPRESCI prize at the 2003 Thessaloniki Documentary Film Festival, the 2003 HRWIFF

Nestor Almendros Prize for courage in filmmaking, and the Best Documentary, "The Spirit of Freedom," at 2003 Jerusalem Film Festival.

[14] Tony Shaw singles out Indian cinema for identifying the connection between religion and terrorism, discussing the work of Many Ratnam and Santosh Sivan, and the Indian Tamil film *Theeviravathi/The Terrorist* (1997) as the most notable film about terrorism and suicide-bombing produced at the turn of the centuries (185-188).

[15] According to Hassan Riaz from the Yale Center for the Study of Globalization, ninety percent of suicide attacks between 1981 and 2006 occurred in Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel, the Palestinian territories, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (Riaz).

[16] In the period between 2001 and 2003, over forty suicide-bombings took place, resulting in 200 deaths (Schweitzer "Palestinian *Istishhadia"*).

[17] On 19 June 2002, fifty-five Palestinian public figures and intellectuals, including Dr Sari Nusseibeh, Dr Hanan Ashrawi and others published an open letter in *al-Quds* newspaper, cautioning that "these bombings do not contribute toward achieving our national project, which calls for freedom and independence" (Allen).

[18] They included Eytan Fox's *Yossi & Jagger* (2002) and *Walk on Water* (2004) and Ra'anan Alexandrowicz's *James' Journey to Jerusalem* (2003). Following *Paradise Now,* Lama Films continued to produce films by Palestinian directors, Tawfik Abu-Wael's *Thanator-Last Days in Jerusalem* (2011), Sameh Zoabi's *Man without a Cell Phone* (2010) and *Under the Same Sun* (2013), and Lebanese-born Ziad Doueiri's *The Attack* (2012), returning to the topic of suicide-bombing.

[19] The ARTE France executive Remi Burah co-produced Suleiman's *Divine Intervention*, and will, during the following decade work on Eran Riklis' *The Syrian Bride* (2005), Nadine Labaki's *Sukkar banat*/*Caramel* (2007), and Samuel Maoz war film *Lebanon*

(2009), while Roman Paul and Gerhard Meixner worked on Ari Folman's *Vals Im Bashir*/*Waltz with Bashir* (2008) and Haifaa Al-Mansour's *Wadjda* (2012).

[20] They included French cinematographer Antoine Heberle, production designer Olivier Meidinger, and Dutch editor, Sander Voss.

[21] The inclusion of Pierre Hodgson indicates the project's scope and ambitions. During this period, Hodgson worked on Philippe Grandieux's *Sombre* (1998), and two films by the Portuguese filmmaker João Canijo, *Ganhar a Vida*/*Get a Life* (2001) screened in the *Un Certain Regard* program at the 2001 Cannes International Film Festival, and *Noite Escura*/*In the Darkness of the Night* (2004).

[22] One can find the evidence for these claims in the behind-the-scenes materials, acquired during the production stages of the film, featuring armed members of Hamas and Fatah who commemorated the beginning of the intifada at Al-Dawar Square in the Nablus city center, evacuated of its female population (*Paradise Now* DVD).

[23] Discussing the prevalence of mental illness at Palestinian refugee camps, Sylvie Mansour asks: "How can one understand the fact that so many people declare themselves ready to die in suicide operations against the Israelis? Perhaps they think this is the only margin of freedom that remains for them, that they have no other way of making personal choices except by choosing when and how to die" ("A Week in Jenin" 42).

[24] The decision was rationalized by the Academy's spokesman, Joh Pavlik: "We're not in the business of defining countries" ("Oscar Nods").

[25] *Paradise Now* received prizes at the 2005 European Film Awards, 2005 Berlin International Film Festival, The Netherlands Film Festival, Durban, Vancouver, Dallas-Fort Worth, and other international film festivals.

[26] The film was in US release for 21 weeks, until March 2006. In the United States of America, the film made $1,457,843, and its world-wide takings were $3,579,902 ("*Paradise Now"*). In Europe, the film was distributed in the Netherlands and Switzerland.

[27] The term was first used by the White House Press Secretary Ari Fleisher in April 2002 and backed by the News Corporation (F James).

[28] The Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) produced a Study Guide of *Paradise Now* targeting senior secondary students of Media Studies ("*Paradise Now Study Guide*").

[29] In her extension of Agamben's concept, Nurhan Abujidi proposes to discuss "The Palestinian States of Exception" which entail all aspects of life, presenting themselves in various hierarchies, forms and experiences of exception, which face Palestinians in their daily existence (Abujidi).

[30] Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Beacon Press, 1967.

[31] In Charles Derry's typology of the thriller genre, the author, rather than using generic categories, draws the distinctions based on themes and narrative devices (*The Suspense Thriller: Films in the Shadow of Alfred Hitchcock*).

[32] Following the complex relationship between the Shin Beth agent and a Palestinian informer, *Bethlehem* is set during the Second Intifada, although it ignores its political context (G Levy "*Bethlehem*").

[33] Neta Alexander writes that *Omar* is not different to Ra'anan Alexandrowicz's documentary, *Shilton HaChok*/*The Law in These Parts* (2011)*,* Dror Moreh's non-fiction 2013 Academy Award nominee, *Shomrei HaSaf*/*The Gatekeepers* (2012), and the festival circuit favorite, *Khamas Kamîrât Muhattamah*/*5 Broken Cameras* (2011) co-directed by Palestinian Emad Burnat and Israeli Guy Davidi, that were screened in Israel, in spite of covering the same controversial issues (N Alexander).

[34] *The Guardian's* film critic, Jonathan Romney was absorbed by the "political and moral complexity of a Le Carré story" (Romney), and Jay Weissberg of *Variety* praised the portrayal of Abu-Assad's men, who make "tragic, often self-destructive decisions as a result of an inescapable environment of degradation and violence" (Weissberg). These and other film reviews testify to Abu-Assad's gradual acceptance by the cinematic mainstream.

[35] The Dubai-based MBC is, along with Al Jazeera, the largest provider of film and entertainment satellite content across the Arab world, with a broad fan-base following Hollywood blockbusters, American sitcoms and Turkish soap operas and is the network that produced and screened *Arab Idol* (Kuttab "Passing the Palestinian Patriotism Test").

[36] In his film *Man Without a Cell Phone* (2010), Sameh Zoabi's made an attempt to negotiate a narrow line between a romantic comedy and a politically engaged film (Aftab "To Truly Laugh").

[37] Produced with the support of German and American funding bodies, Serbia's 2016 Academy Awards nomination, Goran Radovanović's *Enklava/Enclave* (2015), features a group of Serbian children from Kosovo in the roles of Serbs and Albanians. This was the first film told from a 'Serbian perspective,' produced seventeen years after the conflict, and presenting the story from children's point of view.

[38] The young Israeli-Palestinian actor Tawfeek Barhom appeared in Eran Riklis' film *A Borrowed Identity/Dancing Arabs* (2014), adapted from Sayed Kashua's novel, *Dancing Arabs*.

[39] Abu-Assad appears in the role of the Palestinian businessman in Gaza, asked to support Assaf's journey, and in the video footage of street celebrations at the end of the film.

[40] As Justin Chang puts it in *Variety*, the closing sequence in *The Idol* seeks to convey the euphoria following Assaf's victory, "and how it momentarily transmuted a cheesy pop-cultural phenomenon into an almost sacred moment of collective triumph – an all-too-rare

occasion for an embattled people to gather in a spirit of peace and celebration rather than protest" (Chang).

[41] Seville's international sales included the United States of America, Australia, China and India, September Films managed the Benelux distribution, and one of the co-producers, MBC, supervised the release in North Africa and the Middle East (Levine).

[42] *The Mountain Between Us* grossed 48.7 million worldwide. At the end of the first weekend, it grossed $10.1 million dollars, slightly below expectations, but in the second week, its box office record dropped by 47%. Palestinian actress Hiam Abbas appears in the role of Freysa Sadeghpour in *Blade Runner 2049* (D'Alessandro).

Chapter 5. Towards New Horizons:

Contemporary Palestinian Women Filmmakers in Context

The fifth chapter in this thesis maps out contemporary tendencies in Palestinian minor transnational cinema in the works of Palestinian women filmmakers. Through investigating the converging elements of cinematic transnationalism, this chapter takes a different approach to the single-*auteur* analyses conducted in the previous chapters of this thesis. Shifting the focus to a body of work by women directors, the current chapter maps out the cultural contexts permeating short films, feature films, documentary and experimental films, and focuses on their contribution to the aesthetics and politics of Palestinian minor transnational cinema. Hjort's typology of cinematic transnationalisms will be used to explore elements of opportunistic, modernizing and cosmopolitan transnationalism in these works, and will be interweaved with Patricia White's theorization of women's cinema as world cinema. Placing an emphasis on the feminist concerns, aesthetics and politics of contemporary Palestinian women filmmakers and by taking into account the circulation of these films within global production and distribution contexts, White's theoretical framework establishes women's cinema as a transnational formation (8). Combining these two approaches – established by Hjort and White – allows for an analysis of the converging modes of cinematic transnationalism and of the dynamic transnational partnerships within Palestinian women's cinema. This critical framework also opens up avenues for the discussion of the gendered framing of thematic and political concerns, engaging with the minor form, stylistic features, and production and reception contexts in which Palestinian and non-Palestinian women directors produce their films.

The previous chapter elaborated upon how Hollywood's transforming relationship with international production and distribution contexts has afforded new opportunities for Palestinian filmmakers. Connections with production companies, funding bodies, and

television channels in the West have extended to transnational sources of funding and support in the Middle East, allowing Palestinian filmmakers to expand their partnerships and models of financing, as well as their aesthetic approaches. The expansion of the production base and the opportunities for disseminating Palestinian cinema's content testifies to the integrating vectors of economic and cultural power, global media and communications, but also continues the tendency of fragmentation within transnational alliances, distinguished by a nomadic *modus operandi*, devoid of stability or consistency. Coinciding with the intensification of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the decline of the peace process and unilateral moves aimed at legitimizing the *status quo* which marked the early decades of the twenty-first century, these ties appeared as a lifeline and provided opportunities to emerging filmmakers who sought support for their projects.

It is generally accepted that, due to restrictive measures imposed by the Israeli occupation, film industry constraints, and the minority representation of women in cinema as a global problem, the participation of women filmmakers has historically been far surpassed by the greater number of their male counterparts in Palestinian cinema. However, in spite of the instability of transnational ties, the Palestinian women directors discussed in this chapter, whose films demonstrate the concurrent facets of modernizing, opportunistic and cosmopolitan transnationalism, have, since the turn of the twenty-first century, been among the more productive cohorts in present-day Palestinian cinema and the cinemas across the Arab world. The reason they have not been singled out for individual study in previous chapters is due to the relatively limited scope of feature films produced by individual women filmmakers and also due to their focus on specific modes of film production, such as documentary and experimental films.[1]

Concerned with Israeli occupation, loss, dispossession, exile, and the right of return, and characterized by a convergence of postcolonial and feminist elements, the films by

Palestinian women filmmakers located within the global film festival and commercial mainstream contexts maintain political commitment but have also become increasingly market orientated. They broaden the thematic scope and advance particular aesthetic attributes and production capabilities that characterize Palestinian cinema, expanding its transnational visibility and influence, as well as forging emancipatory currents within the global film industry arena.

Divided into four sections, this chapter discusses select feature, documentary, short and experimental films of five women filmmakers, focusing on transformative and emancipatory processes within Palestinian society, emerging female subjectivities in diasporic contexts, retrieving and re-imagining the lost and looted Palestinian archival records, and the new Palestinian narratives of return. This section examines films by the following Palestinian women filmmakers, Najwa Najjar, Annemarie Jacir, Cherien Dabis, Azza El-Hassan, and Jumana Manna, and draws attention to the works of other Palestinian and non-Palestinian women filmmakers where relevant.

Exploring the emancipatory and transformative tendencies in the films of Palestinian women directors, the first section in this chapter begins by covering the documentary films of Najwa Najjar, absorbed by the dynamic and productive social and cultural life in the pre-Nakba Palestine. Thereupon, the discussion opens up, focusing on the feminist and postcolonial elements in Najjar's first feature film, which is set in present-day Israel-Palestine. Concerned with the themes of loss, exile, dispossession and return, Annemarie Jacir's early shorts and feature film narratives revolve around the gendered framing of journeys of Palestinian-American women returnees and their endeavors to reconnect with the land of their ancestors. Jacir's work also focuses on mapping emancipatory and transformative tendencies in Palestinian society from a historical perspective. The filmmaker celebrates the contribution of women to the Palestinian revolutionary struggle, and its

progressive and secular character which has placed Palestine on the map of global movements against colonialism, exploitation, patriarchy and social injustice.

The second section of this chapter is centered on the work of Cherien Dabis whose films revolve around the emerging female subjectivities in diasporic contexts and exemplify the increasingly market-orientated position of Palestinian filmmakers who operate in transnational production frameworks. Dabis navigates the interests of popular mainstream cinema and engages with female subjectivities in different cultural contexts representing voices of mediation, inclusion and conformity. Her films expand on the migrant and transcultural experiences of Palestinian women, and of American women of Palestinian background who rebuild their lives and the lives of their families in diasporic communities, and, in doing so, negotiate cross-cultural relationships, dominant social values and the limitations of patriarchal society, while never fully separating themselves from the confines of Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Focused on retrieving and re-imagining lost historical and cultural heritage, Azza El-Hassan and Jumana Manna examine the role of archival materials in constructing cultural identity and memory and dissect the strategies of cultural colonization in denying and obstructing access to Palestinian historical and cultural legacy. Searching for looted and destroyed Palestinian film archives, Azza El-Hassan investigates the production of individual and collective memories of Palestine and the role of images in constructing and retrieving memories of occupied Palestine. El-Hassan identifies continuities in her work alongside works by early Palestinian filmmakers highlighting the connections between the films of the Palestinian Cinema of the Revolutionary Period and political activism. The filmmaker also demonstrates the capacity of these works to articulate subaltern cultural identity and memory. In her shorts and documentary films, visual artist and filmmaker, Jumana Manna examines and recreates the photographs and ethnomusicological archives positioned in the social and

cultural contexts of pre-Nakba Palestine. Manna enquires into the competing concepts of modernity as well as the emerging structures of power and knowledge in the period prior to the creation of the state of Israel.

Situating their films within unstable political, hybrid and polycentric cultural contexts, Najwa Najjar and Annemarie Jacir balance their post-feminist[2] concerns and their immersion in the commercial and the film festival mainstream with oppositional perspectives in new narratives of return. These filmmakers use the framework of family reunions to reflect upon the multiplicity of perspectives connecting and separating diasporic and internally displaced Palestinians from those residing in the state of Israel and territories under Palestinian control. Revolving around the position of an individual and framed by geopolitical conflicts and communal tensions within Palestinian society, these films underline both subjective and counter-hegemonic positions, using new stylistic approaches in re-visiting the motif of return as one of the most popular tropes in Palestinian cinema.

Converging Transnationalisms, Political Commitment and Stylistic Diversity

This inquiry is framed by paradigms of converging modernizing, cosmopolitan and opportunist transnationalisms, established in Mette Hjort's typology of cinematic transnationalism. Positioned within the historical, social, political and cultural contexts of Israel-Palestine, and immersed in the struggle for human rights and resistant to cultural exclusivism, these directors reject the Israeli occupation. They bring to light the conditions of Palestinians, and more specifically Palestinian women living under this regime, and highlight the importance of films produced by Palestinian women. Balancing their gendered framing of subjectivity with a postcolonial critique, these women filmmakers underline the modernizing

elements in their films, emphasizing emancipatory and transformative tendencies as well as the struggle for equality in an occupied society based on traditional norms.

The majority of women directors covered by this chapter spent their formative years, completed their education and began their film careers in Arab countries and in the West, where they formed their cosmopolitan allegiances. There, they established industry networks, produced their first short and documentary films, and screened them at film festivals, participated in television productions, curated art and cinema exhibitions, and continued to develop experimental projects removed from the commercial and film festival mainstream. The exilic pasts and diasporic displacement emerge in different forms in the works of these cosmopolitan directors who move across borders and in a range of transnational contexts, producing films which converge on the lives of the oppressed and marginalized individuals and subaltern communities. As their careers gradually progressed, most of these filmmakers began to divide their time between their adopted countries, Israel-Palestine, and regional centers in the Middle East. Creating dynamic transnational partnerships to ensure support for their films, they have adjusted to operating within seemingly pluralistic, but often hegemonic cultural contexts where public discourse is partial to the Zionist narrative, while maintaining the distinctness and urgency of political commitment in their cinematic narratives.

While the opportunist element plays a vital role in their careers, these filmmakers demonstrate the ethical facet that features two qualities of transnational production: resistance to globalization and cultural hegemony, and reassurance that economic imperatives do not marginalize the pursuit of aesthetic, artistic, social and political values (Hjort, "On the Plurality" 15). Refuting the idea of a stable national space, these women filmmakers use the synergy between local cultural contexts and the conventions of the popular mainstream and demonstrate cultural hybridity as well as establish and implement diverse and innovative aesthetic approaches. Refusing to be distinguished solely by minority discourse as license for

artistic exclusivity, they contribute to the rise of Palestinian popular cinema by developing a range of narrative strategies to extend their craft. As Kay Dickinson pointedly asserts: "If Palestine has long been a 'laboratory' for outsiders to test everything from their religious convictions to their journalistic ethos and most up-to-date weaponry, then Palestinian cinema both opposes the worst of this and assumes its own right to experiment, rather than solely remonstrate" (*Arab Cinema* 106). These interlocking attributes of cinematic transnationalism, coupled with the pivotal, political element in the work of Palestinian women filmmakers are revealed in a multiplicity of stylistic approaches, and demonstrate continuities with films by their predecessors, and also pave the way for future directions in Palestinian cinema.

