

currently present yet seems unworthy of representation. For the traumatic background to this paradox, see Elsaesser (1997; 2001; 2004).

46. These joined a collection of images which represent history today through the media, while concealing it, in fact, behind the picture – the shots of the attack on the Twin Towers, photographs of swollen-bellied African children, snapshots of tortured Iraqis. As Elsaesser argues, in these cases and others, the single image has obtained power, strength, and a halo that were once bestowed on art alone.

47. See footnote 21.

7. BETWEEN EXILE AND HOMELAND: THE FILMS OF ELIA SULEIMAN

A comparison of Suleiman's two feature films, *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (1996) and *Divine Intervention* (2002), lends itself to a comprehensive review of what had transpired in Palestinian society in general and in its cinema in particular during the period between the signing of the Oslo peace accords and the Second *Intifada*, from "the calm before the storm," as Suleiman calls it, to "total devastation and disintegration" (Erickson, 2003). The two films revolve around similar episodes. In both, some of the scenes take place in the home of Suleiman's parents in Nazareth and others in Jerusalem; in both the director adopts a comical stance toward the ordinary day-to-day friction between the Arabs of Nazareth and toward the Jewish-Israeli violence in Jerusalem; and both culminate in a fantasy of revenge against the Israelis.

The differences between ostensibly similar films highlight the historical, ideological, and cinematic developments that took place in the short time that elapsed between the making of the first film and the production of the second. In the earlier film, we encounter diverse locations: the house of Suleiman's parents in Nazareth, the director's home in Jerusalem, and the width and breadth of the various vistas unfolding in the course of his journeys across the country. Although these spaces are crowded and threatened, it seems possible to remain in them and to conduct one's daily life, albeit one charged with violence. The second film, however, refigures what in the first film was only suggested indirectly. Here, there are no open spaces, and the house in Nazareth is reduced to the kitchen. Its living room is displayed only once, while its contents are impounded by the income tax authorities. Rather than Jerusalem, the film

features the nearby A-Ram roadblock separating Jerusalem and Ramallah, and daily life has turned into a stagnant routine encumbered by hate, anger, and arguments. The contrast between the spaces in the different films is denoted by discrepancies between the structure of the plots and the images. In the first film, as in all his other work, Suleiman examines images that relate to reality; he deconstructs them, sets them up as parodies, and reconstructs them as complex poetical intersections fraught with multiple meanings.¹ In these junctions, the Palestinian story appears as one among many, as a narrative that cannot be told yet is recounted nevertheless. This story both exists and does not exist in the minutiae of everyday life, independent of images, symbols, and clichés, and yet beyond it lies, veiled yet apparent, a broader meaning – the Palestinian meaning. In the second of these films, *Divine Intervention*, as in many other Palestinian movies of the period, the episodes and the plot, as well as the details of the landscape and of daily life, delineate first and foremost the Palestinian situation; thus they lose their independent existence and become instead the symbolic representation of the Palestinian condition. That condition, which dominates all the layers of the film, creates a coherent plot – more linear than its earlier manifestations – of conquest and struggle, and Suleiman mobilizes the details of daily life to do this.

I don't want to tell the story of Palestine [he explains in an interview with Ame Bourlond]. My right as a Palestinian lost its meaning as a point of departure for my work, at least politically speaking. Of course I am aware of people's need to share a common language, way of life, safety and democracy. But I will always doubt this collective institution called nation. The concept root is meaningless for me. In my case, land is not the element creating passion. (Bourlond, [1999] 2000: 96–7)

In the same interview, Suleiman defines the rift between cinema and nationalism: "Cinema is not meant to reinforce the national image or its opposite: the negative image of the other" (99). He also clarifies his outlook on the cinema he wishes to create: "I want to open the way to multiple spaces that lend themselves to different readings . . . I am trying to create an image that transcends the ideological definition of what it means to be a Palestinian, an image far from any stereotype" (98). That is to say, he is attempting to create a "democratization of the image" (Erikson, 2003).

The film *Divine Intervention* testifies to the difficulty of creating this kind of multiplicity of spaces during a time of national threat. As Suleiman explains:

I didn't really change . . . When I filmed *Arab Dream* (*Al-Holmo-l' Arabi*, 1998), I seriously felt how fascism was growing and strengthening in Israel. Since that time, because this fascism has filled up the whole space

and has penetrated into the soul, the space for the poetic has diminished (Joyard, 2002).

In spite of this, *Divine Intervention* also testifies to the possibility of overcoming this diminishment of "poetic space" and for creating – through parody, fantasy, and humor – a rich range of meanings, a "third space" that exists between languages, identities, nationalities, and cultures.² This "third space" can be found in all of Suleiman's films, even those aspiring toward a single national significance.

1 THE HOME – THE PRIVATE SPACE

The New Palestinian Cinema characteristically delineates a fragmented and blocked geography in which the home is cut off from the land and both are diminished and divided by borders and barricades. Therefore, there is an inherent difficulty in the endeavor of this cinema to form a whole imaginary map. It attempts to capture limited places, to elevate the camera in order to encompass open expanses, or to highlight a specific detail and turn it into a symbol of wholeness. Suleiman reflects, with particular strength and accomplishment, the obstacles that Palestinian cinema faces: the process of reduction as well as some possible ways to overcome it.³ This process is what differentiates his two full-length films from one another; while in the first there are still homes and spaces, by the second these elements have disappeared.

In *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, the private home, that of the director's parents in Nazareth, is not an integral part of the public space, as it is in Khleifi's films, and does not represent the public space, as it does in the late Palestinian cinema. Yet the public domain lies beyond it, as another layer, a palimpsest. The film follows the minute details of what is going on inside the home, the life of a middle-class Christian family that could be taking place anywhere in the world. Yet the director, in an interview with Jason Wood, connects it with the Palestinian condition:

Nazareth is a ghetto and my humor emanates from dealing with a population living in a claustrophobic state of stasis, an impotent inability to change the face of their reality. Unable to dislocate or shake free of the dominant power ruling them, they eventually unleash their frustrations against each other. (Wood, 2003)

This statement somewhat simplifies what actually occurs in the film, which depicts a small society occupied with its own affairs, with its inner life, and with various conflicts – between neighboring cities,⁴ different families,⁵ and within the individual family itself.⁶ The recurring scene of two people getting out of a

cut, striking each other, and then returning to the car to continue their journey satirically reflects these inner conflicts.

