

# CLASS 9: Palestinian Cinema

# Early Footage of Jerusalem & Palestine

The first motion picture frames that were taken in Palestine can be credited to **Auguste and Louis Lumière's cameramen**, who travelled to many countries after introducing film to the world. The date is not well documented, although most sources list **1896 as the year of the first film shot in Palestine**. The scenes that were filmed featured **quotidian details; trains entering the station, [people waiting on platforms](#), the landscape around Jerusalem, and so on (Tryster 1995)**. These early silent movies were frequently played in the movie houses scattered around major Palestinian cities. Edison cameras also toured the Middle East region as early as 1903, releasing films such as **Arabian Jewish Dances and Jerusalem's Busiest Street**. In 1908 Pathé released a film entitled Jerusalem, which was part of a world tour (Travel Film Archive at [www.travelfilmarchive.com](http://www.travelfilmarchive.com)). A simple internet search for 'Palestine' and 'early film' yields numerous results. [The Travel Film Archive website](#) has twenty- three films taken in Palestine from the early 1920s silent era to the mid-1940s. The themes of the films are quite diverse, including religious tours, folk dances, architectural exploration and travelogues. Following the Lumière brothers, other foreign film crews documented the country while others filmed **dramatic adaptations of New Testament stories**. The documentaries of this period were **Orientalist** in nature, **did not grant Palestinians agency and generally presented them as primitive** (Gertz & Khleifi 2008).

## Orientalism

In art history, literature and cultural studies, **Orientalism is the imitation or depiction of aspects in the Eastern world.** These depictions are usually done by writers, designers, and artists **from the West.** In particular, Orientalist painting, depicting more specifically "the Middle East", was one of the many specialisms of 19th-century academic art, and the literature of Western countries took a similar interest in Oriental themes.

Since the publication of **Edward Said's Orientalism in 1978**, much academic discourse has begun to use the term "**Orientalism**" to refer to a **general patronizing Western attitude towards Middle Eastern, Asian, and North African societies.** In Said's analysis, **the West essentializes these societies as static and undeveloped—thereby fabricating a view of Oriental culture that can be studied, depicted, and reproduced in the service of imperial power.** In his book he describes it as Orientalism is the wider term that can be defined by whoever is studying the orient and the dimension of it lies between orient and occident and not only that it also explore the series of interests which can be psychological analysis, political, scholarly descriptions and landscape etc. Implicit in this fabrication, writes Said, is the idea that Western society is developed, rational, flexible, and superior.

# Ibrahim Hassan Sirhan

In 1935, **Ibrahim Hassan Sirhan** filmed a twenty-minute long silent movie that documents King Saud of Saudi Arabia's visit to Palestine. **Sirhan followed the king from Lod to Jaffa, and from Jaffa to Tel Aviv.** The film was screened at the Nabi Rubin festivals, and Sirhan played an **accompanying soundtrack** so that, it is said, spectators did not realise that it was silent. **This event is deemed to mark the starting point of Palestinian cinema, whose history is divided into four periods that correlate to the major stages of the national Palestinian struggle** (Gertz & Khleifi 2008).

Sirhan was **self-taught**, and **relied on books and instructional manuals to learn filming, developing and editing techniques, reportedly assembling his editing table himself.** Sirhan collaborated with **Jamal al-Asphar**, the cinematographer who filmed King Saud's visit, and together, the two men are considered to be **the founders of Palestinian cinema.** They went on to produce a **forty-five minute film called Realized Dreams (1940) about Palestinian orphans.** The film also self-consciously aimed to prove that Palestinians, and not just Europeans, **were capable of producing movies about Palestine.**

## ‘Studio Palestine’ (1945)

Sirhan, together with **Ahmad al-Kilani** – a Palestinian who studied film in Cairo – founded a production studio called **‘Studio Palestine’ in 1945.**

The studio produced several feature-length films that were **screened in Palestine and neighbouring Arab countries.** There were a number of other prominent figures that played an important role in shaping Palestinian cinema during this same period, such as Mohammad Kayali and Abde-er-Razak Alja’uni, who also produced several films in Palestine, all of which are now lost (Gertz & Khleifi 2008).

# Nakba (1948)

In 1917, when Palestine was under the British Mandate, **the Balfour Declaration** was drafted: a paragraph-long letter from the United Kingdom's foreign secretary Arthur Balfour to the leader of the British Jewish community Baron Rothschild, which stated that **Palestine was to be the national home for the Jewish people**. This declaration was put into effect in 1948 and as a result, more than 700,000 Palestinians were forced into exile. Palestinians were driven out of their homes and many had to go to refugee camps.

