From the Field:
As if they do not exist. Images of (be)longing and of owning Palestine

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Abstract: Films from or about Palestine are frequently programmed at international film festivals. They are sometimes released in cinemas and quite often presented in special screenings at various institutions all over the Western World. Due to the scarcity of screens and the boycott of Israel, they are seen to a lesser extend in Arab countries. Compared to screenings of other Arab films or the presentation of movies from other former colonies and mandatory territories, Western audiences often react highly emotional to the images from Palestine. In debates questions for a better understanding of the films' subject or context are barely ever asked. Rather the foreign spectators seem to have a sense of belonging and to claim the right for co-determination. Where do these emotional ties originate from?
In recent years a large number of films shot in Palestine during the late Ottoman period and the British mandate were made accesssible online, mainly by the Steven Spielberg Film Archive in Jerusalem and the British War Museum in London. Libraries like the Library of Congress in Washington digitized parts of their photographic collections. Based on them as well as on the films I work with as distributor and programmer for Arab film series, in this article I look at images on and from Palestine and ask for what purpose, in which context and by whom they were made and distributed.

Keywords: Palestine, Image Politics, Self-Determination, Heteronomy, Religious Photography, Anti-Colonial Struggle, Institutional Image Production

Since 170 years photographs, and later films, about Palestine are commercially distributed in the Western World. Also trade cards of the region were published. And until the expeditions and conquests in the 16th century, Jerusalem was the geographical centre of European maps. It was not before the late 1960s that Palestinians themselves started producing films as one expression of self-determination. By that time an image of Palestine, created by European and US-American photographers and film-makers, was sufficiently known abroad. What did this image look like?

Colonialism and modern technology

Photography was introduced in 1839 in France. In December the same year the first photographers travelled to Palestine. Back then it was a marginal Ottoman province and part of Greater Syria. Also in 1839 the *Tanzimat*, the period of Ottoman political and economic reforms, were initiated. They were regarded by some as modernisation and turning towards the West, by others as installation of semi-colonial structures and subjugation to the West. In any case they facilitated European powers to materialize their colonial aspirations in the region.
The introduction of equal rights for religious minorities all over the Ottoman Empire as part of the Tanzimat encouraged different Christian communities to settle in their Holy Land. The *American Colony* and the German *Temple Society* are the best known among them. About the same time also the Zionist, thus European Jewish nationalist movement started its colonisation between the Mediterranean and the Jordan, which finally led to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948.

Like any other colonized society the peoples living in Palestine neither had the power for self-determination nor did they own the means of production when photographic images, still and moving, were first introduced. The camera initially was the tool of the colonizer or the European traveller and scientist. In the case of Greater Syria the Ottoman rulers did not seem to have taken much interest in photographic evidence of this district before WW I, though Sultan Abdülhamid II, who reigned from 1876 till 1909, was a great collector and promoter of photography. His photographic collection[1] (about 1880 till 1893) comprises 51 albums with almost 2000 pictures taken by commercial Turkish photographers. The majority of the images show buildings and pupils of the new institutions of general and higher education that were constituted in the wake of the Tanzimat. In the early 1890s the Sultan presented both the Library of Congress in Washington and the British Museum in London with a copy of the collection. Geographically the photos focus on that part of the Ottoman Empire that comprises the Turkish state of today.
It was European and US-American photographers who travelled to Palestine and depicted it with their camera first.

Three kinds of colonial photography are common to the description of the foreign place: images of the landscape, portraits of the subjugated population, the exotic Other, and documentations of modern civilization as defined by the European invading powers. The first mainly showed vast landscapes that, by countless repetition of the motif, give the illusion of being unclaimed territories. The second had mainly anthropological purpose, thus categorizing peoples, suggesting stagnation in development and stressing inferiority. The third showed the accomplishments of modernity, mainly the installation of new Western technology and the introduction of machines.

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[1] http://loc.gov/pictures/collection/ahii/about.html.