And yet, in the end, all sides are reconciled and life calmly resumes without frustration or violence. If anything is demonstrated in this film about the Palestinian experience, about life in the ghetto, it is done inadvertently, coincidentally, and indistinctly, and as part of a spectrum of many diverse meanings.

The first part of the film, which takes place in Nazareth, focuses on the director's family and friends and appears unrelated to the national political plot, occurring in Jerusalem. Ostensibly, it seems that the bridge constructed by Khleif between the home and the homeland has been cracked and that this rupture divides the film's space in two. Yet although Suleiman's family home in Nazareth does not necessarily represent the public space, it is linked to it, if only as one more image concealing a deeper reality. This becomes particularly apparent at the end of the film, when the opening scene showing the director's parents dozing in front of the television set is repeated. This time the Israeli flag flutters on the television screen, accompanied by the national anthem *Hatikva*, which marks the end of each day's public television broadcast. It is accompanied by the caption: "My family, my only homeland" (*ʿAilati, watan al wahed*). The homeland, represented in so many Palestinian films by the home, does not exist here. It is embodied in the image of the dozing parents,⁷ who represent only themselves, as the captions indicate. Neither is the homeland present in the image of the Israeli flag which invalidates it. And yet this absence constitutes the strongest presence in the scene, the presence of what is missing.⁸ It could be argued that, compared to films which dissolve the individual into the collective, or to Khleif's work, which fuses both domains into a unity only to be deconstructed and reconstructed as disparities, Suleiman's cinema focuses from the outset on the domestic domain alone. The homeland seems absent from the film. However, here, absence itself bears meaning. The absent homeland is what the director seeks but does not find within the home and the family.⁹

The film's second episode, "Political Diary," takes place in Jerusalem. "If the Israelis, and the Israeli army, are missing from the Palestinian city of Nazareth, Jerusalem is a space reverberating with the occupation and its iniquities" (Bresheth, 2002b). In this part, the national significance of the home, veiled in the first half of the film, becomes clearer. Jerusalem, as Bresheth (2002b) claims, "expresses a world of difference. It is the locus of Israeli-Palestinian conflict." Suleiman's home in Jerusalem is a cramped and dark apartment, repeatedly obscured as a claustrophobic prison through whose barred windows the director gazes at the outside world. In this respect, it is perhaps no different from his home in Nazareth, but here the claustrophobic experience is associated with the occupation. This connection becomes obvious when we see the Israeli police break into the apartment in a way that is reminiscent of the many break-ins that did actually happen and of their depiction in numerous

Palestinian films.¹⁰ Here, as in the films of Ali Nassar and Rashid Masharawi, the trauma of the occupation and the trauma of the loss of one's private home, as well as of the national homeland, are brought to the fore.¹¹ This trauma casts a different light upon the film's first episode, which initially appears untouched by trauma. In retrospect, we detect the undercurrent flowing beneath the image of a comparatively peaceful Nazarene reality. The second part of the film, therefore, elucidates why the homeland appears as a missing presence in the first part.

The home of Suleiman's parents in Nazareth, where family life takes place in *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, also appears in *Divine Intervention*. In the latter film, however, there is neither family life nor any other kind of life. The camera is set up in the kitchen and captures the father, over and over again in recurring episodes, as he sits at the table with a cup of coffee, a plate, and a hard-boiled egg in an egg-cup before him and sorts through a pile of letters, with the annoyingly monotonous sound of birds chirping outside. The static monotony that was present in *Chronicle of a Disappearance* dominates the scenes here and all that goes on in them. The house is narrowed, reduced now only to the kitchen; the mother is gone, friends do not come. Toward the end of the episode focusing on Nazareth, the house is appropriated by the income tax officials, who arrive on the scene, take an inventory of all the furniture, and seize it. This episode ends with the father's collapse, hospitalization, and subsequent death. Thus, while the first film ends with the caption: "My family – my only homeland," at the end of the second film there is no home and no family and the caption is: "In memory of my father." What is described by the director as the Israeli occupation that has turned the city into a ghetto, is responsible for annihilating the home within the private sphere, and, as in many other films, its erasure leaves a void that is filled by contents with a national significance.

THE OUTSIDE – THE NATIONAL SPACE

In *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, the external space, like the interior of the house, has a double existence both as connected to and separate from the national domain. The outside is usually hidden from the director. Sitting in the house, his view is obstructed by the laundry hanging out to dry, by the head of the observer, or by a closed window. It is divided, disjointed, apprehended only bit by bit – a minaret, a tree, a plot of land – and then cut up even further by the editing. That outside is in many cases dark, filmed through the grille of the window, from a boat rocking on the waves, through flickering light that challenges the existential certainty as to what is seen, reminiscent of *film noir*.

Nevertheless, in three different scenes the director abandons his limited point of view, from which the landscape seems fragmented and dim, and shoots the scenery in its entirety. He does so while traveling, in long takes without cuts,

and accompanied by a singing voice. These are the director's private journeys, touring his homeland.

Yet, like many journeys in Palestinian cinema, they also draw a blurred image of the map of the land in its length and breadth, thus conveying the organic connection with the landscape and control over it.

One journey takes place in the northern part of the country and ends in a monastery on the Mount of Beatitudes (also called "Mount Happiness"), overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Another takes place in the eastern side of Jerusalem, approaching the city from the direction of the Mount of Olives, and concluding in front of the Old City wall and the Al-Aqsa mosque. The third journey is in the south, in the desert, and ends in Jericho. If we add to these Suleiman's stroll along the promenade at the Tel Aviv seashore, and the fishing expedition to the coast at Acre that his father and friends undertake, we can chart a map of the land from north to south, and from east to west. The Arab songs of which the soundtrack to parts of these journeys is composed charge the filmed spaces with national meaning, turning them into "Arabic-speaking" spaces. Nevertheless, the map drawn by these journeys is the map of an absent land, owned by others.¹²

In the film's second episode, which takes place in Jerusalem, the national significance of space is also strengthened. During both episodes the fictitious director – the film's protagonist – constitutes an absent presence. He does not utter a word, move or act; he only looks and does not always see because the sights in front of him are usually blocked. In the second part of the film, this absent presence is embodied by the Palestinian Arab, from whom the Israelis took his home, his space, his voice, his identity. As suggested by Haim Bresheeth (2002b), the disappearance of the director becomes a symbol of the disappearance of the Palestinian: "Through the speechless Suleiman, his father, cousin, and friends, a certain feature of Palestinian reality, a reality of being throttled, of being silenced, is being spoken here by passages of expressive silence."

