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# Palestinian Film: Hyperreality, Narrative, and Ideology

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## Palestinian Film: Hyperreality, Narrative, and Ideology

Palestinian Film: Hyperreality, Narrative, and Ideology

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Comparative Literature

By

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December 2011  
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## Abstract

Both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have developed diametrically opposed national narratives and identities that are both predicated on the concept of victimization. These narratives have developed into simulacral narratives as the result of the nature of their development. This paper deals with the Palestinian simulacral narrative which bolsters societal values, particularly the value of victimhood, that are crucial to coping with the prolonged conflict. The Western media, at any given moment during the conflict, has either accepted the concept of Palestinian's as victims of the conflict and the Palestinian simulacral narrative, or rejected it. The media then produces a hyperreality of the conflict for its Western viewers which influences the West's acceptance or rejection of the Palestinian simulacral narrative. This paper uses Michel Khleifi's *Canticle of the Stones*, Hany Abu-Assad's *Paradise Now*, and Elia Sulieman's *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Divine Intervention* to examine the degree to which Palestinian films confirm or contradict the societal beliefs that contribute to the prolongation of the conflict and the relationship between the presentation of those beliefs, the hyperreality of the Western community, and Western public opinion. It also examines the relationship between the presentation of violence in the films and the presence of violence in Palestine.

This thesis is approved for recommendation  
to the Graduate Council.

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### Palestinian Film: Hyperreality, Narrative, and Ideology

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has contributed and continues to contribute to instability in the Middle East and yet, despite the efforts of the international community, remains unsettled. While there are a number of factors that have made this particular dispute difficult to solve, one dominant factor appears to be that both sides of the conflict have developed diametrically opposed national narratives and identities. Scholars agree that many early Palestinian documentary films were used to create a counter narrative to the Zionist narrative (Alexander "Palestinians in Film" 321; Gertz and Khleifi "Roadblock" 317) but the more recent fictional films break away from the homogenized treatment of Palestinian identity for political means and offer new frames of reference for Palestinian existence and cultural identity (Gertz and Khleifi "Roadblock" 322). While early Palestinian film most likely played a role in the development of the national narrative, the Palestinian national narrative and national identity have developed as the result of a variety of political and psychological factors, each of which's individual influence is difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle from the others. While there are certain historical events that undisputedly took place, the degree to which they are emphasized or dismissed, and the interpretation and memorialization of these events is starkly different on either side of the Green Line. There are also, undoubtedly, a variety of interpretations of the historical events in Israel and Palestine by the many different religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups in the region. For the sake of this paper, however, I will limit myself to the two broad and generalized

narratives perpetuated by the governing forces on either side of the Green Line and which function as national narratives for both sides. For example, the Israeli and Palestinian descriptions of the events of 1948, even in very broad and general terms, are different and at odds. According to the Israeli narrative, Israel declared itself a nation in 1948, most of the Palestinians left the area of their own free will, and the Israeli settlers, now citizens, only used violence against Palestinians in self defense. Palestinians, however, argue that when Israel became a nation, Israeli militia forces forcibly removed them from their homes, stole their land, and the Palestinians fled in fear of their lives. This disparity is perhaps most evident in the way the events of 1948 are memorialized by both sides: Israel celebrates its independence day while Palestinians mourn the same day as “al-Nakba,” or “the disaster.” According to Rouhana and Bar-Tal, the Palestinians and the Israeli narratives of the conflict “emphasize different aspects of the conflict, provide divergent interpretations to the same events, and produce a coherent narrative that supports its own claims and is fully supported by the community” (763). One foundational concept to both of these narratives is the history of victimization and the identification with victimhood from which both sides suffer.

The Palestinian narrative is predicated on the victimization of Palestinians and the vilification of Israel while the Israeli narrative is predicated on precisely the reverse. Both sides also possess histories of violent persecution. Rouhana and Bar-Tal claim that the history of victimization leads to a mistrust of the international community and a sense of lack of security on both sides of the conflict (765). This history of victimization influences the tendency of both sides of the conflict to identify as the victim of the other side: Israel believes itself to be the victim of Arab aggression, while Palestinians believe themselves to be the victim of Israeli Zionists (766). Because the role of victim receives sympathy from the media, the role of who,

exactly, is the victim in this conflict is fiercely contested (Brand 176). Identifying as the victim, according to Brand, has other benefits as well. While there are a number of places where Brand's analysis of *Paradise Now* is reductive, which I will discuss later, he brings up useful points about the dialectical pairing of aggression and victimization. He claims that identifying as the victim allows the individual to justify his or her aggression while enjoying the moral superiority of victimhood by insisting that his or her actions are the product of circumstances beyond his or her control (175-6). It is precisely this phenomenon that he claims, and Rouhana and Bar-Tal agree, perpetuates the violence of the conflict (Brand 178) and contributes to its intractability (Rouhana and Bar-Tal 764). The identification with victimhood is one of the primary elements of the Palestinian national narrative and it is the fight for international recognition of victimization that concerns much of this paper.

The events of 1948 are particularly noteworthy because they have played a foundational role in the formation of both nations' national identities (Rouhana and Bar-Tal) and are an example of the Israeli and Palestinian simulacral narratives. I refer to these narratives as "simulacral" simply because both narratives have become so far detached from the actual historical events of 1948-9 that the real events are no longer truly accessible beneath the sedimented layers of interpretation. Rather than representing a "real" series of events, each side has gathered an amalgamation of folk lore, eye witness accounts, films, and propaganda to develop national narratives that, though initially based on a real series of events, have ceased to bear any relation to the actual events that occurred. Bresheeth argues that "all existence in Palestine/Israel is double existence. So there are two virtual countries within the same space, two parallel universes disregarding and disparaging each other, and yet, totally bound to each other" (80-81). Michel Khleifi himself declared, "I don't believe in the past, it has vanished" (Khleifi

and Alexander 33). The constant conflict over borders and narrative, which many scholars claim to be intrinsically tied to issues of identity as well (Bresheeth 72; Gertz and Khleifi “Roadblock” 320), has led to the creation of a national narrative that is merely a simulation of what might have happened rather than an account or representation of what did happen. The narrative of the events of 1948-9, as well as others, has moved through Baudrillard’s cycle from being a reflection of reality, to being a perversion of reality, to masking the lack of reality, to becoming pure simulation of reality. This is not to say that certain events that compose the Palestinian national narrative never took place or that individual experiences of the events are inaccessible. However, the composite narrative of the major events has been collected, interpreted, and manipulated in such a way as to produce a narrative that is simulacral in nature. These simulacral narratives have come to stand for and be used for social and political means of establishing and reifying national ideologies. The ideology produced by these simulacral narratives promotes the struggle to obtain culturally defined desires, such as a national homeland, instead of natural desires, such as safety, security, and peace. Because of the role of these simulacral narratives in developing national identities, they are fiercely guarded and defended by the respective populations.

Rouhana and Bar-Tal examine some of the psychological factors that contribute to what they term “intractable ethnonational conflicts” and identify four societal beliefs regarding the conflict that contribute to the intractability of the situations. The Israeli and Palestinian simulacral narratives have contributed to ideologies on either side that perpetuate the turmoil because the narratives confirm these four societal beliefs. Rouhana and Bar-Tal explain that in an ostensibly intractable ethnonational conflict, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, certain societal beliefs are maintained and protected as a type of coping mechanism in order for the

populations to deal with the violence and hardships of prolonged conflict (765). The four societal beliefs that they mention as the most important are the belief that the goals of the group are just, the opponent is illegitimate, the group can do no wrong in regards to the conflict, and the group is the victim (765). These four societal beliefs can be simplified into roughly two: one side is the righteous victim, while the other is an illegitimate enemy. In order to continue the struggle against Israel, the Palestinians must adopt and safeguard these beliefs, all of which are encompassed in the Palestinian simulacral narrative; however, as previously mentioned, these beliefs, particularly the identification with victimhood, are precisely one of the reasons the conflict is so difficult to resolve. While I believe this is a phenomenon that takes place on both sides of the conflict, I am dealing with four Palestinian films and will only be treating the Palestinian simulacral narrative and societal beliefs in this paper.

This simulacral narrative also has an effect on the Western community's perception of events. The international ruling bodies and the general Western public are composed of few people who have a lived experience of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. As a result, most rely on media coverage and reports in order to form their opinions. However, the media coverage of the conflict creates what Baudrillard calls a hyperreality for the Western media viewer in which the "reality" of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as understood by the West, is different from and does not necessarily bear any relationship to the actual events that occur in Israel and the Palestine. This hyperreality is created by the saturation of Western Media with images and sound bites of the conflict, each of which, on some level, is an interpretation of an event or situation. The sole reliance of the Western viewer upon these incomplete, often inaccurate or severely biased interpretations of the events causes the Western viewer to develop a conceptualization of the conflict that is wholly based on interpretation and wholly unreal. The uninformed Westerner's

concept of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict does not exist, and yet, the uniformed Westerner believes it to be the reality of the conflict. The interpretations that create this hyperreality shift and change in favor of or in opposition to the Palestinian simulacral narrative based on various events and political climates. However, the West still presumes this shifting hyperreality to be the actual reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, regardless of its relationship, or lack thereof, to the actual events taking place in the area. Again, this is not to say that events are not taking place or that the conflict does not actually exist, but that the Western concept of the conflict is produced in newsrooms and through interpretations, not by the actual events that are taking place. This phenomenon goes beyond Edward Said's concept of Western Orientalists creating the East because, in Said's work, the Orientalist's interpretation becomes more important than the real that is being interpreted, but it does not fully replace it. For viewers of Western media who have no other experience or knowledge of the conflict, the media representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict *is* the reality of the conflict. Another problem with using only Said's work is that the hyperreality that is produced is not purely the result of Western influences. Israel, technically an Eastern country, plays a role in manipulating US media to produce its desired image in the country (Mershimer and Walt 45) which is, in part, why the hyperreality is usually slanted towards a pro-Israeli stance. This hyperreal media narrative of events, because of its sole basis on interpretations, is more flexible and changing than Israeli or Palestinian simulacral narratives. There is also less ideological and psychological pressure to maintain a single, unwavering narrative of events in the West because such a narrative is not a defining characteristic of the West, as it is for the Israelis and Palestinians. As a result, Western opinion is able to shift, depending on the media content and images coming from the Israeli/Palestinian area. This, in turn, affects the West's understanding of the conflict, making public opinion more

or less sympathetic to one side or the other. This popular opinion of the Western community has a relationship to the way in which different types of violence are portrayed in Palestinian fictional films.

The presence of visual violence in Palestinian films appears to be related to the degree to which Western public opinion accepts the simulacral Palestinian narrative of victimhood. The media plays a key role in this acceptance or rejection of the Palestinian simulacral narrative in that it chooses which images and sound bites are presented to the public. These images interpret the events of the conflict in a manner consistent with or contradictory to the Palestinian simulacral narrative and its foundational concept that Palestinians are the victim of Israeli violence. In return, the Western community who views these images is, in effect, steered toward acceptance or rejection of the Palestinian simulacral narrative based on these media interpretations. The Palestinian films I examine in this paper appear to show more or less visual violence based, at least in part, on how the West views the Palestinian simulacral narrative at the time of production, though the types of violence treated in the films are different. Michel Khleifi's *Canticle of the Stones* (1990) and Hany Abu-Assad's *Paradise Now* (2005), demonstrate the typical, expected, relationship between the depiction of violence in Palestinian films and Western public opinion for full length, fictional, dramatic films. *Canticle of the Stones*, filmed when the Palestinian simulacral narrative was in favor in the West, contains a large amount of resistance violence and, because it was also filmed during an uprising, strongly confirms Rouhana and Bar-Tal's four societal beliefs and, in turn, the Palestinian simulacral narrative. Khleifi is able to do this by using visual violence of both resistance fighters and the Israeli army to demonstrate the impact of the Israeli occupation on the whole of Palestinian society on both communal and personal levels. The presentation of this violence ultimately

confirms that Palestinians are purely victims and Israel is purely the villain. *Paradise Now*, on the other hand, was filmed when the Palestinian simulacral narrative was not in favor in the West, so it contains little visual violence and actually deprives viewers of the expected violence at the end of the film. It is also important to point out that while Khleifi is dealing with violence done to the Palestinian people and violence used in a military context to resist oppression, Abu-Assad's film is treating violence that is directed at civilians and has been committed for the sake of continuing the resistance rather than ending the occupation. *Paradise Now* was filmed during a time of Palestinian disunity and towards the end of the second Intifada and it only confirms two of Rouhana and Bar-Tal's societal beliefs, while directly contradicting the other two which actually calls into question some aspects of the Palestinian simulacral narrative.

