



Figure 10 Still from *Jenin, Jenin*. Directed by Muhammad Bakri, 2002.

## 6 The Continuity of Trauma and Struggle

RECENT CINEMATIC REPRESENTATIONS  
OF THE NAKBA

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In recent Palestinian cinema, narratives of loss and trauma centered around the 1948 Nakba have a strong relationship to the continuing traumas of occupation and oppression by the Israeli forces. The prevalence of Nakba themes in recent Palestinian films, always connected to the second *intifada*, suggests that the Nakba is not mere memory or a trauma of the past; instead, these films seem to point to both a *continuity of pain and trauma*, reaching from the past into the heart of the present, as well as a *continuity of struggle*. The losses of the Nakba, they suggest, fire the continued resistance to Israeli occupation and subjugation. The resolution of trauma is the struggle itself. This chapter will examine the links across memory, trauma, and identity in the context of the Nakba, arguing that recent Palestinian film has been engaged in a storytelling project that is tied to trauma, reliving it and thus perhaps turning melancholia into mourning work. The turning from the pathology of melancholia to the normalcy of the work of mourning is not a simple or straightforward social process, but it is this very process, through recent Palestinian films, which is the focus of this chapter.

### The Economy of Pain: From Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* to Caruth's Trauma Writings

Memory is at the root cause of trauma, Freud tells us, but is also the source of its resolution. In one of his later works he outlines how the pain of reliving the events leading to the trauma may in turn hold the key for a gradual return to normality (Freud 1991 [1920]). Mourning, and the work of mourning, he tells us in a piece written some years before, is crucial for the return to the normal life (Freud 1991 [1917]). Those who are not able, or not allowed to mourn, may well lapse into a pathological state, such as melancholia. Mourning the dead is an essential need of human society, and of the individual within it. Freud writes of "the economics of pain" when designating mourning as a reaction "to a loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (ibid.: 252). The link made here by Freud between the self, a loved person, and "one's country" and "liberty" is of special interest to us when examining films that also juxtapose such entities in their narrative structure.

Freud clearly distinguishes between mourning—a normal process that duly ends, and melancholia—a pathology that may destroy the subject. One of the most interesting differences between the mourning process and the pathological loops of melancholia is that the latter may well be triggered by a loss of what he calls an "ideal kind": "one can recognize that there is a loss of a more ideal kind. The object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love" (Freud 1991 [1917]: 253). Hence, the loss that may trigger the melancholia is not necessarily a death, or total loss, but something like the loss of one's country. Real as it is, this loss is different from death. After all, the country is still there. Thus the loss continues, gets fixated, cannot be mourned and done with, as in the case of death. The loss of one's country *never ends*. It must be even more pronounced when the loss is experienced *in situ*—while living in the lost country. Freud reminds us that melancholia contains "something more than normal mourning. In melancholia the relation to the object is no simple one; it is complicated by the conflict due to ambivalence" (ibid.: 266).

So what would become of whole societies where mourning is prevented? Where coming to terms with the loss is not an option? What of societies whose loss and catastrophe have been covered up, hidden away, and systematically erased? One such example is Palestinian society: it has been reeling

from its great loss of country and autonomy ever since 1948—since the formative event of the Nakba, or the great catastrophe. In this chapter, I examine the Nakba and its construction in, and of, Palestinian memory and identity, through some cinematic representations in recent Palestinian films. The rereading of Freud's work on trauma offered by Cathy Caruth's writings, which link it to life, play, and storytelling, applies particularly well to situations and people within a number of films I have chosen for close study.<sup>1</sup>

### Recent Palestinian Cinema and the Memory of the Nakba

The choice of films was made with the fiftieth anniversary of the Nakba in mind. It is no accident that this painful anniversary, happening as it did concurrently with Israel's fiftieth anniversary as an independent state, produced reworkings of the memories and history of the 1948 disaster. Palestinian films that emerged around this important date have some common characteristics: they tell and retell the history of the Nakba. I shall examine six films produced by three Palestinian filmmakers, all Israeli citizens,<sup>2</sup> that deal with recent history, memory and narrative. The films discussed are *Ustura* (Israel, 1998), *1948* (Israel, 1998) *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, (Europe and Palestine, 1996), *Jenin, Jenin* (Israel/Palestine 2002), *Egteyah* (Israel/Palestine, 2002) and *Divine Intervention* (Palestine, 2002). The films represent a special interest in the Nakba and in cinematic storytelling, which they use as a unifying device while still operating roughly within the boundaries of documentary cinema. Even films dealing with contemporary events invoke and reference the Nakba in various ways. Many other Palestinian films have similar concerns but this small number of better known films represent well the gamut of expression on this topic.

For many years, the Nakba in Palestinian or Arab films was noticeable by its absence.<sup>3</sup> This is far from surprising; the images of loss and destruction meted out by the Zionist forces to the many hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees are far from easy for Arabs, especially Palestinians to confront. A long time had to pass until the Nakba could become a live topic within Palestinian cultural life, serving both the need to purge the trauma as well as to construct identity. A whole generation of Palestinians had to grow up with hardly any cinematic representations of the great catastrophe of 1948 as well as the acts of resistance that were part of their history. This reminds us of the similar attitude (though for different reasons) in Israel toward the Holocaust during the 1950s. The images of Jews led to the slaughter were an

abomination for the Zionists of post-World War II Palestine—the Old Jew of Europe has always been seen as an embarrassment for Zionism, a motivating negativity that propelled it to construct the *New Jew*, the Israeli Zionist.<sup>4</sup> Thus, visual representations of the Holocaust, and especially cinematic representations, were very rare in this formative period of Israel.<sup>5</sup>

The important exceptions to this demeaning condition of European Jewry, are, in Zionist eyes and texts, the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, other smaller uprisings, and the struggle by Jewish partisans against the Nazis. Such armed resistance is seen and hailed as the precursor to the activities and existence of the IDF, the armed forces of Israel. Thus, Israel managed to capitalize on the few important acts of armed resistance by Jews in Nazi-controlled Europe, and to make them, ipso facto, a justification and *raison d'être* for its own actions in 1948 and afterward. It is therefore interesting to note that Palestinians also have seen the Warsaw Ghetto struggle as iconic. At many points Palestinian organizations and individuals have made reference to the Holocaust events. One such reference was the visit in 1983 of a PLO delegate to the Warsaw Ghetto monument, at which he laid a wreath and pronounced: "As the Jews were then justified to rise up against their Nazi murderers, so now are the Palestinians justified in their own struggle with the Zionists."<sup>6</sup> While this fact, like some other instances of Palestinian references to Holocaust events, is mentioned in James Young's (1993) illuminating book, he manages to overlook, in a work on the texture of memory, some interesting facts about the memorial sites he discusses. When describing Zionist memorializing projects, such as the forests planted to commemorate Holocaust victims, Young does not mention that most of these forests formed part of the active destruction and erasure of hundreds of Palestinian villages and towns taken over in 1948. Most of these villages were bulldozed in the 1950s and planted with trees so as to remove all signs of earlier habitation that would tie past occupants to the land (see Slyomovics, this volume). The trees, like those who planted them, are in the main foreign. The trees were firs of European origin, not native to Palestine; they covered up the evidence of an earlier Mediterranean ground cover, removing even the memory of the natural environment. Such forests cover the location of the town of Saffuriyya, which some of the films dealing with the Nakba feature.<sup>7</sup>

The great injustice meted out to the Palestinians by the Israeli state is thus covered up and camouflaged by commemorating another, unconnected injustice. The story of Palestinian ruin and expulsion is turned into a positive narrative of Zionist rebirth with the European fir tree as its potent symbol.