Thus, the elements that had seemed in the first part of the film unrelated to the conflict are linked to it in the second part; the loss of voice, the loss of identity, the loss of home and land, and the disappearance of the director are revealed in Jerusalem to have been the result of Israeli action.

The film's second half begins at a clubhouse, where Suleiman is to give a lecture about "peace" as the theme of his latest film. However, he is unable to do so as the sound system does not work. Instead of his voice, which we cannot hear, the hall is filled with the clatter of conversations, babies crying, and the ringing of cellular phones. The scene, which is a satirical portrayal of cultural life in Nazareth, is reminiscent of a similar scene from Suleiman's earlier film, *Homage by Assassination* (1991), in which the host of a radio program tries to interview Suleiman about a film (the same one we are watching) and is unsuccessful because of a faulty phone line. The silence, the absence of a voice, the

impossibility of telling any story let alone that of the film he is making, then, are repeated in Suleiman's films in different contexts – and in all instances there remains a doubt as to whether the speaker is, indeed, mute or perhaps it is his audience who are deaf (as suggested by the translation of an Arab song into sign language, in the film *Arab Dream*). In the second part of *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, muteness and disappearance are set in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When asked about the meaning of the scene described above, Suleiman says: "I felt that 'talking about peace' is simply a title. Real peace does not exist" (Kaufman, 2003). However, silence in the present case becomes part of the broader Palestinian story. As mentioned above, in the first scene the director loses his voice. In another scene he loses his home and his identity when police officers burst into his apartment and conduct a search, all the while totally ignoring his presence as if he were just one more object among the other objects in the house. At the next stage, Eden, Suleiman's girlfriend, rebels. She uses a two-way army radio that the Israeli police have left behind in order to voice absurd commands, first sending the Israeli army scurrying back and forth all over Jerusalem and the surrounding area and then ordering them to evacuate the city. The voice that betrayed her in the earlier scene and thwarted her chances of obtaining a place to live, wins the entire space for her. Everything that was taken away from the director – his voice, his identity, his space – is restored by his girlfriend; through her voice she controls the Israeli army and sends them all over the place, thus replacing the director's passivity with (fantastic) actions and exploits. The filming supports this; the camera captures her from a low angle, as she orchestrates the chaos of military vehicles zipping aimlessly beneath her.¹³ One can thus summarize and say, in the words of Eliaesser (1997), that the abstract malaise, in the first half, finds its "concrete wound" in the second half: the wound of the Israeli occupation.

Just as in the first part of the film the homeland is both present and absent, so too its past is simultaneously apparent and concealed. The obstructed spaces or open expanses are not steeped in the Palestinian past, as they were in Michel Khleifi's cinema. Neither does Suleiman attempt to excavate and seek historical relics, as some of the new films have done. In an interview with Prokhoris and Wavelle (1999), Suleiman explains: "For me, there is no homeland. The only homeland is memory and memory is first and foremost in the body." Yet, once again, what is missing from the film permeates it by virtue of its absence: personal memory, the parents' home, the music of the 1950s, longing for the Sea of Galilee prior to the founding of the State of Israel (in the monk's monologue), or even the move from Nazareth to Jerusalem which is, according to the director (ibid.), the transition from the Palestine of 1948 to the Palestine of 1967; all these revive in the film that which is not depicted, that which is inaccessible and out of reach, a clouded memory of something that is vanishing into oblivion. This memory drives the second half of the film and affects its every

detail. The homeland, its past and its vistas, which are conceived as present though absent in the first half of the film, are transformed in the second half into a sort of a cover story for the "present absentees" of the past – the refugees who did not voluntarily leave the land in 1948, who were in fact exiled from their villages against their will because they were not at home on the first day of the war.¹⁴

While in *Chronicle of a Disappearance* landscapes still existed and one could travel through them from one place to another, in the later films, such as *Arab Dream* or *Cyber Palestine* (2000), as in a considerable number of other Palestinian films of this period, this landscape gradually disappears and trips across the country no longer reveal it. In *Cyber Palestine*, the journeys completely lack direction. The route from the refugee camp in Gaza to Bethlehem goes around in circles and keeps returning to the refugee camp until it reaches the Israeli Erez roadblock at the northern end of the Gaza Strip. In *Arab Dream*, bushes form hedgerows that block the landscape, and darkness or rapid movements of the camera prevent it from being seen. In *Divine Intervention*, even those subdued landscapes have vanished. The first part of the film is reduced to the narrow and enclosed streets of Nazareth, shown as a place choked by courtyards crowding each other, occupied parking spots, neighbors who violently infringe on each other's territory. The second part of the film is reduced to the border – the roadblock. Seemingly, from the gloomy and static atmosphere of the hospital where the father is treated, the film shifts sharply to the dynamic movements of a vehicle driven by the son. However, this dynamic is imaginary, and it is immediately cut off by the roadblock. In a similar manner, *Arab Dream* cuts abruptly from a map of the entire world on the computer screen to a map of Israel, and Jerusalem and on to a search for the Palestine website, which does not appear on the Web, or from the film's theme song, which recounts the dream of a united Arab world, to a blocked house with a sign posted in front of it that reads "Forbidden Zone." These transitions, in fact, tell the story of the vast, universal or national pan-Arabic space that has shrunk and is now severed by a border that tears down and encloses private and public places alike, that intrudes on the home and tears apart the Palestinian identity that can no longer define itself by movement, space, or the gaze, and is defined only by the border that bisects it. This process of the reduction of space is manifested not only in the film itself, but also in the difference between it and the earlier *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, in which home and space were still evident.

As mentioned before, in order to accomplish what is impossible in reality, and to break down the stifling blocked borders, Palestinian cinema turned to the dream and to film, to love and to fantasy. All those were meant to reunite the fractured space and to rejoin the divided identity. Such integration also occurs in Suleiman's second film, *Divine Intervention*.