The relationship between the depiction of violence in Elia Suleiman's films, *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (1996) and *Divine Intervention* (2002), and Western public opinion, however, is seemingly contradictory to that of Khleifi and Abu-Assad's films. This difference, however, is the result of the difference of genre; Suleiman's films are comedies, and, as such, the violence in them is not perceived by the West in the same manner as violence in serious dramas. The violence in *Divine Intervention* is exaggerated, comical, and not meant to be taken seriously. *Chronicle of a Disappearance* was filmed as the Oslo Accords were failing and as Palestinians were losing favor in the West because religious extremists continued to use terrorist techniques to attack Israel (Smith 246; Baxter and Akbarzadeh 145-6). There also happens to be virtually no violence in the film, and the societal beliefs and Palestinian simulacral narrative are only weakly supported by the events of the film. There was no uprising at the time, so the need to bolster ideology was lessened. *Divine Intervention*, however, was filmed during the first two years of the second Intifada, a time when Palestinians had little support in West because of the continued use

of suicide bombing (Smith 248), which would lead one to suspect the film, like *Paradise Now*, to contain little violence. However, *Divine Intervention* contains much more visual violence than *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, though not nearly so much as *Canticle of the Stones*. Like in *Canticle of the Stones*, the presence of visual violence in *Divine Intervention* correlates to the presence of a relatively organized resistance movement on the ground, the second Intifada. However, because the film is a comedy and the scenes are hyperbolic, the violence in *Divine Intervention* functions to different ideological ends. Because of the exaggerated and fantastical nature of the violence, the scenes actually function to mock the Israeli belief that Palestinians are an existential threat to Israel which in turn bolsters the Palestinian simulacral narrative. However, far from being the ringing endorsement of Rouhana and Bar-Tal's four societal beliefs, Suleiman's second film only confirms three.

It is important to understand the relationship between Western perceptions of the conflict and the presentation of Palestinian societal beliefs in these films because of the transnational nature of both the films and the directors. Two of the directors currently live in diaspora in Europe, Khleifi in Belgium and Abu-Assad in the Netherlands, while Suleiman, though living in Ramallah now, spent over ten years in the United States. Palestine, because of the violence and economic strangling from the occupation, does not have a film industry. Gertz and Khleifi explain that if a Palestinian wishes to make a film, he or she must use foreign crews, find foreign funding, and, often, have been trained in a foreign country ("Chronicle" 189). This situation creates an interesting and often times difficult, dynamic for Palestinian filmmakers. Livia Alexander explains:

On the one hand, there is an identification with and evaluation by Western standards of film production, funding, and distribution, as well as the experience of living in exile in the West. On the other hand, being members of a people denied their right to land and to nationhood or being regarded merely as 'terrorist'

placed Palestinians in a marginal position in the West. Offering a site of resistance and negotiation from this position, their film production is closely concerned with issues of Palestinian identity and existence. (Alexander "Palestinians in Film" 320)

The experiences of the filmmakers in the West undeniably influences both the style and content of the work, as does being Palestinian. When asked about his decision to live in Belgium, Khleifi replied: "the fact that I live internationally does not make me forget that I'm from a small street in Nazareth. Although, let's be realistic, yes I live in Europe so I'm part of Europe as well" (Khleifi and Alexander 33). Because of these dual influences on the directors, examining these films in relation to Western public opinion, which might very well have an influence, conscious or unconscious, on such international directors, is both legitimate and useful in terms of understanding some of the complex issues at work in these four films.

*Canticle of the Stones*

In *Canticle of the Stones*, Michel Khleifi presents the story of two lovers who were separated by the violence and difficult circumstances that the Israeli occupation produced. This narrative, which is filmed using a formal style, is interspersed with documentary footage of various situations and stories of people living in Palestine during the first Intifada. Khleifi's films often treat the clash of two worlds (Telmissany 77) because he believes that the "spirit of the cinema" is to show a clash of elements. For *Canticle of the Stones* this is the clash between the violence of the intifada and the fictional story (Khleifi and Alexander 32), but he also conveys this clash of elements using a clash of forms as well, formal and documentary. Gertz and Khleifi, in their book, argue that Michel Khleifi's films, unlike later Palestinian films, contain a more cohesive sense of the landscape, and, while they predominantly discuss *Wedding in Galilee* and *A Tale of Three Jewells* to do so, much of what is said can also be applied to *Canticle of the Stones*. In *Wedding in Galilee*, Khleifi includes images of landscapes and citiscapes and uses camera work to transcend borders and to recreate the land that has been fragmented (Gertz and Khleifi *Palestinian Cinema* 82-3), but Khleifi does so in *Canticle of the Stones* as well. It is through similar camera work and juxtaposition of images, and his use of the "collective memory of Palestinians," which contains diverse, but "closely knit" experiences that contribute to an over-all identity (76), that Khleifi is able to examine the multiple layers of Palestinian society in the film. In this film, Khleifi uses the different film styles, formal and documentary, to focus on the consequences of Israeli violence on multiple levels of Palestinian society: individual, familial, and communal. While this contrast works to establish a distinction between personal and impersonal experiences of the occupation, all of the experiences mentioned or displayed are inextricably tied to the violence of the occupation and resistance and work to demonstrate the

pervasiveness of the occupation. Khleifi's portrayal of the violence continually reaffirms the core Palestinian concept of the Palestinian people as the victims of Israeli violence. In comparison to more recent films, such as *Paradise Now*, Khleifi's film directly depicts significantly more violence and active anger. While this violence is of a different type than that in *Paradise Now* or *Divine Intervention*, it is still visual violence. Because of the media representation of the first Intifada and the relatively small amount of violence Palestinians used during the first Intifada, the Palestinian simulacral narrative of victimization was accepted and propagated by international media which, in turn, lead to a general acceptance of the Palestinian simulacral narrative in Western public opinion. The violence in Khleifi's film works to strongly confirm the societal beliefs that bolster the Palestinian simulacral narrative.

#### Hyperreality, Western Opinion, and Societal Beliefs

The political factors surrounding the first Intifada relate to the presence and prevalence of violence in Khleifi's film. The media images coming out of the West Bank and Gaza during the first Intifada created a shift in the hyperreality concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in favor of the Palestinian simulacral narrative, which resulted in a shift of Western public opinion regarding the conflict as well. The favorable political surroundings created by this shift coincide with Khleifi's use of large amounts of visual violence in his film. This violence works to bolster and progress the four core Palestinian ideological societal beliefs: presenting Palestinians as victims, justifying the resistance movement and the behavior of its participants, and delegitimizing Israel as much as possible.

The first Intifada began as a grassroots, popular uprising against the Israeli occupation in December of 1987. This uprising, unlike the subsequent al-Aqsa Intifada, involved relatively

little violence on the part of the Palestinian resistance fighters. They primarily used peaceful means of protesting and boycotting and, when they did attack Israeli soldiers, the vast majority threw sticks and stones. These methods were met with harsh repressive actions by Israel such as tear gas, beatings, rubber and actual bullets, and curfews, which worked to tarnish Israel's international reputation. According to Baxter and Akbarzadeh, "images of Palestinian children armed with stones facing off with Israeli armored vehicles were beamed throughout the world [...] and images of Israeli soldiers beating unarmed Palestinian civilians only intensified international calls for resolution" (140). These media images saturated the international media and turned the tide of public opinion against Israel, who had always portrayed itself as the victim of its hostile Arab neighbors. For the first time since the beginning of the occupation, the West accepted a fundamental part of the Palestinian simulacral narrative: that the Palestinians were, in actuality, victims of the Israeli occupation. Khleifi's film also functions to confirm and support the Palestinian simulacral narrative by strongly confirming Rouhana and Bar-Tal's core societal, and ideological, beliefs.

Khleifi is able to support the claim that the Palestinians' goals are just primarily through his documentary footage. Most of the documentary footage, because of its depiction of the interwoven-ness of individual, familial, and community life, connects the actions or sufferings of the individuals to the greater Palestinian cause. In Mohammad's sequence, Mohammad's friend mentions the right of Palestinians to have a state and a right to self determination. The father, whose son was shot while moving barrels for the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), ends his story with an appeal to end the occupation. Several other documentary subjects also make connections to the Palestinian goal to have their own state, free of Israeli soldiers. By linking the violence and

tragedy in these stories with the goals of the Intifada, Khleifi demonstrates that these peoples' sacrifices are justified because the goal of the Intifada is just.

Similarly, much of the same footage is used to demonstrate the injustice and illegitimacy of the Israeli occupation. The footage of the Israeli soldiers firing at young boys who are throwing rocks and the footage of the women breaking curfew to buy food for their families both strongly portray some of the excessive violence of the Israeli troops, which helps delegitimize their presence in Palestine. Khleifi also includes an interview with an elderly woman who remembers the 1948 Nakba, or "disaster," and 1967 Naksa, or "setback." She recounts how her father owned large tracts of land and lost much of it in 1948 and lost even more in 1967. She gestures out to her land and indicates that this land is all that is left of the many acres her father once owned that the Israelis now own. This woman is too old to be an active part of the Intifada and she has no children who could be involved in the resistance. The inclusion of her footage in the film is simply as a means of remembering the events of 1948 and 1967 and delegitimizing Israel's presence in the West Bank further.

It logically follows that if the Israeli cause is illegitimate and the Palestinian cause is just, then the actions of the resistance movement are justified. However, Khleifi offers images that further justify and support Palestinians' protests and use of mild, predominantly stone-throwing, violence. The scene of the old woman discussing the events of 1948 and 1967 works to justify Palestinian actions in that it offers evidence of past wrongs. If the Israelis took land from the Palestinians in 1948 and 1967, Palestinian attempts to regain that land are justified. He also includes instances and descriptions of the excessively violent or cruel measures of the Israeli occupation such as demolishing the homes of innocent Palestinian families. The male protagonist's family did not know about his involvement in the resistance, but the IDF destroyed

their family home regardless of the family's innocence. Khleifi includes a scene of Israeli soldiers forcing two young men to paint over graffiti on a city wall, which would have been understandable had the two young men been the ones who had done the graffiti, but they were simply walking towards the city when they were stopped by the soldiers and forced to paint the wall. When they try to refuse, the soldiers threaten them with guns. These kinds of humiliation tactics and excessive force further justify the decision of the Palestinians to revolt against the occupation. While the film strongly confirms all four societal beliefs, the bulk of the visual violence in the film is directed at painting the Palestinians as the self-sacrificing victims of the occupation—a topic which will be examined, in detail, in the following section.

#### Film Style, Violence and Victimization

In *Canticle of the Stones*, Michel Khleifi uses two distinctive styles of filming to create a contrast between the individual, personal struggles of the unnamed couple, played by Bushra Karaman and Makram Khoury, and the experiences of Palestinian families and communities. While the couple is filmed using a formal style, images from the community and stories of families are filmed in a documentary style. While he also uses personal interviews in the documentary footage, these interviews express the outrage and indignation of the Palestinian people as they describe personal events as opposed to the fictional couple who also describe personal events, but with more emphasis on the variety of emotions and intimate experiences involved in the incidences rather than simply anger. As a result, the exterior, community images convey a sense of chaos, violence, and loss while the quiet dialogue of the couple conveys a sense of the calm stability and determination of individual Palestinians in the face of occupation, but both styles used in the film convey strong images of violence, either visually, in the case of

the documentary-style scenes, or through verbal description in the formal scenes of the lovers. This violence is used as a means of emphasizing the Israeli occupation's victimization of the Palestinian population as a whole.