The events of the Nakba and its aftermath are not well documented in tangible form other than **oral histories and personal testimonies**. Most of the Palestinians suffered from posttraumatic stress after the Nakba, experiencing a collective sense of, but not limited to, denial, guilt, shame and a general difficulty in coming to terms with the facts of their situation and the loss of their homeland. **Practically no Palestinian films were made between 1948 and 1967. It is therefore dubbed the epoch of silence, and historians view this as the second era of Palestinian cinema** (Gertz & Khleifi 2008: 11).

# Cinema of the Palestinian Revolution

The era of silence ended in 1968, when the third period of Palestinian cinema began. This happened on the heels of yet another significant and devastating event for the Palestinians: the **1967 Arab– Israeli war, the Naksa**, during which Israel **defeated the Arab forces and occupied the Gaza Strip and took the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria** (Gertz & Khleifi 2008). Several Palestinian institutions, such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) that had been formed during the years preceding the 1967 war, were greatly strengthened as a direct result of the conflict. Most Palestinian cinema of this era was made by **exiled filmmakers who resided in Amman and Beirut**. As the PLO was also based in Jordan from **1969 to 1971**, it provided a makeshift sanctuary for these filmmakers. In view of the involvement of the PLO and other Palestinian organizations, such as the **Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP)**, **the film production body of this period is referred to as the ‘Cinema of the Palestinian Revolution,’** or the ‘Cinema of the Palestinian Organizations’ (Gertz & Khleifi 2008: 12).

In 1967, **Sulafa Mirsal** a young Palestinian who studied **photography** in Cairo set up a small photography unit in her kitchen. Her equipment was primitive and her techniques were basic, and she mostly worked with images of Palestinian casualties, the shahids (Abu Gh'nima 1981 cited in Gertz & Khleifi 2008). Her work was transferred to Amman, Jordan, where the PLO offices were located and the Department of Photography was established. **Mustafa Abu-Ali** and **Hani Johariya**, both Palestinian filmmakers who were living in Amman, joined Mirsal.

The two of them worked for Jordanian television, and regularly borrowed cameras and film from the station to document protests, public gatherings and cultural events related to the Palestinians. The first movie produced in the third period; **Say No to the Peaceful Solution (1968)**, was a collaboration between **Abu-Ali, Johariya and Salah Abu Hannoud**. The film documented the demonstrations of the civilians who objected to the 'peace solution' suggested by US Secretary of State **William Rogers**, as they believed it neglected the interests of the Palestinian people (Gertz & Khleifi 2008: 21).



## Mustafa Abu Ali "They Do Not Exist" - (1974)

Salvaged from the ruins of Beirut after 1982, Abu Ali's early film has only recently been made available. Shooting under extraordinary conditions, the director, who worked with Godard on his *Ici et Ailleurs* (Here and Elsewhere), and **founded the PLO's film division, covers conditions in Lebanon's refugee camps, the effects of Israeli bombardments, and the lives of guerrillas in training camps.** *They Do Not Exist* is a stylistically unique work which demonstrates the intersection between **the political and the aesthetic.**

Now recognised as a cornerstone in the development of Palestinian cinema, the film only received its Palestine premiere in 2003, when a group of Palestinian artists "smuggled" the director to a makeshift cinema in his hometown of Jerusalem (into which Israel bars his entry). Abu Ali, who saw his film for the first time in 20 years at this clandestine event noted: "We used to say 'Art for the Struggle', now it's 'Struggle for the Art'"

Mustafa Abu Ali, who died July 2009. **Considered the founding father of Palestinian Cinema,** Abu Ali created the PLO's Film Division.

When the PLO was forced to leave Amman, Jordan, for Beirut, Lebanon, due to conflict with the Jordanian monarchy that resulted in the events of **Black September** in 1970, the film group, led by Abu-Ali, went with them. During this period, **more than sixty documentary films about the Palestinian struggle were made, under the harshest of conditions.** It was during this period that 'the Palestinian organizations reiterated their belief in cinema as a **significant tool for the advancement of their cause**' (Gertz & Khleifi 2008: 12), and in accordance with the era's Marxist-Leninist outlook, cinema was regarded as a **means of promoting revolutionary ideals, as it was in anti-colonial and resistance movements worldwide.**

The situation in Lebanon wasn't easy for the filmmakers. **Equipment constantly had to be borrowed, and as funding from the PLO was scarce, and there was a constant shortage of crews. Footage from their archive was used to complete films, and once recorded, the material was sent outside of Lebanon for development, as laboratories no longer functioned after the Lebanese civil war. After the editing process, the films had to be sent back again for printing. The process took months, and resulted in fifteen or twenty-minute long films at best. The filmmakers nevertheless continually pressed Palestinian organizations for any kind of support they could afford** (Dabashi 2006).