Suleiman, the protagonist (referred to as E.S.),¹⁵ meets his lover at the border between Ramallah and Jerusalem, from where they observe the Israeli roadblock at A-Ram and all that transpires there. The bond between the two is a physical one – they silently hold hands. Thus the film demonstrates the possibility of breaking through the roadblock and transforming it from a place which fragments the Palestinian identity into a place of connection and love.¹⁶ Suleiman – the director – attempts to overcome this border, not through love alone but also by way of the camerawork. The static camera that was dominant in the first part of the film is now replaced with a more "dynamic" one that charts the breadth, the depth, and the height of the place (via tracking and crane shots). The love between the two protagonists not only allows the merging of the split Palestinian identity into a single whole, including the man and the woman, it also leads the Palestinian to action. The woman gives material form to the fantasies and desires of the passive man as she passes through the roadblock, paralyzing the soldiers and causing the watchtower to collapse behind her, or as she wipes out a unit of Israeli marksmen in scenes taken directly from the Ninja warrior films and from the virtual world of *The Matrix*.¹⁷

In *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, too, it is the woman who, by controlling space through the use of a two-way radio, personifies male yearnings. In the present film, where there is no space to control, she crosses the border and "destroys the enemy." In the former film, an absurd and humorous scene was used instead of physical violence, and was open to many interpretations; in the latter film physical violence is portrayed vividly and realistically, and it most clearly relates to the Palestinian resistance, although only as a fantasy.

After directing his first film, Suleiman was asked why he ignored the violence that pervades the reality around him and he answered:

First of all, I think that all presentation of violence promotes violence, and secondly, how does one measure a man's suffering, how can we take responsibility for defining sorrow or suffering? Let's say that I show a Palestinian being beaten; when I put this on the screen I limit his pain. (Kapa, 1998)

Following his second film, Suleiman was asked the opposite question: why he expressed the violence. To this he answered:

Instead of criticizing these individual separate scenes,¹⁸ perhaps it would have been more useful to think of me as a test case. The film is meant to raise questions – how is it that an artist like myself, who doesn't even live here, who neither he nor his family have ever been harmed by Israeli forces, creates such violent scenes? (Pinto, 2003)

He also explains: "This film can be considered an example of how a violent environment affects the consciousness of a person like me" (Kelly, 2002).

Palestinian viewers living in the Occupied Territories who saw *Chronicle of a Disappearance* reacted angrily to the scene showing Suleiman sitting passively with his cousin at the entrance of the Holyland store, and wondered why these people did not take up arms (Boutlond, [1999] 2000). In *Divine Intervention* their demand/querry was answered.

The difference between the two films, *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Divine Intervention*, is most apparent in their use of well-known and sometimes well-worn Palestinian symbols. If in *Chronicle of a Disappearance* Suleiman endeavors to free himself of these symbols through a loving insistence on depicting the smallest of details of the actual reality in Nazareth and Jerusalem, in *Divine Intervention* space disappears and time shrinks, leaving the hero with no real existence. This may explain why in the latter film, as in so many other Palestinian films made during this period, the image again dominates the reality and the specific detail that has ceased to be part of what "is there" is transformed into a symbol of what is absent.

Divine Intervention employs virtually the entire inventory of symbols used by Palestinian culture in general and Palestinian cinema¹⁹ in particular: the black-and-white checkered *kaffiyeh*, the rifle, Kalashnikov and hand grenade, the Muslim symbol of star and crescent, the map of Palestine, a stuck car, a blocked road, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, pictures of Arafat, kites and birds in the sky – almost all of the many symbols that typify recent Palestinian cinema and literature appear in this film. However, although Suleiman exposes, here as in other films, the fictitious status of these symbols through the use of parody, absurdity, and humor, he also searches for the truth behind them and renews their lost significance. The balloon that Suleiman sends up to soar over the roadblock and over Jerusalem, sporting Arafat's wrinkled face grinning widely, is an example of the symbols' double status in these films. Arafat's portrait is indeed perceived here as a caricature, yet it floats above the roadblock, leaving the soldiers there stunned and helpless, and then crosses the border, hovers over the Jerusalem skyline, over churches and synagogues, and finally lands on the Al-Aqsa mosque. The music that accompanies this flight merges Eastern and Western motifs, thus introducing a dream-like atmosphere of beauty and a dimension of cultural openness. All that is signified in Palestinian cinema by kites, flags, high-flying birds, is symbolized by this flight upward and away, crossing borders, thus liberating the imagination, hope, and the dream. In its flight, it captures the city of Jerusalem and the mosque, which as mentioned already, today symbolizes Palestinian unity – its present, its past, and its future – more than any other image. The highly political and almost didactic episode of the balloon can thus be read in different ways, any one of which can both cancel out the others and,

conversely, strengthen them. Through this, the symbol of Arafat is ridiculed and rejuvenated simultaneously.

While the floating balloon portrays the Palestinian dream, then the "Ninja" scene signifies the Palestinian struggle, with all the prerequisite symbols: the woman's face hidden by a *kaffiyeh*, the gun in her hand, hand grenades, a map of Palestine serving as her shield, the star and crescent projected like a spear, stones flying from her slingshot, and a halo of bullets surrounding her head which introduces a religious element. This scene was universally understood as a symbol of the Palestinian resistance and won the appreciation of the Arab critics and audience, who had disapproved of the director's first film. When this was shown at the Carthage Festival in 1997, loud objections were inside and outside the theater, some calling Suleiman a traitor and collaborator.²⁰ "The land is burning," wrote Samir Farid (no date), "but according to Suleiman it looks like Switzerland in the middle of World War II." The scene in which the heroine makes fools of the Israeli soldiers, ordering them to leave Jerusalem, was perceived by Farid as an unconvincing joke that did not portray any kind of Palestinian struggle. In contrast, the balloon and "Ninja" scenes evoked excitement and pride. One of the journalists at the press conference in Ramallah, in 2002, said of them: "[T]hey rescued me from despair and led me to optimism and pride; they reminded me of the heroic resistance that I witnessed yesterday in the street."

Indeed, the "Ninja" scene, like the balloon episode, is more political than its parallel in *Chronicle of a Disappearance*. Yet, it too projects two opposing messages both summarizing the symbols of the struggle, hope, and, Palestinian resistance and ridiculing them by presenting them as if they are taken from a computer program and video games rather than from the real world.

This oscillation between a "straight" representation of the Palestinian narrative and a parody of it is the new language through which Suleiman renews the discourse of contemporary Palestinian cinema.