In the overwhelming majority of the documentary footage Khleifi uses in the film, the content regards the destruction or interruption of Palestinian communities. The first of such scenes occurs early in the film and depicts Israeli police closing down a Palestinian all-girls school in Jerusalem. This documentary footage is interspersed with and highly contrasts the scenes of the lovers having quiet conversations and intimate moments. The footage of the street outside the girls' school is chaotic—sirens blare in the background, multiple people speak in quick dialect, the Israeli police shout orders and wave guns. In this footage the camera is shaky, and the shots are short and are not formally composed, which contributes to the sense of chaos and fear emanating from many of the individuals being interviewed. Though it includes brief interviews with a handful of students, some parents, and a teacher, this instance is not presented as one person's story but as an experience shared by a community. Young girls, most wearing hijab, are shown loaded in the back of police vans while their mothers frantically search for them. Another group of girls is interviewed and tries to explain that the police are shutting down the school because they claim the girls were throwing rocks. However, the group of girls denies the allegation and claims the police are simply provoking them. The teacher who speaks briefly to the camera is at a loss of what to do because she cannot find any other teachers or school officials. This footage is an indication of the effects of the occupation on multiple levels of the community. The single act of closing down a school affects the community, from the professionals who teach at and run the school to the young girls who attend it and their families. This action is also aimed at a non-combat target filled with civilian women and girls. Khleifi is

able to use this image of the forceful and violent closing of a girl's school to indicate that the entire community suffers from the occupation, not just the young men fighting in the resistance movement.

Khleifi also uses the documentary footage to show the connections between individual, familial, and communal experiences of the Intifada. One of the best examples of this connectivity is Muhammad's story, which is interwoven with his community's and his family's stories. Though the actual footage shown is not of violent events, Muhammad describes, in detail, the violent conditions under which he was wounded and shows the scar from the shrapnel that hit him. Before introducing footage of Muhammad, however, Khleifi begins with Muhammad's parents' interview, during which the boy's father describes how he can no longer share an apple with his son, and his mother laments how Muhammad can no longer eat her cooking, which he used to enjoy, because Muhammad lost most of his intestine as a result of his wound. By introducing Muhammad's story through the boy's parents, Khleifi is indicating that Muhammad's story has repercussions that reach farther than the seventeen year old boy and the Intifada and into his family and community.

Muhammad, himself, is first filmed in his hospital bed with a friend, who periodically contributes to the interview, also in the frame. His hospital room is decorated with pictures of martyrs from his neighborhood and, while he does describe his wound and his personal experience, his description is couched in the broader context of the Intifada and his community. He often speaks about the Palestinians' desire to have their own state and the daily humiliation that he and other Palestinians have suffered at the hands of the Israeli occupying forces. He points to and describes several of the martyrs' photos that hang above his bed, giving the martyr's name and a brief description such as "he had eight children" or "he was only fifteen."

His mother tells of how, the day before he was shot, Muhammad went to have his picture taken and claimed that he would soon be a martyr. He recognizes that his experience is similar to and connected to hundreds of other young Palestinian men who were wounded or killed under the occupation, and his community also recognizes the connection. Muhammad is the most obvious victim of violence in this section of the film, but he is depicted as only one victim in a long line of similar victims through the martyr's photos. Khleifi uses Muhammad as one example of the violence that the resistance fighters experience, but he also expands the resistance fighters' story to include the rest of the community as well. Muhammad is not shown in isolation.

When Khleifi shows footage of Muhammad's return to his neighborhood, it becomes clear that Muhammad's community views him as a hero, and his return is celebrated with his entire neighborhood dancing in the street, his mother in the center of the crowd. Even this celebration, however, cannot escape the threat of violence, as a group of Israeli soldiers stand warily around in the distance, guns strapped to their bodies. Khleifi uses Muhammad's story as evidence of the pervasive effects of the violence of the Intifada on Palestinian society. The story of one boy's wound and recovery are inextricably woven with and part of the story of his community, on behalf of whom he is fighting and who is also a victim of the occupation.

While the documentary footage includes interviews with individuals who tell their personal story, much like the unnamed fictional couple, these stories are often graphic and violent accounts told in angry voices and comingled with the rhetoric of the Intifada. Perhaps one of the most striking interviews of this nature that Khleifi includes is with a middle aged man who describes the death of his son. In this interview, the interviewee is seated and surrounded by other members of the community. He is filmed facing the camera and talks directly into it. While there is nothing violent about this scene visually, violence enters the scene through the man's

description of his son's death. According to the man, when he and his son were leaving the mosque, an IDF soldier asked the man to move barrels out of the street. Because there were women and children present, and the soldier had already broken one child's arm, the man complied, but soon asked his son for help in order to finish the task more quickly. When a group of men attacked the soldiers by surprise, the interviewee's twenty-six year old son was shot ten times and died in the street. While the man is simply telling his story, and the viewer does not see the violence, there is a palpable anger in the man's voice as he speaks and, in places, shouts about the death of his son. After telling his story, however, the man relates his son's death and his own suffering to the community by showing the camera a child with a lump on his ribcage from a lodged plastic bullet which indicates that his story is not a singular or isolated event. In this scene Khleifi has again used one individual to represent the suffering and victimization of the community as a whole. Like the girls in the scene of the girls' school, neither the interviewee in this scene nor his dead son are resistance fighters. According to the father, the son had done nothing to deserve being gunned down in the street and was simply at the wrong place at the wrong time. In other words, his son was purely the victim of unprovoked Israeli violence.

In these documentary-style scenes, there is a blurring between the personal and public both through the individuals interviewed and through the incorporation of other people, images, and sounds within the scenes. This weaving of images, some quiet and beautiful, some loud and chaotic, some somber and sad, others doggedly persistent, is reflective of the daily experience of the Palestinians under occupation and designed to demonstrate the definitiveness of the Palestinians' claim to victimization by Israel. While there are still pleasant experiences for Palestinians and while life in the West Bank and Gaza does continue, these pleasant experiences are countered at regular intervals with experiences of trauma, grief, anger, and humiliation, the

combination of which produces a sense of victimization that Khleifi highlights in the documentary-style scenes.

However, lest the viewer think that Palestinians are overwhelmed by this victimization, Khleifi includes the more formal scenes between the two lovers to help demonstrate that, despite being the victim of perpetual violence, Palestinians continue their lives in occupied Palestine through calm persistence and determination. These scenes involving the couple are highly staged and carefully composed. In the first scene of the pair, she is seated on the bed, slightly to the right of the center of the screen. The room is dim, with the only light coming from a window to the right. As she speaks, she occupies the majority of the shot; however, when the man walks into the frame, he sits on the bed in front of her, creating an L-shaped composition of figures, and dominates the shot. Because of the color of his light blue shirt, the lighting from the window highlights him, making him and his speech the primary subject of the scene. Almost every scene of the lovers is similarly, meticulously composed. Unlike the documentary-style footage, these scenes are long, still, and quiet, except for the dialogue which is also calm and steady.

The sense of steadiness that the use of these formal elements creates is contrasted with the topics of the couple's conversations. The couple discusses their personal experiences of the occupation in intimate detail, and, while they describe the events of their lives in calm voices, the events themselves are violent and tragic. The emphasis, however, is not on the violence of the incident, but on the personal experience of the violence for the man and woman, as individuals and, for some experiences, as a couple. Khleifi uses formal filmic elements, such as lighting and scene composition, to highlight the narrator of these stories and his or her determination to continue as normal an existence as possible in Palestine in the face of the violence and trauma that they suffer as individuals. By including these scenes, Khleifi also contrasts the communal

anger depicted in the documentary footage with the complex emotional experiences of the two individuals of the couple. This contrast helps Khleifi encompass as much of the Palestinian experience of victimization as possible in his film as well as depict the less obvious and more personal damage that Palestinians face as a result of the occupation.

In the first scene involving the couple, the man describes the day he was arrested and his family's eviction from their home as a result of his involvement in the resistance and his imprisonment. There is a multiplicity of emotions evoked by the story he tells, but his face remains stoic. He laments that the family lost their house as a result of his actions and recalls the concrete as well as the abstract items the family was forced to leave behind. His description and the emotions evoked by it contrast sharply with a documentary-style scene that Khleifi includes towards the end of the film. In that scene, a family is being evicted from their home and their entire neighborhood is in the process of being demolished. The scene is loud and conveys the sense of chaos that the family is feeling as the grandmother wails about the loss of her home, young children stand around at a loss for what to do, men strip the house of anything of value that the family can keep, the family's belongings are tossed around the yard, and a young woman speaks quickly and angrily to the camera, saying that even though they have no money for food or medicine and now they have no home, the resistance will not be quelled. It is essentially the same scene the man describes, but, while the documentary footage conveys anger almost exclusively, the description the man offers of his personal experience of being evicted contains his personal sense of sadness and loss as well as feelings of guilt for inadvertently making his family a target of the Israeli army.

He discusses the way his family looked at him, as though they had never seen him before, as he was being arrested and how he was responsible for the destruction of their family home. He

tells how his family lived in a single-roomed house for a long time after the family home was torn down, but his family did not blame him. In fact, his family stood by him. Through poetic language, the man allows the reader to focus on and examine images that get lost in the shuffle of noise and anger in the documentary footage. He claims that his “head is filled with the image of a chair thrown into the sky, [his] little brother’s socks floating in the air.” These images captured by his dialogue allow the viewer to focus the broader picture painted by the documentary scenes to a more narrow, personal experience. While there were furniture and clothing strewn about in the documentary footage, the man paints a strong image of these two particular items that have become a part of his memory. In this description, they are no longer random items scattered around nameless people, they are a chair that belonged to his family and a sock that belonged to his brother. The images of this violent event become personal and more concrete.

Similarly, the woman tells a number of anecdotes that personalize some of the themes of the documentary footage. One of her most moving narrations is her description of her first love and her subsequent abortion. In this story, she describes going to the university in Haifa where she met her first love. She talks about learning rebellion and resistance but forgetting herself in the process. She got pregnant and had an abortion, but developed an infection and confessed to her family when she could not hide it any longer. However, she goes on to describe the discussion her family had about what method they should use to kill her, though they eventually decided on exile. Throughout the telling of this story, the woman describes her feelings of love, fear, grief, shame, and guilt. This narrative involves themes that are dealt with more broadly in the documentary footage and the film as a whole including the disruption of family life brought about as the result of the rebellion. There are multiple scenes from the documentary footage that

indicate an aberration in typical family activities. There are frequent images of markets that were once open being closed and deserted because of the Israeli-army-imposed curfews on the cities. Khleifi even includes images of women and children breaking curfew in Gaza in order to go to a make-shift market and buy food because the city had been under curfew for days and the families had begun to run out of food. As mundane an activity as going grocery shopping has been forced into “criminal” (by Israeli standards) act, and the women forced into criminals, because of the occupation and the intifada.

Another, perhaps more jarring, incident captured in the documentary footage is the scene of a group of young boys, perhaps eight years old, who are playing a game with marbles, but instead of marbles, they are using rubber bullets that they have found on the street. They tell the camera that the soldiers confiscated their marbles, so now the best substitute is the rubber bullets. One of the boys then goes on to show the camera a handful of different types of bullets and describe the differences between them and what happens when someone is shot with one. This scene is reminiscent of a child showing an adult a collection of marbles and describing the difference between a Cat’s Eye and an Oxblood marble. Even an activity as seemingly innocuous as children playing marbles has been altered as the result of the Intifada. In both of these instances, however, the subjects of the documentary footage remain unnamed and impersonal. There is no mention of their feelings about these alterations to their daily activities except annoyance and anger.