While Israel has planted millions of those trees, as well as setting up thousands of stone, concrete, and metal memorials, it has consistently refused to allow the Palestinians to commemorate their own history. Power is not only exercised over the land and its people, it also controls the story, its point of view, and the meta-narrative of *truth* and *memory*.

### Ethnographic Film and Ethnotopia: Who is Telling the Story?

So how is *truth* established? Is documentary cinema a vehicle in such a historical process, or could it be? The history of documentary cinema is consistent in one thing: it concentrates on identity, on the struggle between images of *selfhood* and *otherness*. In Russell's words: "One of the most important cultural ramifications of early cinema was the exchange of images made possible by traveling cameramen and exhibitors" (Russell 1999: 76). Such a division of identities, necessary for the process of identity formation to function culturally, is obviously problematic—the filmmaker is helping to define self by gazing at others. Russell outlines a safer and more complex perspective, which she calls *Ethnotopia*, after Bill Nichols' use of the term (Nichols 1991: 218). In her own use of this term, the documentarist/ethnographer assumes a more dynamic position than that occupied by his or her predecessors; the term combines *Utopia* and *Ethnos*—suggesting that the story changes depending upon the positioning or *topos*. In the Palestinian films I discuss in this chapter, the *Ethnotopic* impulse is directed away from the oppositional self-other binary precisely because the filmmaker is presenting his or her own *ethnos*, dramatically altering the equations used by these analysts of documentary. However, one can apply the notions Russell develops, and especially that of the "return of the colonial repressed," to a selection of recent Palestinian films.

All the films to be discussed here use storytelling as an *Ethnotopic* device in order to deal with the tragedy of the lost *Heimat* or homeland, Palestine. The stories told within the films not only function as devices for delivering historical detail and personal memory but also revive and reclaim for Palestinian memory the experiences of the Nakba and the expelled inhabitants, convey the enormity of loss, and offer empathy to the exiled. More importantly, they offer a voice to the unsung and unheard continuing tragedy of Palestine, constructing a possible space for national and individual existence and identity today. In telling the story of Palestine, they counter the enormously powerful

narrative of Zionism that occupied center stage for most of the second half of the twentieth century.

### A Tale of Two Towns: Saffuriyya (1948) and Jenin (2002)

The practice of using a storyline in documentary is as old as the genre itself. What I want to discuss here is the unique relationship between storytelling *within* a film, and the story *told* by the film. This relationship is especially germane to documentary cinema as a discourse of identity-formation—a discourse that represents the social and cultural *Self* and *Other*.<sup>8</sup> This argument could quite justifiably be extended to fiction film, and definitely to the fiction films under discussion here.

It is perhaps not entirely coincidental, considering the centrality of the Palestinian town of Saffuriyya in Palestinian accounts of the Nakba, that three of them feature the town, which was forcibly evacuated in 1948 and later destroyed by the IDF, as a means of exploring the loss of *Heimat*. Arguably, Saffuriyya has become symbolic of the Nakba, an icon of the totality of its loss. In at least two of the films, *Ustura* and *1948*, Saffuriyya's story stands for the story of Palestine itself. Elia Suleiman's film, *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, also features the famous Palestinian writer and native of Saffuriyya, Taha Muhammad 'Ali, who appears also in *1948*, where he speaks of his hometown.

Behind *1948* hides another Palestinian storyteller, the late Emile Habiby, a writer, intellectual, and leftist politician. Habiby's ironic, harsh, and humorous novel, *The Pessoptimist* (also called the *Opssimist* or *Optipessimist*) has served Muhammad Bakri, director of *1948*, as the reference and starting-point for a rambling theatrical production by the same name. This show, which Bakri, also an accomplished actor, has delivered many times in Arabic and Hebrew to packed audiences, tells the story of the invisible Palestinian minority of Israel, its Nakba, its subsequent marginalization, oppression, and mistreatment in the newly formed state of Israel, and its aspirations for freedom, equality and development, all dashed by the harsh realities of the Zionist entity. This bittersweet story of human suffering, survival, and hope in the face of the immovable object of Zionism, is the source of the novel's name—a blend of optimism and pessimism.

Of the three newer films, all completed in 2002, two deal with an iconic event during the second *intifada*: the destruction by the IDF of the center of the Jenin Refugee camp, an event of such brutality as to still command inter-

national anger. Both *Jenin, Jenin*, by Bakri, and *Egteyah* directed by Hassan—two documentaries that explore the Israeli invasion in revealing (though very different) visual discourses and have led to complex debates in Israel<sup>9</sup> and abroad—use the framework of the Nakba and its remembered/memorialized acts of destruction as a referent. Arguably, Jenin has become, like Saffuriyya before it, symbolic of the terrifying wanton destruction that has become so normalized across Palestine. While *Jenin, Jenin* leaves the telling of the destruction to the inmates of the camp, and especially to a young and impressive girl (fig. 10) and a deafmute man, the film *Egteyah* (which means Invasion) tells the story mainly through the eyes of one of the Israeli D9 bulldozer operators, whose narrative is that it is a “difficult job that has to be done.” Both films expose an Israeli soldiery of a kind that most Israelis continue to deny; they are presented with a clear image of a society that has brutalized itself and then gone on to brutalize and devastate the Palestinians.

The newest of these films, Elia Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* (Palestine, 2002) is, like his earlier film discussed here, a heady combination of fiction, documentary, and agitprop, moving freely between formats and even building in a fantasy musical scene that combines the Hong Kong action movie with a musical agitprop. While this film does not deal with the Jenin incident specifically, it does deal with the second *intifada* in general. The film is set, like his earlier *A Chronicle of a Disappearance* (1996), in his native Nazareth, as well as in the liminal spaces between the Israeli and Palestinian entities. This grey zone in which Palestinians now exist is his main interest, and he sets the most remarkable parts of the film in the parking lot of the A-Ram checkpoint near Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> The enigmatic Suleiman, silent throughout the film, as in his last one, is seen with his girlfriend. She comes from the Occupied Territories, while he lives on the Israeli side of Palestine. The only place they can meet with relative impunity is in the no-man's-land of the checkpoint.<sup>11</sup>

The two help us remember that the Nakba has separated the Palestinians since 1948 and continues to do so now. The film was shot after Ariel Sharon's calamitous visit to the Haram al-Sharif (Dome of the Rock) in September 2000, a visit that triggered the second *intifada*. It starts with poor Santa Claus pursued up a steep hill by a gang of kids, losing all his colorful baggage on the way and finally suffering a mortal wound, just outside a hilltop church. In one scene Suleiman blows up a red balloon with the effigy of Yasir Arafat on it and sends it flying across Jerusalem, past the checkpoints, until it reaches the same golden dome and lands on it. In this pastiche of Arafat on a pumped-up balloon, he connects the hopes of Palestine to the symbol of its struggle.