THE POSTMODERN LANGUAGE

Suleiman's unique cinematic language, which always juxtaposes two versions of reality – one present and the other absent, each concealing yet exposing the other²¹ – is revealed as *Chronicle of a Disappearance*'s second language. On the one hand, the plot of the film and its sequences are cut into separate episodes, the frame is divided into its components, and the harmony between sound and picture, between picture and context, and between the event and its pace are severed. On the other hand, all these fragmentations that also shatter human identity are integrated at the end through the gaze of the director, who is aware of the impossibility of healing them.

The film opens, for example, with an extreme close-up of a shape, so blurred that it is difficult to identify. Only when the camera moves away does it become

clear that this is a face, more particularly the nose of a sleeping man who is, as is revealed later, the director's father. The director's parents are filmed in a similar manner throughout the film; body parts are seen through doors, reflected in mirrors, or displayed as "real" pictures. The off-screen soundtrack is sometimes disconnected from the picture and suggests action that will never be seen. The music and choreography are related to one context, while the action is taking place in another; for example, the car check in a garage takes place to the rhythm and sound of dance music. The dissonance between these three components – music, movement, and event²² – creates a surrealist comic atmosphere that clashes with the hyper-realistic style of other scenes in the film. In addition, the object of the gaze, disconnected from the watching eye,²³ is revealed to the viewers as a chaotic conglomeration of details, frames, doors, windows, furniture, which are filmed in deep focus with a wide-angle lens, lacking a unifying focal point. The split space – Suleiman's parents' home, the coffee house where he is sitting, his girlfriend, Eden's, apartment, and so on – is also divided between different virtual levels: between the cinematic reality, the television screen, and the computer monitor. In many cases the materiality of the human figure itself is cast in doubt within the deconstructed spaces. It is unclear whether a figure in the director's girlfriend's apartment is a living human being or a sculpture of a human being, whether the Syrian choir that is singing a love song to Palestine²⁴ exists in the reality of the film or is merely seen on a television screen within the film, if the director is looking out of a window or is illuminated by the computer screen. As Bresheeth (2002b) puts it: Reality is seen here not as the order of things, but the device undermining reason and logic.²⁵ The characters are blurred in long shots or are seen with their backs to the camera, as in the film of Godard films and, later, Jim Jarmusch, and as painted by Magritte – artists who deconstruct the illusion of a coherent reality with the human being at its center. From these angles, *Chronicle of a Disappearance* could be defined according to the criteria of postmodernism, as outlined by Jameson (1991), Hutcheon (1988), Ophir (2002), and others. Indeed, all of Suleiman's early films could be defined as such. *Cyber Palestine* opens with a man sitting in front of a computer screen. The light from the monitor illuminates his face while opposite him, on the monitor, appears an Internet site called "Palestine." The man presses the Search key and then the Home key. The camera focuses on a tourist poster hanging on the wall that says: "Visit Palestine."

This is an example of Elia Suleiman's virtual world, the world of simulacrum. The man sitting in front of the computer is Joseph, and the pregnant woman standing at his side is his wife, Mary. In the background are the sounds of Bach's *Art of the Fugue*. The sounds of the pipe organ change into electronic sounds, and Bach's music becomes the tune of a cellular phone ringing. On the phone's monitor the sender's name, Gabriel, appears, along with the message: "Joseph,

take your wife to Bethlehem. There she will give birth to her son." The father and the mother stand by the window. A great light shines on them and the electronic Bach switches back to the powerful sound of the pipe organ. But Mary and Joseph cannot get to Bethlehem because they are stuck at the Erez road-block, the Israeli checkpoint at the border of the Gaza Strip.

In all of Elia Suleiman's early films, the words, even the most charged ones, do not represent their plain meaning. Behind Suleiman's signifiers, we find unpredictable objects and concepts. In *Cyber Palestine* and in *Arab Dream*, the name Palestine is a website, and in *Homage by Assassination* the computer "Home" and "Return" keys are meant to represent the place and the right of return. In both films the computer's monitor (the frame) is used as a "writing tablet."²⁶ It is loaded with texts from different sources that clash with and contradict one another, in both their original tongues and in the translations. In *Introduction to the End of an Argument* (1990), bygone landscapes of an Arab town, perhaps from the 1920s, which are captured by the camera, turn out to be an advertisement for Kodak. In *Cyber Palestine*, footage of the peace accords and entertainment programs are interspersed with images of Palestinian fighters and a refugee camp.

Introduction to an End of an Argument attacks the images of the East in Western civilization, but like other films, it exposes not only the East but rather the whole world as a simulacrum.²⁶ As a reality whose only existence is a televised,²⁷ cybernetic, or cinematic one, this is a world of texts without referents. It is a world that "can no longer set out to represent the historical past: it can only 'represent' our ideas and stereotypes about that past" (Jameson, 1991) – disconnected fragments, with no unifying focal point.²⁸

In *Homage by Assassination*, a young woman stands in an empty street next to a car, waiting. The director-protagonist (E. S.) observes her from afar. A car approaches. A young man emerges from the car. They speak, maybe argue, the young man returns to the car, starts it up, and drives away. The young woman is still standing. She smokes a cigarette. Maybe she is excited, maybe not. It is impossible to know. Neither the viewers nor the director know the whole story; who the protagonists are, what has happened to them up to this moment, and what will happen to them in the next moment. That is how *Homage by Assassination* and most of Suleiman's other films are structured. In a world where there is no connection between image and reality, there is also a gap between events and their contexts and between the events themselves. For instance, while in New York, the director hears the wailing of an alarm emanating from a car parked on his street; the alarm is transformed into an air raid siren and the caption reads, "At this moment my mother in Nazareth is putting on her gas mask."

In this fragmented world, it appears that Palestine itself has turned into an additional representation, one among many, and as such its story perhaps

cannot really be told. Hence, the journey's embarked upon by Suleiman in the first part of *Chronicle of a Disappearance* not only connect the traveler to the landscape or trace its map, but also cast doubt on these landscapes when they end in tourist sites: the bustling tourism at the Sea of Galilee, the camel on which tourists take a very brief ride in Jerusalem, and a brand-new but empty hotel in Jericho, built for the hordes of tourists expected to arrive in the wake of the Peace Accords. The director leaves his home for the landscape and instead he finds an illusion – a constant static picture postcard – something to look at and enjoy from afar but not a tangible place in which to live. In another version, the land is presented through endless meetings between the director and his cousin at the entrance to the "Holyland." Although this place is a real souvenir shop in Nazareth, where Suleiman used to sit for hours and hours during his visits home, it is still connected to the fictitious homeland; its name has replaced the actual Holy Land and that it represented, and the picture postcards on a revolving stand have replaced the real landscape.