Palestinian Women's Cinema as World Cinema

The convergence of quests for national liberation and gender equality is prominent in most postcolonial and Third World cinemas, including Palestinian cinema. Ella Shohat points out that the Western world is showing signs of saturation with predominantly Eurocentric narratives, while third world peoples and their gender, sexual, diasporic communities have only begun telling theirs ("Post-Third-Worldist Culture" 5). Cognizant that, while "the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (Spivak, "Can the Subaltern" 287), Palestinian women filmmakers are concerned with making gender visible in the representations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They reflect on how gender frames and articulates the established roles and the narratives of the opposing sides, probes the constructions of national identity and women's roles and identities, and engages with the conflict and its consequences (Sharoni *Gender*). Recognizing that Palestinian women have been constrained by the Israeli occupation and "male nationalist rhetoric" (Massad, "The Persistence" 52), these directors reject postcolonial existence (Sayigh, "Remembering Mothers" 43) and propose that the Israeli occupation must cease

simultaneously with the ending of the imprisonment of Palestinian bodies (Mayer 173). However, as Shohat reminds us, drawing on multicultural and postcolonial studies in *Gendered Cartographies of Knowledge,* the conflicting positioning of scholarship within the feminist arenas of struggle produces a sense of a methodological conundrum (2).

For the purposes of this analysis, I endorse and expand on the concept of women's cinema as world cinema, established in feminist scholarship and located within the era of second wave feminism, where key areas of consideration remain contested.[3] Patricia White, in *Women's Cinema, World Cinema: Projecting Contemporary Feminisms* (2015), discusses the rise of the emerging generation of women directors, their impact on the changing formations, aesthetics and politics of arthouse cinema, and the circulation of their films within the global "festival and art house ecosystem" (204). White draws on the decentering theorization of Lucia Nagib, who refutes the ideas of core and periphery, proposing that women's cinema should always be seen as world cinema, and not in opposition to Hollywood (Nagib 30, qtd. in P White 4). Surveying and challenging different feminist genealogies, White probes how the films of the new generation of women cineastes frame feminist ideas within national and transnational contexts. These films convey individual and general ideological allegiances, critique, re-contextualize and re-shape the gendered concepts of identity, taste and authorship in which they are immersed.

Patricia White draws on a "polycentric approach" introduced by Shohat and Stam[4] and expanded by Nagib, which allows her to animate the authorial, industrial, textual and comparative properties of women's filmmaking in transnational contexts, and to navigate through the circulatory elements of women's cinema (31). I endorse White's concept of women's cinema as a transnational formation, integral to film scholarship in the twenty-first century, and expand this concept, re-stating the key research question of this thesis: who can speak for the people of Palestine? In this context, the question is reformulated to examining

who can speak for Palestinian women and the population of Palestine, and what are the key thematic concerns in the Palestinian minor transnational cinema in which women directors have had an increasingly important role?

Minor Aesthetics and the Postcolonial Feminist Perspective

In positioning the films of Palestinian women filmmakers within transnational contexts, it is important to acknowledge Alison Butler's adaptation of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of minor aesthetics in *Women's Cinema: The Contested Screen*, an approach which also informs this analysis. Challenging the counter cinema's[5] opposition to the formalist and ideological dominance of Hollywood, Butler posits women's cinema as minor rather than oppositional and identifies displacement and deterritorialization, the political element, and a propensity to take on a collective value as its most prominent concerns (20). According to Butler, women's cinema is not 'at home' in any of the cinematic or national discourses: "The distinctiveness of women's filmmaking is therefore not based on an essentialist understanding of gendered subjectivity, but on the position – or positions – of women in contemporary culture" (22). Acknowledging Butler's position is crucial for clustering the works of Palestinian directors, born and educated in the state of Israel, in territories under Palestinian control and in exile in this chapter, but also acknowledging the work of non-Palestinian filmmakers, as gender pervades national boundaries, social norms and cultural canons, based on hegemonic principles and pre-established positions of women in film industry. Embracing Butler's ideas, White evokes the idea of the "politics of location," introduced by Adrienne Rich and developed by Caren Kaplan (P White 13; Rich; Kaplan, *Questions of Travel* 166-167), and urges for reterritorialization of women filmmakers and their work. This discussion also acknowledges Butler's position but cautions that recognizing

the geopolitical and historical contexts which pervade all spheres of life in Israel-Palestine is crucial for engaging with all forms of Palestinian cultural production.

Finally, recalling the important contribution of Anna Ball's *Palestinian Literature and Film in Postcolonial Feminist Perspective* to this field, it is pertinent to highlight the two points of difference examined by her writing; concurrently approaching the literary and film texts of both men and women as the subject of feminist analysis, and recognizing that transnational scholarship has, at least partially, obscured the specific historical and political contexts of Palestinian cultural production and the trajectory of gender-conscious-expression in Palestinian film and literature (11). In acknowledging Ball's position, it must be reiterated that the previous chapters in this thesis scrutinize the power structures in representations of Palestinian identity, and the re-positioning of women in the new constellations of power in the films of selected male directors. Grouping together women directors in this chapter does not aim to separate them from the films produced by men which treat feminist concerns. Instead, it brings to prominence some of the key themes, specific but not exclusive to this cohort, expanding the global reach of Palestinian cinema, and urging for inclusiveness and equality in the film industry and society as a whole. Acknowledging "the extreme self-reflexivity, complexity and creativity of Palestinian's self-image" (Ball 11) emerging from the works of women directors, it is essential to reiterate that minor transnationalism allows for a hybrid and relational approach to their cinematic texts, converging modes of cinematic transnationalism, adoption of the minor film aesthetics, and discussion of cultural contexts and industry conditions in which Palestinian women directors operate.

Rebels, Returnees, Revolutionaries:
At the Helm of Emancipatory and Transformative Processes

Najwa Najjar's early documentary films examine the emancipatory social climate in pre-Nakba Palestine, and its social and cultural decline following the formation of the state of Israel. Najjar was born in Washington D. C. and graduated from courses in politics and economics prior to undertaking her training in filmmaking. Her documentary films are informed by her multiple, cosmopolitan identities and typified by modernizing attributes, highlighting the processes of social change in pre-Nakba Palestine, and the consequences of colonial rule and oppression. Najjar positions herself outside the hegemonic, Eurocentric narratives, and engages with documentary material that subverts the dominant preconceptions about pre-Nakba Palestine, representing it as a dynamic, multicultural society with a rich cultural life.

Supported by the Heinrich Boll Foundation and the Cultural Section of the French Consulate in Jerusalem, Najjar's transnationally produced documentary film, *Na'im wa Wadee'a/Naim and Wadee'a* (2000) centers on the life of her grandparents in pre-1948 Yaffa, using the family's testimonies and Israeli, American, Jordanian and UNRWA archival materials. Her foreign-educated cosmopolitan grandparents' social rituals, cultural interests, and transnational ties are presented against the backdrop of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Palestinian society, typified by modernizing tendencies and a vibrant cultural life. The filmmaker alerts her cinema audiences to the changing attitudes towards work, education, leisure time, the position of women, and cultural connections with Europe and the Middle East, as evident in the Palestinian middle class's interests in cinema, fashion, literature, music and travel. She uses excerpts from Egyptian, French and American films of the era, popular music and family photographs, and combines them with archival images of the 1948 war, suggesting that this period of animated cultural exchange was disrupted by

colonial subjugation. As Najjar's family reflect upon the fate of their home library, the manuscripts that can never be retrieved, and the exodus of the Arab middle class, their dispossession evokes the suspended processes of modernization, the disintegration of Palestine's multicultural fabric, and the emergence of a society based on the ideology of settler-colonialism.

In *Jawhar al Nisiyan*/*Quintessence of Oblivion* (2002), Najjar continues to reflect on the life of Palestinian communities during the periods of 1948, 1967, and 2001, and connects colonial oppression with processes of cultural stagnation and decline. The filmmaker centers on the legacy of the Al-hamra Cinema in East Jerusalem, one of the key hubs of cine-culture in Palestine, reiterating that the Israeli occupation blocked emancipatory tendencies and processes of cultural exchange, leading to the subjugation of Palestinian communities to policies of cultural domination. Highlighting these developments, Najjar also aspires to create a sense of continuity with the Palestinian cultural production of the past, which is evident in her feature film debut, but also in the works of other Palestinian women filmmakers discussed in this chapter.

While Najjar engages with independent female characters, she also acknowledges the limitations of minority discourse, and refuses to be seen solely as a female director (Najjar, qtd. in Nusair "On Palestinian Cinema"). Her feature film debut, *Al-mor wa al rumman*/*Pomegranates and Myrrh* (2008), produced by her Ramallah-based Ustura Films, in association with ZDF/ARTE,[6] ADC/Sud, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kuwaiti Desert Door Productions and Rif Film Morocco, centers on a Palestinian woman who negotiates the constraints imposed upon women's roles and identities by colonial rule and patriarchal order. The production of the film was halted because of the difficulties in moving between Ramallah and Jerusalem, and due to the death of one of the co-producers, Hubert Balsan. Nevertheless, using their initiative, Najjar and her production team decided to revise the

production structure and include a significant proportion of Palestinian investment which afforded them more creative freedom (Fahim).

Positioned within the arthouse and film festival circuits, Najjar balances oppositional and feminist elements articulating the gendered framing of identity within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and acknowledges the broad ideological and communal allegiances of her central character, but at the same time draws attention to her subjective position. The film revolves around Kamar (Yasmine Al Massri), whose husband Zaid (Ashraf Farah), was defending his olive grove, and then imprisoned by the authorities on trumped-up charges. While Zaid is in administrative detention, awaiting trial, Kamar continues to produce olive oil, living in a family home, surrounded by the Israeli settlements, and grows close to the choreographer, Kais (Ali Suliman), a returnee from a Beirut refugee camp, who returns to Palestine after twenty years in exile, and who introduces innovative approaches to Arab dance to her local troupe.

The narrative follows the Palestinian family's struggle to keep their land against the confiscation order and settler attacks, while negotiating the legal battle to ensure Zaid's release from an Israeli prison, but the emphasis gradually shifts to Kamar's relationship with Kais. The initial idea for *Pomegranates and Myrrh* was born during the Second Intifada, when tensions between Palestinians and Israeli authorities reached a critical point. Following the escalation of violence, traditional norms and restrictions were re-imposed on the public presence of Palestinian women and their engagement with men. Najjar draws on postcolonial and feminist concerns in her narrative, as Kamar deals with the conditions of collective imprisonment, imposed by the ocuppation, the patriarchal reguations dictating a certain type of behaviour upon women, and the confinement of her own body (Najjar, qtd. in Nusair, “On Palestinian Cinema”). These concerns are evident in cinematographer Valentina Caniglia's use of panoramic shots and framing of the Palestinian land, carved out by checkpoints,

Jewish settlements and the concrete barrier, in Kamar's visits to Zaid in Israeli prison, and her encounters in homes, cars and cafes, where extended close-ups are used, brimming with frustration and sense of confinement. The un-nuanced representations of Israeli authorities and Jewish settlers do not expand on the intricacies of colonial violence and repression. Najjar's screenplay which participated in the Sundance Lab, uses the character of a female Israeli lawyer known for her support of the Palestinian community, to balance her anti-hegemonic position with moderate views which renders the film more acceptable to Western and Israeli viewers.

Najjar acknowledges the significance of a woman's artistic expression in her struggle for national and cultural identity by highlighting continuities with the past and tensions in the dance troupe's search for creative direction, faced with new approaches to traditional *dabke*. One can also detect differing perceptions of pre-established gender roles, and approaches to Zaid's defense strategies, but the director does not delve into political or communal tensions within the Palestinian community. Rather, she places an emphasis on emancipatory values, highlighting the importance of dance in Kamar's search for individual freedom. During her early visits to Zaid, Kamar's world is immersed in her relationship with her husband: "Without you, everything has lost its smell." However, her acquaintance with Kais and their shared passion for dance open new avenues for Kamar's evaluation of the restrictions imposed upon Palestinian women during the Intifada. When asked by the choreographer whether she has studied dance, Kamar responds: "It's not possible here." While her views gradually change, Kamar's passivity, criticized by some reviewers (Halligan), remains unaltered throughout the film. It is counter-balanced by Umm Habib (Hiam Abbas), a local cafe owner who openly challenges male authority and embodies the strength and resourcefulness of Palestinian women under ocuppation. The final scene between Kamar and Kais, discussing the nature of their relationship while facing the Israeli settlements built on a

nearby hill, remains deliberately open-ended, as Kamar rejects Kais' advances, but recognizes his role in helping her change her perspectives.

The casting of local and regional stars, Al Massri and Ali Suliman, demonstrates Najjar's intention to connect with a new generation of Arab audiences and thereby position herself and her work in the film festival and commercial mainstream.[7] In spite of her attempt to balance Kamar's emotional dilemmas against the expectations of Palestinian viewers and leave their relationship ambiguous, the film incited criticism from Palestinian spectators who saw Kamar as unfaithful to her husband, and the spirit of Palestinian resistance (Bizawe). *Pomegranates and Myrrh* fared much better globally, screening at more than eighty international film festivals and marking one of the most successful feature debuts of a Palestinian director.[8]

Annemarie Jacir's modernizing vision, cosmopolitan competencies and opportunistic agility allowed her to navigate political obstructions, economic constraints and the severe under-representation of Arab and Palestinian women across the festival circuit, and, following the success of her early films, elevate her status in the international arena. Jacir lived in Saudi Arabia until the age of sixteen, moved between Bethlehem and Riyadh, and received her formal education in the United States. Anchored in secular principles, and committed to progressive values, her films reflect on the themes of loss, dispossession, exile and return, highlighting political and subjective overtones embodied in the compelling figure of Palestinian woman returnee.

Named after Tawfiq Zayyad's 1965 poem, "Here we will stay," Jacir's *Ka'inan Ashrun Mustaheel/Like Twenty Impossibles* (2003) was the first Arab short film and the first Palestinian film directed by a woman, screened in the official selection at the Cannes International Film Festival. Supported by the Jerome Foundation Media Art and Columbia University, it centers on a Palestinian-American film director, Anne Marie (Reem Abu-

Sbaih) and her film crew travelling through the geopolitical landscape of Israel-Palestine. Intentionally distanced from the conventions of mainstream cinema, Jacir's minor film combines fictional elements with documentary-style footage, which is enhanced by the use of mobile camera framing, highlighting the fragility of subaltern groups, and the subjective position of the woman returnee at its center.

Jacir's visual poem establishes the gendered framing of Palestinian narratives of return as one of the key poetic motifs in her work. The filmmaker's cosmopolitan allegiances and exilic subjectivity inform her creative process, merging an anti-hegemonic perspective and circulatory principles in her work and also inviting audiences to partake in her intense and emotional journey of return. Jacir's journeys evoke what Esmail Nashif sees as the quintessential form of Palestinian rituals of return to the self:

> The moment of the Palestinian return to his/her self and existentially remaining there, are the indulgence in this process from the end, death, and emptiness, and in this respect, going back to the ruins, is a particular form of returning to the self (137).

Rather than placing emphasis on essentialist gender subjectivity, Jacir reterritorializes her central character, by locating her in the context of occupied Palestine. Like the majority of "accented" films, Jacir's early works posit the country of origin as an important referent defining one's sense of identity, but also establish the location where a return is rendered impossible, illusory or undesirable (Naficy, *An Accented Cinema* 27). An aspiring filmmaker, Anne Marie is naïve and convinced that she is absolved from the realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, revealing what Helga Tawil-Souri describes as a parodic representation of diasporic Palestinians, "with an American sense of empowerment, security and justice" ("Review" 165). This self-reflexive rendering of the central character prompts spectators to engage with the complexities of Anne Marie's journey, connecting deterritorialized subjects as part of her production crew, as she visits the land of her ancestors.

When the crew decides to take a side road, evading an Israeli checkpoint on their way to Jerusalem, the production disintegrates along with the optimistic mood that originally marked the film's beginnings. The local members of the crew, actor Rami (Ismail Dabbage) and sound operator Mohammed (Ashraf Abu-Moch), banned from travelling to the West Bank, are detained by the Israelis. Claiming she has permission to travel and film, Anne Marie tries to convince an Israeli soldier born in Miami to let them go, and, for a moment, it seems like their 'American connection' will take precedence over the centrality of ethnic conflict in Israel-Palestine. But the soldier sternly reminds her that it is forbidden to shoot in the West Bank and marches the director and her crew out of their van. Ordered to stop filming and disperse, the crew are aware that this may be the last time they see one another. As Jacir's control of the recorded material becomes apparent (Dybvik), the cast and the crew disintegrate, and the actor is arrested, Anne Marie leaves the location, and the sound and the images become, in a manner similar to Palestine and its inhabitants, disconnected. Followed by a mobile camera, Anne Marie helplessly wanders between Rami who stands detained with his arms in the air, and Mohammed, who is taken away by the soldiers, but continues to record sound and discourages the director from trying to reason with the Israelis, telling her to "Get real." Anne Marie's appeal to release the crew is met with a warning by one of the soldiers: "If you don't like it here, go home." The director replies: "This is my home." This recurring motif in Jacir's films sees her female protagonists thwarted from establishing meaningful relationships with Palestine and the people who live there. Anne Marie leaves the Israeli roadblock a different person, recognizing not only the realities and extent of subaltern marginalization, but also being able to relate to the narratives of exiled and dispossessed Palestinians.