Religious photography

As far as Palestine is concerned an additional category was introduced, namely religious photography. Its themes range from re-enacted biblical scenes to the documentation of biblical sites and other historical traces which allegedly prove ownership of the land. While the three categories mentioned above emphasise on the discovery of unknown territories and peoples, the religious images establish the idea of returning, of re-discovering and of familiarity with the land.

The re-enactment in the photographic image refers mainly to subjects that have been popular in paintings of the photographers' countries of origin over the centuries, like the *Book of Ruth*, for example. Félix Bonfils'[2] famous photograph *Field of Boaz, biblical scene* (ca. 1870)[3] shows peasants at the grain harvest. In the centre of the image stands an aged woman, Ruth, next to her right is an old man, Boaz, who seems to explain something. The original glass plate of this snapshot-like black and white image in documentary style shows an angle of a contemporary sign in the upper right corner of the plate. In all reproductions it is retouched. The cleaned photo and the caption give the impression that Bonfils knew Ruth and Boaz and makes the spectator forget that the story takes place about 3000 years earlier.

Some forty years after Bonfils, the famous *American Colony Photo Department*[4] produced a whole photographic series on the Book of Ruth.[5] The staging of the scenes is more obvious, at the same time some individual pictures look real. The Library of Congress, that published parts of the series online, assumes that a member of the *American Colony* played Ruth. Apparently the photos were taken in the Bethlehem area during harvest season and were shot on location. This Ruth is much younger than the woman in Bonfils' picture and looks rather contemporary. She is the protagonist of the arranged scenes with the local peasants as extras. A few wide angle shots show men in the fields threshing grain manually. Those do not include Ruth, they provide atmosphere and mock a realist ethnographic context.

These same images, yet as moving pictures, appear in the British film *Portrait of Palestine*[6] which was produced by *Anglo-Scottish Pictures* for the *Colonial Office* in 1947. In its depiction of agriculture the film shows fishing in the Sea of Galilee

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[2] Bonfils (1831-1885) took part in a French expedition of 6000 soldiers to Lebanon that intervened on the site of the Maronite Christians in the *Druze-Maronite Conflict* in 1860. He went back to Beirut with his family and opened a photo studio in 1867, in 1876 he returned to France. His wife Lydie and his son Adrien continued the photo business in Beirut till WW I.

[3] http://geh.org/ar/strip63/htmlsrc/m198803530104_ful.html#topoftext.

[4] The *American Colony* was a utopian Christian sect that was established by US-American and Swedish pilgrims in Jerusalem in 1881. The roughly 100 members believed in the Second Coming of Christ at the Millennium and hoped to ensure their redemption though charitable work, like the colony's schools and soup kitchens. In the early 20th century they became involved in the tourist trade. Another important enterprise was the photo service which was established after the visit of German Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1898. Colony member Elijah Meyers had documented the visit, the photos were highly demanded and their selling improved the colony's conditions.

[5] http://www.israeldailypicture.com/2012/05/book-of-ruth-comes-alive-in-antique.html.

[6] http://colonialfilm.org.uk/node/2477.

and a camel operated drawing well in a rather arid landscape additional to the threshing. The voice-over says:

> "Harvesting in the traditional manner is even more primitive [than the fishing, I.N.]. Threshing and winnowing are still carried on with the same methods as were used in the Old Testament times. And this is the age old way of drawing water. Without man made irrigation much of Palestine would be desert. This is the way of the past."

Measured orchestra music dominated by string instruments is added to the scene. Cut. Peppy orchestral music with an emphasis on the brass. A cement hydro dam and loads of water. A different narrator with a dynamic voice annunciates: "And this is the way of the future. In the Upper Jordan Valley stands a giant hydro-electric plant." Cuts to various trenches with streaming water. "The power it generates is used to pump up water for irrigation on a wide scale. Irrigation means prosperity."