Abu-Ali, along with several other Palestinian filmmakers, decided to set up a **Palestinian Film Unit/Archive**. Their main intention in doing this was to create a **history of Palestinian identity**, especially since many **pro-Israel politicians had renewed the 'Palestinians don't exist' campaign**. In setting up an official archive, they also wanted to **unite the efforts of Palestinian filmmakers worldwide and hoped to give Palestinian cinema better recognition and status**. The archive included over one hundred films, dating from pre-1948 and up until the early 1980s, as well as all the films directed by the group. Since materials from past films were constantly being used as footage in newer films, a systematic and easily accessible method for storing the films was needed. Khadija Abu-Ali, the first Palestinian woman filmmaker and the wife of Mustafa Abu-Ali (Hillauer 2005: 209), was in charge of screening and received archival training to respond to the growing need to access the films. The budget – not surprisingly - was minimal and the films they had were stored in boxes marked with the film type and date of filming. No computers were available and thousands of meters of celluloid were categorised manually.

The archive was initially housed in **the Film Institute in West Beirut** (Gertz & Khleifi 2008: 28). It contained a vast amount of documentation of battles, bombings, sieges – footage which had miraculously survived considering the circumstances it was taken in – as well as political and social events and interviews with political leaders, intellectuals and academics, most of whom have passed away now. The archive also contained films and documentaries about life in refugee camps and the lives of Palestinians in the diaspora. Additionally, newly made films were constantly being added to the archive. However, when Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, life for Palestinians in Beirut came to an abrupt halt. The Israeli siege signalled, not only the devastation of Palestinian life in Lebanon, but also the obliteration of the Palestinian cultural presence there, and marked the end of the third period of Palestinian cinema. Alongside the thousands of casualties and the complete destruction of civilian infrastructure in Lebanon, the destruction of the archive can be considered to be one of the biggest losses of the war.

Two recent films that have been made about the lost archive. The first and most recent is a short eight-minute experimental film essay by Sarah Wood entitled [For Cultural Purposes Only](#) (2009). The film starts with a flickering image of what looks like a film certificate. It states the name of her film, but we see several shots each with a different price marked on them, the last one marked being fifty pounds. Black and white film footage from what appears to be 1930s Palestine is displayed on the screen next, with the word 'cinema,' first in French then in English, juxtaposed over the moving image. Next we see a great number of people walking about, and several camels as well, in what appears to be archival footage. A black blank screen then appears, and we begin to see a sentence slowly being typed in white, **'What would it feel like to never see an image of the place that you came from?'** More black and white footage follows, but this time of a small child sliding playfully on top of a tent, and the word 'cinema' in Arabic on top of him.

While For Cultural Purposes is incredibly nostalgic, all of the narrated memories are, poignantly, **about films that don't exist anymore**. Wood wonderfully explores the concept of how **cinema fuels memory, and what the effect of cinema is on culture and heritage**. More importantly, the film strongly conveys the dependence of the **Palestinian narrative on memory**, and its strong urge to return to a Palestine that once was. The film also presents an alternative medium through which these historical accounts can re-emerge. The interviewees relate to Wood through their recollection of the films that are now lost key events in Palestinian life such the Nakba, as well as the Sabra and Shatila refugee massacre in which hundreds of children and women were mercilessly slaughtered. **Watching this reconstruction, composed of quick drawings, makes the viewer acutely aware that in a world that depends on moving images to give the facts, spoken memories count for very little.**

The second film concerning the lost film archive is a lengthier documentary entitled [Kings and Extras: Digging for a Palestinian Image](#) (2004). Directed by the Palestinian Azza El-Hassan, the film chronicles **El-Hassan's journey from Jordan to Palestinian territories, Syria and Lebanon on a quest to try and find clues about the whereabouts of the missing archive.** El-Hassan begins her search in a Jaramana refugee camp, located in Damascus, Syria, where Iranian filmmakers shot a film about the Palestinian war using Palestinian refugees as actors. All that remains of the filming location is a few burnt car tires and an-ash coated car. As with the archive, all evidence of their involvement in the film has vanished, except for the memories of a few elderly people who remember seeing the film set.

El Hassan is continually confronted with **new clues, yet meets dead ends.** She interviews numerous people and receives all sorts of accounts as to what might have happened to the archive. She and her film crew even locate the apartment in which the archive was said to have been stored in during the Israeli siege, waiting for the owners to show up. However, when she eventually meets them, they tell her that they were totally unaware of this. **Towards the end she is led to the graveyard that is believed to have been yet another assumed 'resting' place for the archive, but no one is prepared to start digging.**

The 1980s and 1990s were particularly tumultuous decades in Palestinian history. **The economic crisis, increased Jewish settlements and even the Intifada (Arabic for ‘shaking off’) left the Palestinians in a vulnerable state. Poverty, unemployment, and crumbling infrastructure were, and still are, the priority of the Palestinian Authority.** Cinema was once again relegated to the margins of the Palestinians’ concern. However, it did not come to a complete halt. **Michel Khleifi effectively began the fourth period of Palestinian cinema – one that is presently on-going – when he returned from Belgium to his birth town of Nazareth in Galilee in 1980.** He produced his first documentary - presented in a fiction-like narrative – about two Palestinian women, one of whom (Khleifi’s maternal aunt) was forced to work in an Israeli textile factory after her land was expropriated.