Figure 11 Still from *Divine Intervention*. Directed by Elia Suleiman, 2002.

the Al-Aqsa mosque. The film becomes almost a child's fable, with its red balloons, and an indestructible flying superwoman who defies her enemies with kung fu action and stops bullets with her bare hands. It ends in a marvelous scene of a female, victorious Christ, crucified by Israeli bullets, but to no avail, as she survives all their attacks, even one by an army helicopter, using a metal shield of Palestine as her only armor. Arafat, Suleiman, his Superwoman girlfriend, the musical and action extravaganza, Christ's crown of thorns, the *intifada*—all become elements in a *mélange* rich with cinematic references.

At this point, it is useful to return to Freud, through the creative agency of Cathy Caruth, in order to illuminate some of the devices in the films discussed. In a recent piece, Caruth (2001) discusses the famous *fort/da* episode in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and draws out of his article some hidden meanings crucial for discussing trauma and representation. Caruth charts Freud's advances in this seminal piece, from the description of World War I traumas in surviving soldiers, through the *fort/da* story of the little boy, to the deep implications of this theoretical notion, not just for trauma studies, but for our culture as a whole, and especially for history and memory, and their social functions.

In this rereading, Caruth parallels the form and content of Freud's famous essay, showing that the interplay (*spiel*) between the death drive and

the life energy is at the heart of the little *fort/da* story and gives the whole piece its structure. By rephrasing Freud's questions in his piece, she manages to reframe his work to bring it up to date and make it useful again. She talks of transforming "the original questions of trauma—*what does it mean for life to bear witness to death? And what is the nature of a life that continues beyond trauma?*—into an ultimately more fundamental and elusive concern: *what is the language of the life drive?*" (Caruth 2001: 14). In Bakri's film, *Jenin, Jenin*, another child, this time a young girl, takes us through her traumatic experiences of the invasion. At one point in her account, she says to the filmmaker, and through him, to us: "The Israelis can kill and maim, but they cannot win. . . . all the mothers will have more children . . . and we will continue the struggle."

The movement charted in this sentence, from death and the trauma of destruction to the new life that will bloom and bring salvation, is exactly what Caruth unearths in Freud's article—the constant seesawing between the polarities of the death drive and the life drive, between utmost despair and new hope. Both are actually inseparable in the girl's story, as they are in Freud's story, or in Caruth's account of the trauma suffered by the friends of a murdered boy in Atlanta; the font of hope lies in the obsessive return to the "scene of crime," to the locus of pain. Representing the trauma in a story, a *spiel* (*game*, but also *play* in German) is the mechanism chosen by all to deal with the various traumas they are facing—death, parting, loss, devastation.

This throws new light on the many stories of woe told in the film's under examination, and on the whole practice of storytelling of the Nakba—a tradition richly represented by the films selected for examination. Even the structure of the films is deeply affected by the storytelling function. Like his earlier film, Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* is divided into chapter-like scenes, as is the film *Egteyah* by Nizar Hassan, who even names the chapters: for example, *The Dream*, *The Passage*, *The Guest House*. Such storytelling strategies are just part of a wide variety of storytelling techniques integral to the films discussed in this chapter. Two of the films even start as a children's fable would—1948 starts with the director/actor, Muhammad Bakri, playing the role of Habibi's central character, Sa'id Abu al-Nahs, telling the story on stage: "Every folk tale begins: 'Once upon a time, a long time ago.' . . . Shall I tell the story, or go to sleep?" (this is said against the background of four black and white images, gradually filling the screen, of Palestinian families in flight during 1948), "But Papa knew that Churchill<sup>12</sup> did not intend to stay here very long, so Papa befriended Yaakov Safsarchik "

While the voiceover recounts this, we see archival footage of the British forces leaving Palestine. At the point of the voice reaching Yaakov Safsarchik [based on the Hebrew *safsar*, for illegal peddler or black marketeer] we see the archive footage of Ben Gurion and his wife on the occasion of the transfer of power from the British mandatory forces. The scene ends with the British flag being lowered, and the Israeli flag being hoisted on the same pole. Bakri tells us, in Habibi's words: "Before dying, Papa told me: 'If life is bad, Sa'id, Safsarchik will fix things!' So he fixed me."

This is obviously, as the title suggests, the story, or stories, of the Nakba. The framing device of the many stories of Palestinians who were driven out of their homes, never to return, is indeed a fable about the betrayed Palestinian whose father/leader trusted Israeli double-dealing, or at best, false promises. That the stories are not just about houses, wells, and trees, is beautifully clarified by Taha Muhammad 'Ali, speaking later in the film about what Saffuriyya means to him:

Saffuriyya is a mysterious symbol. My longing for it is not a yearning for stone and paths alone, but for a mysterious blend of feelings, relatives, people, animals, birds, brooks, stories and deeds. . . . When I visit Saffuriyya I become excited and burst out crying, but when I think about Saffuriyya the picture that forms in my mind is virtually imaginary, mysterious, hard to explain.

Like Freud's little boy, with his game of *fort/da*, the writer returns to Saffuriyya—the town that lies perfect in his memories but is totally destroyed in reality. Telling the stories is his way of dealing with the unimaginable—the totality of destruction and loss. What was lost during the Nakba, then, is not just houses and stones but a whole life of a nation—the country, the people, their homes and gardens, their animals and birds. Showing the stones that are left cannot provide the picture; neither can the black and white photograph of Saffuriyya on the writer's wall.

Story follows story in 1948, interposed by Bakri riding a broomstick on stage, interpreting, contradicting, and complementing the tales. The story-telling is disarming—both Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews in the audience fall into the trap: disarmed, they listen with compassion, understanding, even anger. The stories in 1948 are not limited to Palestinians telling of their fate. Some Israelis were also chosen to tell their stories. One of them is Dov Yermiya,<sup>13</sup> who was the IDF officer responsible for the conquest of Saffuriyya. His story confirms most of the facts given by the inhabitants who fled and describe the background for the battle. But later he tells us of the atrocities

committed, clearly siding with the Palestinians, speaking with anger and grief about his "side of the fence." His story, told in Arabic, is an obvious deviation from the Zionist narrative about 1948 and reinforces the Nakba narrative.

Nizar Hassan's *Ustura* also starts with the director's voiceover, telling us the story of Saffuriyya. This is another fable, told with irony, humor, but mostly with pain: "In 1948, there was a town called Saffuriyya. In one of its houses lived Grandfather Musa al-Khalil, and his wife, Grandmother Amna al-Qasim." (This takes place with a background of archive stills of Saffuriyya and the family photographs of the Nijim clan pasted on the wall of their living room. We see the photographs of Musa and Amna, marked by time and by the journeys they endured.)