Portrait of Palestine opens with aerial shots of the Jordan Valley and the desert. A voice-over explains where Palestine is located geographically. And continues:

> "Everywhere in Palestine, even down in the valley through which the Jordan winds are the ruins of the past. Mounds of earth mark the site of the biblical city of Jericho whose walls came tumbling down to let in the children of Israel on their journey to the Promised Land."

The images illustrating the narration of Jericho show a shepherd and his goat. A shepherd also crosses the image when the tomb of Rachel is displayed. In the ruins of the synagogue of Capernaum, where Jesus is said to have preached and performed miracles, blond men in European dress look at the old stones.

> "On the shore of the Mediterranean stands the medieval fortress of Athlit. This was the last great stronghold of the crusaders in Palestine. Some crusader churches have in the course of time, been converted into mosques. For ever since the end of the crusades the dominant religion in this land of many religions has been Mohammedanism."

For exemplification large buildings in rural areas are shown into which women, wearing traditional cloths and carrying water jars on their heads, enter. When Bethlehem is portrayed the images differ from all other scenes in which the population of Palestine is depicted. Shots of street and market scenes are close-up and eye-level. The pictures are commented as follows:

> "Now Bethlehem is an ordinary Arab market town. Except that its people are Christian Arabs. Many of whom are said to have crusader blood in their veins. The women go unveiled. The headdresses they wear are a medieval European fashion introduced by the crusaders."

Also Zionist photography and films use historical references in order to underline the claim on the land. In these narratives the Old Testament times are the period of great civilisation and not at all synonymical to backwardness as presented in the British movies. They are referred to as evidence for the Jewish ownership of the land that has to be restored. Sometimes the exact same filmic images are used to

tell two different narratives, the Christian British and the Zionist. Most of the scenes from *Portrait of Palestine* described above are original footage of <u>*The Land of Promise*</u>[7] which was produced by *Palestine Film Co. Ltd.* in 1935[8] (see Gooding 2010). This first Zionist talkie has little original sound. The narration replaces the inter-titles that introduce the subsequent sequence while the soundtrack mainly consists of orchestral music as accompanying silent films. The scenes of the threshing and dwelling are shown at the very beginning of the film. They are only prefigured by bird's eye view images of desert and the words:

> "This is the land which God promised to Abraham. Once, while the Jews lived in this land, it was the centre of a great civilisation. When the Jews were driven out, the land gradually declined. Primitive life returned."

The spectator then has time to contemplate on that primitive life, viewing the images of agricultural work and those of the mosque described above. This time they are used to fantasise post-Old Testament centuries. In the next sequence Jerusalem is told to be a city that has not changed since the Middle Ages. A voice-over introduces the contemporary Jewish life in Palestine.

> "The city on the hill of Zion existed as a sanctuary for three great religions, embracing one half of the human race. […] But older than these [Muslim and Christian religious ties, I.N.] by far are the memories which bind the Jewish people to Palestine, the birthplace of their religion and their nationhood."

The Palestinian Jews are used as the narrative link between the times of the great civilisation and the time of the film's making. "Oriental Jews", the narration states, "only in externals resemble the lives of the surrounding peoples" but echo the patriarchal civilisation. The Middle Ages, a period of which the British crusaders ruled in part of the country and which the British films emphasise on to claim Palestine, are marked as backward. The opening titles of *The Land of Promise* declare "The Jewish People rebuilding Palestine" as the movie's cast. The film's first few minutes are the only ones showing or mentioning the local population.

Unlike other colonial films made in the first half of the 20th century, Zionist motion pictures almost entirely delete the indigenous peoples from the image. At no time films were made to civilize the actual population by entertainment, like for instance Belgians did in The Congo with the <u>*Mata Mata & Pili Pili*</u> series[9]. This kind of films was made for the Arab (Oriental, Sephardi) Jewish immigrants though, who were not part of the original European Zionist idea and thus had to be de-Arabized. One of the first examples of such productions is the silent animation

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[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QD0D6W2z01s.

