

Cinematic Representations of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

A Statement of Intentions

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Work on this project has until now consisted primarily of building up a suitable collection of films, and though new films will be added as they become available, the basic corpus is now in place. While most of the films were made by Israeli or Palestinian directors, relevant productions by other filmmakers (such as Otto Preminger, Jean-Luc Godard and Jørgen Flindt Pedersen) are also included since the object of the present study is not to examine Israeli and Palestinian films per se, but rather to explore a number of strategies for cinematically portraying the conflict between the two peoples. And although the present corpus is by no means exhaustive, it is representative and should provide an ample basis for studying the issues at hand.

The scholarly literature to be drawn upon in this context is quantitatively limited but also highly informative and interesting. The principal reference works on Israeli and Palestinian film¹ that I now expect to use are:

- Ben-Shaul, Nitzen S. *Mythical Expressions of Siege in Israeli Films*. Edwin Mellen Press, 1997.
- Hennebelle, Guy and Khémais Khayati (eds), *La Palestine et le cinéma*. Éditions du centenaire, 1977.
- Kronish, Amy and Costel Safirman, *Israeli Film: A Reference Guide*. Greenwood, 2003.
- Leaman, Oliver (ed.). *Companion Encyclopedia of Middle Eastern and North African Film*. Routledge, 2001.
- Loshitzky, Yosepha. *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen*. University of Texas Press, 2002.
- Shafik, Viola. *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity*. American University in Cairo Press, 1998.
- Shohat, Ella. *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation*. University of Texas Press, 1989.

And these books will of course be supplemented by shorter pieces found in journals² and on the Web.³ Periodic searches have not yet turned up any scholarly work outside of the kinds listed above, devoted to cinematic representations of the conflict.

As to how the study can best be carried out, several possibilities now seem promising. And although the future tense will be used to describe them, everything that follows is still a tentative statement of intentions.

Certain of the films will be singled out for close study – including shot-by-shot analyses of key scenes. This applies for example to Elia Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* (2002), undoubtedly one of the most original Palestinian feature films ever made; it won a number of awards including the Jury Prize at Cannes, but was excluded from the competition for the coming year's Oscars by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences on the grounds that it did not issue from a country formally recognized by the United Nations. Other films to be singled out for close study include Godard's *Ici et ailleurs* (1975), which raises serious questions about the making of cinematic images in connection with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and Amos Kollek's *Lahav Hatzui/Double Edge* (1992), designed to undercut what the film defines as simplistic views of the conflict.

Other films will be studied comparatively, in pairs or groups. This is the case for four documentaries – two Palestinian, two Israeli – portraying each in its own way and with its own underlying agenda, the tragic events that took place in Jenin in April 2002:

- *Jenin, Jenin* (2002), Mohammed Bakri
- *Invasion* (2002), Nizar Hassan
- *Jenin Diary* (2002), Gil Mezuman
- *The Road to Jenin* (2003), Pierre Rehov

Two Danish documentaries dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will also be compared:

- *De Besatte* (2002), Jørgen Flindt Pedersen – a film which set off a heated debate in the Danish press, and the making of which was described by the director in his book, *Brylluppet i Ramallah* (Gyldendal, 2002)
- *Mørke og forsoning* (2003), Stig Dalager – a film that focuses on intercultural efforts for coping with the loss of life on both sides

Several “wedding films” will also be studied in relation to one another:

- *Wedding In Galilee* (1987), Michel Khleifi;
- *Rana's Wedding* (2002) Hany Abu-Assad;
- *The Syrian Bride* (2004), Eran Riklis

as will films focusing on checkpoints, such as:

- *Cock Fight* (2000), Sigalit Liphshitz,
- *Checkpoint* (2003), Yoav Shamir
- *Like Twenty Impossibles* (2003), Annemarie Jacir
- *Detail* (2004), Avi Mograbi,

In these and other contexts not yet crystallized, an attempt will be made to understand some of the pur-

poses each of the films was designed to fulfill for one or more specific publics. The method and conceptual model used for carrying out this aspect of the work will be borrowed from an earlier study, *The Functional Analysis of Art: On the Social and Psychological Functions of Literature, Painting and Film* (Arkona, 1982), with modifications appropriate to the works to be analyzed.

Whenever possible, new interviews will be made with the directors, in an effort to bring further information into play regarding intended functions of the films studied, as well as other important aspects of their storytelling. Empirical, bottom-up explorations of the films will take precedence over working from the top down, and readers looking for highly theoretical discussions will not find them here.

Considering that the issues confronted in this study are extremely sensitive, and that partisans of one camp or another may be hostile to any discussion that does not *a priori* conform to their own views, it is likely that the book resulting from this research will dissatisfy some, even if the author's personal position (inspired primarily by the work of the late Palestinian intellectual, Edward Said, and the Israeli writer and political activist, Amos Oz) is kept in check as much as possible.

Notes

1. Numerous works on the history of the conflict have also been consulted but will not be listed here.
2. Such as Frédéric Strauss, “Le cinéma palestinien: le processus de création,” in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 514 (June 1997), pp. 54-58.

