Coming Into Being and Flowing Into Exile: History and Trends in Palestinian Film-Making.

By Helga Tawil

Almost two decades ago, Edward Said suggested that the existence of a "center" (or a "meta-narrative") to describe the Palestinian experience, was not just missing, but would likely fall short:

> [w]e have no dominant theory of Palestinian culture, history, society; we cannot rely on one central images (exodus, holocaust, long march); there is no completely coherent discourse adequate to us, and I doubt whether at this point, if someone could fashion such a discourse, we could be adequate for it. Miscellaneous, the spaces here and there in our midst include but do not comprehend the past; they represent building without overall purpose, around an uncharted and only partially surveyed territory. Without a center. Atonal (Said, 1986; 129).

As Said suggests, it is impossible to define Palestine or Palestinians in any coherent, holistic sense, for neither is monolithic or simple. Palestine can signify a biblical geography or the ever-shrinking Territories promised to the Palestinian Authority in the Oslo Accords. Most maps, no matter their date, do not denote Palestine. Similarly ambiguous, Palestinians can signify people living in Jerusalem with an Israeli ID card, or in the refugee camps of Lebanon. A Palestinian could likely be residing in Paris with Canadian citizenship, in the U.S. with an Egyptian *laissez-passer*, or in a rural West Bank village with Jordanian papers. Palestinians can be Muslim or Christian, or, even atheists; their political views can be radically different and opposed – Communist, Islamist, Secularist, One-State Solutionist, Globalist, to name but a few. They can speak Hebrew, or Arabic, or neither at all. Indeed Palestine or Palestinians are more aptly to be understood as hybrids rather than a place or a people easily defined.

On one hand Said's claim can be read as a call for the need to document Palestinianness. On the other hand, it should also be understood that any such undertaking be done with trepidation, for not only are Palestinians increasingly becoming "hybrids," but everything to do with Palestine seems to rest on shaky ground. If to define a Palestinian is challenging, imagine then the difficulty in agreeing on what constitutes a "Palestinian film." The notion of a Palestinian cinema begs the question of how it can be classified as such in the first place. Is a film 'Palestinian' that is directed by a Palestinian person? And what if that person is an exile, a refugee and/or has taken citizenship elsewhere? Or is it a film shot on location in 'Palestine',

and if so according to which borders? Is a Palestinian film to be determined by where the production company is located, where financing came from, where it was edited, who distributes it, or even who its intended audience is? Can there be such a thing as Palestinian cinema when there is no such thing, in geo-political terms at least, as Palestine? As the controversy over Elia Suleiman's film, *Divine Intervention*, shows, Palestinian films cannot enter the Oscar-race since the MPAA did not recognize Palestine as a nation-state (see Judith Gabriel, 2002). And yet, there is definitely a growing, creative, body of work that can be called Palestinian film-making; and it can be defined by any of the questions I raise above.

What seems clear from the onset is that we should expect Palestinian films, however we agree to define them, to reflect the contradictions, the hybridity, even the absurdities at the heart of what constitutes Palestinianness. To discuss Palestinian films puts us in the quandary of dealing with the notion of the "national," the world of Palestinian film – to be understood in a number of ways – is rich, diverse, contradictory and one of the growing forms of cultural expression for a peoples both attempting to build their nation and at the same time being thread apart by diaspora and exile. Palestine, in one sense, can be understood as the 'nation without a state' – a political project aimed at defining autonomy of a national group within (and with-out) the existing system of states. It can also represent a 'state of mind' – as that of belonging to an oppressed group that sees a specific geographic location as its 'original' homeland. As such, this dual existence is reflected in the history and development of Palestinian films. Films are inevitably constructs, fabrications and representations – be they fictional or documentary – but they do intersect to some extent with the historical processes that have shaped 'Palestine.' What I intend to do in this paper is to delineate different filmic theories and briefly assess the history of Palestinian film-making vis-à-vis these different theories.

A Brief History

> *"A country without images or a nation which does not produce images is like a country or a nation which does not produce its own food supply."*
> *film-maker Moumen Smihi*

'Palestine' has not known the cinema industry in the proper sense of the word. Being under Jordanian, Egyptian and Israeli rule, Palestinian society has had little possibility to establish a cinema industry. Given the political centrality of Egypt and Syria during the 1950s and 1960s, it should be no surprise that they were the first Arab countries to produce films about Palestine and the Palestinians. *Land of Peace*, an Egyptian film made in 1957, is the first film

ever to be made in the Occupied Territories by an Arab. In the 1960's, Syria, during the time of a strong pan-Arab orientation, became a haven for exiled Palestinians and pro-Palestinians, as exemplified by the Festival of Young Arab Cinema in Damascus. Its promotion was seen as a support and a supplement to the armed struggle. The dominance of the Palestinian question in Damascus did not only express itself on a verbal level. Between 1969 and 1972 three (out of the five) full-length feature films produced by the Syrian film organization dealt with Palestine. Five years after the 1967 'Six Day War' and the subsequent occupation of the rest of Palestine by Israel, and a year after Black September, the Palestinian question was inevitably in the fore of any political discussion. Although films focused on Palestinian issues, they were more socio-political commentaries on the commitment and responsibility to a pan-Arab unity.

In the case of Palestinian film-making, cinematographic activities developed in connection with armed struggle, started by exiled Palestinians after the defeat of Egypt, Syria and Jordan by Israel in 1967, and the subsequent Israeli occupation. The various Palestinian national resistance movements were among the first to recognize the latent possibilities of the media to support and express national self-assertion and liberation. So it was in 1967 that a Palestinian cinema came into existence, primarily focused on addressing 'public opinion' and introducing the 'facts' of the Palestinian problem – from the Palestinian perspective. But this Palestinian cinema was to be formed in exile, with practically no cinematic development within the Occupied Territories. Between 1967 and 1968 the first Palestinian film unit was founded and annexed to *Fateh*. After Black September in 1971 the group moved to Beirut, where it continued producing documentaries about the situation of the Palestinians until 1975. Other Palestinian political organizations, like the PLFP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), the PDFLP (Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine) and the arts and culture section of the PLO, began to produce films. The films coming out of the Palestinian organizations dealt with the roots of the armed struggle against "the Zionist enemy… [and] highlighted the historical and contemporary dimensions of the Palestinian-Zionist struggle and the Arab-Zionist struggle" (Abdel Fattah, 2000a). Politically and financially conditions were unfavorable. Cut off from Israel and the Occupied Territories, they documented military actions and life in the refugee camps. "But because of the lack of planning and the absence of a clear goal for cinematic production, which depended mainly on individual initiative, it was not properly effective" (*ibid*.).

The Palestinian Cinema Group formed in 1973, which had no allegiance to any of the factions, was created as a nucleus for a Palestinian cinema, but only managed to produce one film – *Scenes of Occupation in Gaza*, which was an edited version of scenes shot by Western

news agencies showing the intimidation and suffering of Palestinians. The activities came to a total halt after the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982, and a great part of the Palestinian cinema archive disappeared. With the PLO's move to Tunis, its cinema department drastically limited its own production. As Shohat and Stam note of the early history of Palestinian cinema,

> Palestinian film production, from the establishment of 'Unity Cinema' in 1967 through the 'Palestinian Cinema Group' in 1973 to 'The Palestinian Cinema Organization,' under the auspices of the PLO, has always been intended as an instrument for the promotion of the Palestinian national cause and the registering of revolutionary events related to the Palestinian resistance. Virtually all production, therefore, has been devoted to news and documentary films – a situation common in societies struggling for political definition (Shohat & Stam, 290).