Unlike the subjects of the documentary footage, the woman’s experience of the resistance and love altered her in a more fundamental way and, as a result, caused her and her family more pain and suffering. Because, under the thrall of her first love and her first exposure to the resistance movement, she forgets herself and her family ties, she brings shame on her family,

which results in her removal from them. As her family members discuss the possible ways to kill her, the final method suggested was burning, which was met with the response: “how can they burn you when the country is aflame?” The final decision is that she should be exiled, but this quote indicates that, perhaps, the only reason she is alive is because the destruction caused by the various rebellions renders her death a meaningless addition to the violence. Not only does the intifada contribute to her loss of self, it also, to her benefit, disrupts the familial process of meting out punishment for her behavior. However, unlike in the documentary footage, the viewer learns of her feelings of fear, shame, and guilt, as well as her family’s emotions during the process of deciding how she should be punished. Her male relatives are angry and ashamed of her behavior. Her mother is overwhelmed with sorrow. This snapshot of how the occupation and Intifada changes family relations is more personal than the images in the documentary footage and offers a complexity of emotion for the viewer to experience rather than just generalized, violent images. This scene might initially appear to contradict my assertion that the film confirms the belief that Palestinians can do no wrong. Telmissany argues that Khleifi uses dual critique throughout most of his films, including *Canticle of the Stones* (81-2), while Khleifi, himself, and Kennedy both point out that Khleifi likes to engage with the traditional/modernity internal critique (Kennedy 40; Khleifi and Alexander 33). While this scene is a critique of the traditional Palestinian cultural norms of dealing with a rebellious daughter and shame, it is a critique of the internal workings of Palestine, rather than external problems with the occupation. While the occupation influences the family’s decision, the process itself is not a result of the occupation or resistance to it. Rouhana and Bar-Tal’s analysis of societal beliefs refers specifically to behaviors that are related in some way to the conflict itself, so though individuals

are still capable of wrong in their personal and family lives, Palestinian behavior regarding the resistance is still considered right and just.

The couple also describes events they experienced together. The most prominent event that they discuss is his arrest and imprisonment for fifteen years. They discuss their separation as the result of his imprisonment several times throughout the film and each discussion highlights the differences in their personal experiences of the same event. The first instance they discuss is her decision to cut her hair. He mentions how he loved her long hair and often thought of the feel and smell of it while he was in prison. However, she explains how she had to cut it in order to erase her first love, who also loved her long hair, and “finish with the suffering of the second,” him. Khleifi uses this scene to demonstrate that, though people may experience the same events, they do so in different ways, and the events come to mean and symbolize different things for different people.

However, unlike the scenes of the couple, the documentary footage focuses on joint emotion and joint experiences. The first man interviewed in Gaza about the death of his son, for instance, describes how Israeli soldiers raided his house in the middle of the night, killed one of his sons, and took another with them. As he describes this scene he is angry, agitated, and surrounded by a group of men from his community, and footage of him and the men is interspersed with footage from around Gaza. As the man finishes his story, a man seated next to him claims the same thing happened to his neighbor two days later and the soldiers returned to blow up the neighbor’s house a few weeks later. There is a focusing, in these scenes, on the common experience. An individual tells his or her story but is quick to relate other stories just like his or hers in order to show that the violence of the occupation is pervasive. The emotions displayed during the telling of these stories, similarly, are ones that are shared by the group or

community. In the documentary footage, the individuals never talk about their experiences in an intimate or personal way and usually display sorrow or anger, which are usually shared by everyone present at the filming.

Khleifi's insistence on including the intimate, personal account of the couple along with the documentary style footage allows the film to capture both the pervasive and invasive nature of the occupation for the whole of Palestinian society as well as the means by which individuals cope with the violence thrust upon them by the war. He offers a rounded image of the Palestinian experience of the occupation and Intifada that includes the psychological and emotional damage of individuals as well as the structural damage to communities and family units. This rounded image, in turn, demonstrates all the ways in which Palestinians are victimized by the violence and disruption of the occupation.

The persistent use of violence throughout the film to demonstrate the various societal beliefs that Rouhana and Bar-Tal claim are necessary during intractable interethnic conflicts and the particular emphasis on displaying the Palestinians as the undisputed victims of Israeli violence work to confirm the Palestinian simulacral narrative that is founded on those beliefs. However, the reaffirmation of those beliefs, in this film, correlates with West's general acceptance of the societal belief that the Palestinians are victims and the heavy use of visual violence correlates with the presence of an organized resistance movement within Palestine. The saturation of the media with images of Palestinian youths throwing rocks at Israeli soldiers who are firing automatic weapons caused a shift in the hyperreality of the West. The overwhelming presence of these images allowed the West to accept, for a time, one of the most important aspects of the Palestinian simulacral narrative: that the Palestinians, and not the Israelis, are the true victims of this conflict.

*Paradise Now*

*Paradise Now*, though released sixteen years after *Canticle of the Stones*, examines some of the political, economic, and psychological motivations of suicide bombers in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hany Abu-Assad, however, approaches his film in a different stylistic manner from Khleifi. While Khleifi uses contrast to establish the multiple levels of suffering of the Palestinian population, Abu-Assad harnesses the general style of Hollywood thriller films. Yaqub claims that the use of genre produces expectation in the audience (219). While she is referring to the wedding and road film genres, the same can be said for Abu-Assad's use of the thriller genre. The use of the thriller genre and Abu-Assad's choice of topic produces in the viewer the expectation and "desire for the spectacle of terror, the desire to enjoy what is morally reprehensible, and simultaneously disallows the spectacle from materializing before their eyes" (Gana 36). Abu-Assad primarily uses lack of movement, of both the camera and characters, to indicate the stagnation and loss of hope that enveloped much of the Palestinian population following the collapse of the Oslo Accords and following the second Intifada. His film, unlike Khleifi's, progresses chronologically and uses a single, consistent filming style for the entirety of the film. Also unlike *Canticle of the Stones*, *Paradise Now* has very few visually violent scenes despite the film's inherently violent subject. The violence of the occupation permeates the content of the film, but on a predominantly verbal, through anecdotes and discussions, rather than a visual level. Gana points out that Abu-Assad

makes use of cinematic conventions [...] in order to undo the spectacle of terrorism and to articulate a more nuanced and challenging narrative of Palestinian nationhood, a narrative that has been so far both impermissible and/or readily discreditable by the hegemonic system of Israeli occupation. (2)

It is important to mention, however, that the type of violence in Abu-Assad's film is different from the type of violence in Khleifi's film which could account for at least some of the

differences in treatment of violence in the films. As previously mentioned, the violence in Khleifi's film is violence between resistance fighters and Israeli military, while the suggested violence in Abu-Assad's is committed against civilians. The type of violence in Abu-Assad's film is considered morally reprehensible by many, particularly his Western audience, which very well might have played a role in his decision to not actually show the final bombing. The second Intifada was considerably more violent than the first. Palestinians, who had generally eschewed guns and bombs in the first Intifada, took them up more regularly in the second. As a result of the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, American and European public opinion was easily swayed in support of any country who was the victim of suicide attacks and against any group that used or encouraged suicide bombing—a conflation that Israel used to its advantage. Gana points out the trouble of discussing suicide bombing after 9-11 and argues that if one is trying to “interpret” terrorism, it is often conflated with condoning it (22) and that many avoided discussing the complexity of terrorism or its contextual factors out of fear of humanizing suicide bombers which ultimately “betrays [...] an interest in their dehumanization” (25). Because the hyperreality created by the media had been saturated with images and sound bites that linked suicide bombing with evilness and anti-Americanism and further linked Palestinians to suicide bombing, Palestinians were, once again, seen as the aggressors and the Israelis were seen as the victims in Western media. This shift in the hyperreality created a shift in Western public opinion in opposition to the Palestinian simulacral narrative. What is interesting, however, is that rather than reaffirming the Palestinian simulacral narrative by reaffirming core societal beliefs like Khleifi's film, *Paradise Now* actually rejects two societal beliefs that are critical in supporting the Palestinian simulacral narrative: that Palestinians are always and only the victims in the conflict and that Palestinians can do no wrong regarding the resistance of the occupation. Abu-

Assad accomplishes this through the dialogue between characters regarding the appropriateness of violent resistance.

### Post 9/11 Shift in Hyperreality and Western Public Opinion

As previously stated, while, during the first Intifada, Palestinians primarily protested or armed themselves with stones, during the second Intifada, the violence escalated (Gross Stein 224). During the mid and late 1990s, after the Oslo Accords failed to produce tangible results and after the Goldstein massacre in 1994 left at least 29 Palestinians dead, extremist Palestinian groups such as Hamas began using suicide bombing against Israel (Baxter and Akbarzadeh 145-6). In response to the bombing, Israel further developed and tightened the enclosure system of roadblocks, fences, and walls in Palestine which led to extreme economic restrictions on the Palestinian population because neither goods nor people could cross the border easily (Bornstein). As Israel's security and Palestine's economic situation deteriorated, the 2000 Camp David Summit was a last-ditch effort to save the Oslo Accords. The attempt, however, failed, and the tensions within Palestine continued to simmer.

The second Intifada, or al-Aqsa Intifada, began on September 28, 2000 when the then candidate, but soon to be prime minister, Ariel Sharon, who was greatly disliked by many Palestinians because of his role in permitting the 1982 massacre at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon, visited the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Palestinians rioted and the turmoil quickly spread throughout the territory. During this uprising there were no images of adolescents armed with stones facing Israeli tanks circulating in the media, and the West viewed it as just another war. Palestinians had failed to alter the hyperreality produced by the Western media in their favor. A year after its advent, in September of 2001, the al-Aqsa intifada lost whatever

popular support it might have had in the United States and Europe after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack on the World Trade Center in New York City. Sharon, who won the election for Prime Minister earlier that year, was quick to forge a good relationship with President Bush and even quicker to conflate the attack in New York with the suicide bombings in Israel, which allowed Sharon to couch the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the broader terms of Bush's "war on terrorism" (Baxter and Akbarzadeh 150). The Western hyperreality was saturated with images and reports of Palestinian suicide bombers who were instantly equated with the suicide bombers of 9/11, which created a decisive shift in Western public opinion. Furthermore, Hamas, a group categorized by the United States as a terrorist organization, was gaining popular support with Palestinians because of Fatah's failure to achieve progress. Arafat also received a series of blows which led to his fall from grace in the West such as the IDF finding papers that indicated he personally approved payments to the families of terrorists (Baxter and Akbarzadeh 150).

This new framing of the conflict also created the political need for the Palestinians to distance themselves from images of violence, while the stagnation of the peace process and the crumbling social and economic conditions provoke a psychological need to examine societal beliefs. During the first Intifada, there was still hope and a possibility of success through resistance. Because of the changing political and economic scenes, hope in Palestine is slim and the living conditions of Palestinians worsen every day (Ajluni). The violent means of the second Intifada only worsened conditions for the people without bringing any hope for resolution, only promises of prolonged conflict, and Abu-Assad offers a film designed to make its viewers question some of the societal beliefs of Palestinians. Though Israel's presence in Palestine is still delegitimized and the goals of the Palestinians are still justified, the film actually works to break the cycle of psychological defense mechanisms, which perpetuate the violence, by bringing into

question the rightness of the actions of some Palestinians, namely suicide bombers, and the status of Palestinians as strictly the victim.