Although Khleifi's name was the most prominent during the 1980s, many others began making films during that period as well, many of whom are considered to be major Palestinian directors today such as Elia Suleiman, Rashid Masharawi and Nizar Hassan (Gertz & Khleifi 2008: 32). **However, the difficulties faced by the filmmakers are essentially the same as those encountered around the time of the Nakba.** Edward Said called attention to this fact in his essay 'Permission to Narrate' (1984). Most media outlets were inaccessible to them, especially in Israel, as **cultural and artistic events were banned because they were deemed to be acts of incitement.** Even displaying the colours of the Palestinian flag was considered an offence worthy of arrest and indefinite detention. **Painters, singers, actors and especially filmmakers were constantly arrested, expelled from the country and even assassinated** (Gertz & Khleifi 2008).

Starting with the 1970s and onwards, there is evidence that Israeli agents have targeted and assassinated prominent Palestinian artists and intellectuals, not only in Palestine but also around the world (Dabashi 2006: 26). The novelist Ghassan Kanafani was murdered with his 16-year-old niece in Beirut, the writer **Wael Zuaiter in Rome, the intellectual Mahmoud al Hemshari in Paris, the feminist leader Nada Yashruti in Beirut, and cartoonist Naji Al- Ali in London, to name only a few** (Dabashi 2006: 26). Palestinian cultural centres are also common targets for Israel. The Khalil Sakikini Cultural Centre in Ramallah, that often hosts literary events and film screenings, was destroyed in 2002, causing irreparable damage to the artwork in the building. Moreover, the offices were ransacked and equipment destroyed, and most alarmingly, the hard drives of all the computers were stolen. Similar incidents have also occurred at the Land Registry Office, the Central Bureau of Statistics, various human rights organizations, as well as at numerous radio and television stations and film theatres such as the Kasaba Theatre Cinematheque.

Palestinian cinema is intricately tied to the **Palestinians' displacement and the desire to return to a pre-1948 Palestine**. It must therefore be understood specifically in this context; **not as a luxury or leisure-time pursuit or a medium for addressing complex philosophical questions, but as a means of survival and a fundamental part of the demand to be recognised, both individually and collectively. It stands against invisibility, and making visible what has been forcibly made invisible.** It also stands against the western stereotype of Palestinians in the media; the masked, kufiyya-wearing, stone-throwing violent entity, by providing a **counter narrative and a counter identity for Palestinians**. Although the Palestinians are now a dispersed people whose films originate from many different places (the West Bank, Gaza, the Arab world, Europe and the United States), most of the cinematic works created in the diaspora still address questions of Palestinian national identity. The Palestinian people and their identity, frequently marginalised in today's media, are therefore given a chance to rediscover their voices in film. Items such as keys, title deeds, family photographs, newspaper clippings, school certificates and marriage licenses are the foundation of Palestinian memory, and hence are a decisive part of Palestinian cinema, alongside depictions of landscape and trauma.

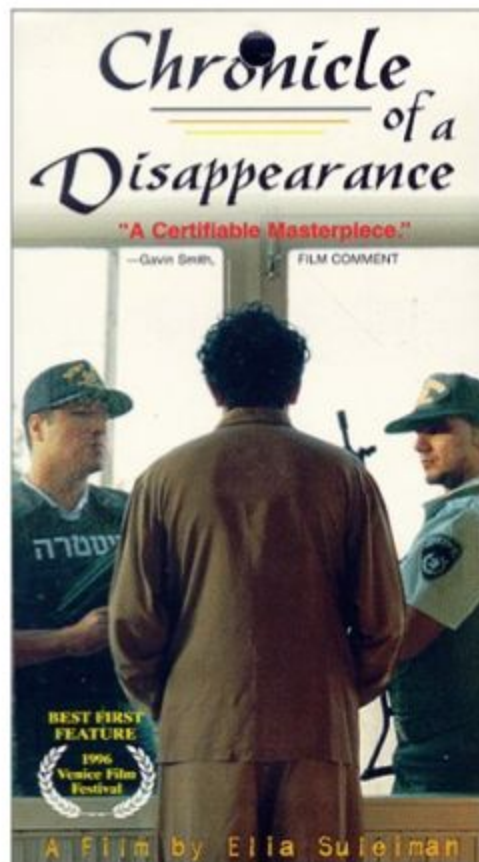
*“Palestinians stand against invisibility, which is the fate they have resisted since the beginning; and on the other hand, they stand against the stereotype in the media: the masked Araf, the kufiyya, the stone-throwing Palestinian - a visual identity associated with terrorism and violence.”*

Edward Said, *Dreams of a Nation*

*Chronicle of a  
Disappearance*  
(1996) by Elia  
Suleiman

-

Depicting a Nation in  
Hibernation



# Elia Suleiman

- Born in 1960, in Nazareth, to a Palestinian family. He grew up under Israeli political and cultural domination.