One Ramadan evening in 1948, everyone was breaking the fast. Suddenly the Jewish planes began bombing; people got up and fled. They say that when people ran away, they locked their houses and took the keys, positive that they'd only be away for a short time.<sup>14</sup> That's what they thought. Amna al-Qasim did not take the key, but she took her grandson Salim. . . . And the Jews took Saffuriyya, and named it Zippori, and that's when Israel was established. "That was it for Palestine," as we say. Thus begun the journey of Umm Salim and Abu Salim's family.<sup>15</sup>

Hassan is not only telling us this "fable"; he also partakes in it in the prologue. Later in the film, he is seen seated with the three sons of Fatma, facing her in the large family room in which the whole family is seated, listening to the mother's story. Hassan relates to this story personally—his own mother told him a similar story when he was a young child (Ben-Zvi 1999: 80). By sitting in line with the sons, Hassan becomes a son too, and his presence (and the presence of his camera crew) transforms the private event into a public one.

Factually, *Ustura* narrates the story of a Palestinian family, the Nijim clan, from the Galilee. When the film begins, the family is living in a town called Saffuriyya before 1948 and is expelled by the Israeli forces. Some of the family members stay behind in Palestine, trying to get back to their home town. Others are trapped in Lebanon and not allowed back by the Israeli authorities, now in control of the whole Galilee, then as now mainly populated by Palestinians. The family is never to reunite again. As the Lebanese exile gives birth to other exiles—Jordan, Syria, Europe, the United States—the family is dispersed over the whole exilic spectrum of the Palestinian diaspora. It must be clear even from this limited description that the film is iconic, because the family experiences chosen here are representative of the Palestinian people.

and their continuing plight after the Nakba. The Nakba in these films is the *beginning of the story*<sup>16</sup> of Palestine, and in some sense, also its tragic end.

But nothing becomes truly universal before it is specifically particular, and this is a film about the specificity of a particular family. The family flees from Saffuriyya after a bombardment by the Israeli forces and starts on the well-known refugee trail, first to the Lebanese border, then to Ba'albak, where they stay for a couple of years. Only the old patriarch, Grandfather Musa al-Khalil, stays behind, while his wife, Amna al-Qasim,<sup>17</sup> flees with the rest of the family—her son Muhammad Musa, his pregnant wife Fatma, their son Salim and daughter Khadra, and the aunt Khadija, daughter of old Amna. During their stay, Grandmother Amna decides to return home. Taking with her her grandson Salim and her daughter Khadija, the three steal across the border back into Palestine, now called Israel, intent on returning to their home town, Saffuriyya. The town, however, has since become the Israeli Zip-ori. Most of the houses have been destroyed by the Israeli army, but some of the remaining houses have been populated by new immigrants. Since there is no way for the family to go back home, they settle clandestinely in the local convent and Amna, whose husband still lives in the town, registers her small grandson Salim as her own son, on her Israeli ID. Thus does the family become exiles in their own *Heimat*, illegal infiltrators into Israel. Thus their story becomes the iconic Nakba story, combining the loss of home, town, and country in one powerful narrative.

In returning to her town, although “she didn’t take her keys,” as the director so pointedly reminds us in the prologue to the film, Amna al-Qasim displays not nostalgia, but resolution to survive in her homeland. There is disagreement on the reading of the gesture of “taking keys” to the abandoned home in refugee narratives, and Hassan relates to this in his own narrative in *Ustura*, quoted below. Patricia Seed (1999: 91) argues that the keeping of the key to the old house is not a nostalgic gesture but a gesture meant to prompt the memorizing of the old home as a story to be told. History becomes a story. But Amna al-Qasim has another key to her homeland. It is not a key made of metal, but her grandson Salim. The boy Salim will become the key to reuniting the family in Palestine. Salim, growing up away from his parents, with two adoptive mothers—his grandmother and his aunt—is sent to a prestigious Jewish preparatory school numbering many Israeli elite as former students. In the 1960s, through trying to get his family back from Jordan where they had settled in the meantime, he finds out that his brothers, Mahmud and Yusuf, who were born since the separation from the fam-

ily, are the reason his application for family reunification is rejected. He is then advised by the Israeli security forces to remove the names of his brothers from the application. After ten years, and with the assistance of Shimon Peres, he succeeds in reuniting with most of his family, except his brothers. During the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in the early 1980s, Salim thinks that the PLO fighter interviewing an Israeli pilot who was shot down in Lebanon is his brother Mahmud (who he had seen in Lebanon thirty years earlier). He reports this to the Israeli authorities, who try to recruit him and to trap his brother through him.

The first meaningful reunion of most of the family takes place because of the shooting for Hassan’s film, and a very painful event it is. By that time, the family is anywhere but in Saffuriyya—the new patriarch, Salim, now lives with his family and mother and aunt in Nazareth; his brother Mahmud lives in Germany, where he has married a German woman; and his brother Yusuf and sister Khadra live in Irbid, Jordan. Saffuriyya itself is no more—it suffered the same fate as hundreds of Palestinian villages and towns eradicated by the Israeli authorities. For all intents and purposes, it had never existed.

Here is the place to ponder an unusual quality of *Ustura*. Although all information regarding the characters and their travails is presented, the film does not yield this information easily—one could even say it is unwilling to part with it. To use a phrase coined by Jeffrey K. Rouff (1998: 287), it is a “text at war with itself.” This form of narrative unclarity is an important departure from normative documentary practices and a clear indication of its exilic and “interstitial” structure, to use Hamid Naficy’s term (1999: 125–50). The film opens with a prologue, lasting a mere three minutes, cramming into this short period a number of seemingly unconnected utterances by yet-to-be-identified characters of the drama and a high-speed argument. By the end of the prologue we are clear about one feature—the family that lost its home in Saffuriyya has also lost its *Heimat*—Palestine. It is the story of the Nakba in microcosm.

The film’s title, *Ustura* (fable or story), appearing after the prologue, presages the stories that the film tells. This mode of storytelling is not just a product of the Palestinian/ Arab oral tradition of storytelling but also a substitute for the lost *Heimat*. If we recall Steiner’s (1985: 26) reference to the *text* as the “homeland of the Jew,” then the story told to the family is the homeland of the Palestinian. Hassan, in an interview published in an arts and media journal (Ben-Zvi, 1999: 80) says:

Reality turned into a catch, and this catch is our fate. . . . I had only one choice left: grasp my fate and construct an order for myself. This I could do only through a mythical story. One cannot undermine a mythical story, a legend. It cannot be challenged, and I don't want anybody challenging my existence.