Like Twenty Impossibles was screened at more than two hundred and fifty film festivals around the world ("Like Twenty Impossibles"), receiving multiple awards, marking

a historical precedent for the transnational visibility of Palestinian women cineastes, and facilitating the director's access to global mainstream film production. Jacir became the co-founder and curator of Columbia University's *Dreams of a Nation*[9] project, dedicated to Palestinian cinema, and afterwards returned to Amman, where she established her production company, Philistine Films.

Jacir's feature debut, *Milh Hadha al-Bahr*/*Salt of This Sea* (2008) was co-produced by Philistine Films, production companies from the USA, Switzerland, Belgium, United Kingdom and Spain, and government bodies from France, Switzerland, The Netherlands and Belgium. In spite of Jacir's film festival success and partnership with Jacques Bidou and Marianne Dumolin of JBA Production, French producers with a substantial portfolio of transnationally funded films and commitment to working with first-time directors, it was initially very difficult to secure funds for this project generated by a woman filmmaker engaged with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict ("Case Study"). While the collaboration between a cluster of minor production companies and funding bodies from Europe demonstrates Jacir's resourcefulness and opportunist acumen, it also attests to the difficulties of Palestinian filmmakers, trying to source financial support for their projects. *Salt of This Sea* screened in the *Un certain regard* program at Cannes where it received a FIPRESCI award, and was released in cinemas in Europe, Asia and the United States of America.

Dedicated to the memories of the Nakba and the 1948 massacre in the village of Ad-Dawayima *Salt of This Sea* re-visits the tragedy that befell a multiethnic country (Jacir, qtd. in Mir) focusing on the journey of return of a Brooklyn-born Palestinian woman, Soraya (Suheir Hammad), who mediates the relationship between the present and the past. Placing an emphasis on human rights, equality and justice this film uses the narrative conventions of romance and the road-movie, targeting Palestinian and global audiences.

We are introduced to Soraya as she arrives in Israel on a visitor visa to claim her inheritance and is questioned and humiliated by the customs officers at Tel Aviv airport. In Ramallah, she meets a Palestinian, Emad (Saleh Bakri) who is awaiting his visa for Canada, trusting the notion that "Life is better in other places." Jacir's reterritorialized character's quest for truth becomes a catalyst for fantasies of a return to the land of her ancestors. Soraya idealizes Palestine and its people in her grandparents' recollections of their visits to the Al-hamra Cinema, described as if they were her own, thus evoking the multi-ethnic legacy of a society and culture transformed by the Israeli occupation. The male authority figures of Israeli soldiers and the Palestinian bank manager are seen as preventing Soraya from re-establishing her bonds with Palestine. When she is informed that her family's pre-1948 bank accounts are invalid, Soraya convinces Emad to rob the bank together with her. As they drive through Israeli roadblocks and roam the cities disguised as Jewish settlers, filmed by their friend Marwan (Riyad Ideis), Jacir again uses the aesthetics of minor film to document their memories of Palestine through small acts of resistance and to reconnect the fragmented parts of colonized land in the form of a home movie.

Soraya insists on reconstructing the historical case by confronting the Israelis and making them recognize the injustices caused by Zionist ideology. She enters her grandparents' house in Jaffa and demands an acknowledgement of the wrongdoings committed against her family, but the tenant – ironically a woman and a supporter of the peace process – asks her to leave. Jacir suggests that the nationalist polarities created by the occupation prevent the two women from establishing a basic sense of solidarity and understanding. Apprehended by the Israeli police, Emad is taken to prison and Soraya is deported to the border crossing. While her hopes for justice and a return are dispelled, Soraya acknowledges there was no other way to learn about Palestine. When asked how long she has been in the country, Soraya responds: "I've been here all my life. I was born here." Jacir

implies there is no hope or happiness at the end of this film as Soraya and Emad cannot be together and that, in spite of connecting with Palestine, she is still unable to break the cycle of traumatic experiences or to form a lasting bond with those she loves ("Case Study").

Unshackling the representations of Palestinian struggle for national liberation from traditional norms, Jacir subverts the gendered readings of history, recognizing the participation of women in the revolutionary movement that has become a symbol of global struggle against colonialism, racism, sexism and social inequality. Co-produced by Ossama Bawardi, and Rami Yassin, *Lama Shoftak*/*When I Saw You* (2012) is a coming-of-age film set in 1967, following Tarek (Mahmoud Asfa) and his mother Ghayda (Ruba Blal) who arrive in Jordan with thousands of refugees, waiting for the return of their father and husband. Unlike the documentary films of the Palestinian Cinema of the Revolutionary Period which limit the inclusion of women in active roles, the filmmaker refutes the representations of Palestine as a fertile motherland (Murphy "Honoring Palestinian History"), placing a female figure at the heart of the struggle for justice, freedom and equality. Filmed by cinematographer Helene Louvart, known for her work with iconic cineaste, Agnes Varda, the narrative is immersed in Tarek's formative experiences with a group of Palestinian freedom fighters. At the same time, in portraying Ghayda's embracing of a revolutionary ethos, the film evokes Geraldine Heng's understanding of the rise of female consciousness in conjunction with anti-colonial, national-modernization and reform movements (30-31). *When I Saw You* poetically conjures the spirit of the era when the liberation movement captured the world's imagination and the "struggle between good and evil, justice and injustice" (Mahjoub 290), emerging as the salient marker of the Palestinian national and cultural identity, and promising to transform the nation, the region and the world.

Although the filmmaker centers on the rise of Palestinian female subjectivity amidst the Palestinian revolutionary movement, her approach is not limited by oppositional

elements. Jacir endorses, rather than opposes the aesthetics of commercial cinema and frames progressive and feminist ideas within transnational contexts in order to engage audiences from global film festival and popular cinema circuits. And while Jacir's film may not articulate the new sensibilities of Palestinian cinema audiences, which are already acquainted with the liberation movement's revolutionary past, it nevertheless provides foundations for cultivating new models for the representation of Palestinian history to Western viewers largely unaware of its modern, secular and progressive legacies.

In recent years, other Palestinian women filmmakers whose minor transnational films are characterized by the convergence of modernizing, cosmopolitan and opportunist elements, have also focused on the rise of emancipatory and transformative tendencies in Palestinian society, situating them in various historical periods, including the Palestinian revolutionary era and the First Intifada. In this context, two films warrant special mention. Hind Shoufani's[10] documentary film *Trip Along Exodus* (2014), presents a portrait of the filmmaker's father, Dr Elias Shoufani, one of the central figures in the Palestinian revolutionary movement, who abandoned his academic post in the United States of America, and in the early 1970s joined the Palestinian Liberation Organization in Beirut. Following the conflict with the Fatah's leader Yasser Arafat and disillusioned with the Palestinian leadership, he moved to Syria, where he remained until his death. Conceived as a reflection on the Palestinian political history, and produced on a micro-budget,[11] *Trip Along Exodus* combines more than twenty different formats of visual material,[12] mapping out Dr Shoufani's political career and poring over the loss of vision among male-dominated Palestinian elites who have negotiated a series of agreements with the Israeli governments, contributing to the decline of the peace process.

In her feature debut, *3000 Layla/3000 Nights* (2015), set in the 1980s in the West Bank city of Nablus, veteran documentarist Mai Masri circumvents the gendered narratives

of the prison film by focusing on the political struggle of Palestinian women prisoners in an Israeli detention system during the First Intifada. The result of a transnational collaboration between production companies, developmental funds and government bodies,[13] *3000 Nights* revolves around Layal (Maisa Abd Elhadi), falsely accused as an accomplice to a teenager who attacked an Israeli checkpoint. Layal is sentenced to a prison term and becomes involved in the struggle for the human rights of Palestinian female inmates. Consistent with the key concerns in Masri's documentary work,[14] *3000 Nights* appropriates the conventions of the prison film, anchoring the gender-framing of Palestinian subjectivity in the context of women's struggle for political rights, justice and equality.[15] Celebrating the legacy of the Palestinian revolutionary struggle and the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories, these women filmmakers place an emphasis on the importance of emancipatory and transformational tendencies in Palestinian society. Moreover, drawing attention to the role of Palestinian women in these momentous historical events, they highlight the relevance of those values for the overall Palestinian struggle today and establish continuities underlining the dominant political element in Palestinian cultural and film production.

Voices of Mediation, Inclusion and Conformity:
Exploring Palestinian Female Subjectivities Within Diasporic Contexts

Operating within the framework of commercial cinema, Palestinian-American director, Cherien Dabis, uses the convergence of modernizing, cosmopolitan and opportunistic elements, exploring the emerging female subjectivities within diasporic contexts. Dabis articulates the experiences of Palestinian women coming to terms with their migrant and transcultural experiences and divulges how their lives have been affected by processes of dislocation. Dabis' career is typified by productive and dynamic industry connections and transnational collaborations with private investors, government bodies, film

festival funds and television channels which have helped her secure support for her projects and position her within film festival and commercial circuits. Her relationship to popular cinema attests less to Dabis' oppositional sensibilities and more to Nagib's approach, which is in line with Dudley Andrew's proposal of "An Atlas of World Cinema," refuting binarism, and national and cultural exclusivity, and urging for inter-connectedness, hybridity and inclusivity (Nagib 30; Andrew "An Atlas"). Dabis positions her transnational subjects within hybrid cultural frameworks different to other Palestinian filmmakers. The director adjusts her approaches to the expectations of the global commercial mainstream market and to audiences who may not be invested in the political situation in the Middle East and who may espouse different views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Dabis presents a range of female subjectivities, tackles subaltern identities, and acknowledges pre-established gender roles and dominant power structures that have impacted on the position of Palestinian women within the diaspora. However, her narratives, centered on their individual preoccupations, do not place any special emphasis on political values like the work of other Palestinian filmmakers. Unlike the exilic narratives, comprising a vertical and primary relationship with a host country, prominently featuring the sense of loss, absence and retrospection, diasporic consciousness is horizontal and multi-sited, and, according to Naficy, a mind-set that accentuates the homeland and compatriot communities around the world, thus de-emphasizing the partisanal political character of exilic cinema (*An Accented Cinema* 14). Dabis' female characters are primarily perceived as voices of mediation, and act as agents of inclusion and solidarity, opposed to violent conflicts perpetuated by forces of aggressive masculinity, while at the same time divulging a sense of cosmopolitan, middle-class conformity.

Dabis engages Western audiences by focusing on the problems of racial discrimination and intolerance, encountered by Palestinian migrants in Western societies, as

well as the cross-cultural dilemmas confronted by Arab-American returnees to the Middle East. However, her narratives remain contained within the framework of "liberal pluralism" – as defined by Shohat and Stam – acknowledging modernizing tendencies and universal values of freedom, equality and sensitivity towards other, but failing to subvert the hegemonic relations of power, thereby emboldening and transforming subordinated institutions and discourses (*Unthinking Eurocentrism* 48). Dabis' opportunistic transnationalism reveals new market-orientated approaches to the aesthetics and politics of Palestinian cinema, negotiating the interests of multiple stakeholders and targeting predominantly Western arthouse, film festival and mainstream cinema audiences.

Dabis was raised in a Palestinian-Jordanian family in the American Midwest, and often reminisces about her childhood experiences within a polarizing social climate of America at the time of the Gulf War, permeated by public and media prejudices against Arabs. The filmmaker acknowledges that moving to New York, following the terrorist attacks of 11th of September 2001, she encountered an atmosphere of cosmopolitan inclusivity and openness (Frosch). These formative migrant experiences and complex cosmopolitan identities will constitute the pivotal line of enquiry in her feature films. Between 2006 and 2008, Dabis worked as a staff writer on Showtime Network's series *The L Word*, revolving around the experiences of a group of lesbians and bisexuals living in Los Angeles. While she continued to expand her industry connections, Dabis' first major breakthrough on the international scene came about when, returning to Israel-Palestine after twenty years of absence, she used a skeleton crew to produce a short film, *Itmanna*/*Make a Wish* (2007).

This minor film centers on a young Palestinian girl, Mariam (Mayar Rantissi) who lives in Ramallah and uses her resourcefulness to overcome and bypass obstacles in her mission to buy a birthday cake. Dabis positions her protagonist at the center of politically

charged environment, but the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for most of the film serves mainly as a backdrop for the ostensibly simple narrative. Surrounded by the wail of emergency vehicles, Mariam and her sister Lama (Lone Khilleh), traverse the streets of Ramallah adorned with the posters of Palestinian fighters, but the camera remains focused on her emotional journey, until the revelation at the end of the film, when the audiences learn that, celebrating her birthday, Mariam wishes to pay respects to the memory of her father. Dabis' approach brings to mind Butler's observation that the minor film aesthetics should not be seen exclusively as a strategic infiltration of the mainstream, but as an engagement with popular experiences (A Butler 21). Rather than responding to the history of the conflict, Dabis uses non-professional actors and mobile camerawork to convey a sense of emotional urgency as her character mediates the experiences of Palestinian children scarred by the occupation. Premiering at the Sundance Film Festival, *Make a Wish* was screened at Clermont-Ferrand, Aspen, Edinburgh, Dubai, and has received children film festival awards in Cairo and Chicago, as well as grants from international cultural foundations (*Make a Wish* Press Kit).

Dabis' feature film debut *Amreeka* (2009) was the first feature film financed by Image Nation Abu Dhabi FZ.[16] The film was co-produced with fourteen companies from the United States of America, the United Arab Emirates, Canada, Jordan and Kuwait, the support of Jordanian and Canadian funding bodies, as well as the Berlinale development program. This indicates Dabis' dexterity in gathering together an alliance of major-minor cultural partnerships. While it contradicts Naficy's assertion that diasporic filmmakers are largely located outside of the hegemonic modes of cinema production (*An Accented Cinema* 111), thereby revealing Dabis' opportunistic insight and market sensitivity, *Amreeka* also points to some of the compromises made by the director, by engaging with the subject of Arab-American relations in her debut feature.

Amreeka centers on a Palestinian-Christian single mother, Muna (Nisreen Faour) and her son Fadi (Melkar Muallem), who leave Ramallah to join her brother's family in Illinois. Arriving in America, they encounter prejudices against Arab immigrants, but also discover unexpected allies in their struggle for acceptance and equality. Concerned with the position of Arab migrants in America in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of the 11th of September 2001, and the invasion of Iraq, and situated within the popular cinema mainstream, *Amreeka* does not position itself against the hegemony of Hollywood. Endorsing Nagib's rejection of counter-hegemonic principles, Patricia White proposes to engage with women filmmakers' work in the circulatory mode of "flexible geographies" urging a need to "attend to gender both as a material dimension of the flows and hierarchies of world cinema and as a key to its imaginary" (19). Dabis, who cites Western directors and photographers[17] as her creative influences, began work on the screenplay while studying at Columbia University where she liaised with Toronto producer Christina Piovesan. During the early stages of production, filming in a semi-documentary mode and focusing on the diasporic subjectivity of her protagonist, Dabis was hoping to achieve a sense of immediacy, typical of films shot with light weight, mobile cameras ("Cherien Dabis"). But, the end result, a light-hearted comedy about adjusting to life in a new country, is more aligned with "liberal pluralism" and middle-class values that pervade Dabis' films which are conventionally attuned to the expectations of global mainstream audiences.

In a manner emblematic of exilic and diasporic directors, Dabis tests the descent relations with the homeland and the consent relations with the host society (Naficy, *An Accented Cinema* 12) engaging with the challenges that her minor transnational subject confronts in the process of integration. However, rather than solely espousing dissent when confronted with the distorted constructions of the other, the Palestinian woman at the center of her narrative mediates cultural differences and advocates inclusivity. Acknowledging the

formulaic representations of Arabs in Western media, Dabis expands on the analogies that bind Palestinian stories and other diasporic narratives, but also the experiences of other subaltern groups, as oppositional voices give way to moderate overtones. Exploring the challenges of migrant integration, she highlights Muna's relationship with the bank clerk (Adriana O'Neil), her gay co–worker Matt (Brodie Sanderson), and the school principal Stan Novatski (Joseph Ziegler), descended from a family of Jewish-Polish migrants, as she mediates the Palestinian sense of otherness to other subaltern groups in America.