The fact that Israel is still depicted as the illegitimate enemy and the Palestinian's goals are presented as just is not surprising. Palestinians have legitimate grievances with the past and present behavior of Israel and their goals of self-determination and an independent state are, from most points of view, justifiable. Unlike in *Canticle of the Stones*, however, the means by which Abu-Assad reinforces these societal beliefs are not by displaying visceral violence, but by depicting the spatial and economic violence that the Israeli enclosure system inflicts on the Palestinian population. The film opens with Suha, played by Lubna Azabal, crossing a checkpoint and having to walk around an Israeli roadblock in Nablus. Checkpoints and roadblocks, though present before, were increased throughout the Occupied Territories in the period following the Oslo Accords. In the name of security, Israel made travel from the Occupied Territories to Israel and travel within Palestine difficult for most Palestinians and nearly impossible for certain demographics (Arnon 587). These road blocks and checkpoints are routinely subjected to arbitrary closings and Palestinians are often refused passage or harassed for no apparent reason (Bornstein). The result of this closure system was the economic strangling of the West Bank. Because of their prominence in daily life, roadblocks are also often used in films made during this time period. Films like Abu-Assad's *Rana's Wedding* and Suleiman's *Divine Intervention*, as well as others, center key events around road blocks and closed off space in an attempt to recreate harmonious space out of the now even more fragmented landscape of Palestine (Gertz and Khleifi *Palestinian Cinema* 134-70).

It is difficult to find work in Palestine and it is difficult to legally obtain passage to Israel, even for work. As a result unemployment levels and poverty are continually increasing (Roy).

Abu-Assad captures this phenomenon in a number of different scenes. When Said, played by Kais Nashif, learns that he will be going on the suicide mission, he tells his mother, played by Haim Abbass, that he will be going to Israel for a job interview. She is pleased, but surprised, and mentions how difficult it is for a young man Said's age to obtain a work visa for Israel. She also makes sure to remind Said to tell his boss where he is going because it was lucky for Said that he was able to find work in Palestine at all. During his final speech, Said mentions that he has only been outside of the West Bank once in his entire life and that was only because he needed surgery. The enclosure system not only restricts human movement, but also the movement and availability of necessary goods. This process is reflected in the film by the repeated mention of the price of water filters. Israel controls most of the water resources in the West Bank and the water in many of the Palestinian cities requires filtering. In the film, everyone from the radio station, to the cab drivers, to Said and Khaled, played by Ali Suliman, mention something about the high priced water filters and where to find the cheapest ones. These instances are examples of the injustices of the Israeli occupation which work to delegitimize the Israeli presence in the West Bank. At the same time these instances also work as reasons for the justification of the Palestinian goal of a state free of Israeli interference. In this way, Abu-Assad leaves the core societal belief that Israel is the enemy and Palestine is just relatively undisturbed. However, Abu-Assad does go on to challenge two of the other primary societal beliefs.

During an interview, Abu-Assad, who faced accusations of justifying and promoting violence and terrorism after the film's release, addresses this topic directly and claims that:

If you see the film, it's fairly obvious that it does not condone the taking of lives.[...] The full weight and complexity of the situation is impossible to show on film. No one side can claim a moral stance because taking any life is not a moral action. The entire situation is outside of what we can call morality. (7)

While Abu-Assad calls into question the “rightness” of Palestinian actions, he does so in an ambivalent way through Suha and Said. As previously mentioned, Abu-Assad represents, through these two characters, the two general approaches of resistance to the occupation: violence and non-violence. Rather than take an obvious side, however, Abu-Assad lets the characters point out the problems with both violent and nonviolent methods of conflict resolution. This approach is perhaps best illustrated in the scene where, while trying to find the other members of the group after the first attempt at the mission failed, Said quickly fixes Suha’s car and his watch is broken in the process. He hands the watch to Suha while he looks at her car and she lays it on the car. When he is done looking at the car, he, inadvertently, slams the hood of the car down on the watch, breaking it. Suha, who was supposed to be taking care of the watch while Said worked, insists on fixing it, though Said tells her that it does not matter. When they take the watch to a shop to have it fixed, Suha becomes upset about the martyr and collaborator videos, and she and Said leave without giving the shop owner specific instructions about the watch. Said ushers Suha out of the shop and leaves the watch. In her article, Yaqub argues that cars in *Paradise Now* are symbols of the troubled Palestinian society (224-5). Suha and Said, symbols of nonviolent and violent resistance respectively, both contribute to breaking the watch, which could be interpreted as a symbol of time and progress, while trying to fix the car, a symbol of troubled society. While Suha insists on trying to fix the watch by taking the watch to a repair shop, where they can find a supposed expert at fixing such problems, after arriving at the shop, she becomes so distracted by the lack of respect and opportunistic behavior of the shop owner, who is arguably symbolic of the United States, that she forgets about the watch entirely and Said is able to shuffle her out of the shop without making plans to repair the watch. This reading is reflective of the Peace Process in general and indicates that both the nonviolent and violent

resistance movements share some blame in the break-down of progress; violent resistance movements by giving Israel an excuse not to come to the negotiating table and non-violent resistance movements by, according to some, continuing to participate in a process that has failed to produce results and that is biased towards the Israelis. The rest of the film elaborates on these roles.

### The Resistance Debate and Societal Beliefs

Throughout the film, Abu-Assad uses lack of camera movement, symbolism, and character dialogue to demonstrate the stagnation and hopelessness of everyday life in Palestine and the fracture in the Palestinian population and leadership over the best way to proceed with or settle the conflict. Rather than use images of violence, however, Abu-Assad treats the topic of violent resistance as a whole and addresses both sides of the debate throughout the film. Suha, who grew up in diaspora, comes to represent progress and a peaceful solution to the conflict while Said comes to represent the opposite—stagnation and prolonged violence. Through these characters and their debate, Abu-Assad contradicts two of the core societal beliefs that are part of the Palestinian simulacral narrative: the role of Palestinians as victims, and the justness of Palestinian actions.

Suha, the primary female role in the film, has returned to Palestine after a life in diaspora. She was born in Morocco and educated in France, but her father, Abu-Azzam, was a famous Palestinian martyr. Khaled and Said respect her because of her father's sacrifice, but they generally do not agree with her politically. Though the viewer is first introduced to her as a potential love-interest for Said, her second appearance and subsequent conversation with Said demonstrate that she is far from just a pretty face. Yacub argues that the female characters in

*Paradise Now* act as the “bearers of culture and sustainers of life” (222) but that they are only marginally effective (222). She goes on to argue that the failed relationship between Said and Suha is a “manifestation of the sterility of the community from which Palestinian culture and politics should (but cannot) arise” (223). While Yacub offers convincing analysis as to why the two male characters’ mothers are symbols of culture, her labeling of Suha as a symbol of culture is a little more problematic. Suha lives alone, travels alone, and grew up in Europe and Morocco—away from the culture in Palestine. Labeling Suha as a bearer of culture is difficult when she behaves so differently from the other women in the film. However, Suha is emblematic as a sustainer of life because the argument her character makes, verbally and symbolically, is in favor of preserving life during the conflict. In this sense, perhaps her failed relationship with Said is a symbolic of the failure the proponents of violent resistance and the proponents of non-violent resistance to present a unified front against the occupation.

The first scene that indicates her and Said’s opposing stances is the scene in which Said, who has learned of his suicide mission, tries to slip the key to Suha’s car under her door in the middle of the night, since he knows he will not be returning to the shop the next day. She, however, is still awake and opens the door as he is trying to slip the key under. She invites him in and they discuss a few topics before he brings up her father and the resistance. Unlike Khaled and Said, Suha does not agree with her father’s politics of violent resistance. She argues that Palestine must admit it has no military might when compared to Israel in order to find more peaceful means of settling the conflict. This brief conversation defines Suha’s and Said’s roles for the rest of the film. Suha, with her West African and European upbringing, makes the argument for peaceful resistance and negotiations from the point of view of Palestinians in diaspora and as a surviving family member of a resistance fighter. Her point of view, not having

grown up in Palestine and under the oppression of the occupation, is quite different from Said and Khaled's, both of whom suffer on a daily basis at the hands of the occupation, have lost faith and hope in peaceful negotiations, and belong to a lower socioeconomic class. Her arguments cause Said to waiver briefly on whether or not to follow through with the bombing, and he even goes so far as to question Jamal about Heaven and ask Khalid whether or not they are doing the right thing. However, in the end, her arguments are not enough to sway Said from his mission.

Later in the film, she fleshes out the argument for non violent resistance during a conversation with Khaled, after she learns what the two men plan to do. She tells Khaled, "If you can kill and die for equality, you should be able to find a way to be equal in life," and that if they continue with violence there is "no difference between victim and occupier." She asks Khaled:

And what about us? The ones who remain? Will we win that way? Don't you see that what you're doing is destroying us? And that you give Israel an excuse to carry on? [...] We have to turn it into a moral war. (*Paradise Now*)

Though Khaled argues against her in this conversation, he eventually heeds her words and decides against fulfilling the suicide mission. The key difference between Suha and the two men is her maintenance of hope. She has not personally experienced the daily economic and spatial restrictions that the two men have and, as a result, is still invigorated at the idea of successful peaceful negotiations. While she is able to convince Khaled, Said is too jaded by his personal history with the Israelis and feels a personal need to counter his father's collaborative actions. Her words cannot undo the past for Said and he feels the need to make up for his father's short comings by continuing the resistance where his father undermined it.

Though Abu-Assad is careful not to blatantly argue one side over the other, Suha, who is associated with nonviolent resistance and peaceful negotiations, is also associated with movement and hope. She is one of the few characters who is routinely shown moving within the frame of the camera. When she moves, the camera moves with her. When other characters are

around her, they move more. By associating her with movement, the film associates Suha and her political stance with progress. She smiles and makes jokes. She, unlike most of the other characters, is full of life and hope. However, in several instances, her optimism is checked by the harsh realities of the occupation, and, as she cries and stares at the photo of Said while he travels to Israel to complete his mission, the viewer is left to wonder what effect this harsh dose of the realities of the occupation will have on her, according to Khaled, naive optimism.

Abu-Assad primarily uses Said to make the argument in favor of violent resistance to the Israeli occupation. Kennedy argues that “it is the inability of parents to protect or even provide for their children that has politicized the younger generation,” which, at least in part, accounts for the presence of higher numbers of young people in more recent Palestinian film (45). It would appear that, for Said, this is, in fact, the case. Said is haunted and humiliated by his family’s past. His father was executed as a collaborator when he was a child, and Said and his family have had to bear the brunt of the humiliation of his father’s actions. In the opening scene, the disgruntled customer references the incident when he says to Said that the bumper is “crooked like your father.” It is a family history that Said cannot escape much like the Nakba and Naksa are social histories that are woven into Palestinian identity and cannot be easily escaped. Because of this personal history, Said is more committed to the suicide mission than Khaled. When Suha’s arguments threaten to change his mind, his memories of his father and the humiliation he has faced as a result of his father’s actions reaffirm his initial decision.

The speech he gives before he is sent to complete his mission is his strongest argument for violent resistance, though it is still the result of the hopelessness inflicted upon him by the occupation. In this speech, he argues that life in Nablus is like life imprisonment and that the Israelis exploit peoples’ weaknesses and turn them into collaborators, and “by doing that, they

not only kill the resistance, they also ruin families, ruin their dignity and ruin an entire people.” He claims that the Israelis must understand that “a life without dignity is worthless. Especially when it reminds you, day after day, of humiliation and weakness.” Though he has a personal shame that is not shared by all Palestinians, Said points out that the daily life in Palestine is filled with indignity and humiliation which cannot be tolerated forever without enduring consequences on the Palestinian population. Whereas Suha claims the violence and deaths of the resistance are tearing the Palestinians apart, Said maintains that the daily humiliation is the actual culprit responsible for destroying the lives of Palestinians. Both he and the other members of the group in charge of orchestrating the suicide bombing say, repeatedly, that life under occupation is equivalent to death. For Said, who has lived in Nablus his entire life, suffered the humiliation of having a collaborator as a father, and has virtually no prospects for upward social or financial mobility, life under the occupation is static and hopeless, which is why he chooses to end his in the desperate hope that the resistance will at least carry on fighting against the injustice, even if they have little hope of ever winning their freedom.