When asked about the rationale for telling a political story as a myth, Hassan takes us back to his childhood and, more specifically, to his mother. Mothers are the family storytellers in his and other Palestinian films (Ben-Zvi, 1999: 80) as the Nakba becomes an inseparable part of his cultural heritage:

My clearest meeting with Palestinian history as a story, a narrative, and not as a collage of isolated incidents, I owe to my mother. . . . I was six or seven years old—and my mother took us to our bedroom. She sat on the bed and we three sat in a circle around her (which is what gave me the idea for the central scene in *Ustura*, in which Umm Salim tells her story). I only remember her telling the story without any tragic note, without victimhood, but with a dramatic sense of survival. She was full of anger, a strong will, and much hope. . . . We went to bed, and for the first time in my life I felt *grown up*, not just “a big boy,” but grown up, like kids think about grown ups. I understood that I live in my homeland, Palestine, that I belong; I am Palestinian, and no one can take that away from me.<sup>18</sup>

Here as in the other films analyzed, the story is the anchor for identity—personal and national. The story of family meets and overlaps the story of nation. The story includes secret coding: Hassan describes himself as wishing to “discover the hidden codes of Palestinian discourse” (Ben-Zvi 1999: 76) when speaking of one of his earlier films, *Istiqlal* (Israel, 1994). By discovering the codes, interiorizing them, one internalizes the identity of Palestine, of the Palestinian. The story is the secret of making sense as a person, as part of a larger unit. Narrative and myth are here seen as the “organizers of reality and of the past,” what Grierson terms “the creative treatment of actuality” (cited in Rotha, 1952, p. 70). The stories of the Nijim clan and Hassan's own family history are closely related and intertwined. Hassan succeeds in relating this through engaging the social actors very intimately: As documentary theorists Anderson and Benson (1991: 151) note, “Without the participation of social actors, the documentary form known as direct or observational cinema could not exist. Without the informed consent of the subjects, the form lacks ethical integrity.”

The stories that start *Ustura* and *1948* act as framing devices, offering irony, a sense of humor a perspective from which to view. In both, it is the film-

maker who directs our attention to details. This colors the documentary material that follows, affording and dictating a Brechtian positioning for the viewer—a spectatorship that is active, in which judgments are to be made by the viewer, who is not allowed to passively consume the film.

The third film that involves Saffuriyya, Elia Suleiman's *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, is peppered through with storytelling, coming to a high point with a story *about* storytelling, told by the same writer we see talking about Saffuriyya in *1948*, Taha Muhammad 'Ali. The film's stories remind one of Walter Benjamin's *Angel of History* ([1966] 1968: 257) who, looking backward over history, can see only the piles of rubble and destruction, a cacophony of massacres and privations. But the stories here go somewhat further. They seem to indicate that memory is the material of myth, and myth is the foundation of the identity of nations. Benedict Anderson has pointed out that the conditions for the growth of national narratives are traumatic: “All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives” (Anderson, 1983: 204). While it is impossible to assume amnesia in the case of Palestinians living in Israel after 1948, a sort of forced *public* amnesia was experienced for a number of decades within the Palestinian community in Israel: the conditions for remembering and commemoration did not exist because Israeli rule prohibited any such activity. Only gradually, with the ending of military rule and the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1964, and especially after the shock of the 1967 war, did a narrative begin to develop and grow to its open manifestations of the last three decades.

If the first two films discussed perform the task of unearthing evidence, making visible that which was erased and hidden by Zionist occupation, Suleiman's *Chronicle of a Disappearance* tells the actual story of a disappearance—that of Palestine as an entity. A series of stories outline the situation. A story told by a Russian Orthodox priest, with the Sea of Galilee in the background, clarifies the process of disappearance by encirclement:

I'm encircled by giant buildings and kibbutzes. As if that's not enough, my collar's choking me. An odd bond unites me to those people, like an arranged marriage, with this lake as a wedding ring. Not long ago, those hills were deserted. At night, when I gazed at the hills from the monastery, I contemplated a particular spot, the darkest on the hills. Fear would grab me, a fear with a religious feeling, as if this black spot were the source of my faith. . . .

Reality turned into a catch, and this catch is our fate. . . . I had only one choice left: grasp my fate and construct an order for myself. This I could do only through a mythical story. One cannot undermine a mythical story, a legend. It cannot be challenged, and I don't want anybody challenging my existence.

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Then, they settled on those hills, and illuminated the whole place; that was the end for me. I began losing faith. . . . I feared nothing any longer. Now my world is small. . . . They have expanded their world, and mine has shrunk. There is no longer a spot of darkness over there.<sup>19</sup>

The two entwined worlds, that of the priest, representing the disappearing old pre-Nakba Palestine, and the kibbutzes, representing the growing sphere of Zionism, are a graphic representation of the conflict. This undoubtedly is not documentary footage but a staged scene; yet it frames the documentary footage with which the film plays. Toward the middle of the film, the weight of the scenes, autonomous in a true Brechtian fashion, starts adding up to a critical mass. We begin reading the absent *other* into the collapse of realities. The absent other is Elia Suleiman, coming from exile in New York to a double exile at home in Nazareth and ending up in a worse exile yet—that of life in Jerusalem under occupation. Instead of finding an old and cherished self, Suleiman is gradually and painfully disappearing—a simile of the disappearance of Palestine, and of the Palestinians. This disappearing act is everywhere—in his endless and aimless sitting by his cousin's souvenir shop, waiting, waiting . . . then not even waiting anymore; in the slowness and frailty of his parents, who, in the last scene, fall asleep in front of the television, while the Israeli TV channel is broadcasting the closing item of the day—the Israeli flag waving, as the national anthem plays in the background; in the Jericho scene, in which Elia sits alone in a Palestinian cafe on a fine evening in liberated Jericho, with a flag of Palestine beside him, in a further attempt to find the missing Palestine; when the café lights, put on to mark the passage of day into night, keep arcing away as he looks at the darkening town, they cause him to appear then disappear. In a similar scene, the lights also fail in the rooms he rented in Jerusalem. But instead of going out, they keep on blinking with a will and rhythm of their own. At the end of the film, the exiled director chooses to disappear, with a proverbial suitcase, reminiscent of the famous poem by Mahmoud Darwish, in which home is a suitcase.

Suleiman's alter-ego in the film, the young Adan, a Palestinian woman choosing to fight the occupation, represents, like his parents, *sumud*, adherence to the land, resistance, and survival. If the struggle of the old generation is by powerful inertia, Adan chooses the active road. To fight an enemy like hers, one must adopt some of its tactics and methods, use some of its machinery. She thus operates through the ether, broadcasting in Hebrew to the enemy, using a found army radio to send her messages, coded in the

nonsensical fashion so beloved by the IDF. As an ultimate weapon, she uses *Hatikvah*—the Israeli national anthem, which speaks of the hope residing in every Jew for a return to Jerusalem, read in its original sense as an anthem of the oppressed who have lost Jerusalem, who have lost the land, who have disappeared. Only this time, it is the Palestinians who hope for return and liberation. Those without means, deprived of everything, have to use the power of their oppressors in order to survive, in order not to disappear.