Although space is deconstructed in this film, the subject is fragmented and reality is divided; the director's view of this reality is not a postmodern perspective split between infinite possibilities and angles, lacking clear focus. It is, rather, the view of the exile, the placeless émigré who longs for a clear yet unattainable foothold. Thus, it is true that the camera is always at a distance, in some inconvenient observation point from where one cannot see all the details in full, and from where the picture seems fractured and incomplete. However, this kind of view²⁹ is not only alienated and distant, it is also the view of one who clings to all of the details – the sensuous, the concrete, the minute – of the reality he is describing. This is the view of one who can no longer enter his filmed image and therefore remains outside of it as a voyeur. However, the image is dear to him, and so he continues to observe it, attentively, taking in all the details long after the event is over.³⁰

The director's double vision in *Chronicle of a Disappearance* reflects the duality characteristic of the entire film. Everything that fragmented and deconstructed the picture and cast doubt on the filmed reality, on the observing eye, and on the possibility of reassembling the puzzle of the old home as a total existence in time and space, is also an attempt to do the opposite. It is an endeavor to examine the pieces of the puzzle and to let the eye rest on the tiniest and most casual and incidental details that appear in the cinematic frame or in the story itself: women's conversation in the house, the preparation of fish, the father who goes off with his friends to fish, feeding his pet bird, playing with his two hound dogs or playing backgammon on the computer, the man who hangs a note on a pole, and another man who passes by and looks at it. These marginal details of ordinary living that have no place in the heroic national narrative are included in this film not because they "mean" something, but simply because "they were there." This is also true of the details of the picture: parts of a bed,

sections of a balcony and women in the kitchen seen from the back. The director tries to reconstruct all that he has lost, to no avail. Everything remains fragmented, broken. As a result, everything about the filmed images that alienates the viewers is simultaneously meant to compel them to participate actively in their construction.³¹

In that endeavor, too, the private yet universal experience of loss, embedded in human existence itself,³² represents the Palestinian story in a new way: through the struggle to preserve all that is threatened and is in danger of disappearing. The details of reality and daily life do not represent anything other than themselves alone. And yet it is precisely in this disconnected way that the particulars are tied to the passive Palestinian struggle of *sumud*,³³ clasp on to the land or, in Shehada's words: "to bow one's head until the storm has passed," "to remain human despite existing conditions" (Shehada, 1982; Bresheth, 2002). In this way they undermine the narratives that have erased Palestinian reality and have hidden it beyond its various representations.

In the first part of *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, the weaving together of unrelated contexts creates a surrealistic, absurd world with neither hierarchy nor meaning. In the second part, this cinematic technique transforms the Israelis into ridiculous puppets; they are the ones who violated order and hierarchy, and they are punished for this through humor. For example, they get out of the car to urinate and do so in rhythmic steps, or they burst into the director's apartment in a comical Chaplinesque choreography, to the music of a tango. They also find the director's girlfriend, Eden, and drive her out of her apartment to the rhythm, music, and words of Leonard Cohen's song, "First We Take Manhattan, Then We Take Berlin," but fail to notice when she suddenly disappears and is replaced by a doll. What could well have been perceived as a pastiche in the film's first part, as an imitation without an original, according to Jameson (1991), is directed here toward a clearly identified source, which it ridicules and mocks. Life as an absurdity, within the twentieth-century context of trauma, is revealed here as a picture obscuring a different trauma behind it, the trauma of occupation.

Similarly, the fiction that has disguised reality is part of the estrangement and alienation of the exile cinema in particular and contemporary film in general. In this respect, too, a general phenomenon whose national significance only reverberated indirectly beyond it, in the second part of the film, takes on a clear and overt national meaning. In this case, the objectification of the landscape, its transformation into a touristic commodity, into an empty representation, is explained by suggesting that the Israelis have turned it into a tourist site and the real land into the Promised Land or, as the film's captions indicate, the Missed Land.

Hamid Naficy asks whether a postmodern play of meanings is possible in films that "place the homeland as a stable referent" and his answer is no. He

describes what he calls "accented cinema,"³⁴ filmmaking of exile, as cinema that at its core is not postmodern despite the fact that it employs postmodern poetics. It is a cinema that seeks for the origin beyond the imitations and attempts to reveal the truth behind the images and the manipulations of language (Naficy, 2001).

Naficy's definition partially applies to Suleiman's early films. In these films, neither the homeland nor its history provides a stable referent. In this respect, the films are essentially postmodern. The attempt to tell a tale of struggle and solidarity and to construct unity instead of disintegration, creating a sense "of home, of people, of tradition" (Saïd, 1990: 359) rather than exile and alienation, is represented in them as fiction alone. And yet, the absent referent is overpoweringly present, thus affiliating them with modern poetics, with its endeavors to "create matter and meaning where there is perhaps no content" (Alter, 1975: 142). Unity, therefore, has not disappeared in Suleiman's first films, and neither has the homeland or the Palestinian story. Nevertheless they are now contained within the search itself or in the fantasy that creates them. As a director in exile, who is both inside and outside his country, Suleiman manifests an ambivalent stance, oscillating between the modern and the postmodern.³⁵ Possibly, this perspective is what enables Suleiman's films to overcome the worn-out version of the Palestinian story, to estrange it and so, as other directors did – both precursors and contemporaries – to renew it.

The Palestinian narrative that is delineated only indirectly in the earlier film, *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, is presented more clearly and in a more precise and coherent manner in the later *Divine Intervention*. As in Suleiman's other films, in this one too the lack of a framework that organizes the picture according to the hierarchy of center versus periphery goes hand in hand with the lack of plot that gives coherence to the different episodes. However, because a major proportion of the episodes in this later film concentrate on acts of violence, the violence itself becomes the common denominator that provides cohesion or explanation for the disconnected parts. Thus, someone throwing a bomb into a collaborator's home, someone spraying it with bullets, people beating a snake violently with clubs and then shooting it, children chasing after Santa Claus and murdering him are all a part of the big picture. A man filmed from afar as he washes his dentures at a water tap in a gas station does not fit into the plot of *Chronicle of a Disappearance* in any way, while the people throwing the bomb, spraying the bullets, or beating the snake in *Divine Intervention* do fit into the general atmosphere of violence. The fact that, at least in the first few moments, it is difficult, because of the distance from which they are filmed, to discern who the people are beating, what the target of the bomb is, or who is chasing Santa Claus, intensifies the general atmosphere of inexplicable violence and evil – a violence which, while apparently devoid of any specific tangible motive, is

nevertheless – in Suleiman's words – an aspect of the "loss of innocence, in a decaying city" (Kipp, 2003).