The films of the Palestinian *fedayeen* did little to influence world public opinion. These films seldom made into the Territories or outside the boundaries of the nation-state they were produced in, and had very limited viewership. Nevertheless the promotion of the national cause and revolutionary aspects continued well into the 1980's, when most films produced focused on the war and resistance 'martyrs.'

It was during the 1980's that a few independent Palestinian film-makers began to take different 'artistic' and 'political' turns in their films, and began to address Palestinian perspectives beyond the purely nationalistic views of the majority of films. Most of these film-makers were Palestinians in exile, educated in Europe and managed to secure technical knowledge and funding from foreign sources. For in order to finance films, independent Palestinian film-makers to date, have only two options: to rely on foreign producers or be born into a wealthy family. When Arafat returned to Palestine after his exile in 1994 and his Palestinian Authority was granted permission to control its own media, he concentrated on setting up newspapers, radio and television broadcasting stations, not cinematic capabilities, in order to maintain as much control as possible on the 'national' media, and leaving little room for art or oppositional cultural forms.

According to film critic Abdel Fattah, Palestinian cinema (as *in* Palestine) today is in dire conditions as it lacks the necessary technical and artistic resources to make films, it lacks a specific working place and methodology, and also suffers because of the dispersion of Palestinian filmmakers among various revolutionary factions which leads to fragmentation rather than a uniting efforts. Clearly, Abdel Fattah's notion of what the Palestinian cinema should be leaves no room for heterogeneity or difference, and sees it as something to be done under the auspices of one national power and one 'unity.' A conviction, still held today, of a

purely nationalistic cinema. Although to him the most serious impasse is that "Palestinian cinematographers have not bothered to ask themselves one simple question: who is the targeted audience? Is it the Palestinian, the Arab or the foreign audience?" (Abdel Fattah, 2000a).

But beyond the financial constraints or a lack of directive as to who the audience is/should be, it most often seems expected of Palestinian film-makers to uphold to the notion that film is one part of the liberation struggle for the nation-state still to come. For example, Abdel Fattah claims of Palestinian cinema that it should be "one of the tools used to restore Palestinian rights and reiterate the identity of their land, history, language, customs and traditions" (*ibid.*). Or as Palestinian film-maker Elia Suleiman put it, "my brand of humor or irony is not at all accepted [by Palestinian audiences]. I have even been accused of treason, of being a Zionist! My approach is considered too critical for a time of national construction that is said to call for unity and even uniformity. They think that Palestinians should all speak with one voice" (Bourlond, 100). There is definitely a fear of destabilization linked to a place, where unity is considered essential. Suleiman's style of self-critical and self-mocking humor requires a certain freedom; and in a place where the daily reality is occupation and military presence, humor and irony aren't very well accepted.

According to Bibas (2001), there seems to be two major trends in Palestinian film-making: those with explicitly political discourses, as first intended by the Palestinian Cinema Organization,[1] to make use of the cinema for the Palestinian revolution; or those that have a more aesthetic language such as the films of Michel Khleifi, which take him back on a search of Palestinian identity by way of folklore and memory. The remainder of Palestinian films look the same: desperate refugees, litanies of complaints about the lost homeland, the brutality of Israeli occupation, and finally (and almost always) the possibility and the dream of return. But Bibas has quite a narrow view of what Palestinian films today consist of. It is still true that the categories of 'explicit political discourse,' the refugee/homeland/occupation/return, and the new 'aesthetic' films exist. But there are also films such as those by Elia Suleiman, Mona Hattoum, Hany Abu-Assad and Rashid Masharawi – among others – that belong to entirely different categorizations. There has been a diversification and appearance of directors from various ethnic or religious groups[2], which indicates on the ideological level a disintegration of the common notion of nationhood and unitarian nationalism.

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[1] Set up in 1968 by Hani Jawharia, Mustafa Abu Ali and Sulafa Gadallah, as part of the "Palestinian Cinema Manifesto" within the framework of the revolution.
[2] Rashid Masharawi is a Muslim refugee from the Gaza Strip, Mona Hattoum is a Christian Palestinian from Lebanon now living in the U.K., Michel Khleifi and Elia Suleiman are exiled Christian Palestinians from Nazareth, Subhi Zubeydi is a Muslim born in Jerusalem who grew up in a refugee camp and now lives in Ramallah, Hanna Musleh is a Christian from the Gaza Strip, Azza El Hassan is Palestinian from Jordan, Mai

Palestinian films cannot make claim to a huge collection, but their historical trajectory has still touched on various aspects of different film movements. More recent Palestinian films, although small in number, represent a range of styles (aesthetic, political, mode of production, etc.). Given that they began when they did they were firmly embedded in national and third cinema perspectives of film-making, a tradition which continues on until today. But Palestinian films, due to the political nature of Palestinian history, are also evocative of exilic cinema, whereby some film-makers have attempted to veer away from the imposed national image, constructed by political/cultural actors who drone on about what Palestine means or should mean, and who fear that if such an image disappears, then political/artistic inspirations will disappear with it. Some film-makers focus on the pathos of exile. Others even posit that Palestine does not exist: it has no borders, it has all the chaotic elements that leads one to question space, borders, and crossings, even if none of these elements, in itself, is valid. Some even attempt to have the audience participate in the construction of the image and hence in the construction of the (his)story. In short, Palestinian film-makers are asserting a pluralistic sense of 'Palestinianness' through various approaches and filmic styles, from the experimental exilic films to the national ones.

National Cinema

Theories of national cinema seem to be concerned with the 'internal' aspects, how, if at all, the production, distribution and consumption of films are constitutive of the national collectivity. However, there is also an awareness of the 'external' as a shaping force, as cultural, economic, political and ideological forces. Here then we come to a concept of national cinema that is two-fold. On one hand, it looks inward by reflecting on the nation itself, on its past, present and future, its cultural heritage, its traditions, its sense of common identity. On the other hand, is also looks outside its borders, asserting its difference from other national cinemas, proclaiming its sense of otherness or difference. It assumes then that national identity and tradition are already formed and fixed in place; also takes borders for granted as effective in containing political, economic, cultural developments and identity.

In discussion of national cinema, the nation is treated as singular, and the study of national cinema revolves around a country's cinematographic production. The problem of delineating a national cinema is based on a statist paradigm, firmly rooted in the development of a political culture: "film functions as a cultural articulation of a nation… [it] textualizes the nation and

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Masri is a Lebanese-Palestinian living between Beirut and Europe, Najwa Najjar is a Muslim Palestinian living in Ramallah, to name some of the various Palestinian film-makers of today.

subsequently constructs a series of relations around the concepts, first of state and citizen, then of state, citizen and other…" (Schlesinger, 25). What seems clear is that whether consciously or not, social communication thought[3] is an expression of the cultural geography of the nation-state. "This is the bedrock on which film studies has been based when it involves a largely derivative sociological argument about nationalism and national identity as a necessary starting point for studies of national cinema" (Schlesinger, 29).