Dabis' casting of Nisreen Faour, a Palestinian actress born and educated in the state of Israel and in the United States of America, who appeared in the films by Ali Nassar, in theatrical plays, and on Israeli television, reflects her intention to utilize the common ground between Israeli and Palestinian cinema audiences. The filmmaker's approach also involves aesthetic compromises aimed to engage American and global spectators, evident in focusing on the relationship between Muna and Mr Novatski, who begins to alleviate her fears, and becomes an intermediary between Muna and her adopted country. Symbolically reconciling Palestinians and Jews, removed from the location of their conflict, Dabis invests in the American potential to resolve conflicts globally, but does not critically engage with the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or that of the American support for Israel. Dabis' decision to accentuate moderate overtones proved to be effective, as following the film's screening at the *Quinzaine des Réalisateurs* at the Cannes International Film Festival, where it received the FIPRESCI Prize, the film continued its tour of the global festival arena. National Geographic Entertainment acquired theatrical and home entertainment rights, and *Amreeka* proceeded to screen for 24 weeks at 40 theatres in the United States of America, returning more than $2 million dollars worldwide ("*Amreeka*").

While Dabis' feature debut follows the diasporic experiences of a Palestinian woman in America, her second feature film, a Jordan-US-Qatari co-production, *May in the Summer*

(2013), places a Palestinian-American woman, May, at the center of a family reunion, examining the clash of cultures, values and beliefs within an Arab-American household. A New York-based writer May, played by the director, returns to Amman to be with her sisters Yasmine (Nadine Malouf) and Dalia (Alia Shawkat), and their born-again-Christian mother, Nadine (Hiam Abbass), in the wake of her impending nuptials. May navigates Nadine's opposition to her marriage to a Columbia University lecturer of Muslim background, Ziad (Alexander Siddig), makes attempts to reconcile with her estranged American father, Edward (Bill Pullman), and gradually accustoms to life in Amman, enjoying the night life with her sisters.

Presenting the frictions in May's cosmopolitan middle-class family, Dabis suggests that their concerns, cultural capital, and social values are different from those of the national bourgeoisie (Dwyer; Desai). Their cosmopolitan identities and liberal values are tested, putting them at odds with families and friends, and in a broader context, in conflict with Western pluralist societies and their Arab Christian family. While continuing to accentuate their middle-class conformity, Dabis suggests that, by proceeding with the wedding preparations, May's anxieties are amplified by tensions within her family. May attends family reunions and church gatherings where she rebuffs questions about her relationship status but does not probe her family's religious beliefs or their opposition to cultural hybridity. Using a light-hearted comedy mode to diffuse tensions, the director reveals the frictions separating the returnee from broader social expectations. When Nadine uses her failed marriage to caution May against cross-cultural relationships, she rejects her mother's advice: "Just because your marriage crumbled, it doesn't mean mine has to." Visiting their father, being nurtured by his Indian-American wife after a heart attack, May and her sisters jokingly critique the American policies in the region, and Dalia even rejects his job offer, but they steer away from comments about his lavish lifestyle in stark contrast to their mother's

modest apartment. At the same time, witnessing the decline of Edward's second marriage, May realizes that the efforts of her parents to mediate between different cultures have been largely unsuccessful.

While it is evident that the conflict in the region overshadows the personal dilemmas of her characters (Prigge), Dabis again diffuses the political element in her narrative, instead centering upon their individual concerns. Spending a weekend near the Dead Sea, muted by the roar of the fighter jets, Yasmine questions May's resolve to marry a Muslim, and May prompts Dalia to be open about her sexuality – to no avail. The filmmaker deflects the critique of patriarchal norms, highlighting her protagonist's middle-class conformity in response to social expectations. May's sense of disorientation intensifies when she finally decides to defy social norms, and her acquaintance with Karim, who organizes adventure tours, evolves into a romantic involvement. May's interactions with Zaid unravel upon his arrival, and her life begins to resemble that of her parents. Dabis' characters disperse while May remains in Jordan, contemplating her choices, and eventually finding her impending return to New York as unappealing as the prospects of spending more time with her family in Amman.

The decision to produce, direct and star in the film, as well as to engage an international cast, reflects Dabis' aspirations to break into the commercial mainstream. However, her attempt to present a portrait of an Arab-American diasporic woman, unable to negotiate the challenges of cross-cultural relationships, did not resound well with global audiences. Premiering at the opening night of the 2013 Sundance International Film Festival, *May in the Summer* failed to repeat the success of *Amreeka,* achieving only modest international film festival exposure and box office results.

Retrieving and Re-Imagining Lost Cultural Legacy:
Palestinian Archives and Constructing Cultural Identity and Memory

Consistent with the work of scholars in the field of Palestinian cinema, this thesis has argued that one of the pivotal tendencies in Palestinian cinema is to position the representations of national identity within the context of the creation of the state of Israel. Palestinian filmmakers have, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, begun to inquire into the Israeli policies of expropriating and denying access to archival materials dating from the pre-Nakba Palestine to the Palestinian Cinema of the Revolutionary Period. These policies have been implemented with the intention of colonizing cultural discourse, rescinding the individual and collective memories of Palestinians, and ultimately silencing their narratives of the past.

Most actualities and documentary films and footage which corroborate the indigenous status of the Palestinian population, made in the pre-Nakba period, and those produced between 1968 and the Palestinian withdrawal from Lebanon, following the Israeli invasion in 1982, have been lost.[18] Due to the scarcity of material recovered from this era, it could be argued that the minor transnational films concerned with the destruction and pillaging of the Palestinian archives are the sites of multiple inquiries. Using the medium of cinema, they provide sites for engaging with geopolitical issues, exposing policies to colonize the cultural discourse by refuting the access of subaltern groups to their heritage. They afford opportunities to connect with the past through examining the role of archives in shaping individual and collective identities and memories, thereby documenting attempts to establish, preserve and protect Palestine's cultural legacy and institutions of culture, and to retrieve and re-imagine plundered historical records. This allows Palestinian filmmakers to use the medium of cinema and processes of filmmaking to identify their cultural legacy and assert

national and cultural identity, establishing their cultural citizenship rights and claims to cultural expression.

Palestinian women filmmakers engage with lost, pillaged or existing archival records in various capacities, as artists, filmmakers, and curators, and survey specific periods of Palestine's history, uncovering continuities with their predecessors in Palestinian cultural production. Investigating the fate of looted archives reveals continuities with the legacy and work of nascent Palestinian institutions of culture, the pioneers of the Palestinian Cinema of the Revolutionary Period, and the curators and researchers of Palestinian cultural and artistic heritage. This process also reveals tensions between the national and the transnational, as the filmmakers engaged in these investigations are compelled to collaborate with the Israeli institutions, instrumental in devising and implementing the Zionist policies of denying Palestinian national identity, as well as any access to their cultural artefacts.

Azza El-Hassan was born in Jordan, spent her childhood in Lebanon, and completed her cinema education in the United Kingdom prior to returning to Palestine. Growing up in hybrid cultural environments has affected her documentary work, which is immersed in intense subjective overtones and traumatic memories of Palestine. El-Hassan's films, *Zaman al-Akhbar/News Time* (2001), and *Thalathato Cintimeteratin Akall/3cm Less* (2004) explore the production of individual and collective memories and the role of visual imagery in constructing, preserving and retrieving the narratives of the past, in addition to endeavors to understand their meaning and open up new avenues for alternative accounts of Palestinian history. El-Hassan places specific emphasis on the political value of her transnationally produced narratives, scrutinizing the processes of articulating the sense of national and cultural belonging, identifying continuities with Palestinian filmmakers of the past, and reflecting on her position as a women filmmaker participating in these processes.

In her feature documentary film, *News Time,* set during the Second Intifada, El-Hassan searches for a production crew in Ramallah, but discovers that most of her colleagues are attached to international news crews: "This is not time to be doing films. This is news time." The world's intense, yet largely superfluous obsession with the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is, in El-Hassan's view, frequently reduced to documenting atrocities, without engaging with the root cause of the conflict: "In this country, we all get filmed. Cameras are running all the time, recording every move we make." Continuing the tradition of Palestinian documentary cinema, El-Hassan uses the medium of film to alert global audiences to the situation in Israel-Palestine, the problem of refugees and the suppressed narratives of the past, and highlights the positions of her subjects drawing special emphasis on the processes of filmmaking (Siepen). Recalling the formative event in her childhood – the Israeli invasion of Lebanon – El-Hassan centers on the lives of four teenagers who roam the streets of Ramallah, as her film enquires into how violence permeates the lives of Palestinians, documenting their testimonies about events during the uprising. Engaging with Palestinian subaltern identities, the filmmaker destabilizes and subverts hegemonic media coverage and refutes such relations of power, creating an alternative narrative and enacting a cinematic re-claiming of Palestine.

Retrieving memories and giving them new meaning constitutes the central line of El-Hassan's film, *3 cm Less*. Her documentary journey takes the form of investigating what constitutes one's memories of the past. She begins by filming the teenagers on the streets of Ramallah and reflecting on the role of visual images in constructing the memories of the past: "My camera will soon, when these children are a bit older, become the way to see themselves and organize their world." El-Hassan follows Ra'eda, whose father, Ali Taha, kidnapped Sabena Flight set off from Vienna towards Tel Aviv, planning to swap the passengers for the release of Palestinian political prisoners. Ali Taha was killed by the Israeli commandos who

stormed the aircraft. Recalling her feelings of abandonment, Ra'eda, convinced that the camera can help her talk to the dead, asks for El-Hassan's help in locating the people who knew her father, in an attempt to understand this defining event of her childhood. Samia, Surida and Sarah recall their mother Hagar's journey from Colombia to Palestine with ten of her children and the body of their father and husband who was killed during the incident. Hagar resisted the attempts by Israeli authorities to block her repatriation and continued her struggle to return to her property for eleven years, but her daughters, in their interviews with El-Hassan, accuse her of neglectful parenting.

Deborah Shaw observes that, while films may not be able to provide access to the truth of a nation, they can reveal discursive and mythical constructions of national identities ("Deconstructing and Reconstructing" 65). Both Ali Taha and Hagar acquired legendary status within the Palestinian community because of their resistance to the Israeli occupation. El-Hassan's attempts to retrieve memories and reconcile parents with their children disrupt the official accounts of resistance, subverting the mythical assumptions of national homogeneity. The director's voice-over centers on the role of the documentary filmmaker in mediating these differences, questioning the motives and the true nature of her characters' reminiscences of past events. El-Hassan arranges a meeting with the last surviving member of the Black September group, Teresa Halsa, but her reassurances about Ali Taha's revolutionary ideals only exacerbate Ra'eda's unease. In a manner typical of Palestinian documentary-makers, El-Hassan makes an attempt to re-articulate the narratives of the past and engages the Israeli-Palestinian actor, Juliano Mer-Khamis, to speak to Ra'eda, pretending he knew her father, but this attempt proves to be as unstable as the memories of her subject. On the other hand, deconstructing the memories of loss and abandonment and disrupting the narratives of two iconic figures within the Palestinian community, El Hassan's documentary journey is reterritorialized in the context of the Israeli occupation. At one point, she films the

projection rooms and theatre interiors of the Ramallah cinema, ransacked by the Israeli forces. Dissecting the efforts to colonize and erase the Palestinian cultural legacy permeates El-Hassan's work as a documentary-maker, engaged in a quest to unearth alternative accounts of the past, and to identify continuities within Palestinian cultural expression which will re-surface as the central themes of her next documentary film.

Co-produced by ARTE, BBC, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Ma.Ja.De. Filmproduktions and Yamama Creative House, El-Hassan's documentary road movie *Kings and Extras* (2006) follows her investigation into the fate of the missing Palestinian film archives. The filmmaker travels through Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, searching for Palestinian films produced between 1968 and 1982, and subsequently looted, following the Israeli invasion of Beirut. El-Hassan's inquiry corroborates Butler's theorization of the distinct nature of women's filmmaking which is anchored in the positioning of women in contemporary culture. Merging her postcolonial and feminist concerns, El-Hassan positions herself as a woman filmmaker mediating between the Palestinian Cinema of the Revolutionary Period and the Palestinian film production of the present-day era. The director reverses the gender stereotypes that have typified the films and institutions of culture in this period, when the task of archiving and conserving cultural heritage was largely reserved for male-dominated political and cultural elites.

El-Hassan's journey is prompted by the idea that the filmmakers of the Palestinian Cinema of the Revolutionary Period were driven by modernizing endeavors and wanted to document how history changed their lives and communities, convinced by the power of cinema to construct our cultural identity and memory. Her quest for pilfered archives begins with investigating an omnipresent sense of loss, which pervades Palestinian art, cinema and public discourse. Most interviewees associate their sense of loss with something personal, and not the collective memories of Palestinians documented on film. A Palestinian woman

interviewed in Beirut points out that it is not the time to think about cinema – a motif persistently reinforced in El-Hassan's films – believing that present concerns should take precedence over inquiries into the past: "If you want drama, go to the checkpoint." However, in El-Hassan's film, the inquiry into the looting of the Palestinian film archives and denying access to cultural heritage, are seen as part of the policies of erasure and colonizing Palestinian cultural space, as well as a constitutive element of the settler colonial project.

El-Hassan's journey across the region evolves into an inquiry into how pillaging the nation's heritage was intended to disconnect Palestinians from the land, from its history and from its culture. Recognizing that Palestinians may be the most photographed people in the world, the filmmaker observes that the Israeli authorities have often denied them access to their own memories and their own image and celebrates the legacy of the pioneers of Palestinian cinema. El-Hassan interviews her friend Hiba, the daughter of the militant Palestinian filmmaker, Hany Jawhariyya, and inspects the last images he filmed prior to his death. She re-visits the sites appearing in his documentary films, expanding on the interweaving of filmmaking, activism and violence in Palestinian revolutionary cinema (Yaqub, *Palestinian Cinema* 206-207; Farhat).

Identifying continuities with her predecessors in Palestinian cinema, El-Hassan places emphasis on the political value of their work and singles out their preoccupation with Israeli rule, human rights and the necessity for change in Palestinian society. Searching for the lost film archives, she revisits the sites of the PLO offices and the Palestinian Film Unit in Beirut, and interviews Mustafa Abu-Ali, Khadiyeh Habasheh and others who reminisce about the fascination of exiles with the power of the visual image to evoke a sense of national identity and cultural memory. Habasheh points out that the refugees who used to see themselves as powerless were, by attending the screenings of documentary films, absorbed by the ethos of

the Palestinian liberation movement. “This gave them power and a sense of identity,” she observes.

Similar to her previous films, El-Hassan makes attempts to intervene in partially retrieved memories of the past by bridging gaps and discontinuities within Palestinian narratives of trauma and dispossession. Discussing the fate of the missing archives, some of the surviving members of the Unit speculate that they could have disappeared in fire, while others believe they were looted by Israelis, Lebanese, or Syrians, or taken by one of the Palestinian factions withdrawing from Beirut. El-Hassan is persuaded by Kais Al-Zubaidi to visit the Martyr’s Graveyard in Beirut where the archive could have been temporarily buried and forgotten, but her investigation remains unsolved.

El-Hassan completes her journey developing a film given to her in Syria by a veteran Palestinian cameraman, that had been stored in his camera for twenty-two years. And while she discovers nothing more but faded images, the tone of *Kings and Extras* is neither pessimistic nor nostalgic, as the filmmaker expresses defiance and refusal to abandon collective memories (Geyer). Documenting the attempts to recover the lost Palestinian film archives, El-Hassan re-confirms the transformational power of cinema which, akin to the acts of political resistance, provides insight into the processes disrupted by loss, occupation and exile, and asserts Palestine’s sense of cultural identity and its struggle for justice, equality and human rights.

El-Hassan is the curator of *The Void Project*, established in 2019, with the aim of exploring the consequences of the Israeli looting and destruction of Palestinian visual archives and visual narratives. The act of looting, according to El-Hassan, triggers the processes of recreating, salvaging and preserving visual archives, and filling in the void, generated by the abduction and destruction of Palestine’s cultural legacy. The project consists of three sections, *Hidden*, *Archive Fever* and *Pep Archive*, tracing the journeys of people who

protect and salvage photographs and films in war times, find, identify and restore Palestinian films, with emphasis on films by women filmmakers - and rearrange, change and fictionalize the archives, in order to process the events and reach some form of closure (*"The Void Project"*).

With the increased profile of curated screenings of Palestinian cinema in the West, awareness began to grow amongst non-Palestinian women filmmakers about the fate of the lost film archives, and questions started to emerge about what kind of stories these records could present to the world. Borrowing its title from Jacir's article, British filmmaker Sarah Wood's short film *For Cultural Purposes Only* (2009) revives the narratives of the Palestinian film archive.[19] Commissioned as part of Animate Projects for Channel 4, and in association with Arts Council England, the film combines the Palestinian filmmakers' reminiscences of lost films with illustrations by Woodrow Phoenix.[20] Wood's polycentric approach, typified by a multiplicity of intersecting cultural locations and departure-points, is anchored in investigating the crucial question about Palestinian access to their cultural history: "What would it feel like to never see an image of the place that you came from?" The end-result is an evocative film about re-imagining lost material from the Palestinian film archives, reflecting upon connections between visual image and cultural identity, and subverting the colonization of cultural discourse and formulaic representations of the other in Western cinema.