Contrary to Suha, Said is associated throughout the film with stillness. When filming Said, the camera is almost always stationary and Said does not move much or move quickly in most shots. However, there are several scenes in the film in which Abu-Assad slowly zooms the camera in on Said’s face: when Said is lying in bed after discovering that he and Khaled have been chosen for the suicide mission, when he is considering detonating the bomb at the bus stop in Israel, when he is wiping sweat from around the bomb taped to his abdomen, when he is giving his final soliloquy, and when he is about to detonate the bomb at the end of the film. Each of these scenes is a crucial moment in which Said is making his decisions. He is utterly still while the camera zooms towards his unblinking eyes, indicating that these are not rash decisions

on his part. The association of Said with stillness and stagnation is not surprising. His life, along with many of the Palestinians living under the Israeli occupation, is languishing. However, the association also extends to his political stance. He is, after all, the suicide bomber who accomplishes his task. As a result, the violent approach to the occupation is also associated with stasis and inactivity. While Said does, in the end, act, he does so not to bring an end to the occupation or to progress towards a resolution. He simply acts in the hope of continuing the resistance with the full knowledge that his death will mean little to the struggle as a whole. He acts for the sake of acting without any hope of change or progress.

Throughout the film, Abu-Assad uses Said and the other proponents of violent resistance to criticize peaceful methods of conflict resolution both verbally and symbolically. The film makes the argument that many of those who argue for peaceful resistance do not understand the severity of the situation in Palestine, that freedom requires struggle and sacrifice, and that injustice must be fought because Israel will not end the occupation unless forced to do so. When Said and Suha are talking in the car after leaving the watch-repair shop, Said tells her that his father was a collaborator and that the whole world knows it. When she apologizes and says she did not know, he tells her, "What do you know? You come from a different world. Abu Azzam's daughter, living in a fancy neighborhood." He points out that she has been relatively unaffected by the occupation because she did not grow up under it, and because she belongs to a different economic class, she has not felt the economic effects of the occupation as strongly as the lower classes. In doing so, though, Said also dismisses the loss that Suha has suffered: growing up without a father. Khaled makes the argument that many organizations and individuals who advocate peaceful negotiations have no real experience of life under occupation and their approach is considered naïve by many who advocate violent struggle. As Khaled later tells Suha,

“Don’t be so naïve. There can be no freedom without struggle.” This phrase and theme crop up repeatedly throughout the film and are an accusation against those who denounce violent resistance of not doing enough to end the occupation. Khaled and Said also make the pro-violence argument that Israel will not end the occupation unless they are forced to do so, and, therefore, the injustice of the occupation must be fought. There are many political analysts who suggest that continued occupation, despite its costliness, is the preferred option for Israel who wishes to maintain control of the land between the 1967 border and the Jordan River without granting citizenship to its Palestinian population, an act which would create a majority of Arabs in the Jewish state (Smith 250 and Shlaim 255). Many Palestinians who advocate violence do so because the peace process has brought nothing but more and worse misery to the populations living in the West Bank and Gaza (Arnon). Settling with the Israelis, to Said, is the equivalent of accepting the injustices of the past. Peaceful means, according to Said, do not do enough to fight this injustice or to bring an end to the occupation. The pro-violence faction of Palestinian society, according to the interpretation of this film, claims that the nonviolent faction of Palestinians is naïve, not capable of bringing an end to the occupation, and threaten to accept injustice.

Suha, on the other hand, criticizes and denounces violent approaches to solving the conflict. Abu-Assad argues, through Suha, that the goals of suicide bombers are not valid, the violence they create gives Israel an excuse to continue the occupation, using violence makes Palestinians no worse than the Israelis, and violent resistance causes damage to Palestinian society as well. While arguing with Khaled, Suha claims “if you can kill and die for equality, you should be able to find a way to be equal in life.” With this statement, she argues that the proponents of violent resistance, particularly suicide bombers, have the wrong goal. The ultimate

goal of the resistance should not be to find equality no matter the cost, but to find a way to live as equals costing as few lives as possible. Suha also argues on two different occasions within the film that violent resistance on the part of the Palestinians gives Israel an excuse to continue the occupation and violence against the Palestinian population. This argument takes into consideration that Israel's primary excuse for the occupation and almost all of their military decisions is that they are in the best interest of Israel's security. The wall, the roadblocks, the checkpoints, the occupation itself were all done in order to "protect" Israel from the perceived threat of Palestinian violence (Smith 240). Suha also points out this cyclical nature of violence when she argues that "if you kill, there's no difference between victim and occupier." Abu-Assad further highlights this similarity between suicide bombing and the occupation in the scene where Said considers detonating his bomb at a bus stop in Israel after the plan has gone awry. The camera scans the other people waiting for the bus and focuses on the women and children. This inclusion of images of the innocent almost-victims makes even Said question the "rightness" of his planned actions. Later in the film Suha asks Khaled "and what about us?[ ...] Don't you see that what you're doing is destroying us?" This is perhaps one of her strongest points as it calls into question the effect that violent resistance has on Palestinian society as a whole. Abu-Assad further supports this point by including images of Suha, Said's mother, and an emotionally distraught Khaled before cutting to the scene of Said, sitting on the Israeli bus, surrounded by soldiers and civilians waiting to detonate himself. Suha and, later, the images of Khaled, make the argument that violent resistance causes devastation within Palestinian families and the community as a whole and that this damage is just as bad, if not worse, than the damage caused by the occupation itself. Both of these characters point out the problems and wrongs of the opposite group which demonstrates that Palestinians, as a whole, are no longer capable of

doing no wrong in regards to resisting the occupation. This is a phenomenon that Abu-Assad and his film crew experienced in Nablus while filming. In an interview, he explains that

We had to report our whereabouts to these armed Palestinian factions behind the backs of the Israeli Army, without the Israeli Army knowing we were in contact with the Palestinians, because getting in and out of Nablus was difficult enough as it was. On top of this, the rivalry between Palestinian factions meant approval from one faction and meant definite disapproval from the other. (Abu-Assad 5)

The rival Palestinian factions created just as many problems for Abu-Assad and his crew as the Israeli army. In fact, one of the factions kidnapped one of his crew members which caused the team to finish filming in studio (Abu-Assad). This is a real-life example of the moral confusion and chaos that the film depicts. Because of the extreme circumstances of the occupation and resistance, Palestinians are no longer given the option of making definitively right or wrong choices regarding the struggle, thus the societal belief that Palestinians can do no wrong is brought into question.

Abu-Assad also challenges the societal belief that Palestinians are always and only the victims in this conflict. As previously mentioned, both Israelis and Palestinians have cultural identities that are based on a history of victimization. This sense of victimization is the result of the competing national simulacral narratives. The Holocaust is a foundational event for Israeli identity since it was overwhelmingly traumatic and sparked mass immigration to Palestine, while this mass immigration of European Jews and the subsequent expulsion of Palestinians from most of their land is a foundational event for the Palestinian population. It is this sense of victimization that creates an unwillingness to compromise in both parties—since both parties feel they, the victim, have already suffered enough (Rouhana and Bar-Tal). In the film, Said explicitly mentions this phenomenon and calls into question its logic in his final speech:

Even worse, [the Israelis have] convinced the world and themselves that they are the victims. How can that be? How can the occupier be the victim? If they take on

the role of oppressor and victim, then I have no other choice but to also be a victim and a murderer as well. (*Paradise Now*)

In this quote, Said points out Israel's failure to recognize its role in producing the conditions that create the suicide bombers that it spends so much time defending itself against and admits that Palestinians are also both victims and aggressors. The victim mentality of both parties produces defensive and retaliatory behavior that provokes more defensive and retaliatory behavior in the other party. The violence is a cyclical, self-perpetuating phenomenon (Rouhana and Bar-Tal). Said, however, recognizes this cycle and still decides to perpetuate the violence because he can find no other way to make an impact on the occupation and can no longer tolerate the injustice of the occupation. While Brand claims that, in *Paradise Now*, "the way out of victimhood is not by resisting its oppression but yielding to it completely. Identification with pure victimhood results in an act of pure violence and an 'achievement' of paradise" (170), I would disagree. In the previously mentioned monologue, Said clearly admits his role of both victim and aggressor, so he is not purely identified with victimhood and acknowledges the same phenomenon that Brand discusses in his article. Brand also lumps Khalid and Suha, who also live in this world where "the only remaining act of self-assertion is to choose one's own death" (170), into a group with Said, and Khaled and Suha actually function in the film to counteract such claims.

By contradicting these two core societal beliefs, *Paradise Now* also calls into question the Palestinian simulacral narrative which rests so heavily on societal beliefs. This rejection of certain societal beliefs happens to correlate with the rejection of the Palestinian simulacral narrative in Western, particularly U.S., public opinion while the lack of violence in the films correlates with the lack of an organized resistance movement at the time of filming. Western opinion turned against the Palestinian simulacral narrative as the result of the saturation of western media with images that connected suicide bombing of any sort with anti-American and

anti-Western sentiments and terrorism. Palestinians were linked to terrorism because of the continued use of suicide bombing by extremist groups and Israel was able to gain sympathy from the West.

*Chronicle of a Disappearance and Divine Intervention*

In *Chronicle of a Disappearance and Divine Intervention*, Elia Suleiman takes a different stylistic approach than Khleifi or Abu-Assad. Suleiman's films are a collection of scenes that chronicle, more or less, the time that the main character, ES, spends in Jerusalem, Nazareth, and the West Bank. Suleiman uses little narrative in these films and the narrative that does exist works to explain and justify the fantasy scenes that are included. These fantasy scenes in the latter film are often violent and, as a result, the narrative threads in *Divine Intervention* are stronger than those of *Chronicle of a Disappearance*. In *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, the narrative strands are loose. Many scenes are presented and produce a mental image of daily life in Palestine, but the only story-line Suleiman conveys is of ES, the walkie-talkie, and Adan, played by Ola Tabari, who attempts to find housing in Jerusalem and subsequently takes a fantasy revenge via the stolen walkie-talkie. This narrative strand is used to situate and explain the fantasy scenes. It is also used to confirm Rouhana and Bar-Tal's four societal beliefs. *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, filmed and produced during the mid 1990s when the idea of Palestinians as the victims of Israel was waning in Western public opinion, contains little violence, and, because it was filmed during the years of relative peace following the Oslo Accords, it only weakly reinforces the Palestinian simulacral narrative and ideological societal beliefs. The violence in *Divine Intervention*, produced during the second Intifada when Palestinians were widely equated with terrorists in general, works to confirm some and reject others of the four core societal beliefs, but does so in a different way than Khleifi's film because the violence Suleiman depicts in his films is antagonistic and humorous. When asked about his reasons for the use of violence in *Divine Intervention* Suleiman explained:

I sponge up the realities around me. [...] You could say that *Chronicle* depicts the calm before the storm [...] But in this latest film[, *Divine Intervention*,] things broke loose.

There's a total breakdown in communication, and the occupation is far more evident[...] If *Chronicle* is the silence before the storm, *Divine Intervention* is the very early stages of a volcanic eruption, before it actually spews lava, but where you can see the sparks and all the warning signs that you have to evacuate immediately" (64-5).

However, though his later film contains more visual violence, both of his films, unlike *Canticle of the Stones* and *Paradise Now*, are dark comedies, and the violence that he depicts in his later film is so outlandish that it actually counters the view that Palestinians could present any real threat to Israeli security, rather than substantiating the claim. In *Divine Intervention*, Suleiman uses violence and the presence, or lack thereof, of narrative strands to confirm the beliefs that Palestinians are the victims, Israel is illegitimate, and the goals of the resistance movement are just but rejects the belief that Palestinians can do no wrong.