The notion of a national cinema proves a helpful taxonomy to some extent, but more importantly this process of labeling is to some degree tautological, fetishizing the national rather than merely describing it. It erects boundaries between films produced in different nation-states although they may have much in common, thereby obscuring the degree of cultural diversity of cinematic activity. Until the 1980s the idea of national cinema tended to focus only on films produced within the territory, while ideas of the nation-state were conceived primarily in essentialist terms, even if anti-imperialist. Seeing these as expressions of a putative national spirit. Since the theories of Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm, accounts of national cinema have sought to resist the homogenizing fictions of nationalism and recognize their historical variability and contingency, as well as the cultural hybridity of nation-states.

Anderson (1991) stresses that nations are ideological constructions seeking to forge a link between a self-defined cultural group and the state, creating an imagined community passed off as 'natural' that we loosely refer to as the nation. Anderson takes mediated communication to be of central importance in the formation of a nationalist consciousness, defining the nation as the mapping of an imagined community with a secure and shared identity and sense of belonging, to a demarcated geo-political space. The nation is forged and maintained as a bounded public sphere and national identity is the experience of belonging to such a community, being steeped in its traditions, its rituals and characteristics. But the 'imagined community' argument imagines the nation as limited, with finite and meaningful boundaries. The problem is then when describing a national cinema, there is a tendency to focus only on those films that narrate the nation as this finite, limited space, inhabited by a unified community, closed off to identities that aren't national. This produces an image of a strongly bounded communicative community, offering little insight into the contradiction, especially in the Palestinian case, of the decoupling between nation and state, or of the invariable hybrid and 'impure' cultural formations of Palestinians, given that most of them do not live in a closely constituted geographic or mental

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[3] Social communication theories hold two key features: a tendency to think in terms of a close functional fit between communication and the nation; and a concern with the interior of the national communicative space. It is also an all-embracing notion of culture as a way of life, "an interactively sustained mode of being that integrates a given people and provides it with singularity" (Schlesinger, 20).

space. And clearly, mass media and films, are ways in which transnational cultural connections (and fragmentations) are established.

Andrew Higson (2000) argues that national identity and national cinema should be seen as "processes." We ought to define national cinema by looking at a range of features: industrial and business aspects, exhibition and consumption, cultural policies, the favoring of particular genres. Essentially, these kinds of theories attempt to address how national cinema may be taken to affirm a singular national self-identity and simultaneously be part of an international system of differences. Not a single, all-encompassing grand theory. He suggests "transnational" as a subtler means of describing cultural and economic formations that are rarely contained by national boundaries, not just a fetishizing of the national (Higson, 54). Furthermore, borders (whether physical or metaphorical) are always leaky and there is considerable movement across them, and so cultural formations are invariably hybrid. The cinemas established in specific nation-states are rarely autonomous cultural industries, involving quite a bit of transnational movement. For example, production and activities of film-makers take place across borders, whether as co-productions or taking into account the itinerant nature of film-makers. Cinema is also trans-national on the level of distribution and consumption. Even if one chooses to focus on state policies vis-à-vis cultural production, one cannot omit that a national cinema is unfettered by the problems of the international capitalist economy. Not only do governments operate on a transnational basis, but in the case of Palestine, there is no such thing as policy towards film-making, let alone a national economic base for funding, production and distribution.

Paul Willemen sees the existence of borders, albeit far from a unified homogenous space, as very real; although their meaning and function are changeable, their effectiveness has not diminished. Willemen focuses his attention on the confusion of cultural specificity and nationalism in film studies. As he explains, "the boundaries of cultural specificity in cinema are established by governmental actions implemented through institutions such as censorship and its legislative framework, industrial and financial measures on the economic level, the gearing of training institutions toward employment in national media structures, systems of licensing governed by aspects of corporate law, and so on" (Willemen, 25).

This leads to a number of problems, such as, encouraging confusion between the discourses of nationalism as an object of study or political project, and the issue of national specificity. However the specificity of a cultural formation may be manifested by the presence, but also by the absence of concerns with national identity. The discourse of nationalism and national specificity are however identical, and neither are the construction or the analysis of a specific cultural formation identical with national identity. Willemen, intending to "go further,"

suggests "that the construction of national specificity in fact encompasses and governs the articulation of both national identity and nationalist discourses. Nationalist ones forever try to colonize and extend themselves to cover, by repressively homogenizing them, complex but nationally specific formations" (Willemen, 26).

Willemen's most poignant argument leads to an essential contradiction of what a national cinema entails.

> A cinema that seeks to engage with the questions of national specificity from a critical or non- or counterhegemonic position is by definition a minority and a poor cinema, dependent on the existence of a larger multinational or nationalized industrial sector… A cinema addressing national specificity will be anti- or at least nonnationalistic since the more it is complicit with nationalism's homogenizing project the less it will be able to engage critically with the complex, multidimensional, and multidirectional tensions that characterize and shape a social formation's cultural configurations. This leads us to the ironic conclusion that a cinema positively yet critically seeking to engage with the multilayerdenss of specific socio-cultural formations is necessarily a marginal and a dependent cinema: a cinema dependent for its existence on the very dominant, export- and multinational-oriented cinema it seeks to criticize and displace (Willemen, 28).

As a case in point, one can look to *Chronicles of a Disappearance*, a film critical of what the national constitutes, vilified for being anti-nationalistic, and having to rely on funding from none other than Israel. It seems then that to be critical is to be understood as anti-nationalistic. But the contradiction can reach beyond the economic/mode of production realm. An unrelenting patriotism/nationalism leads one to one's own self-destruction and that of the nation/national cause. Because of the unwillingness to 'compromise (including being 'critical') – both internally and externally with the Other/enemy – being nationalistic (in the extreme form) hinders the nationalistic causes one is essentially, at the beginning/end, seeking to ensure, protect and/or bring about. The 'means' eventually do not bring about the 'ends' one desires, but instead they further the schism between the actuality of one's personal and national existence and one's desired ends. In the case of film being overly nationalistic and patriotic in one's representation of one's 'nationalness' forces one to maintain a static image/idea of the nation, and therefore forbids one to make any changes which would improve the 'status' of one's nation. Especially in the case of revolutionary films, where what is being celebrated is usually an armed struggle, which seems to only lead to more conflict.

There are a few films that take the national for granted and attempt to portray a sort of unity. Oddly enough two such films were not made by Palestinians, bringing to light the trans-national dimension that need be included in such discussion. For example, the first film whose

events take place in the occupied territories is Egypt's *Land of Peace* (1957) which vilifies the Israelis, and stresses the importance of an integrated Palestinian-Egyptian action to overcome the enemy. Much as the Israelis had tended to portray the Arabs as the Other/enemy in face of Jewish unity, this film does the opposite – Arab unity versus Jewish enemy. Lebanon's *Kafr Qassem* (1973) demonizes the Israelis, by having a Palestinian in the streets of Tel Aviv, observe the sale of a presumably popular toy: a guillotine cutting off the head of an Arab in a *kuffiyeh*. Although the film is about a 1956 massacre of Palestinians by Israelis the murders are dealt with only in passing, as the main focus of the film is on the daily life of the villagers and the internal conflicts that arise from a variety of ideological points of views ranging from opportunism towards the Israelis to explicit pan-Arabism. The film however is also a call upon other Arabs as the final message is the let-down by Arab neighbors of the Palestinians. It makes clear that the claimed Arab solidarity with the Palestinians is characterized by hypocrisy and weakness. Even some of the more recent films share aspects of a nationalistic cinema, such as Hanna Musleh's *We Are God's Soldiers* (1993), which disregards the variety and plurality of political opinion in the Gaza Strip. Instead the film assumes unity of political support for Islamic movements and avoids discussion of dissent or difference of opinion.