### The Al-Aqsa Intifada Films

The films that have appeared since the start of the second *intifada* have built on the same principle and used similar strategies, with one crucial difference: if the films before 2000 are still treating the 1948 Nakba as the ultimate catastrophe, some of the people speaking in the recent films see the events unfolding before them as an even worse turn. In Bakri's *Jenin, Jenin* (2002) we hear the story of an old man who has followed the orders given by the IDF soldiers to vacate his house, only to be shot at close range in his hand and foot in an apparent attempt to disable him. Speaking from his hospital bed, waving his mutilated, bandaged arm, he weeps and says:

In 1948 we tasted the same pain, but nothing like this! All that we have achieved—we built a house, had children—all gone in a single hour! So Bush can be really satisfied, him and his friend the murderer, Abu Sabra and Shatila.<sup>20</sup>

The mention of the Nakba in earlier films, including in Bakri's 1948, is normally used in order to recall the greatest catastrophe of all; but in this new crisis, the residents of Jenin who, like this old man, have experienced the Nakba, realize that what they are now going through is even worse. In most of the films, memory of life after the Nakba has been one long tale of pain and suffering for the people interviewed. Nizar Hassan's *Egteyah* starts with reminding us in the opening titles, that the fourteen thousand residents of the Jenin refugee camp are actually refugees from fifty-six different towns and villages in 1948 Palestine. Some of them, like the old woman telling her story in the ruins of her home, were refugees for the second or third time, before settling in Jenin. Losing the Jenin camp epitomizes despair, a Nakba that continues for a whole lifetime, only getting worse with time. The woman, originally a resident of Zirin, a village long gone and erased by the IDF in the 1950s, has ended up in Jenin, thinking she may have some respite there. But of the intervening years she says: "Since 48 . . . I haven't had one good day. Only fear

and horror [. . .] Our story with the Jews is a long one. . . . Since they arrived we have lived in suffering and bitterness." The links to the now long-gone villages is evident in most stories. A man who had suffered enormously during the Jenin events in 2002 tells Hassan:

Since my childhood I had dreamt of building a big house in my original village, Al-Ghazal near Haifa, a house with curtains, windows, chandeliers. . . . When I had money, I was forced to build it here [Jenin refugee camp] on the camp's slope. It's the highest house.

Which is, of course, why the house was taken over by the IDF, causing its residents to suffer. The stories all go back to that great catastrophe of 1948, the event after which all others seem secondary.

But if the old people had experienced some peace and quiet before the 1948 disaster, the young residents of the camp know only its dusty alleyways and rickety shacks, now all destroyed by the U.S.-made, mammoth D9 bulldozers of the IDF. A young girl, the main speaker for the camp in Bakri's *Jenin, Jenin*, amazes us with her concise logic and unfailing commitment to the camp and its inhabitants. She tells the viewer that the Israelis cannot win: that Palestinian women will bring other babies to replace the dead ones, that the camp will be rebuilt, and that she can never have peace with those who have done this to her people, her country, her camp, and her family. She notes that while the Israelis may well be able to shoot, kill and maim, destroy houses and whole neighborhoods, their deeds reek of fear rather than bravery, of weakness rather than strength. The moral fiber she instills in her story is the foundation of a redemption narrative. As Hassan has told us, being able to control your story is the fountain of strength of the dispossessed.

### **Storytelling as Defensive Practice: Stories of Palestine vs. the Story of Zionism**

In the period following the Oslo Accord of 1993, until the start of the second *intifada* in 2000, the main struggle between the dominance of Zionism and the emerging nationhood of Palestine passed from the arena of armed struggle to that of culture and memory. The narratives of Zionism, annulling Palestine, denying its oppression by Israel, and telling the one-sided story of Zionism as a liberation movement, decimated the space for Palestinian

cultural work after decimating the physical space that was Palestine. First it conquered and subdued the physical space. Then it renamed and reassigned it, thus erasing its past, its history, its story. Fighting the injustice of such narratives has to take place in the cultural arena—not as a replacement for the arena of the physical, but as its complement.

In each of the films mentioned, characters tell stories—mostly stories of the family that are inseparable from the story of Palestine itself. These stories form the films' idiom and structure. Hence the "documents" in these documentaries are really the oral stories told. This raises the most important typological observation about the films: they deal with the story of Palestine as a strategic defensive move, a move designed to recapture ground lost to Zionism and its dominant narrative.

The narrative of Palestine in the cultural arena carved by Zionism is, first and foremost, a story of erasure, denial, and active silencing by historians and intellectuals. The first casualty was the very word Palestine itself. After 1967, when the whole of Palestine was occupied by Israel, it became *de rigueur* to replace the historical term Palestine with the nationalist and expansionist Hebrew phrase *Eretz Israel*. The use of the Hebrew phrase acted as a hidden marker of ideology. It denoted the very absence of Palestine—the country, the people, the language, and its history. The phrase provided a virtual (and false) connection between the biblical existence of the land, and its current occupation by the Israeli state. Here also we can clearly see in action the type of historical amnesia noted by Anderson for nationalisms (1983). This erasure is applied not only in the case of texts that deal with the area and its recent history, but also as a blanket term, even when nonsensical.<sup>21</sup> The use of the term *Eretz Israel* to replace and erase Palestine is not peculiar to the right wing of Israeli politics. It has become a test of conformity and political correctness. Similar codes embedded in Israeli public discourse are the terms used to describe the wars in the Middle East: the 1948 war is referred to only as the *War of Independence*; the 1956 war *The Sinai Offensive*; the 1967 war *The Six Day War*; 1973 is called the *Yom Kippur War*; and the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 is quaintly called *Operation Peace in the Galilee*. Any departure from such terminology is understood as a dangerous deviation, opening the door to arguments about the moral justification for any or all of those military campaigns, and ultimately, to justifications for Zionism itself.<sup>22</sup> The daily papers, whatever their political leanings, have accepted and adopted such terminology without question, as have the various broadcast institutions.

In the face of such thorough suppression, erasure, and socialized forgetfulness, it is not surprising that the Palestinian response seems to be centered around unearthing the story, telling it first to the Palestinians themselves, always in danger of losing their story, but also to Israelis who may listen. This telling of the suppressed story is not only crucial for Palestinian identity, but may also serve as a way of bridging the aspirations of both communities, by trying to bring understanding and compassion through recognizing the other's pain.<sup>23</sup>

The erasure and eradication practiced by Zionism in Palestine are multilayered, and affect each Palestinian on at least four distinct levels, all referenced in *Ustura*. The first level is that of the nation/country—the level most responsible for the production of melancholia. The second level is much less abstract and even more traumatic—that of the locale. This is the town or village occupied, destroyed, and erased from memory, as if the *self* itself was erased. The third layer is that of the family—each family in Palestine has suffered directly, in many ways, during and since the 1948 Nakba. The family has, in many cases, been dismantled as the basic unit of social organization—it has been disbanded, fragmented both mentally and geographically, and has lost its cohesion and efficacy. This is conveyed by the central role attributed to the family and the mother in Hassan's work (Ben-Zvi, 1999: 80). The last and most complex layer, affected by all the others, is the individual Palestinian—Salim, in *Ustura*, for example, or for that matter filmmaker Hassan himself—real people who have had to continue and to fight mental as well as military occupation by the forces of Zionist myth and army.

Hence the dispossession brought about by conquest is even deeper and more painful than just losing home and country. The ultimate loss is that of one's story, losing the right to tell one's own story and history. In *Ustura* we find out that this happened to Salim, who became the hero of a Hebrew short story for children about a little Arab boy. But the retelling of one's own story, which brought tears to Odysseus's eyes, is here barren and distant. In the scene with the author, Salim is so disturbed by the written (Hebrew and Zionist) version of his life story that he departs, leaving filmmaker Hassan alone with the author reading aloud. His story has been appropriated, as were his land and country before.