### *Chronicle of a Disappearance*

The 1993 signing of the Oslo Accords, or Declaration of Principles, seemed to mark a new milestone in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with both of the ruling parties, Israel's Labor party and the PLO's Fatah party, coming together to sign a phased plan for peace. However, right wing religious extremists on either side of the conflict rejected the accords and used the opportunity to carry out violent terror attacks (Baxter and Akbarzadeh 145-6). These attacks and the consolidation rather than the dissolution of the occupation began to have a negative impact on the image of the Palestinians in the West. The fact that the PLO supported Iraq in the first Gulf War did not help the Palestinian international reputation in the West. During this time period, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas as well as other groups began launching more frequent suicide bombing attacks against the Israeli populace, which gave Israel an excuse to develop and tighten the enclosure system. While there were some Jewish extremists practicing similar terrorist tactics, the chief violence committed by Israel against the Palestinians was an

economic violence (Ajluni). This economic violence requires explanations, and, unlike the Palestinian suicide bombings, Israel's enclosure system and the devastating effects it had on the Palestinian economy cannot be readily summarized and illustrated by photographs and sound bites. As a result, the public opinion of the West began to drift away from the concept of Palestinians as victims. This neutrality, or slight negativity, in Western public opinion coincides with a lack of visual violence and weak support for Rouhana and Bar-Tal's four core societal beliefs in *Chronicle of a Disappearance*. Unlike *Canticle of the Stones*, which also supports all four beliefs, Suleiman's film supports them in less obvious ways and with less vigor than Khleifi's film.

The first half of *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, "Jerusalem Personal Diary," is presented as a personal video diary of the main character, ES. The only device that indicates the passing of time is an occasional clip of a computer screen on which is typed "the following day" in Arabic. This section of the film does not have a narrative thread beyond the occasional indication from the computer screen that days are passing. Most of the scenes Suleiman includes could be taking place at any time of day on any day of the week and, rather than work to produce a cohesive series of events, the images work to produce a larger cohesive image of daily life in Palestine. The scene of his father at work, his mother visiting a friend with relatives, The Holy Land shop, and the fishermen are all scenes of daily activity. There is nothing fantastical about them and they do not fit together in such a way as to produce anything that could traditionally be called a plot line. The character, ES, is also silent throughout both *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Divine Intervention*. Salti claims that bearing witness has been a driving force for the Palestinian arts since the 1960s (51) and compares Suleiman's ES to al-Ali's Handhala. Handhala is a cartoon character who is drawn as a child in tattered clothes, with his back always to the reader,

who witnesses horrific events, but never comments on them. His sole purpose is to bear witness to the events. Salti argues that ES is an adult version who is more complex and compels the viewer to witness and speak about what he or she sees, since ES cannot (51-2). There is also no real violence in the first half of the film, though the scenes in front of the café come close. These scenes, which are repeated with different vehicles and occupants, involve a car stopping in front of the café and both passengers stepping out of the car arguing and fighting. However, despite the shouting and pushing, these two men are always subdued by the occupants of the café, settled back in the car, and continue on their journey. Any real violence or bloodshed is always averted and the little scuffles require no explanation from a narrative.

The second half of the film, “Jerusalem Political Diary,” is, literally, another story. In this half of the film, Palestinians are still depicted as victims of Israeli policy. Because the film takes place in Jerusalem, which Israel does not consider occupied territory, the most apparent victimization occurs in the form of discrimination against Arabs in search of housing in Jerusalem. Early in this half, ES goes to an estate agent to try to find an apartment where he overhears the agent refusing to help a young woman, Adan, and encouraging her to either stay with her family or get married if she wants to find decent housing. The real estate agent refuses to even bother trying to help her find housing. This scene is followed by a scene of the girl making phone calls to potential landlords in an attempt to find a place to live in West Jerusalem. Each phone call begins with the landlord assuming, because she has little or no Arab accent, she is Jewish and being helpful and optimistic until he or she realizes that Adan, is Arab at which time he or she refuse to rent Adan the space. She is repeatedly denied housing simply because she is Arab. While this instance of discrimination is not as strong an image of the Palestinian-as-victim as the images of suffering Palestinians in Khleifi’s film, Adan is still the victim of

circumstances beyond her control. As a result, the image does reinforce the societal belief that Palestinians are the true victims in this conflict.

The fact that Palestinians are still portrayed as victims in *Chronicle of a Disappearance* works towards confirming the other three societal beliefs mentioned by Rouhana and Bar-Tal: that Israel is illegitimate, that the Palestinians' goals are just, and that the Palestinians can do no wrong. The institutionalized racism in the housing market works to delegitimize Israel, which claims to be a democracy that treats all of its citizens equally. While every nation falls somewhat short of such lofty ideals, these discriminatory practices are ingrained in Israeli society to the degree that the estate agent, presumably a reliable source of information in his field, refuses to even bother with Adan's search for a home. He is aware of the futility of such a search for a single Arab woman in Jerusalem and will not waste his time. The acceptance of such discrimination as an insurmountable fact by a professional in the housing field highlights the degree to which Israel falls short of its lofty ideal even within its own borders, much less in the territory it occupies. As a result, Israel is portrayed as somewhat illegitimate. However, again, the portrayal of this societal belief is not as strong as the images Khleifi produces using visual violence.

Adan's goal, to find an apartment, appears to be such an innocuous goal that it requires little justification. The young woman is simply searching for a place to live, which is a fairly common occurrence in most parts of the world. However, the event becomes politically charged in Israel and the West Bank where who resides on what land has become a tremendous obstacle to peace. In the second half of the film, ES stumbles upon where Adan has been living, a small dressing room in the theater where she works and where the walkie-talkie eventually settles, though it is unclear how she came to possess it. She does not appear to have political motives for

moving to the west side of Jerusalem, but her search for a home is thwarted by a racist policy in the housing market. As a result, her goals appear justified while Israeli estate policy is delegitimized.

The narrative strand continues into the fantasy scene where the girl orders the Israeli police around the city. The fantasy scene, which roughly begins when the young woman takes possession of the walkie-talkie, is somewhat ambiguous. Suleiman does not clarify who, exactly, is fantasizing. ES could be fantasizing on behalf of the woman, since the viewer never sees him give her the walkie-talkie. On the other hand, the woman goes to sleep and wakes back up before beginning her walkie-talkie charade, so it could be her dream and her fantasy. This ambiguity is only an indication that the fantasy is important, not the one who is fantasizing. The fantasy, however, only has meaning in relation to the Palestinian narrative and the woman's struggle to find housing. Without these two background elements, the fantasy scene would appear as a mere childish prank. She acts out her frustration at not being treated fairly by initiating the ruse, but she also politicizes the act. She makes remarks into the walkie-talkie such as "Oslo is not coming" and "Oslo is not even calling" that indicate her disillusion with the Oslo Accords and the peace process's inability to produce results. This politicization elevates the ploy to the level of an act of resistance against Israel, as well as the U.S. and the P.A. who all participated in the Oslo Accords which led to not only a continuation of the occupation, but also a worsening of living conditions. Bresheeth points out that Adan derives her power from transgressing boundary lines—by taking up the voice and position of the occupier. While ES disappears through silence, she finds power in appropriating the Israeli accent and national anthem (Bresheeth 76, 80) and must adopt some of the enemy's methods in order to take action (81-82). Though it is a primarily nonviolent act of resistance, such a fantasy still bears justification which Suleiman offers prior to

the fantasy scene via the young woman's struggle to find housing. The final societal belief that Palestinians can do no wrong, is not strongly endorsed by the film but it is also not contradicted. The Palestinian characters do not commit any crimes against each other or Israel in *Chronicle of a Disappearance*. Even in the fantasy, the woman only causes confusion—no one is hurt and no lasting harm is done. As a result the film generally supports the ideological conviction, if only because it does not counter it in any way.

### *Divine Intervention*

While *Chronicle of a Disappearance* avoids the use of visually violent footage, *Divine Intervention*, produced in 2002, uses violence throughout the film. *Divine Intervention* was produced during some of the most violent years of the second Intifada. As previously mentioned, the September 11 attacks in New York had a profound impact on media images and international public opinion of both American and international media. After 9/11, any suicide bombing was a heinous terrorist act, no explanations needed or accepted. Because Palestinian groups frequently used suicide bombings against Israel leading up to and during the second Intifada, Palestinians were perceived as enemies in the United States' "War on Terror," no questions asked. While the broader international opinion was not quite as harsh, the public image of Palestine was tarnished, and Palestinians were equated with violent terrorism. Because of this shift in the Western public opinion, Israel was able to justify tightening its enclosure system in the West Bank in the name of national security and the War on Terror (Baxter and Akbazadeh 150). Israel, unlike Palestine, was able to create an atmosphere of sympathy with the United States and, to a lesser degree, Europe. This sympathy allowed the media to create a hyperreality that was sympathetic to the concept of Israel as the victim of Palestinian terrorists. This rejection of the concept of the

Palestinians as victim, a rejection of the Palestinian simulacral narrative, coincides with *Divine Intervention*'s rejection of one of Rouhana and Bar-Tal's core societal beliefs: that Palestinians can do no wrong.

*Divine Intervention*, which involves more fantasy scenes and more violence, has even stronger narrative threads than the second half of *Chronicle of a Disappearance*. In *Divine Intervention*, there are two dominant, narrative threads that involve ES: his father's illness and death and his relationship with the woman. His father's illness is portrayed as the result of the Israeli government seizing his father's shop and belongings. The first half hour of the film is devoted to following the mundane activities of ES's father and the auditing and repossession of his business, car, and other belongings, after which he suffers what is most likely a heart attack or stroke, both of which are illnesses that can be aggravated by stress. The remainder of this narrative strand consists of ES's visits to his father in the hospital, his father's death, and the final scene of the film where he is shown sitting with his mother, watching a pressure cooker steam. The other dominant narrative strand involves ES's relationship with a young woman, played by Manal Khader, whom he meets at the al-Ram checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem. She is unable to cross the border to visit ES in Jerusalem, so they meet on the Ramallah-side of the checkpoint in order to spend time together. ES eventually devises a plan to sneak her across the border, but once at his home, she becomes disgusted with his neighbor, who collaborates with the Israeli police, and leaves ES. He continues to go to the check point, but she no longer meets him there. While there is much more going on in *Divine Intervention*, these two narrative strands, which are interwoven with other images and micro narratives, provide the foundation for the three violent fantasy scenes: the exploding tank, the collapsing tower, and the

shooting range. These three scenes are highly politicized but rely on the narrative for personalization and justification of the violence and confirm or reject societal beliefs.

The first of these scenes to occur also happens to be the first scene in which ES appears. It directly follows the scene in which ES's father has a heart attack or stroke and opens with ES driving to the hospital to visit his father. He sits in the car, eating what appears to be a peach. When he finishes the peach, he throws the pit out of the window where it strikes and blows up an Israeli tank in a spectacularly large explosion. This scene appears approximately one third of the way through the film and after Suleiman has established the injustices of the Israeli government in Nazareth, where his father lives. While there are no blood and no body parts to be seen in the explosion, the explosion itself is a violent act of resistance. This violent fantasy, however, is justified within the film by the knowledge that ES, stoic though he may be, is on his way to visit his father who is dying after being persecuted by Israeli government officials. The scene also works to demonstrate Israel's illegitimacy. This scene is obviously not meant to be realistic, considering that a peach pit has no explosive power on its own. The pit, also called a stone, could be construed as a symbol of Palestine since nectarines are grown in the area and stones are a well established symbol of Palestine in literature and poetry (Parmenter). The image of a peach pit causing the destruction of a heavily fortified Israeli tank and ES tossing it, the act of tossing being a gesture associated with the Palestinian Freedom Fighter (Salti 48-9), could, on the surface, be perceived as a symbol of Palestine destroying Israel. However, the absurdity of the image and the physical impossibility of such a reaction between a tank and a peach pit leads the viewer to assume that Suleiman is mocking the notion that Palestine, with the military might of a peach pit, could pose an existential threat to Israel, who possesses the military might of armored tanks. The hyperbole of the interaction of the tank and the peach pit calls into question the

legitimacy of Israel's security claims against Palestine. If Israel's need to protect itself from Palestinians is false, then Israel's presence on the borders and in the West Bank are equally illegitimate.