More recent theorists have expanded the definition of the nation to a concept of a nation which involves people in a common sense of identity and works as an inclusive symbol which provides integration and meanings (Robins & Webster, 6). In this sense national identity is more about the experience of belonging, allowing diasporic communities to still share a common sense of belonging, despite – or even because of – their transnational dispersal. Communities are seen as consisting of fragmented and dispersed groups of people with as many differences as similarities and with little in the sense of real physical contact with each other. Nationhood thus answers to "a felt need for a rooted, bounded, whole and authentic identity" (Robins & Webster, 19). In similar vein, Higson suggests a national cinema should be understood as a product of a "tension between 'home' and 'away'" (Higson, 67).

Third World Cinema

Theorists such as Roy Armes (1987) define Third World Cinema as the ensemble of films produced by Third World countries. The Third World refers to the colonized, neo-colonized or decolonized nations and 'minorities' of the world whose economic and political structures have been shaped and deformed within the colonial process. As a political coalition, the Third World broadly united around the enthusiasm generated by anti-colonial struggles such as Algeria's. The fundamental definition of the Third World however had more to do with structural economic

domination than with crude humanistic categories, development categories, racial categories, cultural categories, or geographical categories – such as, respectively, the poor, the non-industrialized, the non-white, the backward, and the East. The Third World was defined passively as having had a certain experience, as having suffered and undergone colonialism, hence flattening heterogeneities, masking contradictions, and ignoring differences (Stam, 282).

Early Third World film theory was premised on nationalism and assumed the nation to be an unproblematic term. "Third-Worldist filmmakers saw themselves as part of a national project, but their concept of the national was itself discursively overdetermined and contradictory… discussions of nationalism took it as axiomatic that the issue was simply one of expelling the foreign to recover the national" (Stam, 289). This unitary notion covers the existence of indigenous nations within the nation, provides no criteria by which to distinguish what is worth retaining in a national tradition, nor does it take into account that all Third World countries are themselves heterogeneous – urban and rural, male and female, religious and secular, and so on. There was also an assumption that Third World filmmakers speak for the oppressed, so that a film about middle-class people in Egypt could not 'really' be Third World, bringing to light the problem that the concept of the Third World elides the presence of a Fourth World, consisting of people variously called 'indigenous,' 'tribal,' or 'first nations' – the still-residing descendants of the original inhabitants. So Third World Cinema becomes an anachronistic label, although Shohat and Stam (1997) suggest that it is more useful to distinguish between First and Third World as a geopolitical location, and third-worldists as referring to a discourse and ideological orientation.

However, because of the assumption that Third World intellectuals could only express 'local' concerns, or perhaps because their work was so overtly political, this body of work was rarely seen as forming part of the history of 'universal' (read Eurocentric) film theory. When not ignored, it was treated with condescension, as a subaltern shadow of the 'real' cinema. The incongruity between Third Worldists and Eurocentrism was also, according to Shohat and Stam, a more essential problem. Third Worldists often fashion their idea of the nation-state according to the European model, in effect "reducing Third World nationalism to a mere echo of European nationalism ignores the international realpolitik that obliged the colonized to adopt a discourse and a practice of the nation-state precisely in order to end colonialism" (Shohat & Stam, 287).

Exemplary of Third World films, although containing aspects of accented and national cinemas, Michel Khleifi's films rely on the idyllic chronotope – the unity of an ancient complex and folkloric time, with stress on territoriality, ownership of the land, and attachment in agricultural ways. *Wedding in Galilee* (1987) is an allegorical strategy that hinges on the ritual

of marriage and wedding-night, events over-determined with meaning due to their implicit uniting of families, histories, in this case exacerbated by the political conflict. The Israeli governor's invitation to the wedding signifies the breakdown between private and public dimensions, where marriage becomes the pretext for a socio-political x-ray. The film interweaves a number of intra-Palestinian discourses, diverse perspectives, contrasting attitudes about the political situation, and riveted by ideological, sexual and generational tensions. Khleifi interweaves the longer history of Palestinian dispossession with the narratives of the historically evolving roles of women under the occupation. Unlike other pro-Palestinians, he does not separate the internal problems from the external challenges – traditional and generational clashes and political strife. Although the film alludes to gaps and tensions within the Palestinians, it also reflects a common struggle against occupation, along with a common history and cultural identity rooted in the land and its past. The film connects earth, crops, trees, vegetation and food with the Palestinians. At the same time it links violence to the land with the Israelis, who plant mines in the fields. The documentation of culture reinforces a sense of permanence, a refusal to disappear. The monologues of the old man who rambles, in present tense, about the Turks, reinforces the perspective from Palestinians that the Israelis are yet another invasive foreign power. Portraying the Israelis as "visitors" creates a narrative that favors the land's original inhabitants as Palestinian. The presentation of Palestinian identity is also a national one rather than religious, since the wedding incorporates both Muslim and Christian traditions, and radically opposing Western media's image of "terrorists." Also, the film valorizes the linked destinies and dreams of 1948 and 1967 Palestinians in its seamless interplay between scenes shot in the Galilee and in the West Bank. The films' scenes and sequences are also explicitly allegorical – Palestinians and Israelis together coax a mare out of the mine field, evoking a vision of a dialogical future. The image of the mare expresses the Palestinians' wish for freedom. Two configurations: militarization and cultivation, but Khleifi adds also cooperation. Exterior fields are male spaces of militarization and eventually masculine reconciliation, whereas the interiors are coded as feminine spaces of culture and female reconciliation. "The film established a parallel between the saving of the mare and the transformation of the female soldier, both of which involved demilitarization as a result of cooperation of the opponents. It posits that the Palestinian national identity is dependent not only on securing land but also on creating a thirdspace of cooperation" (Naficy, 2001; 168-169).

The film however also criticizes the ethics of patriarchal Arab society, in particular the concept of male honor – on one hand represented by the fact that the mayor/father must invite the Israeli soldiers to the wedding, angering the son so much that he is unable to have sex with

his new wife. The latter proves to be the more fatal, as the groom's virility is bound up with the father's reputation. This notion of manhood can only be proven by means of penetration and deflowering. In the context of the occupation, Khleifi tries to show how meaningless such a notion of virility is. *Wedding in Galilee* is important for the way that political issues become part of a culture that is changing within its own terms (e.g. the challenges to the patriarch) as well as being threatened from without. Without proposing solutions or creating villains in the Israeli soldiers (who are shown as just doing their job), it dramatizes a social as well as a political crisis. The film also raises questions about gender relations and (in)equalities, by recognizing women's roles in cultural expression, yet maintaining women's culture in a separate realm from the men – inside the home. The wedding is a "thick description" and documentation of Palestinian culture and agriculture. "It forcefully posits that Palestinian Arabs are there on the ground, and that like the Israelis they are capable of making the desert bloom. By so integrally linking the Palestinians to the land and to its cultivation, the film creates an agricultural idyll before occupation and expulsion" (*ibid*., 167-168). Shohat calls this representation a "painterly, quasi-Orientalist idealization of a pre-industrial village" (Shohat 1988, 46).

