THE POLITICS OF IRANIAN AND PALESTINIAN CINEMA: EXPRESSING DISSENT THROUGH CREATIVITY

RIM TOUZZELTI

Thesis submitted to the University of Ottawa
in partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the
MA in Political Science

uOttawa

© Rim Touzzelti, Ottawa, Canada, 2019

“Filmmakers of the world, unite! Shake up images (and words) to shake things up! Upset them! Disturb them!”

Abbas Kiarostami
Tehran
April 2007

Translated by Chris Darke

Acknowledgments

I would first like to take a moment and thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. Frédéric Vairel for his support, relevant suggestions, and for his encouragement since the first day I discussed the idea of this project with him. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Emily Wills and Dr. Dominique Arel as the evaluators of this thesis, and I am gratefully indebted to them for their very valuable comments on this thesis.

Last but not least, I must express my profound gratitude to my parents, as well as numerous friends, who, although unable to be physically present, have nonetheless made sure to provide me with unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout the time it took to write this thesis. I would not have been able to come this far without all of you. Thank you again.

Rim Touzzelti

Table of contents

Chapter One – Introduction

When speaking of movies, of the Septième Art, it is common to hear, from individuals with even a slight interest in the medium, about that one movie, that one story or character, that they felt has changed something in them forever, or with whom they identified strongly. A movie that either shaped their childhood, thus indirectly playing a role in making them into the adults they became, or one that they came across much later, but that changed something in them from that point on. This late October, the French Lumière Prize was attributed to the renowned actress Jane Fonda, who, when receiving the prize, declared that cinema had the power to change human beings. It is interesting that the actress also mentioned the idea of the ability of changing people, which is at the heart of the very origins of politics, where the polis in Ancient Greece was meant to achieve human fulfillment.[1] And what could fulfillment be if not a change, a change for the better that is. Going back to the original idea, such testimonies make us rethink our relationship to art in general, but to cinema in particular, since it is the interest of the present research. These accounts raise questions concerning the power that such an Art genre has on us as audiences. They make us ask whether movies, or even one movie can change us, and thus if movies in their multitude can in fact change the world.

As citizens of an increasingly centralized world, even more so in the so-called Western democratic countries, what is commonly thought of as "politics", that is the organization of public life in the form of a government and its subjected institutions, is what is thought of to hold the key of changing our countries and societies. Voting,

[1] Lane, Melissa, "Ancient Political Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL =

political leaders with their specific agendas that speak to our interests, our personal demands, etc., this is what we think can directly improve or at least change things around us. But what if movies could also do that? What if they could not only shape the world but also speak to and for us, represent our lives in their complexity and fragility, but most importantly, change us from the inside, shape us into better versions of ourselves, humans with more compassion, who take steps to meet the 'other' halfway, to understand where the 'other' is coming from so as to be in harmony with that 'other'?

This thesis is structured in three chapters. After this general introduction, this first chapter will introduce the summary and general aim of the thesis, the case studies and their justification, and the research questions and hypotheses. Chapter two sets the theoretical framework, defines the fundamental concepts, and sets the link between politics and cinema, ending with the literature review. Finally, the third chapter, which is also the practical section, presents the content analysis of the films chosen to be analyzed in this work.

Summary (general aim of the research)

From the foretaste above, the aim of this thesis can be identified as the challenging of the idea that politics alone, as conventionally referred to, are what governs the world. In other words, the goal is to argue that the cultural sphere can also be political. The idea here is to look at how under certain political contexts, cinema becomes political, so obviously so that there is a "need" to censor it. Under such a constraining environment, cinema finds itself in need of finding its own language in order to counter this censorship. This marks the beginning of the creative process.

Ultimately, this project aims at determining the way in which the stories we tell, and the specific ways in which we depict them cinematically can be political in nature and possibly make a concrete change. It is a rather bold statement that cinema is not a simple entertainment, or else a propaganda tool, but can also be appropriated by the people, as a tool for resistance and opposition, through which dissident demands can be expressed in the face of hegemonic dominant powers.

The large set of interest of this thesis is the intersection between politics and the cultural sphere in the Middle East, more specifically where politics and cinema particularly meet in two case studies in terms of "national" cinemas: the Iranian and the Palestinian cinemas. That is to say, this research will explore the ways in which a movie can become political, even a distinct political act. This question (that of the intersection of politics with the cultural sphere) is one that has been explored by academics before, many of whom have chosen to focus on the Middle East. For instance, Lina Khatib's book *Image Politics in the Middle East: the Role of the Visual in Political Struggle* (2013) is one where her main argument is that "in the Middle East, often there is no longer a distinction between the cultural and the political spheres; it is not just that popular culture and politics feed off each other – very often, popular culture is politics. The image-making act can itself be a political act."[2] This is only one of many accounts where these two broad areas can show to be closer than they might seem at first hand. Having said this, this relationship between the cultural and the political is certainly not specific to the Middle East, but the focus will be put on the region due to the case studies selected for this research.