3. See for example Jamil Moledina, “Bringing Palestine to the Silver Screen: An interview with Hanna Elias” (May 13, 2003) at <http://www.thecinematicverses.com/editorials/hannaelias-1.html>

Corpus

Feature Films

Palestinian directors

- 1980 *Fertile Memory*, Michel Khleifi, 99’
1987 *Wedding In Galilee*, Michel Khleifi, 113’
1990 *Canticle of the Stones*, Michel Khleifi, 110’
1994 *Curfew*, Rashid Mashrawi, 115’
1995 *Tale of the Three Jewels*, Michel Khleifi, 107’
1997 *The Milky Way*, Ali Nassar, 104’
1997 *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, Elia Suleiman, 88’
2002 *Divine Intervention*, Elia Suleiman, 92’
2002 *Rana's Wedding*, Hany Abu-Assad, 90’,
2002 *Ticket to Jerusalem*, Rashid Mashrawi, 85’

Israeli directors

- 1984 *Beyond the Walls*, Uri Barbash, 111’
1988 *Crossfire*, Gideon Ganani, 90’

- 1992 *Cup Final*, Eran Riklis 107’
1992 *Lahav Hatzui / Double Edge*, Amos Kollek, 84’
2001 *Trumpet in the Wadi*, Lina & Slava Chaplin, 97’
2003 *Miss Entebbe*, Omri Levy, 75’
2004 *The Syrian Bride*, Eran Riklis, 97’

Other

- 1960 *Exodus*, Otto Preminger, USA, 208’
1984 *Little Drummer Girl*, George Roy Hill, USA, 130’
2004 *Private*, Saverio Costanzo, Italy, 90’

Short Fiction

Palestinian directors

- 1989 *The Shelter*, Rashid Mashrawi, 30’
2001 *Diary of a Male Whore*, Tawfik Abu Wael, 14’

2003 *Like Twenty Impossibles*, Annemarie Jacir, 17'

Israeli directors

- 2000 *Cock Fight*, Sigalit Liphshitz, 14'
2002 *Promise Land*, Gili Dolev, 13' (Scotland)
2003 *Border Project*, Yael Hersonski & Koby Gal-Raday, 40'
2004 *Draft*, Naomi Levvari, 17'
2004 *Road*, Nadav Lapid, 17'
2005 *Don Quixote in Jerusalem*, Dani Rosenberg, 4.5'
2005 *Masha*, Dana Goldberg, 10'

Compilations

- Makom Project* 2002
Moments 2002, 2004, 2005

Other

- 1998 *Pastry, Pain & Politics*, Stina Werenfels, Switzerland, 30'
2002 *Meeting Evil*, Reza Parsa, Sweden, 12'

Documentary

Israeli directors

- 2000 *The Last Enemy*, Nitzan Gilady, 60'
2002 *Jenin Diary*, Gil Mezman, 65'
2002 *Local Angel*, Udi Aloni, 70'
2003 *Channels of Rage*, Anat Halachmi, 71'
2003 *Checkpoint*, Yoav Shamir, 80'
2003 *No. 17*, David Ofek, Ron Rotem, Elinor Kowarsky, 75'
2003 *The Road to Jenin*, Pierre Rehov, 52'
2004 *Detail*, Avi Mograbi, 8'
2004 *Lullaby*, Adi Arbel 52'
2005 *Avenge but one of my two eyes*, Avi Mograbi, 100'

Palestinian directors

- 1990 *Introduction to the End of an Argument*, Jace Salloum & Elia Suleiman, 45'
1991 *Homage by Assassination*, Elia Suleiman, 28'
1991 *Dreams and Silence*, Omar Al-Qattan, 52',
1995 *Forbidden Marriages in the Holy Land*, Michel Khleifi, 66'

- 1995 *Jerusalem: An Occupation Set in Stone*, Marty Rosenbluth, 55'
1998 *Children of Shatila*, Mai Masri, 50'
2000 *Nightfall*, Mohamed Soueid, 70',
2001 *Ashes*, Rima Essa, 37'
2001 *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears*, Mai Masri, 56'
2001 *Light at the End of the Tunnel*, Sobhi al-Zobaidi, 52'
2002 *Invasion*, Nizar Hassan 60'
2002 *Jenin, Jenin*, Mohamed Bakri, 54'
2003 *Ma'loul Celebrates Its Destruction*, Michel Khleifi, 30'

Palestinian & Israeli

- 2004 *Route 181*, Michel Khleifi & Eyal Sivan, 273'

Other

- 1975 *Ici et ailleurs*, Jean-Luc Godard, France, 55'
1992 *All Is Well on the Border Front*, Akram Zaatar, Lebanon, 43'
1993 *Balagan*, Andres Veiel, Germany, 90'
1994 *Inside God's Bunker*, Micha Peled, USA, 40'
1996 *If You Make it Possible*, Lynn Feinerman, USA, 75'
1997 *Mahmoud Darwich: As the Land Is the Language*, Simone Bitton, France, 60'
1998 *Mikdad: Into the Mind of a Terrorist, & Shaheed: The Making of a Suicide Bomber*, Dan Setton, Italy/Germany, 2 x 60'
2002 *500 Dunam on the Moon*, Rachel Leah Jones, USA, 48'
2002 *De Besatte*, Jørgen Flindt Pedersen, Danmark, 98'
2003 *Le rêve brisé*, Charles Enderlin, France, 150'
2003 *Ansigt til ansigt*, Dorte Høeg Brask, Danmark,
2003 *Mørke og forsoning*, Stig Dalager, Denmark
2003 *Muren*, Erik Sibsted/Jørgen Flindt Pedersen, Danmark, 36'
2003 *Selves and Others: A Portrait of Edward Said*, Emmanuel Hamon, France, 54'
2004 *Edward Said: The Last Interview*, Mike Dibb, UK, 208'
2004 *Peace, Propaganda and the Promised Land: U.S. Media & the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, Bathsheba Ratzkoff & Sut Jhally et al, Canada
2004 *Persona non grata*, Oliver Stone, USA, 68'
2005 *West-Eastern Divan Orchestra*, Paul Smaczny, Germany, 90'

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