Theoretically in the 1980's and 1990's there was growing disenchantment of Third Worldism, which brought with it a rethinking of political, cultural and aesthetic possibilities. "The rhetoric of revolution began to be greeted with a certain skepticism. As a result of external pressures and internal self-questioning, the cinema, too, gave expression to these mutations, as the anti-colonial thrust of earlier films gradually gave way to more diversified themes" (Stam, 282). Film-makers wanted to create a cinema which engendered not only political awareness and aesthetic innovation, but also a spectatorial pleasure which could enable a viable film industry. Around the same time, also came forth theories of Fourth World films, usually ethnographic, which, Stam argues, "theorize their own practice by questioning their own authority, while striving for 'shared filmmaking,' 'participatory filmmaking,' 'dialogical anthropology,' 'reflexive distance,' and 'interactive filmmaking,' as artists experience a salutary self-doubt about their own capacity to speak 'for' the other" (Stam, 284). This also leads to the question of indigenous film-makers who confront, what Faye Ginsburg calls a 'Faustian dilemma:' on one hand using new technologies for cultural self-assertion, and on the other spreading a technology which might foster their own dis-integration. But Ginsburg does not see this work as bound in a traditional world, but mediating across boundaries and rupturing time and history. So that the work goes beyond asserting an existing identity to become "a means of cultural invention that refracts and recombines elements from both the dominant and minority societies… [a] new form of collective self-production" (Ginsburg in Stam, 285). Although not as self-reflexive as other

ethnographic films, the work of Mai Masri comes to mind here, where she not only reflects on her own goals and identity, but affords refugee children with cameras of their own, allowing them to tell their own stories.

Third Cinema

"…the establishment of cadres capable of using a camera on the battlefield beside the gun"
– Palestinian Cinema Manifesto

Third Cinema theory originated in Latin America in the 1960's, inspired by the Cuban Revolution and Brazil's *Cinema Nôvo*. Manifestos were written arguing for a political practice of cinema, focusing on the 'national,' revealing divisions and stratifications within a national formation, such as class and political antagonisms. The term itself was launched by Argentinean film-makers Solanas and Getino publishing their ideas in 1968, followed by the publication of "For an Imperfect Cinema" by Espinosa from Cuba in 1969 (see "Cinéma d'auteur ou cinéma d'intervention?", 1978; Solanas & Gettino, 2000; Espinosa, 2000).

There exists a doubtless ambiguity in the term 'third' cinema – a wordplay on the analogy with the term 'third world', that also has to do with the development of a world-wide liberation movement whose moving force is to be found in third world countries. What it suggested was an avant-garde cinema – not in the traditional notion of experimentalism defending the notion of safe artistic space untouched by political consideration. Instead, the third cinema is often equated, although rhetorically in some cases, to the gun. It was about using films as revolutionary tools and radically relocating the practices of viewing and the industrial-economic designation of cinema itself (Solanas & Gettino,1978; Solanas & Gettino, 2000). Teshome Gabriel calls it a "combative" cinema, whereby film is an "ideological tool" in the "decolonization of culture and total liberation" from First world domination (Gabriel, 2000; 304).

Solanas and Gettino offered a 'virtual geography' of their own, not necessarily to be confused with the geo-political boundaries of First, Second and Third World. Their new conception had as much to do with modes of production, 'consumption' (viewing of films) and aesthetics. Third Cinema is to be understood in contrast to First and Second Cinema, or as a trajectory of filmic development that is both dynamic and dialectical, which Gabriel delineates as "phases" that third world films pass through on their path from "domination" to "liberation" (Gabriel, 2000; 299).

First Cinema is the model imposed by the Hollywood system, where cinema is conceived as pure spectacle, and made for exhibition in large theatres. It is designed to satisfy commercial

interests of production companies, and leads to the absorption of forms which necessarily imply a bourgeois world-view in which the capacity to participate in making history is denied to all except the heroic individual, and history is presented as an external force. It imposes models of form, language, and industrial, commercial and technical structures. First cinema is that which expresses imperialist, capitalist, bourgeois ideas, exemplary in the "monopoly capital finances of big spectacle cinema" (Solanas in Willemen, 9). Second Cinema, also known as *auteur* cinema, produces its own structures and patterns of distribution and exhibition, its own ideologies and critics – films made by the elite who would be politically reformist but incapable of achieving any profound change. The Second cinema was that which expressed the aspirations of the petite bourgeoisie. Third (militant or guerilla) cinema was a collective endeavor which opposed itself to First and Second Cinema; and was the expression of new culture and social change. Third Cinema films were those that directly and explicitly set out to fight the system. It was a politically oriented militant cinema opposing mainstream entertainment and *auteur* cinema. It was the convergence between experimental form and radical left politics. In the words of Solanas and Gettino, "Third cinema is… the cinema that recognizes in the [anti-imperialist] struggle the most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestation of our time, the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point – in a word, the decolonization of culture" (Solanas & Gettino, 268). Third Cinema sought to challenge the old race relations paradigm and experimented with new forms of representation, while careful not to fall into Third World essentialism. It questions whether there was an aesthetic paradigm which defines a broad range of oppositional cultural practices. It was made by cultural activists outside the white Euro-American sphere who dealt with questions of domination/independence, center/periphery, and resistance/hegemony. These film-makers looked at the relations between the cultural and political, aligning itself with national culture, as that created by the popular classes. It was essentially presented as a socialist cinema, or in the words of Gabriel, "a cinema of mass participation" (Gabriel, 2000; 301).

The manifestos of the 1960's and 1970's valorized an alternative, independent, anti-imperialist cinema more concerned with militancy than with auterist self-expression or consumer satisfaction. Issues of production methods, politics and aesthetics become inextricably intertwined. The hope was to give expression to national themes in a national style. It is a cinema made for political and artistic reasons seeking to achieve the production of social intelligibility, not only a cinema for the people or of expressing opposition to imperialism or bourgeois rule. A critical dialogue, a need for criticism. Experimental cinema engaged in a constant process of research, reserving the right to any device deemed necessary to achieve their

goals. These manifestos, although having distinctions amongst each other, called for a cinema that promoted a critical understanding of social dynamics, condemning professional and middle class intellectuals whose expertise had been seen as serving the central authority of society. Secondly, they refuse to prescribe to an aesthetics on how to achieve a revolutionary consciousness. Their objective is not to be thought of as similar to oppositional cinema in the European context of doing whatever was the opposite of dominant cinema. The Third Cinema proponents were hostile to dominant cinemas and also refused to let those cinemas dictate the terms in which they were to be opposed. Thirdly, they advocated a cinema which should not be limited to Latin America or indeed to the Third World, instead a cinema to be applicable everywhere.

The Third World film festivals (Cairo in 1967 and Algiers in 1973) called for a tricontinental revolution in politics and an aesthetic/narrative revolution in film form. Written during a period of intense nationalist struggles, the manifestos emerged from a particular cultural and cinematic context, yet did have common concerns. Just because a country was economically underdeveloped did not mean that its films had to be artistically so. "Cinema had to be not only dialectical but also 'anthro-pophagic'... and had to de-alienate a spectatorial taste colonized by the commercial-popular aesthetic of Hollywood, by the populist-demagogic aesthetic of the socialist bloc, and by the bourgeois-artistic aesthetic of the European art film. The new cinema, for Rocha, should be 'technically imperfect, dramatically dissonant, poetically rebellious, and sociologically imprecise" (Stam, 96). It was to be a cinema for political activism, as opposed to Hollywood's entertainment, and saw in art the ability of an endless critical process. Manifestos were published in the Arab world, mainly in Morocco and Egypt in 1972. There was even the "First Manifesto for a Palestinian Cinema" in 1972 issued at the Damascus festival, Syria, and a second manifesto issued in 1973 at the Carthage festival in Tunisia. It became a historically analytic yet culturally specific mode of cinematic discourse and film-making. While Third Cinema may have its share of theoretical limitations (i.e., more applicable to the Latin American context than to the general Third World; not taking into account ethnic or gender divisions), two of its characteristics have a lasting and global value: the insistence on flexibility as research and experimentation, as a cinema forever in need of adaptation according to the dynamics of social struggle, and its attempt to speak a socially pertinent discourse absent in mainstream and authorial cinemas.