- He moved to New York City early 1980s.

- He moved back to Palestine in 1994 to help establish a Film and Media Centre at Birzeit University, during which he made his film *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (1996).



## **Elia Suleiman's Filmography:**

*Introduction to the End of an Argument* (1990) (Co-directed by Jayce Salloum)

*Homage by Assassination* (1993), *The Gulf War... What Next?*

*Chronicle of a Disappearance* (1996)

*The Arab Dream* (1998)

*Cyber Palestine* (2000)

*Divine Intervention* (2002)

*Awkward* (2007), *To Each His Own Cinema*

*The Time That Remains* (2009)

*Diary of a Beginner* (2012), *7 Days in Havana*

# Introduction to the End of an Argument



## Historical Context:

- 1964: PLO was founded in Cairo (inspired by the Liberation of Algeria in 1962).
- 1967: The Israeli military occupation of the rest of Palestine (including eastern Jerusalem).
- 1970: The Black September/Jordan
- 1976: Tel al-Za'atar massacre/Lebanon
- 1977:
  - \*Death of Gamal Abd al-Nasser, a major blow against Arab nationalism
  - \*Beginning of normalization between Egypt and Israel (Anwar Sadat)
- 1978: Israelis occupying Southern Lebanon (murdering thousands of Palestinians and Israelis)

## Historical Context (continued):

- 1980-1988: war between Iraq and Iran

- 1982 massacre of (762 – 3,500) Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon  
“Frightening and forcing a people out of their homeland, cramming them up in dehumanizing slums of refugee camps all around their country, then unleashing a savage army to murder them en masse right there inside those refugee camps, and if they dared to utter a word or to pick up arms and defend themselves branding them vile, violent, and terrorist – that is the history of Zionism in Palestine in a nutshell, informing everything Palestinian artists and intellectuals have said and done, or not said and not done, over the last half-century.” (Dabashi 2006: 146-147)

- 1987: First Intifada

- 1990-1991: Gulf war

- 1993: Oslo Accords

# Chronicle of a Disappearance



*"Chronicle of a Disappearance* can be seen as a study of a present scarred by a history of "forced *public* amnesia," as Bresheeth describes it (Bresheeth 2001, 32), where the conditions of remembering and commemorating are inhibited to this day." (Abu-Remaileh 2015: 82)

## The Palestinian cause having been turned into one big cliché



“Externalizing stereotypes is a conscious production of stereotypes which exhausts their essence. The danger is we protect the system from parody and critical humour. We ought to be wary of this kind of self-defence, also referred to as self-censorship. The latter can result in us becoming our own stereotypes.” (Suleiman 2006: 204)



## 1. Personal Diary/Nazareth/1948

1. The Holy land Shop and the touristy images depicted in the postcards
2. Violence
3. "Allah Akbar"
4. No marking of the passage of time
5. The priest
6. Peace between Serbs and Croatians



“These routine activities are what Homi Bhabha has called the “performative” expressions of nationhood, “the everyday, unofficial representation of the nation” (quoted in Marks 1991, 64-65). These expressions take on a higher significance when the nation is either coming into being or being lost to exile-both of which are true with Palestinians. The performative expression of dailiness by exiled and disenfranchised people is a countermeasure to the official pedagogical representation of them, which tends to abstract them by stereotyping, exoticizing, and otherizing. This may account for the emphasis in the films of the Third World cinema, Third Cinema, and accented cinema on “documentary-like” descriptions of mundane routines and detailed activities that slow the films’ pacing. However, these routines and details carry with them highly significant cultural, national, and critical import; they are not empty gestures or bad filmmaking!” (Naficy 2001: 116-117)



## 2. Political Diary/Jerusalem/1967

1. American Colony
2. Dismantling power relations and ridiculing the occupation
3. Waiting for Godot
4. Performance
5. The law of the absentees
6. The gun, the bomb



“Rarely in the history of cinema has a cinematic will to resist and subvert power so joyously dismantled the entire machinery of a state apparatus (colonial or otherwise) by definition an institutional monopoly on violence” (Dabashi 2006: 135)



“The miracle of Elia Sulaiman’s cinema is in his art of frivolously reformatting the layers of self-erasing memories so that instead of being concealed they are actively exposed – but exposed in a liberating and emancipatory, and not in a vindictive and self-victimizing, language.”