According to Ilan Pappé, Israeli historians have, since the 1980s, discovered that researching in the national archives can alter their views on the state's foundational mythologies (*The Idea* 180). Israeli archivist Rona Sela's documentary film *Looted and Hiden* (2017) explores the fate of The Palestine Research Center, the Palestinian Cinema Institution (PCI) and the Cultural Arts Center (CAS) of the PLO and the materials confiscated by Israeli troops, buried in the Israeli Defense Forces and the Defense

Establishment Archive. Sela departs from the premise that the early images of Jews in Palestine were aimed at consolidating Zionist mythologies of settler-colonialism.[21] She journeys through space and time between Tel Aviv, Beirut, Amman and Fassuta, reconstructing the contents of the Palestinian film archives and anatomizes the methods of control over the confiscated cultural legacy.[22] Sela interviews Sabri Jiryis, the last Director of the PLO Research Center in Beirut 1976-1982, and corresponds with Khadiyeh Habasheh, probing the Palestinian Revolutionary Cinema's endeavors to document the history of trauma, exile and resistance. She alerts the audience to the repercussions of looting Palestine's cultural heritage, revealing how the legacies of 1948 and 1967 are woven into Israeli and Palestinian lives and how Zionism is inseparably bound to, and haunted by, a Palestinian identity which it seeks to negate.[23]

Engaging with archival material to probe into the complexities of Palestinian cultural heritage takes new formal and experimental approaches in Jumana Manna's short and documentary films, immersed in the contested directions of Palestinian modernity. A Palestinian citizen of Israel, Manna grew up in East Jerusalem, and continued her education in the United States of America and Norway, producing short, experimental and documentary films that continually demonstrate the immersion of her subjects within a hybrid and cosmopolitan cultural climate. Her short experimental film, *A Sketch of Manners (Alfred Roch's Last Masquerade)* (2012), produced with the support of the A. M. Qattan Foundation and BilledKusternes Vederlagsfond, Oslo, re–creates the masquerades hosted by the Jaffa merchant, Alfred Roch. A member of the Palestinian National League, he was one of five participants in the Arab delegation at the 1939 London Conference concerning the future of Palestine, organized at a time of high tension, when Palestine's political leaders had been imprisoned, and in exile. During the day, Roch discussed the future of Palestine at the end of

the colonial mandate, and at night he attended parties. Upon his return, he attempted to recreate London gatherings in his villa.

Prompted by an archival photograph of a Jerusalem masked ball, held in 1942, Manna combines the materials from the Eric and Edith Matson's Photographic Collection at the Library of Congress with video footage and voice-over narration. Re-purposing the popular photographic form of the era, she creates a *tableau vivant*, a living image of the costumed Palestinian middle-class, engaged in theatrical playfulness at Roch's masquerade. In the manner of minor aesthetics, Manna uses an anecdotal event to construct a counter-narrative and produce a prelapsarian moment, anticipating the Nakba (Fisher). Amidst the radio news about the German offensives in Europe, the masquerade carries on in a bohemian, but somewhat foreboding atmosphere, transgressing traditional norms and established gender roles, with the guests mimicking European modernity in static poses, surrounded by Arabic translations of classics of Western literature, but unprepared for the events that will mark the irrevocable destruction of Palestine.

Manna's documentary film, *A Magical Substance Flows Into Me* (2015), continues her inquiry into the events relevant to the rise of Palestinian modernity. The film is presented through a series of encounters with the descendants of the residents of colonial Palestine, who were interviewed by Robert Lachmann, a Jewish-German ethnomusicologist, linguist and orientalist. Lachmann moved to Palestine in 1935, following the rise to power of Nazism. He began to run a radio show, "Oriental Music," broadcast from Jerusalem by the Palestine Broadcasting Service, featuring his research into the musical traditions of Palestine. Manna discovered references to Lachmann's research in the writings of Palestinian oud player, composer, poet and chronicler, Wasif Jawhariyyeh, *The Storyteller of Jerusalem,* which documents social changes and cultural interactions amongst the citizens of Jerusalem in the early periods of the twentieth century.[24] Jawhariyyeh and Lachmann debated the current state

and future directions of Arabic music, and the introduction of European systems of notation and musical instruments into Arabic music culture. According to Manna, their debate reflects some of the impasses of Palestinian modernity, exhibiting differences in their understandings of cultural production and heritage.[25] They expose tensions between cultural exclusivity and hybridity, separating the competing projections of future Palestine. Jawhariyyeh believed that dynamic hybrid forces shaped the cultures of Palestine, while Lachmann opposed the ideas of mixing musical styles and traditions. Showing her respect for Lachmann's research and documenting of Arabic music heritage, Manna has maintained a critical relationship with the scholar and the knowledge-power context within which he operated, recognizing that he was part of the "system that erased Palestine" ("A Magical Substance").

Manna invited Yemenite and Moroccan Jews, some of whom did not feature in the original recordings, Bedouins, largely disconnected from their heritage, Copts, and others, to participate in the film, presenting a plentitude of hybrid and interconnected musical traditions and influences in pre-Nakba Palestine. Lachmann's musicians were mainly situated in Jerusalem, but Manna decides against gathering them in one space and records her subjects in their houses across the country, implying that in present-day Israel-Palestine, segregated along ethnic lines, that space is irrevocably lost ("A Magical Substance"). Some musical traditions of Palestine, like the religious chants of its inhabitants of various denominations, have remained intact through centuries, confirming the value of Lachmann's research. It is also apparent that secular traditions have undergone salient transformations, due to hybrid influences that were heralded by Jawhariyyeh. Similar to the other filmmakers concerned with retrieving cultural history, Manna examines the role of the archive in producing cultural identity and memory, but exposes the contesting influences on Palestinian modernity, anticipating the debates that will affect the future of hybrid and multiethnic culture that characterized pre-Nakba Palestine.

What Palestine Awaits?

The New Palestinian Narratives of Return

Throughout this thesis, it has been reiterated that the narratives of return represent one of the most salient and consistent motifs in Palestinian cinema. Stemming from the corollary of loss, dispossession and exile, and immersed in the histories of suffering, these films have, over the past half-century, differed in their approach to re-visiting and reclaiming the occupied space of Palestine. Produced by filmmakers espousing modernizing principles, cosmopolitan identities and opportunist initiative, the new narratives of return share key concerns that have featured throughout the history of Palestinian cinema since its inception. Framed by the geopolitical conflicts and internal tensions affecting Palestinian communities, these films reiterate the importance of ending the occupation, and of reaching a just and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that will enable the return of Palestinian refugees.

What sets these films apart is that, situated in an unstable social climate, they embrace the idea of a hybrid and polycentric cultural space in which Palestinian women filmmakers balance their oppositional principles with their post-feminist and market concerns. The two directors, Najwa Najjar and Annemarie Jacir, whose early films revolved around female subjectivities, turn their attention to the embittered figure of the male returnee in their recent works. These filmmakers reiterate that the unified space that had dominated the national imaginary since the creation of the state of Israel is a projection of the past which is impossible to attain or retrieve. They locate their narratives of return in the Palestinian-controlled West Bank and in the city of Nazareth, in the state of Israel. Focusing in on their characters in the present, these filmmakers converge on events that are largely removed from the central arenas of the conflict, and in addressing the realities on the ground, still concentrate on new forms of Palestinian subjectivity under occupation.

Continuing to produce their feature films with some regularity, both Najjar and Jacir exemplify the advent of modernizing tendencies in Palestinian cinema at the start of the twenty-first century, in which women filmmakers take an increasingly prominent role, as well as their capacity to engage transnational investors and source support for their projects. At the same time, they also highlight the difficulties encountered by women filmmakers and their perennial under-representation within the global film industry:

> In Arab film festivals, more than half the films are made by women directors. But in Cannes, Venice and Berlin, women are never adequately represented. Women almost always don't make a second feature film. Every single time I want to make a new film, I start from zero (Jacir, qtd. in Khan).

Cognizant of the emerging audiences in the global film festival and commercial arena, these filmmakers use new narrative approaches and follow the journeys of Palestinian returnees separated from their families, obsessed by memories of the old country, but still united by their hopes of return. Maintaining a sense of political immediacy, their narratives present themselves as inward-looking, divulging the traumas of coming to terms with the permanence of the Israeli occupation, as piecing together Palestine's fragmented past, their subjects learn to live within its dismal, disconnected realities, and speculate upon its uncertain future.

Najwa Najjar's *Eyes of a Thief* (2014) was shot in Bethlehem and Nablus on a budget of US$ 1.2 million dollars and co-produced by a transnational partnership of production companies, government organizations, and television channels from Algiers, Iceland, France, Germany and Jordan, as well as film festival funds and funding bodies from the United States of America and the Gulf states.[26] Operating in a highly competitive transnational climate, Najjar demonstrates her ability to maintain partnerships with the institutions that have

continually backed her work and generates new sources of financial support for her projects which engage with sensitive political themes.

Imprisoned for ten years following a shooting incident,[27] Tarek (Khaled Abol Naga), a water engineer from Sebastia, returns to his hometown, and discovers that his wife was killed and that his daughter has disappeared in the chaos of the Second Intifada. Arriving in Nablus, he begins to work for a property developer, Adel (Suheil Haddad), and meets Lila (Souad Massi), the owner of a small textile store, who takes care of an orphan girl, Malak (Malak Ermili). Lila is expected to marry Adel, who uses his connections with the Israelis to promote his business interests. Tarek suspects that Malek could be his missing daughter, and also uncovers that colluding with the Israelis, Adel diverts water from local Palestinian communities.

Najjar articulates a novel approach vis-a-vis the motif of return, centering on the attempts of the former prisoner to come to terms with his past, sense of dislocation, and inability to adjust to life in present-day Palestine. Recommencing life in the West Bank enclave does not involve the rituals of return, the reclaiming of land, property or personal artefacts, the confirming of historical and cultural memory, or engaging in conflicts or bureaucratic procedures to reclaim Tarek's citizenship rights in Palestine. While resuming his life in the territory under Palestinian control, Tarek is involved in reconnecting with his daughter and re-composing his life. His problems are analogous to those faced by exiled Palestinians returning to their fragmented homeland, trying to connect with their dispersed families, and attempting to make sense of their traumatic pasts. The film does not sideline the centrality of Israeli occupation in Palestinian lives. It uses the opening scenes to situate the narrative in the context of violence and human rights violations during the Second Intifada, and employs flashback revelations to dramatize Tarek's assault on the Israeli troops. Nevertheless, it places prominence on the Palestine that awaits, ridden with political and

environmental problems, violence, poverty and corruption, obsessed with the past, and devoid of prospects for a future.

Adel's collaboration with the Israeli authorities is presented in contrast with his social standing, his support for ailing children, and for Lila's business, which employs Palestinian women, making him a powerful figure in the local community. Najjar's film suggests that the only way to survive in the Palestinian enclaves is to acquiesce to the male figures of prominence aligned with the interests of the Israeli authorities. In the closing scenes, Tarek exposes a corrupt business scheme, interrupts Adel's and Lila's wedding, and reconnects with his daughter. However, this symbolic victory fails to address the systemic problems in Palestinian society, the exploitation and discrimination of women, children and refugees, thus reconfirming the impossibility of returning to his occupied homeland, devoid of political, social and economic stability.

Casting the Egyptian star, Khaled Abol Naga, renowned for his human rights activism as a UNICEF ambassador for children rights and water rights, and the Franco-Algerian singer-songwriter, Souad Massi, who also composed three songs for the film, Najjar accentuated the narrative's political element, in an attempt to connect with regional audiences. *Eyes of a Thief* premiered in Ramallah's Cultural Palace and was screened at the Rio de Janeiro, Kolkata and Cairo international film festivals scooping the main festival awards (Ritman). In spite of the reluctance of European film festival programmers, and criticism in the American press,[28] addittional theatres were required at the Palm Springs International Film Festival to accommodate those who wanted to see the film (Nusair "On Palestinian Cinema"). And while Najjar's second feature film did not receive wider theatrical distribution, her critique of political and economic elites, the environmental crisis and political corruption may point in the direction of how Palestinian filmmakers might engage with the motif of return in the future.

Annemarie Jacir's third feature, *Wajib* (2017), a Palestinian-Qatari-UAE-Swiss-Norwegian-Columbian co-production was made through a transnational alliance of production companies[29] and globally distributed by Pyramide International, Paris. The film is set in Nazareth over the span of one day and presented in the form of a road-movie. *Wajib* revolves around the reunion between Shadi (Saleh Bakri), an architect, who returns from Rome, and his father Abu Shadi (Mohammed Bakri), a teacher in his sixties, who deliver the invitations to their sister's and daughter's wedding, while trying to heal their own strained relationship. Unlike her previous films, situated in the occupied West Bank, *Wajib* is located in Nazareth, with its silent Palestinian majority, making Jacir's choice of location central to understanding the contexts of her film (Uzal). While Jacir reasserts the imperatives of resolving the problem of the occupation, she approaches the motif of return by focusing on the tensions between father and son and their ostensibly irreconcilable positions. Abu Shadi's solemn acceptance of the conflict's realities on the ground, and Shadi's disapproval of the society he considers his home, expose the tensions between the Palestinians who remain in the state of Israel and those who decided to leave it. Abu Shadi is frustrated by the protracted occupation and disillusioned with the Palestinian leadership, but his loyalty to the land and its people remains unchallenged, and he shows good will toward the Israelis. Stubbornly keeping with his family traditions and continuing to smoke in spite of his doctor's advice, he prolongs his feud with his former wife who abandoned the family and continued her life abroad. Shadi sees his father's perceived conformity, and the dilapidated streets of local Arab municipalities as signs of decline in a society that has rejected modernization. At the same time, he struggles to reconcile his cosmopolitan outlook and his condescending views of a privileged outsider, living a comfortable life in Italy and courting the daughter of the PLO dignitary, with his faith in Palestine and his longing for return. Jacir's drama with elements of comedy abounds with introspective moments, and ends with conciliatory gestures, as both

father and son begin to use their reunion as an opportunity to learn about each another and the realities of Palestine.

The film's success within the film festival and commercial arena corroborates White's ideas about the position of women in the transformation of world cinema, highlighting the position of Palestinian women filmmakers in speaking for Palestine and Palestinians, but also in their partaking in the global struggle for equality within the film industry. Jacir received post-production funding from the Doha Film Institute in the year 2017 when more than eighty percent of their grants were awarded to projects from the Arab world and over fifty percent to women directors (Vivarelli "More Than Half"). Awarded the Best Fiction Film at the 2017 Dubai International Film Festival, *Wajib* was also screened at film festivals in Locarno and Rotterdam, distributed in Italy and Spain, and released in forty-six cinemas across France, demonstrating Jacir's presence within commercial mainstream cinema.

The Cannes International Film Festival premiere of Jacir's 2008 feature debut coincided with the 60th anniversary of the Nakba, and the filmmaker used that opportunity to wrap a *keffiyeh* around the neck of the film festival's director, Thierry Fremaux – an image that quickly disappeared from the media the following day (Jacir "Cannes ya"). Ten years later, invited back as a juror in the *Un Certain Regard* program, Jacir arrived at Cannes following a spiral of violence in the region. Her participation underscored the anti-hegemonic stance of Palestinian filmmakers, protesting against the conflict in the Gaza Strip, and celebrating the opening of the first Palestinian pavilion at the Cannes film festival. Jacir's appearance also acknowledged the position of Palestinian women filmmakers at the forefront of a global struggle for equality, and their support for women across different sections of the film industry, from Hollywood studios to small production companies in Palestinian territories. It furthermore coincided with the protest of eighty-two prominent women filmmakers, who took to the Cannes International Film Festival's red carpet to demonstrate

for equal work and pay, using the sum of female directors who have ever had their films invited to the Cannes' official selection as a symbolic number in their protest.

Palestinian women filmmakers have been using different formal and innovative approaches to articulate their narratives of return. Produced by Collage productions and Filmlab Palestine,[30] Dima Abu Ghoush's *Emwas* (2016) centers on the processes of reconstructing the model of a Palestinian village destroyed in 1967, based on the testimonies of its former residents. Hjort associates the Filmlab Palestine's mission of transnational talent development with her concept of "ontological transnationalism" ("Crossing Borders" 149) underlining the organization's aims to revitalize the cinema culture within Palestine and to enhance transnational solidarity as the pivotal constituents of their program ("The Ontological Transnationalism" 60, 62). In Abu Ghoush's film, the former residents of Emwas, displaced in Ramallah and in Jordan, testify to the cleansing of the area of its Arab population and various attempts made to return to their village. The screening of *Emwas* in Amman is seen as an event of transnational solidarity, as the refugees, joined by Abu Ghoush, approach the map of the village and mark the locations of their homes, symbolically reclaiming the occupied land. Acknowledging that they may never be allowed to return to their village, the exiles and their children use the model of Emwas as a token of their emotional relationships with their place of origin, vowing they will not ever renounce or forget it.

Palestinian women filmmakers are also prompted to employ modern communication technologies, which have long been seen to play a major role in the settler-colonial framework of the Israeli state (Kensicki 9) in their narratives of return. In her short film, *Your Father was Born a 100 Years Old, and So Was the Nakba* (2017), the Lebanese-Palestinian-Canadian filmmaker, Razan AlSalah[31] uses Google Streetview – the only way she can return to Palestine today – to follow her grandmother Oum Amin's virtual ghost, traversing the

streets of her hometown of Haifa, and thereby construct a poetic evocation of return. AlSalah re-purposes communication technologies to connect with her deceased exilic grandmother, a woman from a different era, with pre-feminist sensibilities. The filmmaker reconstructs a world beyond the dominant historical narratives and spatio-temporal limitations, separating the present from the past, and repositions it within a contemporary and decentered cultural context. While the immersion in virtual worlds allows for merging identities, crossing boundaries, and scrambling with time, engaging with exilic histories 'beyond the grave' AlSalah reiterates that, in traversing generations, the exiles' dream of reclaiming their land remains the pivotal motif, dominating the Palestinian narratives of return.