Gabriel (1989b) sees Third Cinema as a 'battle' between history and popular memory – popular memory being a folkloric account of memories passed through the generations, primarily oral; different and in opposition to false consciousness and the official versions of

history. Popular memory considers the past as a political issue, as a theme of struggle, it is "a look back to the future, necessarily dissident and partisan, wedded to constant change" (Gabriel 1989b, 54). Such cinema can often be the auto-biography of the collective, hence multi-generational and trans-individual. It requires multiple points of view, but not just in the process of film-making but also in its reception, whereby film viewers are introduced to the collective autobiography and are urged to interact with it. Such cinema defies notions of passive viewing and celebrates direct participation, entering the spectator's own autobiography. Gabriel calls it both an 'activist aesthetics and critical spectatorship" (*ibid*., 60); "a sharing of responsibility in the construction of the test, where both the film-maker and the spectators play a double role as performers and creators" (*ibid*., 62). So to Gabriel, "Third World cinema does not… have an independent existence. It is merely an index of a general cultural and historical trend in which film-makers can find their role and serve as caretakers of popular discourse in cinema" (*ibid*., 55).

The documentary film *Jerusalem 1948* (1998) attempts to show what has been repressed in official (Israeli) versions of history. The example of the massacre of Deir Yassin is kept alive through collective accounts, delving into the past to reconstruct, redefine and redeem what official versions have overlooked or omitted. Such films are also characterized by open-endedness and keeping a situation unresolved. For example, Gabriel points to *The Duped* (1972) as having closure but of a different nature. Its purpose "is not simply a call for action, but rather an invitation to consider one alternative among many. In this way [it engages and entices] us with historical memories, authenticating the causes of conflict, of failure, and of difference" (Gabriel 1989b, 58). *The Duped* (1972), adapted by Egyptian director Taufik Salih, based on the novel *Men Under the Sun* by Palestinian author Ghassan Kanafani, and financed with Syrian money, is a pan-Arab production *par excellence* (Shafik, 155). Its story deals with the attempt of three Palestinian refugees to enter Kuwait from Iraq, hoping to find jobs in order to support their families still in the refugee camps. A Palestinian truck driver agrees to smuggle them through the desert. The refugees hide in his empty water tank, which is heated by the burning sun, and wait for the truck to pass the border checkpoint. He gets held up at the border, only because the Kuwaiti guards are bored and want him to entertain them. With the delay, the men die in the heat of the blazing tank, the air conditioners having drowned out their cry for help. Salih's film was one of the first to given pan-Arab slogans a more solid base and to state the common responsibility of the Arab states for the situation of the Palestinians. The three refugees represent three different generations of exile, whereas the truck driver who lost his manhood during the way symbolizes the well-established careless émigré Palestinian. The film approaches the

Palestinian question from a rhetorical level, in that the defeat from which Palestinians suffered most seems a result of moral failure. It is not the complicated network of Arab and international political power games that is made responsible, but stupidity, egocentrism, cowardice, and missing vitality of the Arabs themselves. Other films such as *The Captain* (1997), *48 Hours in Israel* (1998), made by Egyptians, and *Men Under the Sun* (a trio of films based on the Palestinian novel by the same name, 1970) made by a Syrian, urge Palestinians to carry arms, stressing that there is no time for personal problems or oscillation between support and rejection of Palestinian action. They also make the point that the cause must be presented to the international public opinion to properly win support. Many of the early Palestinian films were exemplary of militant and guerilla cinema, unfortunately none of them seemed to have survived the war in Lebanon.

Exilic and Diasporic Films

"I don't have a homeland. And since exile is the other side of having a homeland, I'm not in exile. On the other hand, at another level – a non-political level – every place is both a homeland and an exile… Exile is a kind of 'place' too. For me, Nazareth and New York are both simultaneously exiles and homelands… As far as I'm concerned, exile is a choice…"
"I have traveled and lived in different countries, and this nomadic experience is a privilege. My tie to the land is not exclusive… In my case, land is not an element that creates desire."
film-maker Elia Suleiman

Exile is inexorably linked to the homeland and to the possibility of return, and is it is essentially associated with nationalism. The interplay between exile and nationalism are dialectical opposites constituting each other. Exile suggests a painful banishment from one's homeland, and as such "must not be thought of as a generalized condition of alienation and difference… All displaced people do not experience exile equally or uniformly. Exile discourse thrives on detail, specificity, and locality" (Naficy 1999, 4). Although exile is usually solitary, experienced as an acute sense of solitude outside the group (Said, 359), and is very much about the need to reconstitute one's broken life, to reassemble an identity out of the refractions and discontinuities of exile, it is also necessarily related back to the group. As Edward Said notes, and is an example of, Palestinian national identity has been as much created in exile as it has in more traditional means – many Palestinian 'nationalists' (for lack of a better word) have been exiles: for example Arafat in the political realm, Mahmoud Darwish in the literary realm, and Michel Khleifi in the cinematic realm. And so exilic films can also transform individual experience into collective form.

Although it is not an established or cohesive cinema, de-territorialized people and their films share certain features, most of all that they (the film-makers and their films) are at the "interstices of culture and film practice" (Naficy 2001, 4). Although their films may be similar, it is still important to recognize the differences between exile and diaspora. Exile suggests longing for home, dreaming of a return to an organic connection, and so the exile's life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss. It is also most often a solitary and lonely experience. According to Said, exiles also express opposition – to the institutions that dominate modern life, to the place where they are 'forced' to live now.

> No matter how well they do, exiles are always eccentrics who *feel* their difference (even as they frequently exploit it) as a kind of orphanhood. Anyone who is really homeless regards the habit of seeing estrangement in everything modern as an affectation, a display of modish attitudes. Clutching difference like a weapon to be used with stiffened will, the exile jealously insists on his or her right to refuse to belong (Said, 1990; 363).

This can translate into intransigence, exaggeration, overstatement. And so in a certain sense to be in exile means not to let go of the past and one's history (collective or individual, imagined or real). While exile and diaspora are related and are often used synonymously, diaspora also shares in common with nomadism. Holding neither the exilic dream of return nor the nomadic celebration of liberty, "diaspora teaches the perpetual postponement of homecoming and the necessity, in the meanwhile, of living among strange lands and peoples" (Peters, 39). And so while diaspora also shares a sense of holding on to history with exile, it does not do so at the expense of adapting (and to some extent adopting) to one's new place. Furthermore, diaspora often lacks the misery of exile, as it suggests real or imagined relationships among scattered members, whose sense of community is sustained by forms of communication and contact (Peters, 20). And as such diaspora is always collective.