(Dabashi 2006: 142)



*We've drowned in a sea of regrets*



*In our land*

# Objectification of the Landscape



“The objectification of the landscape, its transformation into a **touristic commodity**, into an empty representation, is explained by suggesting that the Israelis have turned it into a tourist site and the real land into the Promised Land, or, as the film’s captions indicate, the Missed Land.” (Khleifi and Gertz 2008: 185)

## General features of Elia Suleiman's cinematic language:

1. Multi-layered
2. Static frames
3. Choreographed action
4. Little dialogue
5. 90% of the cast is non-actors
6. Nonlinear narratives
7. Genre-blurring techniques (documentary/autobiography/fiction) imbued with an ahistorical façade.
8. Keeping a critical distance within his frames. In order not to sensationalize, he tells the story from an angle that is never too far and never too close.
9. Generally political

*"This is the Palestinian wedding:  
Never will lover reach lover  
Except as martyr or fugitive!"*

By Mahmoud Darwish  
From: Blessed Be That Which Has  
Not Come



Artist: Emile Menhem  
Year: Circa 1982  
Publisher: PLO Unified  
Information



*Wedding in Galilee (1987)  
By Michel Khleifi  
عرس الجليل*

*Wedding in Galilee: Reshaping PLO's Artistic Identity*

The presentation will explore the symbolism in *Wedding in Galilee* much of which is rooted in PLO films, showing how by giving PLO political slogans a narrative context, Khleifi succeeds in giving them a deeper meaning.

## Michel Khleifi:

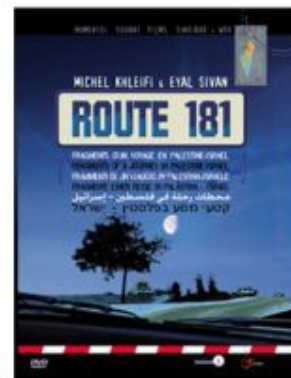
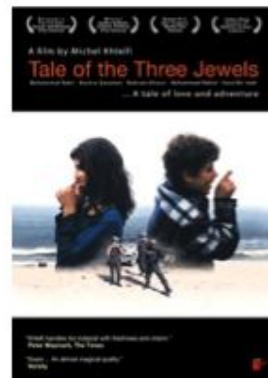
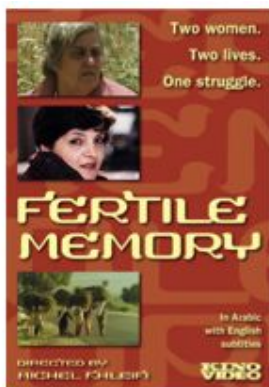
- Born in 1950 in Nazareth, is a Palestinian film writer, director and producer, presently based in Belgium. He grew up in the 50s and 60s in Nazareth, a place which he describes as a "ghetto" at the heart of the Galilee under Israeli rule.
- Emigrated to Belgium in 1970, where he studied television and theatre directing at the Institut National Supérieur des Arts du Spectacle (INSAS).
- He worked in Belgium television before turning to making his own films.
- He has directed and produced several documentary and feature films.
- He has received several awards, including the International Critics' Prize at the Cannes Film Festival, the Golden Shell at San Sebastián International Film Festival and the André Cavens Award in 1987 for his film *Wedding in Galilee*.
- Khleifi currently teaches at INSAS.





## Michel Khleifi's Filmography:

- Fertile Memory (1980)
- Ma'loul Celebrates its Destruction (1985)
- Wedding in Galilee (also known as Arabic عرس الجليل transliteration Urs al-Jalil) (1987)
- Canticle of the Stones (1990)
- L'Ordre du Jour (1993)
- The Tale of the Three Lost Jewels (1995)
- Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel (2003), in collaboration with Eyal Sivan
- Zindeeq (2009)



*Wedding in Galilee* (عرس الجليل) (1987) takes place in Galilee, a village with Palestinian inhabitants within the 1948 borders, under Israeli military occupation.

Abu Adel, the village's mukhtar (mayor), requests permission from the Israeli occupation to hold the wedding of his son past the curfew hours. The military governor agrees on the condition that he and his colleagues be invited to the wedding as guests. Being so keen on marrying his son after a prolonged period of waiting due to the political situation, Abu Adel agrees.

However, his decision is faced with much opposition by the villagers, saying it robs them of their dignity (كرامة).