[8] Before the introduction of video technology it was a common practice of public and private production companies to sell, or buy, footage.

[9] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIu2Ii2e5hI. In the 1950s Albert Van Haelst, a Belgian missionary and film fanatic, made some twenty films in the Congo: the Matamata and Pilipili series. The two comic heroes are loosely based on US-American Laurel and Hardy.

The Adventures of Gadi Ben Sousi[10] from 1931. In the 1960s popular ethnic comedies, the so called *Boureka Films*, were made for the same purpose. Only in the 1980s a noteworthy number of critical Israeli filmmakers started to look for an image of their Palestinian Other, an enterprise that was soon state funded and boosted the export of Israeli movies. Due to their criticality of governmental politics, these films were often regarded in Europe as prove that Israel was the only democracy in the Middle East. In the end of nearly all these movies the Palestinian protagonist had to die while the Jew, who made friends with him during the film, lived. This was not mentioned in the many film reviews and wider critical analysis of this so called *Palestinian Wave* of Israeli cinema.

The 2011 short documentary *Susya*[11] by Israeli filmmakers Dani Rosenberg and Yoav Gross examines and thwarts the long tradition of hegemonial filmic narratives and denunciates a theft of land that is since a century mentally prepared and justified with the help of cinema. In their movie the directors visit the Jewish archaeological site of Susya in the occupied West Bank with two of its former Palestinian inhabitants. They have been evicted when their land was declared state land by the Israeli government as it is a Jewish archaeological site. The villagers are denied access to the new outdoor museum even if they buy a ticket. For the film however they return and watch a movie in the museum's cinema in which their life is shown as mock ancient atmosphere. Then the Palestinian men guide the directors through their village and memory. When the army arrives to kick them out the images look almost staged.

The film premiered at prestigious Berlin International Film Festival. The programmer told me she liked the short so much because it was humorously breaking clichés, namely the old Palestinian in his traditional dress using a mobile phone which he is carrying in the pocket of his Jalabiya. One of the directors on the other hand said that he feels it is becoming useless to make such films if everybody takes position in front of the camera without the director's intervention because they know the media-game by heart. Albeit the film's conditions of production and its subtext are part of the more subtle levels of the occupation, the fact that in *Susya* the Palestinian landowners guide the filmmakers through Palestinian Susya is an exceptional example in which film-makers working in Palestine question the role of their profession.

Individual Palestinian Photographers

The image-productions of Palestine discussed above were initiated or supported by institutions to propagate their respective mission, such as the *British Colonial Office*, *The Palestine Foundation Fund - Keren Hayesod*[12], the different churches

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[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D10_OOgw39k.
[11] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pha0K9QmJg.
[12] Now *Keren Hayesod – United Israel Appeal*, founded in 1920 and still operating as fundraising arm of the Zionist movement. It commissioned and financed a large number of films, many of which are now accessible online at the *Spielberg Jewish Film Archive*.

or the Israeli state. Additionally to the means of production they had and have the needed tools to distribute their image, be it governmental, public, or congregational. As for the case of *Susya*, films with public Israeli funding, like all films which are produced in states with a subsidy system, get the infrastructural support of international and bilateral cooperation agreements in the field of cinema in addition to the local assistance.

To be colonized means to be deprived of these institutional options; it means to be denied the right of self-organisation, self-representation and self-determination including the control over the image. Individuals in all colonies, of course, could and can be photographers or filmmakers. How do they work? To the production of what image do they contribute?