One can see how cinema matters for politics simply by looking at the history of cinema internationally. Innumerable governments have used cinema for

[2] Khatib, Lina. *Image Politics in the Middle East: the Role of the Visual in Political Struggle*. I.B. Tauris, 2013, p. 5.

propaganda purposes in order to influence their populations and keep them under ideological control, from Nazi Germany to Mussolini's Italy to the Soviet Union, first under Lenin, and later on. But to emphasize more on this idea, one clear manifestation of the importance of cinema is translated in the way certain leaders seem to realize it early on. Two examples that come to mind would be first how in Cuba, only 83 days after the 1959 Revolution, the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry was created. A more recent example takes us to Saudi Arabia where, amid the late decompression process that the country undertook under the supervision of the heir prince, movie theaters have opened again for the first time after more than a thirty-year ban. Needless to mention the recurrent censorship of movies in the MENA region, which would not have been censored, had the different political regimes not feared the impact they might have. To give but one example, although it is of an animated movie, *Persepolis*, based on Marjane Satrapi's eponym comic novel, is a movie that is notorious for its critical depiction of the post-revolution government in Iran, which is the reason why it has been banned in the country since its release. But to come back to one of the case studies of the research at hand, suffice to mention that in his first and much anticipated speech upon his return to Iran from a long exile, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini unexpectedly spoke of cinema declaring: "We are not opposed to cinema…It's the misuse of cinema that we are opposed to, a misuse caused by the treacherous policies of our leaders."[3] That the very leader of the Iranian Revolution would mention cinema in such a historical speech is none but an umpteenth reminder that cinema is so closely tied to the revolution and to the political life in Iran.

[3] Atwood, Blake. *Reform Cinema in Iran: Film and Political Change in the Islamic Republic*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, p. 2.

Another way in which cinema matters for politics is the way in which certain directors themselves acknowledge the interaction these two spheres have. Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf has once said "A film's life is longer than a government's life…I have gone from politics to cinema to tell people many things."[4] Here, what one can understand is that movies can in fact be even stronger than hardline politics for conveying messages and speaking to the people.

Given the unconventional use of the concept of politics or the political for this thesis, a proper definition would need to be provided. Indeed, I am interested in ways in which "politics" or "the political" extends beyond the conventional sense it ordinarily has in society, that of the organization of the public life through specific institutions. To give a formal definition, though a very broad one, of what is conventionally meant for "politics", Adrian Leftwich's *What is Politics? The Activity and Its Study* can be insightful. In this book, the author defines politics as "all the activities of co-operation, negotiation and conflict, within and between societies, whereby people go about organizing the use, production or distribution of human natural or other resources in the course of the production and reproduction of their biological and social life."[5] In a simpler but also narrower fashion than in the definition above, politics "as conventionally understood" is meant to refer to the nation-state analytic paradigm which couples the state's coercive power, that is the military, police, judiciary, bureaucracy etc. as well as its control over the territory to control of the economy.[6] But since I am looking at movies, that is, a form of art being a political tool, and more so one for dissidence and resistance, I will need to have a

[4] Makhmalbaf, Mohsen. "Filmmaking in Iran today". In *Mohsen Makhmalbaf: From Discourse to Dialogue*, ed. Fernando González García, 223 – 229. Madrid: Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Cultura, 2008, pp. 226 – 227.
[5] Leftwich, Adrian (ed.), *What is Politics? The Activity and Its Study*. Cambridge: Polity, 2004. Print, p. 103.
[6] Stein, Rebecca L., and Ted Swedenburg. *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. Print. p. 6.

definition that can extend to this sphere. One possible source I can use is the innovative definition which Jacques Rancière gives of politics, in which, as will be seen in more detail later in the research, he conceives of politics as the challenging of the order of the sensible, which gives to each a role or "part". But having introduced the general goal of the present research, it remains important to note that its aim is not to put politics and art, and more specifically cinema, in one and the same basket. The idea, instead, is, like Edward Said argued, in specifying the nature of the link between the aesthetic realm and the political, while being mindful of how this connection is different for every work.[7]