The film's entire plot, like its individual episodes, revolves around a common theme, which imparts a more coherent structure. Israeli culpability dominates the first part of the film; it clarifies the reciprocal acts of violence in the streets of Nazareth and indirectly leads to the death of the father.³⁶ Only after the collapse of the father does his son, Elia Suleiman (E. S.), enter the picture. The second part, in which Suleiman focuses on what is happening at the A-Ram roadblock, now deepens the Israeli guilt and establishes it as the reason for what has occurred in the first part. The result is a plot culminating in a fantasy of revenge against the Israelis. Thus the causal links in the plot, which generally outline *Chronicle of a Disappearance* as well, became clearer and the fundamental element driving it, affecting its every minute detail – the Israeli occupation – is directly referred to.

Compared to the situation in the earlier film, the Israeli occupation in the second completely transforms daily life in Nazareth. Life there seems to have turned into a violent system of vicious cycles. Sisyphean acts: a man repeatedly tossing bags of garbage into his neighbor's yard and the woman next door repeatedly cleaning the yard and gathering the filth into one pile; someone constructing the edges of a path and someone else destroying them; a man waiting for the bus and someone who keeps coming out to tell him that the bus is not coming; a boy playing ball and a man ripping it apart, and so on. The narrowed-down place, the reciprocal violence, and the futile repetition of the same acts and the same events are all connected, and they find their comic parallels in the multiple and split characters: two people dressed identically walking down a hospital corridor and smoking cigarettes in the same exact rhythm; a man talking to his friends repeating the number six dozens of times; three Palestinians standing with their arms raised against a wall while three Israeli soldiers clean their shoes in unison as if to the rhythm of a dance, and so on. A kind of parallel is created between repetitions of the same acts and of the multiplicity of characters, which is reflected once again in the traffic encircling the A-Ram roadblock, by cars that do not move and never arrive, and by the stifled daily life. In his film *Arabi Dream* Suleiman defines this as "not daily life but daily death." In both films, the daily time frame ceases to be the time of the Palestinian *sumud*, as it was in *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, and becomes the static time of the ghetto.

The coherent plot of *Divine Intervention*, which leads from suffering to violent military action, the Palestinian narrative that clearly emerges from the images and from disconnected details of everyday life, and the escape from a fragmented space and an absent past towards the retrieval of the whole homeland, are all hallmarks of the New Palestinian Cinema that has endeavored to establish a stable and durable Palestinian narrative. While Elia Suleiman deconstructs this

story in his early films, he reconstructs it in his latest movie. Yet, in all of his works, he still expresses the inability to hold on and to shape it.

NOTES

1. Or "poetic image," as he himself calls it in an interview with Anne Bourlond (1999: 2000).
2. For an explanation of this term, see the Introduction.
3. In the words of Bresheeth (2002b), it deals "with the liminality of loss and disappearance of country, of the people, of the self."
4. The people of Nazareth consider themselves superior to the people of Sh'faram, and the population of Sh'faram considers itself superior to Tamra.
5. All of the families are bad, except for the speaker's family. This is what comes up in a conversation between two people during a fishing trip.
6. As described in the aunt's account, as she sits facing the camera at the beginning of the film and recounts a long story about family squabbles.
7. The event is not a national allegory in the sense attributed to it by Jameson (1986). See footnote 16 in the Introduction.
8. Haim Bresheeth defines this existence thus: "The anthem of the oppressor . . . is used by the oppressed. This cinematic device offers great power, and derives this power from the very act of transgressing, of breaking boundary lines, of stepping into Hebrew, into the national anthem of Israel, of Zion" (Bresheeth, 2002b: 76). In this sense, the film completely fulfills the type of confrontation with trauma identified by Elsaesser (forthcoming) as parapraxis. See also footnote 8 in the Introduction.
10. See, among others, Ali Nassar's film *The Milky Way* (1997), Rashid Masharawi's *Carrefour* (1993), Azza al-Hasan's *Three Centimeters Less* (2002), and Nizar Hassan's *Invasion* (2003).
11. The absence of home is also experienced by the director's girlfriend, Eden, who is unsuccessful in finding an apartment to rent in Jerusalem. The Jewish landlords immediately recognize her accent and identify her as Arab. In the end the police take her from her apartment. Consequently, home in the film is a scaled place, a breached place, or a non-existent place.
12. This idea is illustrated by the monologue of the monk living above the Sea of Galilee, who mourns the vistas conquered by local tourism and commercial development.
13. This interpretation is based upon a lecture delivered by Ala Alryes at Yale, in 2001.
14. See Bresheeth (2001).
15. See Chapter 1, "A Chronicle of Palestinian Cinema."
16. According to Laura Marks (1994), the energy which was blocked by the roadblock turns into sexual energy.
17. See *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers, 1999).
18. Referring here to the Ninja scene and to another where Suleiman pelts a tank with an apricot pit and the tank explodes.
19. Including Suleiman's own films.
20. Also, see Chapter 1, "A Chronicle of Palestinian Cinema."
21. As noted, this description is based on the definitions of Parapraxis according to Elsaesser (forthcoming). See also footnote 7 in the Introduction.
22. This is also revealed in other places; for example, in a fountain at the Tel Aviv beach that sways to the sound of music, similar to the fountains in Jacques Tati's film, *Monsieur Oncle* (1958).
23. Which receives parts of dissected images, lacking any context.
24. "The hidden tears to console us cannot be found."
25. One of the characteristics of "accented cinema," according to Nakry (2001). See footnote 2 in Chapter 3, "About Place and Time: The Films of Michel Khleif."
26. "Models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (Baudrillard, 1981), or, in Jameson's words: "the identical copy for which no original has ever existed" (1991).
27. Such as the Gulf War, which was only a televised spectacle, according to Baudrillard, whom Suleiman quotes in his film. See also Baudrillard (1981).
28. On this subject see Anne Bourlond's interview with Suleiman (1999: 2000).
29. Always tainted by the subjective consciousness of the director-as-hero even when, in fact, it is not him who views the sights.
30. For more on the character of the director, see Chapter 1, "A Chronicle of Palestinian Cinema."
31. See also Haim Bresheeth (2002b), who explains the director's position as a melancholy stance in relation to the lost object.
32. Adorno, paraphrased by Said (1990: 366).
33. For a definition of the *simulacrum*, see footnote 11 in Chapter 3, "About Place and Time: The Films of Michel Khleif."
34. See also footnote 2, in Chapter 3, "About Place and Time: The Films of Michel Khleif."
35. This stance, which would be defined as parapraxis by Elsaesser (2004), contains both the absent and the present as images that exist beyond each other, in a layered structure.
36. After the repossession of his home, his workshop, and his car. No explanation is given for these scenes of repossession and they may not be understood by the viewer. Therefore, like many scenes in earlier films, they seem unrelated to the main plot. However, once the viewer comprehends what they actually convey, the connection between them becomes clear.