Conclusion

Focusing on four important thematic concerns in the works of present-day Palestinian women filmmakers, this chapter draws on the concurrently revealed facets of modernizing, cosmopolitan and opportunistic transnationalism, interweaving this approach with Patricia White's theorization of women's cinema as world cinema. Films by Palestinian women filmmakers are discussed, highlighting their feminist and oppositional concerns, underlining their circulatory and market sensitivities, and their appropriation of the aesthetics of a minor cinema. These filmmakers operate in profoundly altered transnational conditions at the start of the twenty-first century and converge between Western and Palestinian cultural contexts, engaging with the experiences of loss, dispossession, occupation, exile and the right to return, thus expanding their narrative and stylistic diversity, and continuing to demonstrate their political commitment.

One of the prominent elements in these films is the positioning of women directors at the forefront of emancipatory and transformative tendencies within Palestinian cinema, forging the processes of modernization, highlighting their cosmopolitan disposition and

opportunist dexterity. In her early documentary films, Najwa Najjar delves into the history of pre-Nakba Palestine, and probes the social habits and transcultural dynamics of the Palestinian urban middle class, interrupted by the formation of the state of Israel. In her feature film debut, Najjar continues to explore emancipatory processes and scrutinizes the established gender roles and limitations imposed on Palestinian women during the Second Intifada. The early short and feature films by Annemarie Jacir establish the gendered framing of Palestinian narratives of return as one of the recurring tropes in her *oeuvre*. Jacir's films focus on cosmopolitan and exilic female subjectivities, merge oppositional and circulatory principles, and invite cinema spectators to partake in immersive journeys of return. The director continues to probe emancipatory and transformational processes within Palestinian society, paying homage to the progressive principles of the Palestinian revolution and highlighting the role of women in the struggle for national liberation that has influenced international movements against colonialism, exploitation and gender inequality.

Operating within the arena of commercial mainstream cinema, Palestinian director Cherien Dabis focuses on female subjectivities in diasporic contexts as the voices of mediation, inclusivity and conformity. Using her transnational connections and opportunistic resourcefulness, Dabis makes aesthetic compromises and negotiates the political and economic interests of various stakeholders to secure support for her films. Informed by her cosmopolitan allegiances, and targeting predominantly Western audiences, her feature film debut advocates pluralistic values and diffuses oppositional concerns, centering on a Palestinian woman's attempts to rebuild her life within a diasporic context and mediate Palestinian otherness by acting as a voice of inclusivity. Dabis' second film follows an Arab-American returnee to Jordan, who is a successful professional, espousing cosmopolitan principles and middle-class conformity, someone who finds it difficult to navigate her

transcultural relationships, and divided loyalties between a pluralistic Western society where she resides, and her commitments to her family and cultural background.

Retrieving and re-imagining the lost Palestinian film archives has been the subject of short, documentary and experimental films by Palestinian women filmmakers, probing the role of the archive in constructing cultural identity and memory. These filmmakers draw on the multiplicity of sources ranging from the pre-Nakba visual materials to the Palestinian Cinema of the Revolutionary Period, and examine the representations of Palestine and Palestinians, as well as various policies to control the access of Palestinians to their cultural heritage. Azza El-Hassan locates her investigation of the disappeared Palestinian film archives within the context of exploring the production of individual and collective memories, examining the role of images in creating, conserving, and retrieving the narratives of the past, understanding their meaning, and opening up new possibilities for alternative accounts of Palestinian history. She situates the legacy of those Palestinian filmmakers who have documented the historical events of the revolutionary period within the context of political struggle to claim their national identity and cultural difference. El-Hassan also identifies interconnections between the works of those Palestinian documentarists and her work as a filmmaker, contributing to Palestinian cultural production by establishing her cultural citizenship and protecting her cultural heritage. Appropriating archival material from the pre-Nakba period, Jumana Manna delves into the contested spaces of Palestinian modernity, recreating the Arab middle class' masquerades and evoking the mimicry of European social norms and cultural values. Coinciding with global geopolitical turmoil and negotiations about the ending of the colonial mandate, these parties exude an atmosphere of joviality, but also herald the disintegration of Palestine and the demise of the Arab middle class. Manna continues to enquire into the divergent perspectives of documenting and preserving Palestinian cultural legacy, researching the heritage of ethnomusicologists and

composers from Jewish and Palestinian backgrounds, and observes their debates anticipating the divisions between ethnocentric and hybrid approaches to cultural production. The filmmaker re-visits the cultural legacy of the era and recreates the musical forms that have been either extinct or neglected, reminding the audiences that the hybrid space of multiethnic Palestine has been irretrievably lost, only to be substituted by the ideology of ethnic purity and cultural essentialism.

Endorsing the concept of relational and polycentric cultural space, the new narratives of return balance post-feminist concerns and counter-hegemonic tendencies in Palestinian women's cinema as a world cinema. Najwa Najjar and Annemarie Jacir, whose early films enquired into the emancipatory and transformational vectors in Palestinian society and centered on the position of Palestinian women, re-direct their attention to the journeys of male returnees, framed by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and tensions pervading Palestinian society. Refuting the idea of a unified national space, and investigating Palestinian subjectivity under occupation, Najjar and Jacir situate their films in locations seemingly removed from the main sites of conflict, devoid of Palestinian rituals of return or confrontations with colonial authorities. In Najjar's film, set in the West Bank city of Nablus, the returned prisoner is trying to re-connect with his family and come to terms with his past, confronting the political corruption and violence in territories under Palestinian control. Jacir's diasporic returnee is stranded between his comfortable life abroad, his contempt for a society resisting modernization, and his desire to mend the differences with his father. Retaining a sense of political engagement, these women directors scrutinize the dislocation and dispersal of Palestinian lives and the effects of protracted occupation upon the gloomy, fragmented realities of life in Israel-Palestine, but while their subjects confront the bleak prospects for the future, they still believe in the possibility of returning to Palestine. Attuned to the new responsiveness of Palestinian and global audiences in the commercial and film

festival sphere, these filmmakers use their initiative to create transnational cultural partnerships to support their films, taking an increasingly prominent role in Palestinian cinema while actively participating in the struggle of women filmmakers for better conditions and visibility within the film industry, worldwide.

Finally, positioning this analysis within the framework of women's cinema as world cinema, it is important to reiterate that situating women directors in the context of narratives of occupied Palestine is not limited to Palestinian women filmmakers. Speaking to and for Palestine and Palestinians in their short, documentary and animation films, non-Palestinian women filmmakers from the United States of America, Europe, Canada, Australia, and the Middle East balance their polycentric and feminist approaches with postcolonial perspectives, maintaining a stylistic diversity and a sense of political engagement in their narratives. Producing their films in Israel and the territories under Palestinian control, they have developed transnational networks with production companies, funding bodies and film festivals, and have formed creative alliances with other filmmakers.[32]

While the presence of Palestinian women directors on the international film festival circuit has in recent years become more visible, they still infrequently produce films exclusively focusing on the experiences of Palestinian women,[33] and local film festivals in Israel-Palestine, screening their work are exceptionally rare.[34] Palestinian film festivals around the world have, in recent years, generated more opportunities for Palestinian and non-Palestinian women directors, to screen their works and raise awareness about the position of Palestinian women in Israel-Palestine and in exile. These film festivals afford opportunities to liaise with exilic and diasporic communities, researchers and activists, and acquaint transnational cinema audiences with the work of one of the most prolific groups of women-filmmakers in the Arab world and beyond, and enhance their contribution to the global movement for equality in the film and media industries.

Endnotes

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[1] On gender inequalities in the film industry, see Deborah Helen Jones and Judith K. Pringle, "Unimaginable Inequalities: Sexism in the Film Industry." On engaging feminist film studies and contemporary authorship, see Yvonne Tasker, "Vision and Visibility: Women Filmmakers, Contemporary Authorship, and Feminist Film studies."

[2] For the purposes of this discussion, I draw on the research of Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker who describe postfeminism as a "culture [that] works in part to incorporate, assume, or naturalize aspects of feminism; crucially it also works to commodify feminism via the figure of woman as empowered consumer" (*Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture* 2).

[3] As Alison Butler points out, in *Women's Cinema: The Contested Screen*: "Women's cinema is a notoriously difficult concept to define. It suggests, without clarity, films that might be made by, addressed to, or concerned with women, or all three. It is neither a genre nor a movement in film history, it has no single lineage of its own, no national boundaries, no filmic or aesthetic specificity, but traverses and negotiates cinematic and cultural traditions and critical and political debates (1).

[4] Shohat and Stam propose the relational and radical concept of "polycentric multiculturalism," defining it as a globalizing multiculturalism with many dynamic cultural locations and vantage points and providing a list of seven points of difference between this concept and the superseded concept of liberal pluralism (*Unthinking Eurocentrism* 48-49).

[5] Paul Grainge, Mark Jancovich and Sharon Monteith in "Radicalism, Revolution and Counter Cinema" position counter cinema in a period of globally intensifying alternative filmmaking in the second half of the 1960s, along with the growth of dynamic and mutually instigating tendencies in left-leaning radicalism across Europe and the United States and

Third World revolutionary movements. This radicalism was manifested through an interest in realism and documentary, aimed at politically engaging the audiences, and through an interest in avantgarde ideas intended to challenge the perceptions of spectators by subverting the ideological postulates of cinema, itself (*Film Histories: An Introduction and Reader*).

[6] ZDF/ARTE contributed approximately twenty percent of Najjar's debut film's budget (Najjar, qtd. in Nusair "On Palestinian Cinema").

[7] French-born Palestinian-Egyptian Al Masri debuted in Nadine Labaki's female-centered Lebanese romantic comedy *Caramel* (2007), introducing Arab audiences to LGBT themes. *Caramel* became one of the most commercially successful films in the Arabic language, making over US $14 million dollars internationally ("*Caramel*"). Ali Suliman had a leading role in Abu-Assad's *Paradise Now*, and in the year when *Pomegranates and Myrrh* was released, appeared in Israeli director Eran Riklis' *Lemon Tree*.

[8] *Pomegranates and Myrrh* won awards at Amiens, San Sebastian, Dubai, Doha, Muscat, Rabat as well as at other international film festivals.

[9] The *Dreams of a Nation* program was initiated by Edward W. Said and Zeyneb Asterabadi at Columbia University in the 1990s. In 2003, Hamid Dabashi hosted a Palestinian Film Festival which was brought to Israel-Palestine in 2004, curated by Jacir with the assistance of other Columbia University students, and followed by Dabashi's edited volume *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema,* published by Verso in 2006.

[10] Raised in Damascus and Amman, Shoufani was exposed to the secular ideas of a Palestinian revolution. Shoufani continued her studies in Beirut and in the United States of America, and has been living and working in Dubai for the past decade, but has never visited Gaza or Ramallah (Trbic Interview with Hind Shoufani). Shoufani is the founder of *Poeticians*, the transnational poetry network situated in Dubai and Beirut.

[11] *Trip Along Exodus* was shot on a budget of US $37,000, and was backed by a combination of private sources, crowdfunding and the financial support of the Beirut-based Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC), an independent initiative providing grants to individuals and organizations in the fields of literature, the performing arts, music, cinema and the visual arts (Trbic Interview with Hind Shoufani).

[12] They include archival photographs, 8mm, 16mm, VHS, DV and HD footage, animation and computer graphics used to map out the history of Palestinian resistance (Trbic Interview with Hind Shoufani).

[13] They included the Palestinian Ministry of Culture, the French Centre National du Cinema at de l'Image Animee, the Dubai Film Market Enjaaz (United Arab Emirates), the Doha Film Institute (Qatar), the Royal Film Commission (Jordan), and the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (Lebanon). Masri received post-production funding from the Doha Film Institute in 2015, at the time when twenty-three out of twenty-five production grants were awarded to first and second-time directors (Vivarelli "Doha").

[14] Following her graduation from San Francisco State University, Jordan-born Masri began producing documentary films with her Lebanese husband, the late Jean Chamoun. Their early films which reflect upon the experiences of Palestinian women and children in refugee camps, include *Under the Rubble* (1982), *Wild Flowers: Women of South Lebanon* (1986), *Children of the Mountain of Fire* (1991), and *Children of Shatilla* (1989).

[15] The Israeli legal system has since 1967 housed more than 750,000 Palestinian inmates and at any moment detains over 7,000 adults and children with the conviction rate of more than 99 percent. ("Statistics: March 2019"). According to Masri: "The 1980s was a time when Palestinian women prisoners from PFLP [The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine], Fatah, etc., fought the authorities for every single thing – even a pencil. There was leadership, classes, teaching for illiterate women. I wanted Palestinians today – and of course

others – to see these lives" (Masri, qtd. in Brittain). See Frances S. Hasso's investigation of women's resistance, gender, and sexuality in political activism in occupied Palestine, in *Resistance, Repression and Gender Politics in Occupied Palestine and Jordan* 2005).

[16] Three years later, Image Nation Abu Dhabi FZ produced *Men in Black 3* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 2012).

[17] Dabis cites filmmakers John Cassavetes, Robert Altman and Mike Leigh for their ability to re-create the truth of everyday life, and photographers, Garry Winogrand, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Dorothea Lange and Lee Friedlander for their visual style ("Cherien Dabis"; Jaafar "Cherien Dabis").

[18] Mohanad Yaqubi's documentary film *Off Frame Aka Revolution Until Victory* (2016) explores the history, transnational ties and influences of Palestinian militant cinema, with global reach and revolutionary potential. The filmmaker chronicles the Palestinian struggle as a history of dialectic conflict against the imperialist policies, suggesting that the legacy of revolutionary cinema is one of perpetual opposition to formulaic modes of representation, denying Palestinian people the right to their own voices.

[19] Reading about Annemarie Jacir's observations on curating Palestinian films, Wood came across a description on postal parcels, "for cultural purposes only, no commercial value," used to facilitate the transfer of film prints across borders ("'For Cultural Purposes Only'"). Jacir discovered that this description, aimed to ease the processes of transcultural interchange, had the opposite effect on Palestinian films that were frequently deliberately withheld at the Israeli borders (Wood, qtd. in McKnight-Abrams).

[20] Phoenix who has never visited Palestine drew his impressions from their oral testimonies in the form of the "cartoonish versions of Arab experience" pervading the Western visual imagery and parodying the penchant for using recreation as an abbreviated method to convey ideas in documentary cinema (McKnight-Abrams).

[21] These include photographs from the Israeli Government Press Office-National Photo Collection, the Jewish National Fund Photo Archive and the IDF Archive, and Herman Lerski's films *Avoda/Work*, produced for the Zionist organization Keren Hatessod in 1935, and *Jaffa* (*Carmel Newsreel*, 1951). Sela discovers that any Palestinian presence is relegated to the margins of Zionist history, identifying the captions on the stolen photographs that conceal the colonizing of Arab historical and cultural space, and heralding the negation of their claims to the occupied land (Sela *Looted and Hiden*).

[22] Sela discovers that in the Israeli military archives the materials are restricted and classified according to Zionist codes – using the names of non-existing Palestinian institutions to deliberately obscure their sources. The public access to these documents is forbidden, sometimes as long as for five decades or even longer. Sela recovers only a few films that were returned from the film festival circuit or sent to foreign labs for processing and development, among them Ismail Shammout's 1970s *Urgent Call*, discovered in the IDF Archive, but the majority of films, photographs and works of art remain unaccounted for.

[23] See Stephen Sheehi's article "The Transnational Palestinian Self: Toward Decolonizing Psychoanalytic Thought."

[24] See Wasif Jawhariyyeh, *Storyteller of Jerusalem: The Life and Time of Wasif Jawhariyyeh 1904-1948.* Olive Branch Press, 2013.

[25] Lachmann was opposed to the introduction of the European system of notation and instruments, believing that they were polluting Arabic music, while Jawhariyyeh believed that Arabic music needed progress and hybrid interactions with other musical traditions (Manna, in "*A Magical Substance*").

[26] The film was produced by Najjar's Ustura Films, MACT Productions (France), L'Agence algérienne pour le rayonnement culturel (AARC, Algeria), and Oktober Films (Finland), supported by The State of Palestine Ministry of Culture, the Doha Film Institute,

the Royal Film Comisssion Jordan, Friedriech Ebert Stiftuing Jerusalem, the Sundance Scriptwriter's Lab and the Duke Award, and with the participation of Icelandic Film Fund (Iceland), the Dubai Film Connection (United Arab Emirates), the Centre national du Cinema et de l'image animee, and ZDF/ARTE.

[27] *Eyes of a Thief* is losely based on a 2002 Silwad incident, when on 3 March 2002 Thaer Hamad, a 22-year-old bricklayer from Silwad, killed seven Israeli soldiers and three civilians near the settlements of Ofra and Shilo.

[28] See Alisa Simon, "Film Review: *Eyes of a Thief*."