So Hassan, Suleiman, Bakri, and their colleagues in Palestine fight for the right to at least tell their own story, and history, in their own way. Conceptually and ideologically, they must operate in the interstitial space between cultures: the Israeli and Palestinian, the Palestinian in Israel and the

Palestinian in the occupied territories, the Palestinian in Palestine and the Palestinian in the diaspora, Palestine and the Arab world, and Western versus Oriental discourse. This interstitial mode of production is forced and justified by the normative state of Palestinians in Israel—living on the seams of Israeli society: they always are situated between two other points, Israeli and Hebrew points, on the virtual map of Palestine. The names of their habitations are missing from the road signs, as is their language, an official language of Israel noticeable by its absence. Some of their habitations are not even midway between Israeli named places because no road leads to them, and they are not connected to the electricity grid. They are termed "unrecognized settlements" and receive no assistance from any government agency.<sup>24</sup> They simply do not exist, however large and populous they may be. But of course the Palestinians see this relationship in reverse. All the Jewish settlements are either built on the remains of Arab settlements or lie between such remains, however difficult to discern. When Hassan takes the family back to Saffuriyya, trying to locate the old house, all that Salim can find are some foundation stones of his birthplace. Significantly, the map he uses to draw the route of the refugees in 1948, early in the film, is a map showing the Arab names of the Palestinian habitations, totally disregarding the Hebrew names of Jewish settlements. So there are two virtual countries within the same space, two parallel universes disregarding each other yet totally bound to each other.

The deeper irony is that the victorious newcomers are also refugees, claiming this as the justification for that which cannot be justified.<sup>25</sup> In one scene Hassan discusses with Salim's Jewish ex-headmaster the fact that it is their homeland that the Israelis occupy. The headmaster says he has a very short answer to this accusation: "Auschwitz." Here Hassan is heard saying "cut," ending the scene abruptly. Not only are there two parallel universes superimposed on this landscape, but the powerful occupiers also project a third—that different planet of Auschwitz and the Holocaust, so that the Palestinian interstitial existence is now situated on the space between two universes of Judaism, rather than in their own country. They are also situated on another interstice—that of the space between the Jewish distant past in Palestine and their current control of it. Hassan refers to this in the interview quoted above (Ben-Zvi 1999: 80–81). The normal use of language in Israel, as well as its dominant ideology, connects both instances into a continuum, despite the two thousand years that gape between them, filled by nonexistent people whose nonexistent settlements have filled the nonexistent *san*.

### Recurrent Dreams, Nightmares, and Stories

The six films and their representation of trauma should remind us of Freud's question in the beginning of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud 1920). Cathy Caruth sums up Freud's question thus: "What does it mean for the reality of war to appear in the fiction of the dream? What does it mean for life to bear witness to death? And what is the surprise that is encountered in this witness?" (Caruth 2001: 8). One can make the case that all the films discussed here are trauma agencies, the trauma-resolution social mechanisms of Palestinian society. It is hardly surprising, then, that all films are marked by trauma and melancholia. In *Ustura*, in a deserted park in Germany, the director Nizar Hassan is offered "the only fig in Germany" by Mahmud—a token of the lost *Heimat* and also a biblical token of home—"under your vine and fig tree." Yet the only fig is a barren fig—not to be eaten, never to be continued, like the exile Mahmud who has no children himself. And while he talks of his existence in Germany as merely temporary, he is destined to die in exile, under someone else's fig. In one of the film's last scenes, Hassan discovers Salim sitting high on the branches of a carob tree, the tree of his lost childhood in the convent. Sitting in the tree, he talks of his childhood with no parents, without his siblings, without his people, a childhood spent in exile within the Jewish Israeli community, away from Palestine, while in it.

In a terrifying end to Bakri's *Jenin, Jenin*, the little girl who is the main commentator throughout the film, together with the deafmute who leads Bakri through the ruins, says this of her life, whilst holding a large, twisted metal casing from an Israeli bomb which has destroyed her home and her community: "I saw dead bodies, I saw houses destroyed, I saw sights which cannot be described. . . and now, after they ruined all my dreams and hopes—I have no life left!" So the girl, who claims to have no fear of Sharon and his tanks, like another boy described in the film by his father, may not be fearful, but is frighteningly mature enough to utter such sentiments, which more than any physical damage ever could, damn the continued occupation and its inhumanity.<sup>26</sup> So, melancholia is not the only disturbance which mars the Palestinian social landscape. The film, and through it the little girl, who, one must assume, is *also dreaming* of what she speaks of, is a kind of psycho-social equivalent of dreaming, of dealing with the trauma encountered. The girl's repetitive return to the trauma, like that of others in the film—the deafmute man, the children playing in the devastated landscape (in this film as well as in Hassan's *Egteyah*) are all reliving moments of trauma, in a desperate search

for relief, obviously unavailable, as the trauma continues and intensifies. This is true of the many people telling their stories in the other films—1948, *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, and *Ustura*.

Another common factor in the Palestinian films under discussion is that all six were made by Palestinians who are citizens of Israel, and hence enjoy greater freedom of movement and expression (though not equal to Israeli Jews) than that experienced by Palestinians in the Occupied Territories of Palestine. The three directors are hence sensitized to the very fracture lying at the heart of Palestinian existence since the Nakba—the division of their people into three distinct groups, and maybe even four. Edward Said has enumerated (Said 1979: 116–18) the various parts of the Palestinian nation, separated by the Nakba: The "1948" Palestinians (those who stayed and ended up as Israeli subjects), the rest living in Palestine (the West Bank and Gaza Strip), and the many others living in the Arab countries as refugees (mostly in Jordan and Lebanon). To those one needs to add the many Palestinians living in the larger diaspora that sprang out of the Nakba: the Gulf countries, Europe, North and South America, and elsewhere. If the events of 1948 brought Jews from all over the world to live in Palestine/Israel, the same events have dispersed Palestinians into a diaspora similar to that left by the Jews emigrating to Israel. One immediately is reminded of this separation forced by Israeli occupation in the many scenes in Suleiman's *Divine Intervention*, when the two protagonists, divided by the Israeli checkpoints, can meet only at the checkpoint car park, or in Hassan's *Ustura*, in the vast, green and peaceful German park strewn with *Sans Souci* sculptures, where the "only fig in Germany" is discovered by Mahmud. All the films deal with the various parts of Palestinian existence, and, in a sense, are among the most powerful means of bringing the distinct groups together to work through the collective memory of the Nakba and the atrocities that followed in its wake. The very act of making such films is an active reclaiming of Palestinian identity by the directors, an act of sharing the fate of the divided nation and community, and of bridging and combining memory.