In the early 1860s the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, Yessayi Garabedian, began teaching courses in photography in the church's compound. His student Garabed Krikorian opened one of the early photographic studios in Palestine just outside Jerusalem's Jaffa Gate in 1885 (see El-Hage 2007). This was the place were pilgrims and tourists arrived, where the largest hotel, *Hotel Fast*, stood and where tour operator *Thomas Cook* had its offices. Only few years later three more studios had opened in the same street. Also in Jaffa and Haifa photographic studios were operated by locals (see Nassar 2006). Due to the destruction of Palestine and the expulsion of large parts of its population in 1947/8 not much information is available about most of them. Sometimes photographers are rediscovered, collectors might find a signature of an unknown author on a picture. Or, as in 2006, for example, an Israeli antiquarian collector placed an ad in local Arabic newspapers in Israel/Palestine enquiring about some Karimeh Abbud. It turned out that he had found about 400 photographs by her in a house in Jerusalem which was apparently abandoned by its owners in 1948. Ahmed Mrowat, the director of the *Nazareth Archive Project* could purchase the pictures of this till then unknown photographer (see Mrowat 2007).

The best remembered and studied Palestinian photographer is Khalil Raad. He was Krikorian's apprentice and then went to Switzerland to accomplish his studies. Upon his return Raad opened his Kodak-Studio off Jaffa Gate. Together with Krikorian, Raad (who must have been fluent in German and English due to his education in Protestant Jerusalemite schools) was hired by the Germans as court photographer for the visit of Kaiser Wilhelm II to Jerusalem in autumn 1898 in addition to the in-house photographers that travelled with the Kaiser. In 1915 Raad was chosen by the *Commissariat of the Ottoman Imperial Army* in Jerusalem to document the army mobilisation in WW I. He became the war photographer for the Ottoman troops and their German and Austrian allies (see Tamari 2013).

There seem to be two main reasons why Raad is comparably well remembered: First, he worked in the service of foreign or occupying forces. Hence the photos were archived abroad, either with his clients or as spoils of war. His war

photographs, for example, are part of the _Alan Saunders Photo Gallery_[13] at the _Middle East Centre Archive_ of _The University of Oxford_. Colonel Saunders was District Commander of the _Palestine Police_ in Jerusalem from 1920 till 1926, few years after the victory of the British over the Ottoman army. Second, during the war of 1948 a friend of Raad managed to access the studio and rescued negatives. They were later handed over to the _Institute of Palestine Studies_ in Beirut for preservation.

Above the availability of Raad's works, he is said to be the first Arab photographer in Palestine, which from a nationalist point of view is an important factor for the organisation of the memory. His commissioned photography is not discussed in this context.

Local photographers in Palestine, in contrast to the European and North American travellers, also depicted local events, like the inaugurations of hospitals, or they photographed radio orchestras, soccer clubs, and communal leaders. They took class pictures and snapshots of their families and of friends. They portrayed the affluent classes in the photo studios and sometimes peasants or vendors and crafts-people at work. It was ordinary and at times private photos that seem of no importance except for those in the picture, their loved ones, or for the local press. Souvenirs, not merchandise. Retrospectively, after the _Nakba_, the catastrophe of 1948, their significance changed. In 1984 Walid Khalidi published his book _Before Their Diaspora, A photographic history of the Palestinians, 1876-1948_ which was adopted for the internet recently.[14] It shows photos from different collections that range from the snapshot of a mother bathing her child in an urban private house to portraits of politicians and press photos of political events. Khalidi does not mention the photographers' names, only the archives or the collections are specified.

> "One of the purposes of this book is to refute the Zionist claim, which till these days is being perpetuated, that this was a desert. And that they made it bloom. And this is absolutely not true,"

says Khalidi in an interview about the making of the book[15]. In March 2013 a large Khalil Raad exhibition by the _Institute of Palestine Studies_ was opened in Beirut. Lebanese _Future TV_ reported[16] and spoke with guests as well as with curator Issam Nassar. Many of the older visitors of the show remembered places and, like Khalidi, some of them stated that these images prove that Palestine was inhabited. For Nassar, as he says in the _Future TV_ report, the importance of the images goes beyond that prove. For him the images allow to reconstruct Palestinian life in Palestine and to illustrate what is usually memorised orally.