The 'structures of feelings' in what Hamid Naficy (2001) calls an 'accented cinema' – to refer to films in the diaspora and/or in exile – focus on the undeniable personal and social experiences of exile and diaspora. The prevailing mood may be one of loneliness, melancholy, fear, panic or anomie. Characters may be living between psychological and social formations, hence liminal. They may also be interstitial, located at the intersections of aesthetic systems, languages, nations, and cultures. They may then also be hybrid, appropriating from different cultures. They may interpret all things politically. They recognize the simultaneity of space and time. There is an emphasis on the senses and on textures – sometimes as markers of difference,

loss or longing – sound, screen gestures, nature. There may also be a heightened sense of sensuality and emotionality.

The recurring themes of accented films include the search for identity and the quest for 'wholeness' of the self; a focus on the family as a unit under pressure; an accounting of personal and/or national past; the ambiguity of what is real and visible; the preoccupation with deterritorialization, exile, displacement and un-belonging; and three types of journeys: the home-seeking journey with a search for home at the center and an account of the events that caused departure; the homelessness journey characterized by wandering, continual displacement and homelessness; and the homecoming journey characterized by the return, or by the desire, impossibility or staging of return.

With the concept of return, the conceptual frames of home and homeland are imbued with special significance. As Naficy distinguishes them, house is the material place in which one lives, home is anyplace, temporary and moveable, it can be built, rebuilt, and carried in memory and by acts of imagination – although in his analysis in his later work, he seems to use the terms inter-changeably. Homeland is the most absolute, abstract, mythical and fought for (Naficy 1999). In either of these, the place refers not just to a physical entity (although it might), but also to relations to it and social relations within it. "Home is bound to horizons of reach and homeland to exile. In addition, since place is also historically situated, displacement and emplacement have a temporal dimension… For example, the sense of displacement of Palestinians and emplacement of Israelis is strongly tied to the year 1948… Accented films encode, embody, and imagine the home, exile, and transitional sites in certain privileged chronotopes that link the inherited space-time of the homeland to the constructed space-time of the exile and diaspora" (Naficy 2001, 152). Amos Gitai's *House*[4] (1980) focuses around the irony of Palestinians rebuilding a house for a Jew, which originally belonged to a Palestinian, while at the same time fighting Israel for a homeland. Possession and renovation function as metaphors for the ownership and occupation of the homeland. The film documents three reconstruction projects: "those of a physical house, a house of memory (for the former occupants), and a celluloid house" (*ibid.*, 171). The film was neither aired on Israeli TV, nor had any Israeli funding, as Gitai explained: "the Israeli Television did not want to admit that Palestinians have memories, attachments and rights" (*ibid.*, 171). The completed house is never shown in the film, instead it is a ruin of a house, "a powerful symbol of the multiplicity of histories that have converged at this particular site without congealing them into a single

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[4] "Bait" the title of the film is both the Hebrew and Arabic word for house and home, in addition for the Israelis, *bait* stands for the land, state and homeland of Israel.

History… a poem that contains many ellipses and fragments of narratives but not a totalizing, coherent story" (*ibid*., 172). Focusing on the dispute of the physical house as its bearing on the idea of a national home, is common in Palestinian films as well. *Jerusalem: An Occupation Set in Stone?* (1998), begins with the bulldozing of a Palestinian house, shows Palestinians living in shipping crates and abandoned buses on the sites that used to be their house, and interviews Palestinians in front of their old houses that are now lived in by Israelis. But the physical and discursive battles are not only for a house but for the home. This represents the design to deprive Palestinians of homes, as a place for the possibility of a "radical political dimension" (in the words of Bell Hooks, 1990) and a sense of larger belonging. The Palestinians' vehemence for the house is driven by their understanding of its larger political implications and their struggle for a homeland.

But in the case of Palestinians, transitional places, such as refugee camps, are also part of the idea of place that form identities. In fact there are also three symbolic landscapes in Palestinian exilic literature and film that play a huge role: desert, city and refugee camp (*ibid*., 166). Furthermore Naficy also distinguishes between open and closed films and spaces. 'Open' films favor continuity, introspection and retrospection, as if to suggest that the experience of the here and now are not sufficient or real enough by themselves unless they are projected as loss or mediated by nostalgia or memory. 'Closed' films are driven by panic and fear, and a sense of claustrophobia. Films in and about the refugee camps are common, from the decades old documentary styles of the plight of the Palestinians, to more recent films made by 'outsiders' such as James Longley's *Gaza Strip* (2002). Although Mai Masri has spent the majority of her film-making in the refugee camps of Lebanon, the more interesting films are those by Rashid Masharawi and Subhi Zubeidi, themselves refugees from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, respectively. Both of their films blend documentary, ethnographic and narrative styles, and are produced, filmed and acted in solely by Palestinians, positing a new trend in Palestinian film-making, and a hope perhaps of a birth of an industry *per se.*

Elia Suleiman's films are worth analyzing here as exemplary of exilic cinema, and representative of new trends in Palestinian film-making. Suleiman's *Homage by Assassination* (1990) breaks away from the macro-narratives of national liberation, by re-envisioning the 'nation' as a "heteroglossic multiplicity of trajectories" (Stam & Shohat, 318). Although still anti-colonialist, such an experimental film focuses attention on the diversity of experiences within and across nations. Different than the Third World films that assume a fundamental coherence of national identity, a film like this calls attention to the fault lines of gender, class, ethnicity, religion, partition, migration and exile. The film chronicles Suleiman's claustrophobic

reality in New York during the Persian Gulf war, and an attack by Iraqi scud missiles on his hometown of Nazareth; invoking diverse spatialities and temporalities marking exilic experience. The two clocks (New York and Nazareth time) point to the double spatiotemporality lived by the exilic subject. The film-maker is aware of his own simultaneity and his split existence, he is in fact, paralyzed by them. Souvenirs and fetishes of a Palestinian homeland displayed throughout his apartment: a Palestinian flag on a TV monitor, the land as a map on the wall, and 'al awda'[5] as his 'return' key on the computer.

The diegetic filmmaker has failed attempts to reach his family in Nazareth: the communications media become the imperfect means by which this dislocated person retains the national imaginary, while struggling for a place in a new country. He "is at the nexus of a technologized communication and epistolary network consisting of computer, copier, fax, telephone, answering machine, radio, and television, all capable of both representing and misrepresenting the Palestinians" (Naficy, 2001;117). The routines of Suleiman's day, which he performs silently, represent activities that Bhabha calls the performative expressions of nationhood – "the performative expression of dailiness by exiled and disenfranchised peoples is a countermeasure to the official pedagogical representation of them, which tends to abstract them by stereotyping, exoticizing, and otherizing" (*ibid*., 117). His silence may be read as culturally and cinematically oppositional, alienating the spectators by refusing them entry into the text. But such silence is also representative of the loneliness of the exile, which to Naficy also allegorizes the loneliness of interstitial production mode.

Suleiman's *Homage* also shows the impossibility of communication, even with the telephone's possibility of immediate communication – for in his case communication takes place over the answering machine, phone lines are down in Nazareth, and his only 'immediate' form of communication is through the fax machine, which in this case is not simultaneous. His only other form of knowing what is happening is through the television and radio. But what the film succeed in, is rather than evoking a longed-form ancestral home, it affirms the process of recreating identity in the liminal zone of exile (Stam & Shohat, 321). This film, like Suleiman's other works, does fetishize certain aspects of the homeland, but at the same time goes against the tendency of turning nostalgia into a ritualized denial of history.