# Historical Context

- 1948: Two major events took place:
  1. The creation of the state of Israel
  2. Palestinian Nakba (Catastrophe)
- 1967 Palestinian Exodus: The Israeli military occupation of the rest of Palestine (including eastern Jerusalem).
- 1970s: Palestinian cinema was the political expression of the PLO. These films directly focused on the events experienced by the Palestinian populations in Jordan until 1970 and in Lebanon thereafter.
- Towards the end of the Civil War in Lebanon (1975-1990), this cinema slowly died away without having ever shined, because its role was taken over by television cameras, which rushed to film the Middle East.
- "As far as I was concerned, the Palestinian cause was a just one, but the way it was being fought was wrong. We had to provide the world with another way of talking about us." (Khleifi 2006: 48)

PLO films, and indeed was *The Wedding in Galilee*, were an attempt to refute Israeli claims of Palestinians' non-existence (whether in the past, present or future):

"There is no more Palestine. Finished." Moshe Dayan, Israeli Military Leader, as quoted in TIME Magazine (30 July 1973)

"There were no such thing as Palestinians. When was there an independent Palestinian people with a Palestinian state? It was either southern Syria before the First World War, and then it was a Palestine including Jordan. It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist." Golda Meir, 4<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of Israel, as quoted in Sunday Times (15 June 1969), also in The Washington Post (16 June 1969)



“PLO films — all created in exile — document the continued Palestinian experience of Nakba with minimal reliance on factual narration. Rather, it is the images that speak for themselves. In Mustafa Abu Ali’s *They Do Not Exist* (which takes its name from Golda Meir’s famous quotation in which she denied that there was such a thing as a Palestinian people) women in the southern Lebanon Nabatia refugee camp go about their daily lives — sweeping the floor, kneading dough, tending to the laundry.” (Maureen Clare Murphy, 2007)

“The camera’s painstaking and affectionate scrutiny of rural collective ceremonies and rituals, of the people’s primal love of the land and its fruits, does not remain on the level of an anthropological fascination with a Middle Eastern society but rather makes a simple political point: “we are here, and we exist.”” (Shohat 1988: 45)



*Wedding in Galilee* (1987)  
Galilee (Occupied Palestine)



*They Do Not Exist* (1974)  
Nabatia Refugee Camp  
(Lebanon)

*Wedding in Galilee* (1987)  
Galilee (Occupied Palestine)



Making  
Bread

*They Do Not Exist* (1974)  
Nabatiea Refugee Camp  
(Lebanon)



Laundry



“The film turned the PLO’s militant cinema upside-down. It demonstrated that it is more important to show the thinking that leads to the political slogan rather than the expression of this slogan that is political discourse.” (Khleifi 2006: 51)



My father's pistol and some bullets.



Here are some knives.



You're crazy. Your father's pistol?  
The collaborator?



What have you brought?



- It's very sharp.  
- Of course.



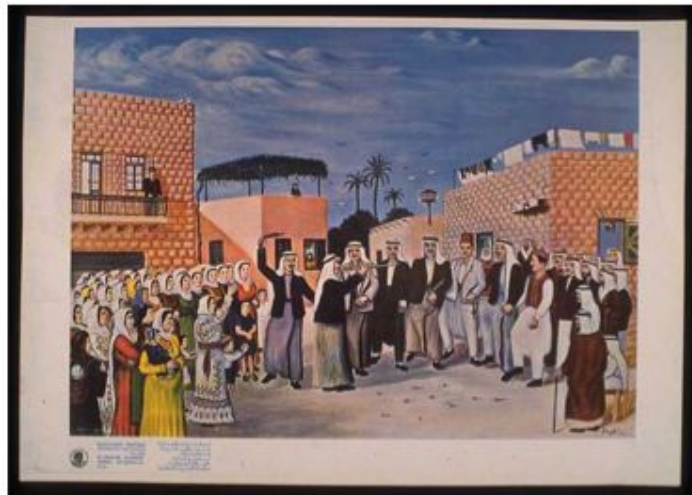
Shut up.  
How else can we do it?



You think it's a toy?



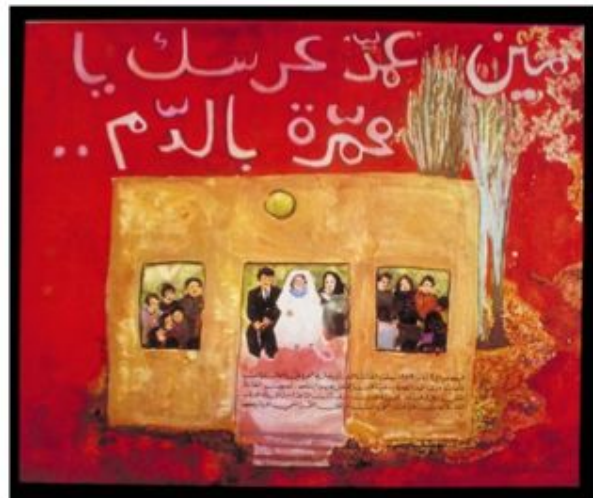
“Much influenced by currents in Palestinian intellectual life and society, Khleifi uses the trope of a village wedding ceremony to dissect a people under military occupation.” (Kennedy 2006: 40)