The destructive effect of the constant exclusion of Palestinians from internationally

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[13] https://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/mec/mecaphotos-saunders.html.
[14] http://btd.palestine-studies.org/.
[15] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fFMNTg2qZZw. All links retrieved in October 2015.
[16] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1T7m9Q54ujQ.

distributed images of Palestine, or the use of the rural population for pseudo historical illustrations, above the physical destruction and expulsion, becomes obvious in the statements above.

War Photography

There has always been organised and sometimes armed resistance to the occupation. Yet only few photographs thereof circulate. The photographers are mostly stated as unknown, sometimes the photo's credit is a press agency. The majority of those images are wide-angle shots. In urban environments they are often taken from roof-tops or balconies. Some photos portrait leaders or units posing in the field. Pictures of troops marching in far distance in the country side exist. They could be photographed anywhere. One of the wider spread photos[17] attributed to the 1936-9 *Arab Revolt* in Palestine is a close up of four fighters, two men and two women, inexpertly posing with their guns at the ready in a dugout. Behind them stands a male combatant outside the trench. The fighters make the picture's diagonal in divine proportion. Their uniforms seem quite dark in the vast landscape. One woman and one man look into the camera. What makes the photo powerful despite its great composition is the closeness of the unknown photographer to the fighters and at the same time a respectful distance. It is an image of an armed unit and of four personalities at the same time. The author cannot have been a stranger to the troops. Looking at the image raises the question if the armies of the *National Arab Movement* embedded photographers? Pan-Arab satellite channel *Al-Jazeera* published archive film footage of a spokesman of the *Arab Higher Committee*,[18] announcing the general strike of 1936. The resistance movement used the media after all. Given the numerous Arab newspapers and magazines published in the Palestinian region at that time[19], some press should have also printed the movement's photos when reporting on those major political events. Where are the Palestinian Arab images advertising their cause?

The Arab-Israeli War of 1948 was an international media event and is widely documented in pictures. Palestinian individuals photographed it in different frameworks. Haifa-born Abdul Razzaq Badran who graduated from the Applied Arts Collage in Cairo in 1940, worked as war photographer for the *Dar el Hilal Magazine* in Cairo, for example. He must have been embedded with the Arab armies. There are photos of units of the *Rescue Army*, as the Arab army of that war was called, taking breaks, formal images of troops, and shots of rather casual meetings of military and civil dignitaries. He is also author of the famous image showing an open truck loaded with dozens of Arab fighters posing.[20] On the engine

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[17] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Palest_against_british.gif.
[18] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IfwaLExx1e8.
[19] The *Al-Aqsa Mosque Library* in Jerusalem alone has a collection of 70 newspapers and journals. Print media then contained fewer images than today, yet press photos were common.
[20] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1947%E2%80%9348_Civil_War_in_Mandatory_Palestine#/media/File:Arab_volunteers.jpg.

hood sits a soldier, carelessly leaning on the windshield and aiming his gun's barrel at the spectator. Another photograph[21] shows a group of three men running towards the camera, positioned in the middle of a country road, ducking slightly. One of them is piggybacking a fourth man. In the background on the left side of the street stands an armed soldier, between the group and the soldier a single man is rushing off the road. The soldier is the vanishing point of the image's perspective.

Jerusalemite Hanna Safieh documented his city photographically between 1927 and 1967. He had worked with the American Colony Photo Department and was employed as Public Information Officer of the Mandate government during the last few years of the British rule, before he opened his own studio and sold his work to international news magazines (see Nassar 2000). For his photos he often expands the frame beyond the actual newsworthy action scene. Like in an image that shows a street in Jerusalem:[22] Barbed wire is marking a front line across a street. A man, bend over, runs towards the camera, coming from a gate on the other side of the line. He is the exact centre of the image, too small and too fast to be recognised. In the gate stands a uniformed yet unarmed man looking at him. In the forefront of the photo is a group of onlookers in a semicircle, with their backs to the camera. One man is getting out of the runner's way. A medic of the *Red Crescent* with a gas mask in his hand looks at the photographer.