Within exilic and diasporic films, one can include the cinema of the nomadic. Nomadic cinema may share some of the same aspects as exilic cinema, such as being multi-focal, asynchronous, including fragmented narratives and multiple subjectivities, and having a shifting and critical distance. Of course there is also in common a strong sense of placelessness,

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[5] Palestinian phrase used to denote the 'right of return' for all Palestinian refugees.

displacement and de-territorialization. One can also argue that both cinemas function and are representative of peoples on the margins, or at interstices of society. But nomadism differs extensively from the exilic first and foremost because it dispenses altogether with the idea of a fixed home or center. Instead home is always mobile, suggesting a kind of doubleness: being at home everywhere, but lacking any fixed ground. Although this may seem similar to the exilic, in the nomadic perspective there is no hope or dream of homeland, there is no sense of forced banishment from (and hence longing for) one's 'original' place. Although they may share their themes of journey, nomadic films tend to represent journeys as an acknowledgement of the encounters with others, with known and unknown forces, and seeing land as something that exists only as mythic wilderness.

As Gabriel (1990) describes it, nomadic cinema is one of celebration rather than tension, it stresses yet minimizes conflict. Its dominant aspects are those of symbolism, metaphor, music and performance of marginalized and de-territorialized people – an expression of a collective memory rather than an official history. Time and space are subjective, flexible, cyclical and simultaneous, an outcome of experience. This seems to go hand in hand with their viewpoint on reality, as both tangible/ seeable and untouchable/ unseeable, and the nomadic perspective on memory and experience as ephemeral. And such expression consolidates the community through ritual and performance and relies on a collective participation. As much as they 'synthesize' their own voices, so they do with the surrounding cultures they pass through. Seeing themselves as belonging to different cultures and different periods of history, they incorporate aspects from different times and places; but they adapt not adopt.

Certainly most Palestinians do not see themselves as nomads, although they may share similar aspects. For them exile is not a choice, nor a privilege, but something that they must now live with. Exiles still somehow search for an identity. For nomads it seems that the quest for any fixed identity is illusory, perhaps even dangerous. Instead their lifestyle is one of drifting liberty, conjuring up images of bohemians, free from any attachment or any responsibility. As such, the nomad is a hero of postmodern thinking, liberating thought from dogmatism, celebrating a mobile diversity of life. Ultimately the concept of "nomadism is the dream of radical liberty, roaming at will, beholden to nothing but the winds and the stars" (Peters, 33). The passing 'through' of cultures is not traumatic but is to be part of the characteristic motion of subjectivity. If exile is the attitude of critical race theorists, multiculturalist, nationalist and ethnic movements, then nomadism is the attitude of poststructuralists, many liberals, cosmopolitans, and postmodernists generally (*ibid*., 32). Which could then include the possibility of a

performance of citizenship. One could see the difference between exile and nomadism as debates about identity, respectively primordial or constructed identity.

Elia Suleiman's *Chronicles of a Disappearance* (1996), although as much exilic as nomadic, shares quite a bit with this mode of cinema, as is perhaps the only Palestinian film to push the limits of Palestinianness. The story is of the return of a film-maker (himself) to Nazareth and Jerusalem. Despite some autobiographical elements, the film is not really autobiographical, nor documentary, nor fiction, as it contains elements of all without specifying which is which. One critic labeled it "part documentary, part psychodrama, part structuralist investigation, and part absurd comedy." The film-maker's return is neither an emotionally fulfilling homecoming to an originary homeland, nor a dystopian vision of total rejection of the old country. The film-maker never speaks which in a sense evokes the performance of his (non)identity. It is difficult to tell what his role in the film is, perhaps a transient being opening windows into Palestinian and Israeli histories, cultures and identities, much like a nomad then, he passes through different places and acknowledges their differences. His silence can also be understood as a strategy of political resistance, or likewise the difficulty of coming to speech in an exilic situation. His film is an assertion of the absence of a Palestinian identity, but also offers an identity constantly seeking to define itself, in perpetual transition, anti-nationalist.

An ironic split subjectivity is developed, which juxtaposes critically and with humor aspects of the two sides' lives, in line with a post-modern aesthetics and ideology. Naficy classifies the film as a 'border' film in which "home turns out to be the critical distance, the third discursive space, which Suleiman creates and inhabits in the film" (Naficy 2001, 236). The film is also characterized by a decentralization of viewpoint and narration, non-linearity, duality of narrative perspectives and plurality of styles. Using non-linearity in narrative mode makes clear Suleiman's challenge to the linearity of the 'chronicle' of Palestine. As he explains of his choice:

> Palestinians have always been ghettoized in a way, geographically and historically. To translate this metaphor requires a nonlinear cinematographic narrative structure… The nonlinear image, which is read through dispersed fragments, is the only way you can make the audience participate in the construction of the image and therefore in the construction of the story, of the discourse (Bourlond, 97).

In trying to create a decentered image of Palestine, Suleiman avoids a centralized, unified image that allows only a single narrative perspective, creating an image that transcends the ideological definition of what it means to be Palestinian – an image far from any stereotype and

simultaneously a rejection of the static aspects of space and memory. Suleiman also seems to think of himself as a nomad rather than an exile; once claiming, "when the place you're in is no longer anything but its own representation, without the possibility of other representations, it's time to leave" (*ibid.*, 101).

The Future

While certainly Palestinian films represent a greater array of theoretical placement – from the nationalistic to the exilic – Palestinian film-makers are only slowly inching beyond thinking of film as a political project – whether of embracing national unity or challenging it. Of course this may have to do with the fact that one could equally think of Palestinianness as still having to do with a political project: Palestine is simultaneously a nation coming into being and a nation being lost to exile, and its films represent both these contradictory aspects. As such, this dual existence is reflected in the history and development of Palestinian films.

Palestinian cinema may always have a political role to play, thanks to the subject matter. Everything about Palestine and Palestinianness is forcibly political, and inevitably manifests itself in cultural products. As such, Palestinian films will remain a description of a people living with constant misery, with political failures, without inalienable rights. Palestinian film-making will continue to be a description of a continuous human tragedy. And so, Palestinian documentation is an explanation of loss, necessarily political. A chagrin for lost earth and lost lives, a lost future.

At the same time however, film-makers such as Hany Abu-Assad (*Rana's Wedding*, 2001 and *Ford Transit*, 2004) and Elia Suleiman point to a birth of a new Palestinian film and new tendencies among film-makers. Less propaganda, less militancy, more experimentation that plays with orality and visuality, with spaces of memory and spaces of borders. As Palestinian film-makers embrace their trans-national experience, their global voice, their hybridity, they will inevitably create an "engaged" cinema. One that not only reflects the social memories, but one that pushes the creative limits of society; a cinema that evokes the curiosity and the will to find solutions to internal and external problems. Then, hopefully Palestinian film can live up to Edward Said's call:

> whatever the claim may be that we [Palestinians] make on the world – and certainly on ourselves as people who have become restless in the fixed place to which we have been assigned – in fact our truest reality is expressed in the way we cross over from one place to another. We are migrants and perhaps hybrids in, but not of, any situation in which we find ourselves. This is the deepest continuity of our lives as a nation in exile and constantly on the move (Said, 1986: 164).

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