CONCLUSION

In this book we have examined the place of the Palestinian people in history and the place of history in the Palestinian narrative. We have explored the connection between Palestinian history and Palestinian cinema, analyzing the manner in which cinema has constructed Palestinian memory and space, representing the places that once existed and those that are now gone. Also contemplated is the cinematic documentation of the lives of Palestinian men, women, and children, both within Israel and outside it, in the family, the village, and the refugee camp. We have traced the cinematic expression of the hardships of exile together with longing for the lost past and its return.

Palestinian cinema is a national cinema. Throughout its history, it has given form to a militant Palestinian nationalism, recounted Palestinian history, and sought the place and daily lives of ordinary Palestinians within that history. This delicate fabric of intertwined personal narrative and national history has been closely related to the national traumas.

In the early cinema, created in the 1970s under the auspices of the Palestinian organizations, the individual represented the national collective, its struggles, and its fate, which was perceived as stagnant and unchanging. The portrayal of the present, moreover, merely amounted to a reconstruction of the past – a restoration of the fixed structure of profound tranquility that had been disturbed by the sudden violence of 1948 and which is continuously reflected in each and every present event depicted. Thus, rather than being experienced as a living reality, life in the refugee camps was perceived not only in its own right but also as a repetition or an echo of another experience from an earlier era.

CONCLUSION

Since the present time was considered dead, hollow, and non-existent, it was deemed suitable for reviving the past. Such preservation of the 1948 trauma and what had preceded it served as a focal point of identification and consolidation for the entire Palestinian people.

During the 1980s, particularly with Michel Khleif's films, past and present became distinct, the individual was set apart from the collective, and two time sequences were formed. The first is traumatic time that restores the past in the present; the second is diverse and richly detailed current everyday life. Time, in these movies, flows simultaneously in two different veins, alternately concealing and revealing each other. Thus a gap was created that allowed a working-through of the trauma while reflecting the diverse facets of Palestinian society: on the one hand, the various strata, genders, and regions that typify it, and on the other, the unity that consolidates it into a unified force, with one goal and a single memory.

A generation of directors, who began their creative endeavors in the late 1980s and during the 1990s, have attempted to follow in Michel Khleif's footsteps and focus on everyday, mundane Palestinian life, forming through it a personal memory based on testimonies, individual histories, and interviews. The attempt to construct the nation's unity through recognition of the heterogeneity of Palestinian society and to shape the flowing time of memory instead of historical time was disrupted to a large extent by the two *Intifadas*. In the late 1980s and especially during the 1990s, the present that turned into a series of disasters and defeats was again perceived as a vacant time. Once more, cinema considered it in relation to the glorious time of the past and the trauma that severed it. Palestinian cinema created during those years has oscillated between the option of describing the diversity of Palestinian life and articulating various Palestinian experiences and memories, and the need to unify this variety and delineate the collective traumatic memory.

Palestinian cinema has coped, in various ways, with the history that "urged" the individual toward the collective and directed present life toward past traumas. One of the most interesting modes of coping with this aspect is the choice in films to present Palestinian unity, people, past, and history paradoxically as absences whose presence is more strongly felt than those of other, actual, current realities.

Elia Suleiman's *Chronicle of a Disappearance* is an example of a film structured according to this model. It focuses on the individual's life and family, refusing to present beyond them Palestinian society and its past. Yet, that which is left untold in the film still reverberates in it. Suleiman thus represents the unrepresentable, indicating a possibility of spinning national unity and memory out of a lack of such unity and history. It evokes the forgotten, even if only as a distant impression lurking beyond the image of the present, and with the distance between the two in mind lures us into observing it.

Chronicle of a Disappearance typifies the way Palestinian cinema confronts the difficulties in narrating Palestinian history and documenting the national and personal life of the Palestinian people. Palestinian cinema offers an abundance of other examples of various – similar as well as different – ways of coping with the same task. This book has attempted to recount the chronicle of this cinema, which is intertwined with the history of the Palestinian people.

EPILOGUE

The writing of this book was completed in 2003. While it was being prepared for publication, several important events took place in Palestinian cinema and some of its best films were produced. We can only refer to these films in brief, hoping that additional books written in due course will fill the gap.

The first Palestinian film to transcend the local scene and reach an international audience was released in 2005. It won the European Film Academy Award for best script, the 2006 best foreign film award at the Golden Globes, and was also nominated for the best foreign film award at the Oscars. That film was *Paradise Now*.

Paradise Now was financed as a German, Dutch, and French co-production, but presented at the Oscars as a "Palestinian film." From the onset, the film was highly controversial in Israel, since it was the first Palestinian feature film to deal directly with the issue of the suicide attacks. Director Hani Abu-Asaad and producer Amir Harel applied in 2003 for a public grant from the Israeli Film Fund. Several fund members denied their request and one, the writer Irit Linor, harshly criticized the film, which she called "a moving and high-brow Nazi film" (Linor, Ynet, 2006. *Anti-Semitism Now* (7 February)). After it won the Golden Globe award no Israeli distributor agreed to take on the film and show it in Israel. Consequently, it was only screened at the cinemateque, enjoying little success.

Some of the debate concerning the film was in fact partly unnecessary, for the real topic of *Paradise Now* is not the "Paradise" but the "Now." It does not necessarily deal with the eternal life promised to the suicide bombers, but rather