The second violent fantasy occurs after ES has visited his father in the hospital for the first time and shifts the focus of the film to the al-Ram checkpoint and ES's relationship. The woman ES is dating is an Arab who resides in the West Bank. As such, she cannot freely pass into Jerusalem, where ES lives. The second fantasy scene is ES's dream of overcoming the hurdle of the checkpoint. In this scene, the woman steps out of her car and boldly walks across the checkpoint without flinching, despite the Israeli soldiers commanding her to stop and pointing their guns at her. As she passes through the closed checkpoint, the watchtower collapses. Ball points out that the power of Suleiman's female protagonist does not emanate from her ability to reproduce or from her symbolism of a "raped and pillaged land," traditional sources of power for women in Palestinian film and literature, but from her "assertive territorial reclamation" (20), but she is still the object of the male dreamer's national fantasies (24). This fantasy scene appears in the film before the viewer is aware of the identity of the woman and the significance of the checkpoint. In the following scenes, the narrative of the two lovers develops at the checkpoint, and the viewer is able to understand why ES would desire its destruction and her passing through it. Without this added narrative, this scene seems somewhat arbitrary, though politically pointed none the less. Gertz and Khleifi point out that Roadblock movies, such as *Divine Intervention*, strive to overcome fragmentation and disintegration, to 'steal the borders' ("Roadblock" 325) and it is through this fantasy scene that the female protagonist is able to do just that. Through this scene and the narrative of the lovers, the film demonstrates that the goals of Palestinians to control their own borders and move freely within their territory is just. The

checkpoint becomes the primary barrier to ES having a normal relationship with his girl friend, a goal which in any part of the world is reasonable.

The most violent fantasy in the film occurs after the woman has left ES and after he has spent two evenings waiting for her at the checkpoint. The scene is also related to a billboard advertisement that ES sees while driving in the car. The advertisement, which shows the face of a Palestinian resistance fighter wearing a keffeya, is for a firing range and reads “Come shoot if you are ready.” ES’s fantasy is set at this shooting range and opens with several Israeli men firing at targets on which Palestinians are painted. They shoot all but one target, and as they take aim upon the remaining target, a single Palestinian freedom fighter steps out from behind it. After no provocation, they proceed to open fire on the freedom fighter, and the freedom fighter proceeds to eliminate the men, as well as a helicopter, using rocks, grenades, ninja stars, and a Palestine-shaped shield. Towards the end of the battle, the keffeya unwraps to reveal that the freedom fighter is none other than ES’s lover. After she is finished killing the men, she walks back to the one remaining target and steps behind it, leaving the scene. This fantasy scene is perhaps the most violent and the most reliant on the narrative plot for its significance. While the other fantasy scenes contain violent or subversive acts, this scene involves a freedom fighter killing Israelis. Without the narrative context, this scene would not make sense with the rest of the film. The viewer is aware that ES has seen the sign for the shooting range and it angered him. The viewer is also aware by this point, that ES sees his girlfriend in his fantasies as an emblem of resistance, thus her presence is explicable and not terribly surprising. The various political symbols encompassed within this scene give it a political significance outside of the story line, but the violence and location can only be justified through the narrative thread. The fact that the Israeli soldiers fire upon the freedom fighter without provocation and are training using images

of Palestinians as target practice also underscores the societal belief that Palestinians are the victims of unwarranted Israeli aggression.

While Suleiman's film confirms the societal beliefs that Israel is illegitimate, Palestinians are the victims, and Palestinian's goals are just, it counters the belief that Palestinians can do no wrong and, in so doing, highlights the tension that had built in the Palestinian population. Throughout the film, many of the segments show Palestinians losing their tempers over small things; one man rips the license plate off of a car because its owner refused to move it, another destroys a young boy's soccer ball because the boy kicked it onto the man's roof, and the opening scene shows ES's father using all manner of obscenities to describe his neighbors as he drives to work. These instances, as well as the final scene of the film, in which ES and his mother watch a pressure cooker, indicate that there is a violent tension that is only just being contained by the Palestinians, and it eeks out through disrespectful and even violent acts towards their neighboring Palestinians. Gertz and Khleifi argue that, in *Divine Intervention*, "daily life has been transformed into a static routine ridden with hate, rage and friction" ("Roadblock" 323) and Suleiman explains that the frustration that comes out in the film is the result of the stasis and paralysis that was brought about by being an Arab living in Israel and the ensuing hopelessness (Suleiman 70). While each of the previously mentioned scenes contains individual acts, the juxtaposition and repetition of the scenes demonstrate the pervasiveness of these tensions, and it is this pervasiveness that relates the behavior to the conflict as a whole. Unlike in *Canticle of the Stones*, these are not private isolated incidents. They are the effect of the spacial and economic restrictions of the occupation and the hopelessness of living as an Arab in Israel. However, this tension in Suleiman's film, unlike the violence in Abu-Assad's, is not directed at Israel. Only the fantasy scenes involve violence directed at Israel. This admission that Palestinians are not always

nice to one another and do not always agree is a small step towards the ideological leap that *Paradise Now* makes by demonstrating that Palestinian in-fighting has played a role in the stagnation of the progress and that Palestinians can also be the aggressors in the conflict.

Though Elia Suleiman's film style is apparent in both *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Divine Intervention*, because of the violent fantasy scenes and a more nuanced ideological stance in the latter, Suleiman must include stronger narratives. The narrative strands are necessary to incorporate the fantasy scenes into both films and to give the fantasy scenes personal as well as political significance. The narrative strands are also necessary, particularly in the more recent film, in order to justify and explain the violence of the fantasy scenes, without which the scenes seem arbitrary and out of place. The amount of violence in *Divine Intervention* correlates with the presence of an organized resistance movement in Palestine while the ideological shift in the film correlates with the negative image of Palestinians in the hyperreality produced by the media and the West's rejection of the concept of Palestinians as victims. These two films, coupled with Khleifi and Abu-Assad's films, demonstrate an interesting relationship between Western public opinion and ideology in the films as well as between the presence of violence in the films and the presence of organized resistance movements on the ground.

## Conclusion

At any given time, Western public opinion has generally accepted the Palestinian narrative and viewed the Palestinians as the victim of the Israeli occupation or rejected it and viewed the Palestinians as the aggressors in the conflict. This acceptance or rejection of the view of Palestinians as victims appears, based on my analysis, to have a strong correlation to how Palestinian film makers display and treat the four core Palestinian beliefs that Rouhana and Bar-Tal claim are essential in the prolongation of the conflict and which bolster the Palestinian simulacral narrative. Over the 17 year span of these four films, the Palestinian simulacral narrative was accepted by the media and, as a result, Western public opinion, but gradually came to be rejected over the years. As the Palestinian simulacral narrative began to be rejected by Western public opinion, the core beliefs that support the narrative also began to be questioned in these four films.

During the first Intifada, when the West's hyperreality was saturated with images of Palestinians suffering at the hands of Israeli soldiers, Western public opinion favored the Palestinian simulacral narrative. Khleifi's film, produced during this time period, strongly confirmed all four societal beliefs that bolster the Palestinian simulacral narrative through the use of graphic violence in his film. During the early nineties, the media saturated the hyperreality with images and stories that indicated that the Oslo Accords had finally solved the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which created an atmosphere of relative neutrality regarding the victimization of Palestinians. Suleiman's *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, filmed during the early nineties, only weakly confirms the societal beliefs and simulacral narrative. His later film, *Divine Intervention*, however, only confirms three of the four societal beliefs and was filmed after the 9-11 attack, which caused Western public opinion to reject any group of people who consistently used suicide bombings. Palestinians, as a whole, were conflated with the extremist groups who

used terroristic methods which damaged their international reputation. Abu-Assad's film was created during a time of Palestinians disunity and as violent resistance was gaining popular support within the territory, and Arafat, who had long been the face of the PA, was suffering political humiliations. *Paradise Now*, filmed during this turbulent time, actually contradicts half of the societal beliefs that support the Palestinian simulacral narrative.

Another trend that developed during the course of my analysis is an apparent correlation between the presence of visual violence in the films and the presence of an organized resistance movement in the West Bank. In *Canticle of the Stones*, filmed during the first Intifada, and *Divine Intervention*, filmed during the second Intifada, there are higher quantities of visually violent scenes. In *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Paradise Now*, both filmed after Intifadas had ended or broken down, there is comparably little visual violence. This trend cannot be easily dismissed as a matter of the director's personal film style because both *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Divine Intervention* were directed by Elia Suleiman. Though it is difficult to draw causal links between Western public opinion and the acceptance or rejection of Palestinian societal beliefs in Palestinian film or between the presence of visual violence in the films and the presence of organized resistance on the ground, given the transnational nature of the films and the directors, the correlation based on this analysis appears noteworthy and warrants further scrutiny in relationship to these transnational directors' desire to appeal to both Western and Eastern audiences.

This analysis, however, does suffer from issues that make drawing definitive conclusions difficult. The first, and perhaps most obvious, is that these four films are a small sample of Palestinian films and my use of them was more a product of availability than of their representativeness of Palestinian films as a whole. Alexander's assertion that Palestinian films

made during the first Intifada tended to be less violent (“Is There a Palestinian Cinema?” 156) draws into question the representativeness of *Canticle of the Stones* as a first Intifada film. When trying to locate films made during the first Intifada, *Canticle of the Stones* was one of the only films to which I was able to obtain access for this paper, and, as a result, may not be a useful representation of other films produced during that time. Alexander cites Rashid Masharawi’s 1993 film, *Curfew*, as a good example of first Intifada films (“Is there a Palestinian Cinema”), but I was unable to obtain a copy of the film with English subtitles, and my Arabic is not yet adequate to watch it without a translation. This study also leaves out a number of prominent and prolific Palestinian producers, most notably Rashid Masharawi and Ali Nassar, both of whom Gertz and Khleifi discuss at length in their book as significant directors. As a result this study is preliminary and the trends that I have proposed need to be examined in a broader selection of films. Using Rouhanna and Bar-Tal’s societal beliefs as a framework for this analysis also had its positive and negative qualities. While using their research as a framework for my analysis gave me specific, psychologically significant, societal beliefs to examine, limiting myself to those four societal beliefs is potentially overly simplistic. The causes of the continuation of the conflict go far beyond these four societal beliefs.

Though it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions without further research and consideration of other films, if Gertz and Khleifi’s assertions that the Palestinian population has traditionally used film as a means of establishing a more concrete national identity and Telmissany’s argument that “Palestinian cinema constitutes a site for negotiation and circulation of values and behaviors that contribute to the assertion of Palestinian cultural and national identities” (70) are correct, the potential relationship between film, Western public opinion, and the hyperreality of the conflict created by the media could be significant. Palestinians have

traditionally been denied the right to define, not only their media representation (Alexander “Palestinian Films” 325) but also their story in general. Bresheeth argues that “the dispossession brought about by occupation is even deeper and more painful than ‘just’ losing home and country. The ultimate loss is that of losing your story, your identity, losing the right to tell your own story, your own history” (79). When discussing *A Tale of Three Jewells*, Khleifi argues that identity formation for children requires both reality and imagination to construct a whole, unified identity (Khleifi and Alexander 31). A similar argument can be made when discussing the role of film in the formation of Palestinian identity. Because the right to define themselves, to tell their story, has been denied for so long, the role of film in “filling in the blanks,” so to speak, and helping to create a unified identity is, indeed, an important undertaking. However, given the transnational nature of modern Palestinian film production, it is also important to understand the various interests and influences acting upon these important films. If the interpretation of the conflict by the media affects Western public opinion and if Western public opinion affects the ideology presented in Palestinian films and if this ideology is then used, as Gertz and Khleifi claim, to establish a cohesive Palestinian national identity, then Palestinian film is, on some levels, triply removed from the reality of the conflict and any national identity that results from the films is quadruply removed. However, there are many “if’s” in that statement and identity formation is a complex and complicated process.

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