Title: Wedding In A Palestinian Village  
Artist: Ibrahim Ghannam  
Year: Circa 1984  
Publisher: FATAH (Palestinian National Liberation Movement)  
PLO Unified Information



Title: Palestine's Wedding  
Arabic translation: Land  
Dat. Palestine's Wedding  
Artist: Unknown  
Year: 1985  
Publisher: PLO Unified Information



Title: Who Baptized Your Wedding  
In Blood  
Arabic translation: Oh bride  
soaked in red, who baptized your  
wedding in blood  
Artist: Kameel Hawa  
Year: 1979  
Publisher: PLO Unified Information



*A horse of Arab blood*



“By focusing on a Palestinian ritual in which Israelis enforce their presence, the film subverts the Western media imagery of Palestinians intruding on Israeli routine.”

(Shohat 1988: 46)

“*Wedding in Galilee* also initiates another shift in rhetoric: now it is the Israelis who are shown to be outsiders in Palestine.” (Kennedy 2015: 58)



“Throughout the film, two conceptions of the same space are locked in struggle. On the one hand are the village dwellings, orchards, and fields that have for generations formed the setting of the Arab community's life; on the other are the military maps and outposts that regulate the community's life from without, with daily intrusions, arbitrary decrees, curfews, and the ubiquitous olive-green jeeps and their personnel.”  
(Gertz 2002: 177)





## The Symbolism of a Horse in relation to Battle of Karameh/PLO



### Al Karameh Battle - Anniversary Stamps

Artist/Designer/Photographer: Research in Progress

Year: 1969

Publisher: FATAH (Palestinian National Liberation Movement)

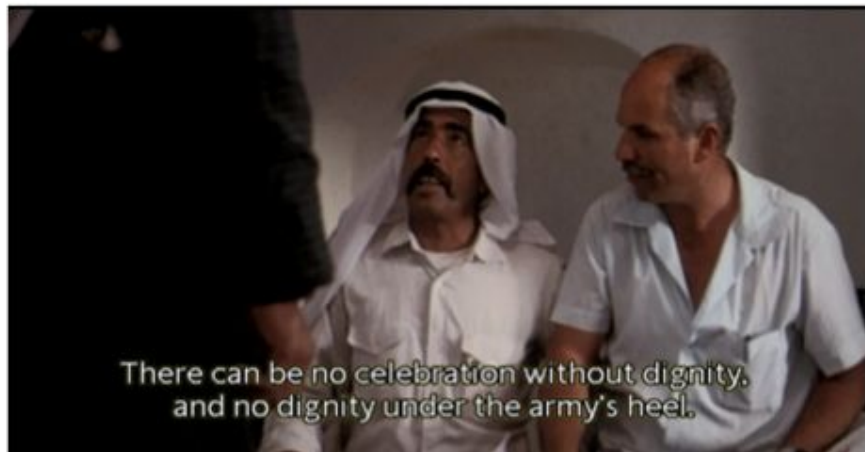


### The Battle of Al Karameh - Hallaj

Artist: Mustafa Al Hallaj

Year: 1969

Publisher: Jadaliyya Ezine







No celebration without dignity,  
and this is our dignity!



- It's an action to regain our dignity.  
- What dignity are you talking about?



What have you got in your hands?  
Drop everything!



You want to turn this wedding  
into a funeral?

• كرامة الإنسان (الفلسفة والتصوّف): مبدأ أخلاقي يُقرّر أنّ الإنسان ينبغي أن يعامل على أنّه غاية في ذاته لا وسيلة ، وكرامته من حيث هو إنسان فوق كلّ اعتبار.

Human dignity (philosophy and mysticism): A moral principle that stipulates that a human being should be treated as an end in itself, not a means, and his/her dignity as a human being is above all considerations.

“Unlike that older generation, I had to get inside of the defeat. I had to know. So I made my little attempts, through the woman question in particular, to understand Palestinian society. As we got older, of course, we blamed it all on Imperialism or Zionism or whatever, but what I realized was that there’s another element besides the balance of power, and that other element is in us: the strength of Israel comes from our weakness, but our weakness doesn’t come from their strength; it comes from the layers of contradictions and archaisms within our society. I had to make that dialectic, so I tried to put together a film that talks about it, that goes inside the power relationship to know why it’s like that.” (Michel Khleifi, 1988)



“The film tests the national masculinity and its narrative by presenting the groom’s lack of virility; he cannot consummate his marriage on the wedding night, ostensibly because his father has surrendered to the Israeli Governor. The connection between masculinity and nationhood is confirmed when the bed sheet, stained with the blood of the bride (who had ruptured her own hymen), is exhibited in front of the guests, an incident which is directly followed by the villagers’ general, though controlled rebellion against the Governor and his men, who are driven out of the village.” (Gertz and Khleifi, 2008)

## Conclusion