How does one make a film about people and places that "do not exist" or whose lives have been destroyed? Whose hopes and dreams have been desecrated, their eyes exposed to taboo sights and to inhuman suffering? Memory is not enough. The foundation of *Heimat* must be fortified by story and storytelling. The place of home is now taken by narrative icons of the Nakba and the lost *Heimat*, re-created for and by film. Palestinian cinema exists in an exilic interstice—between fact and fiction, between narrative and narration

between the story and its telling, between *documentary* and *fiction*, not to mention between Israel and Palestine, and between life and death. Insofar as it parallels the existence afforded by most Palestinians, facts are not enough, these films seem to tell us. In order to create a space to live in, to bring an end to personal and political trauma and melancholia, one must employ fiction, one must play (*spiel*) in the Freudian sense—one must tell stories.

#### NOTES

1. Though Caruth's oeuvre in its great richness informs my analysis, I shall use one of her recent articles (Caruth 2001) to anchor my main observations about the films.
2. Not by choice, of course, but by dint of being born in the Israeli-controlled part of Palestine before 1967. Some of the films actually appear as Israeli films in various catalogues, including the website of the Israeli Film Fund. This is obviously misleading, as the proper denomination would be Palestine. I have used the current denominations, but found it useful to explain here the travesty behind such a system of definition.
3. It is important to remember that until at least the first *intifada*, the ability of Palestinians to produce films independently was almost nonexistent. Film production is one of the hallmarks of a developed, independent society. The Israeli occupation made this almost impossible for many years. Only the Oslo process in its early stages, and some important technical innovations in video production and especially post-production, made it possible for Palestinians to produce films of quality in great numbers.
4. This New Jew was a creature of a modernist grand narrative, the result of deliberate cultural identity construction, a synthetic projection denoting the very opposite of the Ghetto Jew. Hence, military and physical prowess are seen as essential for this New Jew, as essential as intellectual qualities and commercial acumen have been for the old Jew. As the Zionist project and its official (and unofficial) mythology has depended on, and has contributed to a process of controlling the land of Palestine, connections to the land and to tilling the land have also become crucial elements of this new ideological projection. If the Old Jew was landless and demilitarized, as argued by Boyarin, living and existing not on the land, but in the word, as Steiner has put it (Steiner, 1985), then the new Jew was living on and in the land, depending on his military might. The myths and realities of Zionist existence in Palestine, and later in Israel, would, it was argued by Zionist polemicists, somehow purge the New Jew not only of the shame and

- humiliation of the Holocaust, but also of the whole period of living in the Diaspora, rootless and lacking a national identity and a land base. Zionism is thus seen as a massive national therapeutic project, a social-engineering of national identity in a people which is deemed to have lost it, and must regain it.
5. I have dealt with this in detail elsewhere (Bresheeth 2001).
  6. Quoted in Young (1993: 180).
  7. One such forest in the center of Israel, Britannia Park, financed by the British Jews according to the plaque welcoming visitors, is actually planted over the remains of at least five villages, one of which is still easy to decipher as one walks through the former streets and orchards. It seems the construction of Zionist memory requires erasures of earlier memories: it is actually built on such erasure and denial. This can be easily learnt from the 1947 Ordnance Survey maps. The detailed story of the destruction of Arab Palestine after 1948 can be found in Khalidi (1991 and 1992) or in Said (1979), among others.
  8. I have dealt with this issue elsewhere (Bresheeth 2001: 25–26).
  9. *Jenin, Jenin* was banned by Israeli censorship a short while after its release, and this banning was contested at the Israeli Supreme Court. This film has caused enormous disquiet in Israel, with the brutality of the invasion fully exposed in graphic terms, and with powerful montage. The banning followed action taken by some of the soldiers who took part in the invasion, and claimed the film has desecrated the memory of soldiers who were killed during the operation. Such banning is a most unusual act of political censorship, almost unthinkable until quite recently, and bearing witness to the deep decline in the Israeli political scene.
  10. Obviously, he was not allowed to film there, and had to reconstruct it as a set elsewhere.
  11. This is no longer the case—Israeli soldiers no longer allow such meetings to take place.
  12. Churchill was obviously out of government by 1948, having lost the elections in 1945. Habiby uses Churchill generically, as the icon of the British Empire.
  13. Also the author of *My War Diary: Lebanon, June 5–July 1, 1982* (1984). Yermiya who was a high-ranking officer in the IDF, broke his silence rather earlier than many, and exposed a number of atrocities committed by the IDF in 1948–49.
  14. See Patricia Seed's analysis of "taking the key to the house" narratives in her article in Naficy (1999: 87–94).
  15. Another perfect example of the fort/da model: "now you see it, now you don't"—one moment they had a home, sat down to break the fast, and then, in a moment, all was gone. The impossibility of preparing for the inevitable is the source of trauma, as Freud and Caruth remind us (Caruth 2001: 10).

16. Those are the very words used by two of the filmmakers at the start of their films!
17. Arab women keep their family names when they marry.
18. Indeed, the achievement of a widely recognized national identity despite all odds is presented as the main achievement of the Palestinian liberation movement by Rashid Khalidi (Khalidi 1997: 201–9) in the concluding chapter of his exacting work on the topic.
19. The text is quoted verbatim from the English version subtitles—it is spoken in Russian.
20. Abu Sabra and Shatila—a reference to Ariel Sharon, the one responsible for the Sabra and Shatila massacres, even according to the official commission of inquiry which forced his sacking as Minister of Defense in 1983.
21. One such recent case of replacement of the English Palestine with the Hebrew *Eretz Israel* occurred in the translation of Eric Hobsbawm's *Century of Extremes* into Hebrew, and pointed out by Yitzhak Laor in *Ha'aretz*, May 12, 2000.
22. See the discussion of naming in Rashid Khalidi's book, where he looks especially at the naming of Al-Quds/Jerusalem and Haram Al-Sharif (the Temple Mount) (Khalidi, 1997: 16).
23. This need was first pointed out by Azmi Bishara, the philosopher and political scientist turned politician, in an article on the Holocaust and the Arabs (Bishara 1995: 54–71). The importance of understanding the suffering of Jews during the Holocaust, and the importance of empathizing with such suffering, as a precondition to the demand and expectation of the same consideration offered by Israeli Jews to the Nakba, was an important departure from the more usual denial or indifference displayed by Arab intellectuals. Bishara argues for a mutual empathy that one may develop through familiarity with the story of the other as a precondition for a long-term relationship of neighborhood and equality. In a sense, what is argued here is a reversal of historical/political amnesias on both sides as a precondition for a common future.
24. There are more than one hundred of those. Many of them are settlements of Bedouins, but others also are termed and treated in this way. This is a brutal mechanism for removing people from their land, which they have settled for many generations, even centuries. There is an ongoing struggle by the communities but to date it has not been successful. One of the early innovations by Sharon when commanding the Southern Command was the use of military force, and, together with another general, Yaffeh, the setting up of the so-called "Green Patrol," supposedly there to protect the environment but in reality serving as a force against the "unrecognized settlements" of the Bedouins.

25. On the same topic, see Bresheeth (2003).
26. Again, Freud and Caruth illuminate this point—it is exactly the lack of fear and the lack of preparation (the impossibility of preparation) for what they have experienced that causes the trauma in the first place. Not being fearful does not protect from trauma, but causes it (Caruth 2001: 10).