Although showing armies, the Palestinians in these war photos taken by Palestinian photographers have more selfhood than in most of the portrait photographs made for tourism and travel books.

Controlling the Image

Until the defeat of the Arab armies in the war of 1967 a majority of Arabs assumed that the Arab National Movement, long divided into nation states, would liberate Palestine. With the *Naksa*, the reverse, of 1967 many Palestinians lost confidence and strengthened their self-organisation. The PLO, founded in 1964 and so far rather marginal, grew rapidly into a revolutionary mass organisation. One tool of its struggle was the systematic use of images which the PLO produced and controlled.

In 1967/68 the *Department of Photography* was founded under the aegis of *Fatah* by cinematographers Sulafa Jadallah, Hany Jawhariyyeh and director Mustafa Abu Ali. Shortly after, the group changed its name into *Cinema Unit* and started cinematically documenting the struggle of their people. Various other fractions under the umbrella of the PLO began to produce films soon (see Er-Ramahi 1977). At international film festivals the origin of the works was PLO, like other films were registered under their country's name.

The early films were short, between 5 and 20 minutes, the worldwide standard for political documentaries at that time. The PLO was an organisation of the Palestinian exile. The movies accordingly focused on the situation of the refugees

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[21] http://badranaward.com/Index.aspx.

[22] http://www.corbisimages.com/photographer/hanna-safieh.

and spoke of return. The filmmakers had neither access to the territory that had become Israel nor to the 1967 Israeli occupied West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Hights or Sinai.

As revolutionary liberation organisation the PLO was connected to other anti-colonial movements all over the world. *Leipzig International Filmweek for Documentary and Short Film*, a prominent and declared anti-imperialist film festival in GDR, the socialist German state (1949-90), was since 1973, when GDR gained vast diplomatic recognition, organised by the state. Since that same year the PLO participated at the festival and granted an own award. This *Prize of the PLO*, in 1978 renamed after martyred cinematographer Hany Jawhariyyeh into *Hani-Jawnarieh-Prize of the PLO*[23], was awarded to the outstanding film of the festival dealing with an occupational regime. The subjects of the winning films ranged from the liberation struggle in Mozambique to the death of Steve Biko and the Palestinian revolution as depicted by foreign filmmakers.

The PLO's own productions always dealt with Palestine, yet not all the directors were Palestinians or Arabs. In their cinematic language the works varied from rather experimental, like Mustafa Abu Ali's <u>*They do not Exist*</u> (1974)[24], to hard hitting agitation like Monica Maurer's *Born Out of Death* (1981). The films had two taboos: criticising the Palestinian society and going beyond the promise of return. The movies pretend a united Palestinian entity versus the Zionist and imperialist enemy. If a film deals with the return, it ends with the departure. In 1969 PLO-filmmaker Kais al-Zubaidi directed the 11 minute <u>*Away from Home*</u>[25] for the Arab Syrian TV. The film opens with snapshots from a newly built refugee camp, showing mainly children. The sound of a machine gun rules the rhythm of the editing. In the silence of the cease fire a poem about an abruptly ended childhood appears on screen. Then the children of the opening are introduced in calm. From the off they comment the images of the camp, giggling: a child they know walking from one tent to the other or a friend they recognize; sometimes music ads additional contrapuntal sound to the images. In classical indoor interview scenes some of the kids answer questions about how they got to the camp, what they work during their holiday and what they play, what they want to become when they are grown up. The film ends with the children running towards the camera, freezing the frame after a while. This dynamic image is a counter shot of Badran's photo of the refugees with the piggybacking described above and the many other pictures of the refugees of 1948 and 1967. Like Badran also al-Zubaidi, a trained cameraman, uses central perspective. His freeze frame is, in reverse perspective though, suggesting that the children return.