[29] They include Philistine Films (Palestine), JBA Production (France), Klinkerfilm (Germany), Ape & Bjorn (Norway), Ciudad Lunar (Colombia), Snowglobe Film (Denmark), Cactus World Films (United Kingdom), Metaphora Production Cinando (Turkey) and Schortcut Films (Lebanon).

[30] Founded in 2014, Filmlab Palestine (FLP) is a non-profit organization, which introduces Palestinian youth housed in refugee camps in Jordan to the art of filmmaking. In collaboration with international partners, this institution provides space, equipment and residencies to Palestinian filmmakers, organizes film screenings, and delivers school curriculum for developing screen literacy among children (Boulad).

[31] Razan AlSalah screened and exhibited her works at the Sundance Film Festival, the Hot Docs Film Festival, the Melbourne International Film Festival, the Glasgow International Film Festival, the Ann Arbor Film Festival, and teaches at Concordia University in Montreal.

[32] Produced by the South Australian Film Corporation, Anne Tsoulis' documentary film *From Under the Rouble* (2017), uses an animation short by Belgian filmmaker Tilde De Wandel, *Samouni Street* (2011) to support the testimony of the survivor, Amal Samouni and to re-construct the events leading to the deaths of the Samouni family during the 2009 Israeli bombing of the Gaza Strip.

[33] In her ethnographic documentary *Stitching Palestine* (2017), Canadian-Lebanese filmmaker of Palestinian origin, Carol Mansour, collates the testimonies of twelve resilient Palestinian women who speak about their sense of dispossession. *Stitching Palestine* was screened with great success at the 2018 Palestinian Film Festival in Australia.

[34] Upon her return to Ramallah in 2006, filmmaker and curator, Alia Arasoughly established an annual film festival *Shashat/Screens*, dedicated to showing films by women from Palestine and the Arab world. In August 2019, under an edition titled "I am Palestinian," the 11th Shashat Women's Film Festival launched simultaneously in Ramallah and the Gaza Strip featured the works of ten young women filmmakers from the West Bank, Jerusalem, and Gaza (Arasoughly and Taha; Othman).

Conclusion

The first fifty years of Palestinian cinema represent one of the most extraordinary journeys in the history of the moving image. Since the early Palestinian films produced in the mid-to-late 1960s in the refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon, celebrating a revolutionary ethos and struggle for national liberation, Palestinian filmmakers have created an astonishing range of short, documentary and feature narratives, distinguished by aesthetic and stylistic diversity. This long passage towards visibility has continued in spite of the dramatically changing geopolitical situation in the Middle East, the ongoing Israeli occupation, and the support for the *status quo* within Western political and public discourse (Pappe, *The Idea* 313). The rise to prominence of Palestinian cinema has been facilitated by the passion, the resourcefulness, the resilience and the flexibility of Palestinian filmmakers, navigating the conditions of the global film industry, as well as the production and distribution circuit.

This thesis positions the works of Palestinian filmmakers within specific historical, political, cultural and economic contexts, investigating the development and key attributes of the Palestinian minor transnational cinema in the post-1980 period. The thesis revolves around the main question: How can we conceptualize the trajectory of Palestinian transnational cinema in the post-1980 period and what are its key characteristics? A number of subsidiary questions have also been investigated in addition to this central line of enquiry: Who can cinematically speak for Palestine? Where and how are Palestinian films produced? Who are the most prominent filmmakers, producers and distributors, and what is their relationship to the main sources of funding for Palestinian films? What audiences are these films produced for in Israel-Palestine and abroad, and how do they engage with the globalized modes of film production, dissemination and exhibition? And what does the evolution of Palestinian cinema in this period tell us about its transnational identities, ties and modes of collaboration?

The central premise examined in this thesis is that minor transnationalism has been the most prominent characteristic of Palestinian cinema in the post-1980 period, and continues to inform the aesthetics, production and dissemination modes of Palestinian film production to this day. The generation of filmmakers emerging throughout the 1980s and 1990s has distanced themselves from the ideological normativity and the production frameworks of the Palestinian Cinema of the Revolutionary Period. The ostensibly homogenous approaches to the tropes of national liberation that typified previous periods, began to reflect the heterogeneous, diasporic and exilic nature of Palestinian film production. Palestinian filmmakers reject nationalist ideology and the position of an artist as the proponent of cultural purity. These directors recognize the role of culture in enhancing the processes of modernization in Palestinian society, destabilize the ideological underpinnings and archaic models of national identity and urge toward renegotiating the conventional tropes

of Palestinian-ness. Distinguished by the deterritorialized and marginalized forms of cultural production, Palestinian cinema has continued to focus on themes of loss, dispossession, occupation, resistance and exile. Expanding their transnational ties, Palestinian filmmakers have sought new sources of financial support approaching government bodies, television channels and private investors in Western Europe, the United States of America, the Gulf States and Israel, continuing Palestinian cinema's foray into a global production and distribution circuit. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih's theorization of minor transnationalism has afforded a framework for discussing how transnational production engages with the minor form in the films of Palestinian directors. It provides scope for the analysis of various modes of subaltern cultural expression that characterize Palestinian cinema and positions them in different political, historical, cultural and economic contexts.

The original contribution of my thesis to the broader fields of Palestinian cinema and minor transnationalism is demonstrated by three key elements in this investigation. Adopting Lionnet and Shih's concept of minor transnationalism, the thesis reveals that Palestinian cinema's evolution in the post-1980 period is distinguished by transnational cultural collaborations located in the cultural expressions of subaltern groups. This investigation has emphasized Palestinian cinema's opposition to the Israeli occupation and colonial authority, and how it has contributed toward the struggle for liberation and individual human rights. In the context of Palestinian cinema, this thesis has also investigated how transnational ties, exilic and diasporic experiences and the development of new media technologies have facilitated horizontal and asymmetrical collaborations between major and minor forms of cultural production. The examination of transnational partnerships has allowed the scrutinization of the conditions and processes affecting the work of Palestinian filmmakers and accentuated their resilience and flexibility as the key factors in the post-1980 Palestinian cinema's path towards visibility. Drawing from Lionnet and Shih's concept of minor

transnationalism this new perspective has also provided a framework for examining interactions between the transnational, which often takes precedence over the normative power of national culture – the authority of the state of Israel, the projected Palestinian nation-state, or other nation-states, their institutions and cultural policies – and political, cultural, aesthetic and economic implications for the works of Palestinian filmmakers.

Secondly, drawing upon the ideas of Lionnet and Shih and in dialogue with Hjort's periodization of cinematic transnationalism, this thesis focuses on modernizing, cosmopolitan and opportunistic transnationalism evident in the works of Palestinian filmmakers positioning them in specific historical, political, cultural and economic contexts. Situated beyond the exclusive domain of economic relations, this inquiry has established that the works of Palestinian directors may reveal different, co-existing transnational modes at once. It has afforded scope for analysis of their aesthetic and political concerns, highlighted their adoption and re-articulation of conventions of popular cinema and their positioning within the film festival and commercial arenas. The prevalence of modernizing elements has transpired as the common denominator in the post-1980 period when Palestinian filmmakers have underlined their concern with the role of cinema in enhancing modernizing tendencies, in opposing imperialism, and in destabilizing traditional norms and old representations of Palestinian identity. This inquiry has further demonstrated that the cosmopolitan properties in the works of Palestinian filmmakers are affected by the filmmakers' subjectivities, their multiple identities, as well as the hybrid cultural climate and complex trajectories of migration. In the closing chapters of this thesis, the instances of opportunistic transnationalism are discussed as a distinct phenomenon or in conjunction with other modes of transnationalism in Palestinian cinema, centering on the positioning of filmmakers within the global commercial and art house domains, subverting and re-purposing the aesthetic stratagems of popular cinema while maintaining the political element in their films.

Drawing on Deleuze's and Guattari's theorization of minor literatures, the third original contribution of this thesis to the field of Palestinian cinema and minor transnationalism revolves around the engagement of transnational with the minor form. This inquiry identifies the tropes of the minor form in Palestinian cinema located in contested historical and geopolitical contexts, distinguished by limited production capacities, and frequently separated from the commercial mainstream, while highlighting its prominent political element. Researching the works of Palestinian filmmakers, I have encountered a multitude of temptations to extricate films from their multilayered context and reduce their aesthetic complexity to the critique of occupation. Instead, this thesis has consistently argued that Palestinian films are not restricted to the representations of the struggle between the colonizer and the colonized. The critique by Palestinian filmmakers of the traditional representations of national identity is revealed in their rejection of nationalism and male-dominated ethnic conflict. These filmmakers use subaltern cultural expression as a platform for articulating new sensibilities of Palestinian and global cinema audiences and the emerging models of resistance. Their works are characterized by re-purposing the language of the commercial cinema and destabilizing and undermining the configurations of power embedded in the systems of colonial governance and patriarchal society. Palestinian filmmakers emphasize emancipatory currents, expand their transnational visibility within the global film industry and facilitate the formation of new cinema audiences constituted at times of social and political transformation.

The first chapter in this thesis focuses on the films of Michel Khleifi which give prominence to the modernizing tendencies in Palestinian society and the role of culture in forging the processes of social transformation. Khleifi's career is marked by transnational cultural partnerships and the emergence of Palestinian documentary and feature films in the film festival arena. This filmmaker subverts the old representations of national identity by

converging on the ideologically unstable site of the Palestinian household and accentuating the notion of human rights as the key to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Concerned with the consequences of the occupation, his documentary films highlight the Palestinian struggle for human rights, urging his audiences to probe the immersion of Palestinians in the traumatic narratives of the past, deconstructing pre-established gender roles and scrutinizing the old representations of national identity. In the middle phase of his career, which is marked by feature films, Khleifi develops his transnational ties with European sources of funding and expands the visibility of Palestinian cinema within the global arena. He highlights the erosion of the traditional Arab family and the role of women and children as the emerging voices of resistance to colonial authority and traditional norms. Reiterating the inability of his subjects to anchor themselves in alternative worlds, Khleifi follows them as they search for love and acceptance at a time of political upheaval, recognizing a major transformation within the Palestinian imaginary and the sensibilities of new cinema audiences. In the journeys of return which feature prominently in the films of Khleifi's late phase, he subverts the ideology of settler-colonialism and recognizes the global repositioning of Palestine as a laboratory for the emerging forms of colonization and a decline in human rights. Focusing on the positions of his minor transnational subjects, Khleifi divulges the disturbing repercussions of 'Palestinization' with respect to the crisis of global humanity and continues to search for signs of tenacity and compassion necessary to envisage a better future.

Chapter 2 concentrates on the films of Rashid Masharawi, which are characterized by the elements of modernizing transnationalism. Produced in transnational partnerships with European, Arab and Australian funding bodies and television channels, Masharawi's films revolve around life in Palestinian refugee camps and focus on the themes of loss, occupation, dispossession and exile. Converging on the lives of individuals and communities disconnected from the world of nature, his films destabilize the old ideological paradigms of

nature in Palestinian cinema and promote a renegotiation of representations of Palestinian identity. Combining the inquiry of Masharawi's ecological concerns with an intersectional approach, this argument underlines the correlations with other categories of social power within the Israeli-Palestinian context in his films. His early feature films located in the refugee camps in the Gaza Strip subvert the notion of Palestinian proximity to nature as one of the key paradigms of the Palestinian Cinema of the Revolutionary Period. Masharawi's deterritorialized characters evoke memories of their villages and land amidst the colonized landscapes of refugee camps, revealing the consequences of prolonged occupation and the Zionist constructions of nature, aimed at denying Palestinian identity and cultural memory. Masharawi's films situated in the West Bank focus on life in Palestinian refugee camps, his exilic characters' memories of Palestine, and their shared sense of evanescence, and underline the importance of culture for refugee communities separated from the world of nature. The filmmaker singles out the role of culture in enhancing the processes of modernization, articulating resistance to the occupation and identifying the emerging concerns for Palestinian audiences. His late films, located in congested Palestinian enclaves devoid of nature and natural resources, engage with the struggle of exilic communities confronting colonial repression and destructive environmental policies, while maintaining their physical and emotional claims to the land as well as protecting their identity and cultural memory.

Chapter 3 investigates the elements of cosmopolitan transnationalism in the films of Elia Suleiman. Suleiman's cosmopolitanism is evident in his multiple identities, exilic concerns, transnational mobility and the hybrid cultural climate in which he produces his films. This analysis underlines how, by engaging with the minor form, Suleiman highlights his political position and his understanding of the conflict in Israel-Palestine as an ethical question of global importance. In his early films he reveals the construction of hegemonic

narratives produced with the aim of marginalizing and colonizing subaltern cultures and repurposes the language of mainstream media, thus prompting his audiences to engage with the question of Palestine. Suleiman uses his initiative to expand the visibility of Palestinian cinema within the global arthouse sphere in his feature films which concentrate on the cosmopolitan subjectivity of an exiled Palestinian filmmaker, E. S., and expose the tensions pervading daily life in Israel-Palestine. The unsettling but comical tone in Suleiman's films appeals to his audience's sense of humanity rather than their sense of any dogmatic concept of national homogeneity. He subverts the relationships of power between the colonizer and the colonized and challenges the assumption that human interaction could be based on a shared sense of national belonging. Contrasting the ubiquitous sense of stagnation in his narratives, the unmediated encounters between the visual medium and the spectator in Suleiman's films emerge in the form of cinematic spectacle, as he repurposes the language of commercial film, evoking the early days of cinema and its transnational origins. Compelling spectators to delve beyond the rigid historical and geopolitical frameworks, Suleiman suggests that one must engage with the problem of oppression in Palestine, crucial for understanding the connection between the crisis in his homeland and its consequences for global humanity.

Chapter 4 of this thesis centers on the films of Hany Abu-Assad and the rise of opportunistic transnationalism in Palestinian cinema. The emergence of feature film as the key marker of Palestinian cinema coincides with the transformation of Hollywood's global role, the growth of the media industry in the Middle East and technological advances, facilitating access to equipment and reducing the costs of film production, distribution and exhibition at the turn of the twenty-first century. These factors have provided new opportunities for Palestinian filmmakers, expanding avenues for transnational partnership and the emerging rise of Palestinian popular cinema. This investigation underlines Abu-Assad's

aesthetic versatility and his adaptability to irregular forms of transnational collaboration, highlighting his positioning in film festival and commercial circuits and emphasizing the recurring political element in his films. Opposed to national and religious extremism, his early documentary and feature films center on Palestinian subjectivity in crisis and underline his political commitment by drawing attention to the question of human rights. Abu-Assad exposes tensions in Palestinian society, destabilizes the conventions of documentary film and narrative formulas of commercial cinema, and highlights the importance of subaltern cultural production, suggesting that narratives about Palestine and Palestinians have the potential to be produced and exhibited beyond the arthouse circuit. Concerned with the themes of oppression, resistance, loyalty and the conflict between modern and traditional, Abu-Assad's feature films examine the subjects of suicide bombing, betrayal and collaboration. The filmmaker expands his transnational ties and navigates the economic and political interests of multiple stakeholders appropriating the conventions of commercial cinema and applying them to local geopolitical and cultural contexts. Gaining recognition in the film festival arena and gradually making their way into the commercial sphere, his films articulate the emerging sensitivities of Palestinian spectators and open up new avenues for global cinema audiences to engage with the problem of occupation from alternative perspectives.

The final chapter in this thesis investigates four thematic patterns in the films of present-day Palestinian women directors, interweaving Hjort's typology of cinematic transnationalisms with Patricia White's theorization of women's cinema as world cinema, and examining the coexisting modes of modernizing, cosmopolitan and opportunistic transnationalism. These films are typified by a convergence of postcolonial and feminist concerns and are positioned within the arthouse and popular mainstream, expanding the thematic scope, aesthetic attributes and production capabilities of Palestinian cinema, and also becoming increasingly market orientated. The first section in this chapter focuses on the

work of Palestinian women filmmakers, probing emancipatory and transformative tendencies in Palestinian society. The early films by Najwa Najjar explore modernizing currents and the disintegration of the multiethnic fabric of Palestinian society and examine the position of Palestinian woman confronting patriarchal norms and colonial authority. Annemarie Jacir's films converge on the cosmopolitan and exilic subjectivities of Palestinian women returnees narrating their emotional journeys of reclaiming their land and celebrating the roles of women within the Palestinian revolutionary movement which has inspired secular and progressive forces around the world. The second section in this chapter revolves around the films of Cherien Dabis which engage with female subjectivities in local and diasporic contexts as voices of moderation, inclusion, and conformity. Positioned within the commercial and film festival mainstream, Dabis' films diffuse oppositional and antihegemonic voices, and center on the fragility of transcultural relationships, promoting tolerance and inclusivity. The third section in this chapter converges on the works of women filmmakers engaged in retrieving and re-imagining Palestinian archival materials, focusing on the cinematic representations of pre-Nakba Palestine and the Israeli policies aimed at denying the access of Palestinians to their historical and cultural legacy. The documentary films of Azza El-Hasan examine the role of images in producing, preserving and retrieving the traumatic narratives of the past, and connect her search for this lost cultural legacy to the endeavors of Palestinian cinema's pioneers to claim their cultural citizenship and protect their heritage. Jumana Manna excavates archival materials and scrutinizes the contested directions of Palestinian modernity at the end of the British Mandate, divulging the emerging tensions between hybrid approaches to cultural production and legacy, and nationalist tendencies, heralding the disintegration of Palestine. The fourth section in this chapter focuses on the recent films by Najjar and Jacir which, being situated in unstable political and polycentric cultural spaces, revolve around the troubled figure of a Palestinian returnee and investigate

the internal tensions within Palestinian communities under occupation. Established within the commercial and film festival orbit, Najjar and Jacir assume a salient role in Palestinian cinema and contribute to the global struggle of women filmmakers for equality and visibility in world cinema.