PLO film production declined in 1982 when the organisation was forced to leave Beirut and resettled in Tunis. Most film units of the various organisations

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[23] The name was consistently misspelled by the festival and accordingly by all international press. See (German) Federal Archive, DR 139 21/1973-53/1982.

[24] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2WZ_7Z6vbsg.

[25] http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5p6um_%D8%A8%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86-%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A_shortfilms.

operating under the umbrella of the PLO were not reorganized. With only the PLO's *Department of Information and Culture* continuing to produce films and some offices in Europe co-financing movies made in solidarity with the Palestinian cause, it became rather difficult for the PLO to control the image of Palestine.

In 1980 Michel Khleifi's feature length *The Fertile Memory* was released as the first independent Palestinian film. It is a portrait of two women, Farah Hatoum, an elderly working class widow from the Galilee and the much younger feminist author and teacher Sahar Khalifa from Nablus, a divorced young mother living on her own. Khleifi observes the day to day lives of the women with long camera shots. Much of the scenes are filmed inside their houses. He opens spaces in which they can talk, takes interest in their personalities and never hides his subjectivity. Khleifi reflects on how his protagonists' lives are determined by the occupation and the male structures of their own society and on their individual resistance. He allows contradicting comments of the two women on the same political events to stand next to each other. He collects their memory and observes their tradition.
Quite a number of documentary films told political stories on the basis of biographies during that time, in the socialist and in the capitalist states. While they usually focused on one protagonist, *The Fertile Memory* needs the two female characters in order to insist on the diversity of the Palestinian society vis-à-vis the PLO propaganda. Khleifi is from Nazareth and shot on the location to which the children in al-Zubaidi's film depart. Khleifi's family did not leave Palestine. He does not need to imagine the country but rather critically observes it. The film was financed with Belgian, French and West-German money.

Authentic Palestinian Pictures

This short moment when a considerable body of PLO films and an independent Palestinian movie were released at the same time, substantiates the question of what a Palestinian film is. The PLO films are one point of reference for Khleifi's cinematic narration. *The Fertile Memory* is an independent film because the director chose to tell a different story and to ask questions in relation to the PLO productions. As part of a process of decolonizing the culture and the memory, a debate could have emerged about what Palestine should be.

In the late 1980s directors like Rashid Masharawi, Elia Suleiman and Hany Abu Assad started making films. They too, are called independent film-makers. Their families, too, did not leave Palestine. In their works they also criticize or show dissent in their own society in addition to their cinematic struggle against the occupation. The funding of the independent movies is mainly public European. Only very recently Arab film funds were created. Their grants are not sufficient though, to finance the fictional films more and more Palestinian directors are producing. The latter are defined as low budget when they cost less than 5 million Euro. Competition for funds is tough, only 2-5% of submitted projects get money

at all. The funds think increasingly economic which they justify by administrating public monies. For a Palestinian story, as for all other non-Western stories, to be interesting for the fund it needs to be authentic. It has to be unique in the sense that it is culturally different from Europe and gives an insight that only locals could provide to the European viewer, the tax-payer. Given the delicate political situation, Palestinian stories need to be controllable to the fund, as one funding contact person once told me. The most successful result of such film financing is Hany Abu Assad's *Paradise Now* (2005, The Netherlands, France, Germany) about two suicide bombers from the occupied West Bank.

Since the mid-1990s, when the EU started the *Euro-Mediterranean Partnership* and when the PLO moved to Ramallah to prepare the independence of the state, most European funding is provided for documentary films in the framework of training initiatives or special projects on pressing problems like women's or human rights. Financing mainly comes from ministries of development aid (see Neidhardt 2010).

Although both kinds of funds ask for a critical gaze, the European funded films remind the PLO productions rather than the idea of the independent Palestinian cinema. The funders usually lack the knowledge of Palestinian culture, history and discourse and cannot decode the critical scripts or treatments that are submitted. As funds use film as a tool for democratisation the reference is the asserted democratic European culture. Much of it is based on the comprehensive European image production of Palestine analysed above.

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