Working on this thesis it has become increasingly evident that Palestinian film production is inseparable from the geopolitical contexts of Israeli-Palestinian relations. The first two decades of the twenty-first century have been marked by failed peace initiatives,[1] the separation and fragmentation of territories governed by Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip,[2] and Israeli military incursions which resulted in loss of civilian lives and serious infrastructural damage.[3] The expansion of Jewish settlements ("Israeli Settlements") and the concrete barrier fragmenting Palestinian communities in the West Bank, the Israeli policy of targeted assassinations and Palestinian attacks on Israeli citizens have all contributed to the decline of the peace process. The second decade of this century which commenced with Barack Obama's caution to regional leaders to seize the opportunity for peace[4] has been marked by the demise of the two-state solution and the efforts of the Israeli administration and its Western allies to legitimize the *status quo*.[5] And while the Reut Institute's assessment in 2010 that "Israel failed to legitimize and market itself as a peace-seeking Jewish and democratic state" ("The Delegitimisation," qtd. in Pappé, *The Idea* 306) seems hardly disputable today, the socio-psychological barriers of Israel's Jewish population towards the peace process and their perceptions of Palestinians in public discourse have not changed.[6] Said has pointedly observed that the "most demoralizing aspect of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict is the opposition between mainstream Israeli and Palestinian perspectives [...] There simply is no common ground, no possible area for genuine reconciliation" ("Palestinians" 14). There are signs that Israeli policies are now more openly challenged in countries that have traditionally backed Zionist ideology.[7] However, rather than resolving the unanswered

questions of 1967, the new initiatives described by Seth Anziska as "neither two states nor one" are intended to bypass sovereignty and to legitimize a truncated form of self-rule, granting Palestinians individual, but not national rights, and while Palestinians will not likely acquiesce to imposed solutions, they face key questions about the new articulations of their struggle for self-determination (68).

One can assume that the continuing decline in Israeli-Palestinian relations, along with global and regional developments and the implementation of ethnocratic policies in the state of Israel, denying Palestinians minority rights and opportunities for cultural expression will impact upon Palestinian cinema's position and its transnational sources of funding. The global political and economic crisis heralded by the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise and radicalization of political tensions in the United States of America and the European Union, as well as the diplomatic recognition of the state of Israel by a number of countries in the Arab world[8] will present new challenges for Palestinian transnational cultural partnerships. These challenges may be further exacerbated by the radical re-thinking of global modes of production, distribution and dissemination of screen content, and the narrowing of avenues for dissemination and exhibition of Palestinian films in regional contexts.

In April 2018, following fourteen editions of the Dubai International Film Festival, it was announced that the DIFF would become a biannual event. Returned as a "feature film and short film festival" in 2019, it remains to be seen whether this institution that supported more than 200 Arab filmmakers through the Muhr Awards will retain its regional and global relevance.[9] While the film festival's Artistic Director, Delphine Garde-Mroueh, contends that Palestinian films were not specifically targeted by the DIFF and the associated programs, she also reminds that its mission to support Arab cinema has had a positive impact and facilitated the production of indie and fragile films that would have otherwise encountered more difficulties in reaching global cinema audiences.[10] Furthermore, the ethnocratic political

system in the state of Israel is continuing to entrench its influence in the sphere of cultural politics, obstructing the production, distribution and exhibition of Palestinian films in Israel and in the West. When in 2010 the Israeli Minister of Culture and Sport, Limor Livnat instituted the award for the Zionist-oriented art, plastic arts, performing arts and cinema, he re-affirmed the Israeli administration's commitment to an ideology of settler-colonialism and the principles of ethnocentric society (Pappé, *The Idea* 295). In recent years, Israeli funding bodies have continued to obstruct and narrow down the opportunities for filmmakers who identify themselves as Palestinian (Anderman; Irving). However, it is important to note these policies have been continually challenged by Palestinian artistic communities, and by activist advocates and solidarity groups around the world.[11] Even in the most difficult circumstances, the continuity of Palestinian film production in Israel, including the support of funding bodies and participation of Israeli actors and production crews in Palestinian projects, has never been completely disrupted.

Nevertheless, as this thesis has argued, in spite of the continuing decline in Israeli-Palestinian relations, and the stagnation of the peace process, the global visibility of Palestinian cinema in the twenty-first century has been markedly improved, compared to previous decades. More Palestinian short, feature and documentary films are produced and disseminated in the arthouse and commercial arena than at any other period during its history. A corollary of converging processes have been identified and examined in this thesis, including the transformation of the global role of Hollywood, the development of a regional film industry, the extended scope of diasporic and exilic film production, as well as the expansion of global networks enhanced by new technologies which have all benefited Palestinian filmmakers whose works are seen by global audiences and also researched by scholars, adopting a "more acute peripheral vision" (Iordanova, Introduction 23).

It would be pertinent here to identify some areas necessitating further scholarly contributions to the field of Palestinian minor transnational cinema. Future research could include the examination of the elements of epiphanic, affinitive and milieu-building transnationalism in Palestinian cinema. Hjort positions the building of cultural space, community values and cultural heritage at the center of epiphanic transnationalism ("On the Plurality" 16-17) and identifies the sense of solidarity amongst small nations and countering the hegemony of Hollywood, as the key features of affinitive and milieu-building transnationalism (30). Engaging with specific characteristics and the convergence between different modes of cinematic transnationalism may provide researchers with new platforms for investigating Palestinian films concerned with exilic and diasporic communities, as well as women and children. Hjort's theorization also provides analytical tools for exploring transversal cultural partnerships based on community-building and the representation of human rights in the works of non-Palestinian filmmakers forging solidarity with subaltern groups and exposing dominant power-relationships within Israel-Palestine.

One can identify another area necessitating scholarly research in investigating the transnational connectivity of Palestinian cinema within the contexts of the global film festival circuit and the expanding network of Palestinian film festivals. Some valuable research has already been completed on the early history and geopolitical contexts of exhibiting early Palestinian films (Gertz and Khleifi *Palestinian Cinema;* Yaqub *Palestinian Cinema*), and the effects of cultural diplomacy and transregional ties on Palestinian cinema (Chamarette; Dickinson *Arab Cinema*). Future research could investigate the positioning of Palestinian cinema in film festival networks and might examine what Dina Iordanova describes as their key constituents, namely the political economy of film festivals, the composition of film festival boards, sponsorships, stakeholders, programming, industry connections, participants, and their impact on festival organization, marketing and repertoire ("Transnational Film

Studies"). The proliferation of Palestinian film festivals also sheds light on the potential of Palestinian films to engage audiences beyond the global film festival networks and specially organized screenings. Connected to Palestinians in diaspora and exile, these film festivals place emphasis on the identity agenda, corresponding to one of the categories in Iordanova's classification of diasporic film festivals ("Mediating Diaspora"). They also deepen our awareness about transnational differences and the inclusivity of communities in different geographic, social and cultural contexts (Acciari, "Film Festivals" 113). Furthermore, enhancing the visibility of counter-hegemonic narratives, these festivals bring to light the secular tradition of Palestinian cultural production, evident in the diversity of repertoire, contributions by women and non-Palestinian filmmakers, as well as the participation of academics, activists and the inclusion of short, animation and student films.

Finally, the expanded presence of Palestinian films in the online sphere provides opportunities to make the artistic achievements of Palestinian cinema accessible within global contexts. Online platforms afford general access to films that were previously only available in curated retrospectives, on multicultural channels, via DVD editions, university libraries and ethnic food stores. Researching the circulation of Palestinian films on commercial, government and archiving streaming services and university search engines, may provide indications of whether this proliferation of platforms has contributed to the transnational visibility of Palestinian cinema, exposing wider audiences to its narrative and stylistic diversity and its political value. Moreover, this research may also afford valuable information concerning the links between transnational cultural partnerships and different modes of dissemination and exhibition of Palestinian films in the online sphere.

In the final stages of the work on this thesis, a number of festival premieres and commercial releases of films by prominent and emerging Palestinian and non-Palestinian filmmakers have confirmed the heightened visibility of Palestinian cinema within the global

arena. In his Palestinian-Tunisian-Egyptian co-production, *Writing on Snow* (2017) Rashid Masharawi continues to scrutinize the relationships in subaltern communities under siege, exposing the tensions within a group of Palestinians trapped inside a small apartment during the conflict in the Gaza Strip. Premiering at the 2018 International Film Festival Rotterdam, Muayad Alayan's second feature *The Reports on Sarah and Saleem* (2018) follows the affair between a Palestinian man and a Jewish woman which turns into a bizarre case of espionage, exposing the absurdity of male-dominated ethnic conflict. Produced with the support of the Hubert Bals Fund, World Cinema Fund and the AFAC, Alayan's Palestinian-Mexican-German-Dutch co-production did not receive Israeli funding, but featured a number of Israeli actors. Its distribution to the Arab world by Cairo and Abu Dhabi-based MAD Solutions presented an opportunity to expand transregional partnerships as well as increase the presence of Palestinian film in commercial arena. Italian Stefano Savona joined the growing list of non-Palestinian filmmakers on the film festival circuit receiving the Golden Eye documentary prize at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival for *Samouni Road (2018)*, a live-action-animation feature that tells the story of the 2009 death of twenty-nine Palestinian civilians in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead. Balancing her market sensibilities with a critique of the occupation, Najwa Najjar's film *Between Heaven and Earth* (2019) focuses on the journey of a Palestinian couple who, after five years of waiting on a permit, enter the state of Israel from the West Bank to finalize their divorce. Hany Abu-Assad joined other Hollywood directors who migrated to television with an eight-part series *Blood* (2018) authored with Nizar Wattad, the writer of Disney's first Arabic-language film, *United* (2012), and produced by Patty Ishimoto's Los Angeles-based production company Element 8 (Clarke). After an absence of ten years, Elia Suleiman returned to feature film with the Palestinian-French-German-Qatari-Turkish-Canadian co-production *It Must Be Heaven* (2019) made in association with the Doha Film Institute, ZDF/ARTE and Turkish Radio Television, a film

which earned him the FIPRESCI Award as well as a Special Mention Prize at the 2019 Cannes International Film Festival, and a Palestinian Academy Award Nomination for 2020. The film follows E. S.'s journeys to Nazareth, Paris and New York, and presents his sobering encounters with French producers interested in Eurocentric visions of Palestine and American financiers, completely disengaged from Palestinian narratives. Similar to his previous films, the fragmented, and increasingly violent world inhabited by Suleiman's characters bears significant resemblances to Palestine as the filmmaker reiterates that engaging with the other is the ethical imperative of our times.[12]

Palestinian cinema's ongoing presence, artistic accomplishments and remarkably enthusiastic reception across global arthouse, film festival and commercial spheres, testify to the depth of talent shown by Palestinian cineastes, to their transnational connectivity, their adaptability to the hybrid and asymmetrical modes of transnational production, and their enduring sense of political commitment. Operating in the state of Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the region, and in exile, using their transnational partnerships, concentrating on dislocated cultural subjects and undermining hegemonic power-structures, these filmmakers continue to produce films of astonishing diversity and creative power. When Said, in *The Question of Palestine*, asserted that, similar to Israelis and their allies, Palestinians also play an active role in determining their aspirations, political struggles, achievements and setbacks (xvi), he also had in mind the importance of subaltern cultural production in articulating a sense of Palestinian identity. Working within a volatile geopolitical climate, as well as withstanding the decline of the peace process, the denial of basic human rights, an economic blockade and continuing attempts to curb their artistic expression, Palestinian filmmakers promote progressive tendencies and expand the visibility of Palestinian culture within the global arena. Extending their transnational ties beyond the normative power of nation-state, old ideological alliances and solidarity networks, and using new media technologies for

disseminating screen content, they have made Palestinian cinema more accessible to world-wide audiences. It is difficult to foresee a period of peace and stability in which transnational sources of support would not represent the most feasible and reliable way for Palestinian cineastes to speak for Palestine through moving images. However, summing up their unique *modus operandi*, it is undeniable that their creativity, resourcefulness, resilience and flexibility may turn out to constitute the most enduring legacy of Palestinian cinema's first fifty years.

Endnotes

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[1] Some of these initiatives have already been identified in previous chapters and include the Road map for peace (2003), the Geneva Initiative (2003), The Arab Peace Initiative (2002, 2007, 2017), the Annapolis Conference (2007), Barack Obama's "The New Beginning" (2009-2010), and the Secretary of State, John Kerry's attempt to initiate negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis (2013-2014).

[2] The Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005 was followed by the Hamas 2006 election victory win and the taking of control of Gaza from Fatah in 2007. In spite of the Israeli withdrawal, all aspects of life in the Gaza Strip, including control of land-crossing, maritime use and airspace, are controlled by the Israeli authorities. Israeli sanctions against the citizens of Gaza have generated economic stagnation and an environmental crisis on the ground and Palestinian rocket attacks have been used as a reason for retaliatory attacks and entering the territory with Israeli ground forces.

[3] For a reliable account of casualties and the disproportionate use of force during Operation Cast Lead (2008-2009), see Bethany Bell's BBC News report, "Counting Casualties of Gaza's War" and BBC reports "Israel Soldiers Speak out on Gaza," and "Key Excerpts: UN Gaza Report." For discussion of the excessive use of force in the Operation Protective Edge (2014), see the AFP Report, "Israel Likely to Have Committed Gaza War Crimes: Human Rights Watch" and the Amnesty International report, "Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories: Israel/Gaza conflict, July 2014."

[4] See Chris McGreal, "Obama Warns Middle East Leaders 'Chance May Not Come Again Soon.'"

[5] According to the PLO Secretary-General, Dr Saeb Erekat, the Israeli elections in April 2019 confirmed the entrenched perceptions that the occupation should continue and that the two-state solution is unacceptable (Abu-Toameh). Donald Trump's administration

moved the American Embassy to Jerusalem in 2018 and recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights in March 2019. Benjamin Netanyahu's pre-election promise to extend the sovereignty over Jewish settlements in the West Bank ("Netanyahu") was echoed in the United States' reversal of the illegal status of the settlements, announced by the State Secretary Mike Pompeo in November 2019 ("Full Text"), confirming fears that the re-configuring of the political map of the Middle East had reached its new phase in the atmosphere of *fait accompli*, again ignoring the rights of the Palestinian people.

[6] Eran Halperin, Neta Oren and Daniel Bar-Tal identify a system of organized societal beliefs that came to justify holding the occupied territories based on religious, historical, national and security-based reasons, while de-legitimizing Palestinians, and negating their national identity and representing them as a threat (Halperin et al. 52). Also see Mina Tzemach, "Preliminary Findings of a Survey of Israeli Jewish Attitudes on a Future Peace Agreement with the Palestinians."

[7] Harvard law students staged a walkout during the Israeli Consul General, Dani Dayan's speech, "The Legal Strategy of Israeli Settlements," delivered on the 13th of November 2019 at Harvard Law School. The walkout was organized by Harvard Students for Bernie, who tweeted: "Israeli settlements are illegal under international law & we demand justice for the Palestinian community" ("Harvard Students").

[8] In 2020, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain recognized the state of Israel, and Sudan and Morocco announced their intention to normalize diplomatic relations with Israel.

[9] According to Jamal Al-Sharif, the Chairman of the Dubai Film and TV Commission: "With the vast changes taking place both in the regional and global movie-making and content industries, we are seeking to redefine the Dubai International Film Festival's approach to nurturing growth, creativity and talent" (Holly Sands "Dubai").

[10] Delphine Garde-Mroueh asserts that as Palestinian films such as Mai Masri's *3000 Nights,* Hanu Abu-Assad's *Omar*, Susan Youssef's *Habibi* (2012), Khaled Jarar's *Infiltrators* (2013), and Salim Abu Jamal's *Roshmia* (2015) screened at the Dubai International Film Festival gained popularity, their success extended beyond DIFF, facilitating their entry into other international film festival networks (Trbic Correspondence with Delphine Garde-Mroueh).

[11] The BDS (Boycott Divestment Sanctions) is a Palestinian-led movement for freedom, justice and equality. The movement's policies include the boycotting of Israeli institutions of culture described as "part and parcel of the ideological and institutional scaffolding of Israel's regime of occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid against the Palestinian people" ("What is BDS?"). Announcing their cultural boycott of Israel in 2015, seven hundred Artists for Palestine UK expressed their support for "Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice and equality," pleading for Israel to comply with international law and universal principles of human rights (*Middle East Monitor* "700 artists").

[12] According to *The National's* reviewer, Kaleem Aftab: "His overarching observation is that the world has become more like Palestine. State control is being asserted everywhere and people are encouraged to live in a constant state of fear. It's a film about the world he witnesses, one where 'class, the economic gap, migration, anxiety and violence' pervades. 'It's about discrimination, it's about downgrading by color, highlighting the collateral damage in the post-colonial world'" ("Cannes").

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