Case studies & justification

When it comes to the relevance of the cases I have chosen to work on, on the one hand, Iranian cinema is interesting to look at be it at least because of the international prominence it has, but also because it can be so political in certain cases that movies are commonly censored by the Iranian regime inside the country. On the other hand, when it comes to Palestinian cinema, its role is at the very heart of what cinema and image are about: making something visible. This idea of the visible is so central to the Palestinian question, and it cannot be put in a better way than Edward Said phrased it: "the whole history of the Palestinian struggle has to do with the desire to be visible."[8] At the very heart of the Palestinian question is to discredit the famous saying conventionally associated with the creation of the state of Israel "A land without a people for a people without a land", and to say that the land in question

[7] Said, Edward. « Cultural Politics », al-Ahram Weekly, 4 – 10 May. Online ; available at http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/Archive/2000/480/cu2.htm. 2000.
[8] Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*. Verso Books, 2007. Print. p. 2.

actually did have people before the *Nakba* (which translates into "the Catastrophe", and refers to the events of 1948).

For the justification of why these two "national" cinemas together, it is first the singular interest that they each raise that made them interesting to choose, but putting them together in a work will lead to seeing how cinema can be approached in so many ways as a medium to express dissident demands, but also, how, ultimately, these diverse and different ways can ultimately be comparable in their very essence.

Concerning the empirical cases, for the purpose of this thesis, there are two kinds of case selections. First of all there is the selection of two national cinemas, that is, Iranian and Palestinian cinema, as has been mentioned, which will be justified below, and then the specific movies selected for analysis. Beginning with the choice of Iranian and Palestinian cinemas, this part will deal with what is particular about them and what makes them interesting to analyze. Starting with Iranian cinema, it is first of all known that Iranian cinema stands out internationally in comparison to any other national cinemas in the Middle East. Iranian movies get a lot of screenings and nominations abroad, especially at (famous) international festivals, and yet face a lot of constraints to be produced and/or distributed at the national level. But the situation is not all black or white, as it is noteworthy to mention that Iranian cinema has moved from commercial cinema to quality production films post-revolution thanks to public funding by the clerical regime, resulting in the acclaimed cinema the country is known for today.[9] This shows that the affairs of cinema in the country are slightly more complicated than one might think, thus making them more interesting to explore and analyze. But more broadly even, on a symbolic level, images have a great importance in the country. One particularity about Iran is that representations of

[9] Gugler, Josef. *Film in the Middle East and North Africa: Creative Dissidence*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011. Print, p. 6.

people, in the sense of drawings or paintings, are not only allowed but in fact very common everywhere, something that is opposed to the position of Islam when it comes to painting or drawing people, a practice that is strictly forbidden. And the representations are very openly political since posters of the supreme leaders can be found everywhere in Iranian cities, but it is also common for candidates to presidential elections to use visual representations of the sort in their political campaigns. Having said this, it is also important to point that since the Revolution of 1979, the country has undergone such radical changes that people have had increasing contests to make to a government that is widely authoritarian.

Iranian cinema is so intertwined with politics that Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad mentions three cases, in 1979, 1991 and 1998 where three different ministers of culture, namely Mo'adikhah, Khatami and Mohajerani were strongly attacked over their handling of cinema, leading even Mo'adikhah to resign and Mohajerani to be impeached.[10] If anything, this shows the gravity of cinema on Iranian politics. Eric Egan also expands on the political aspect of Iranian films by bringing up the fact that historically, there has been an absence of civil society in Iran, which has led artists to become the critical conscience of society, and the ones to give voice to those unable to speak; as such, cinema has become both an engaged mode of expression as well as an instrument of social change.[11]

In the Palestinian case, the film industry is interesting to study because the demands of these people are even more fundamental: it is the demand of the right to exist, to organize the people in the form of a state so that they can enjoy the right to citizenship which figures in international law.

---

[10] Zeydabadi-Nejad, Saeed. *The Politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic*. Routledge, 2011. Print, p. 1.

[11] Egan, Eric. "Regime Critics Confront Censorship in Iranian Cinema." in Gugler, Josef. *Film in the Middle East and North Africa: Creative Dissidence*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011. Print, p. 58.

Palestinian directors, in their resorting to cinema do so with the intention to be visible, as they are made invisible in the sense that they are denied such a basic right as that of statehood. The fact that they turn to image, what is only conveyed through vision, makes their images, and therefore their cinema, so essentially political that it deserves to be analyzed under such a lens. Thus, Palestinian cinema, as has been said above, cannot be detached from the quest of Palestinians for a home state from which they either had to flee or in which they live but as second-class citizens. This idea is indeed confirmed by Hamid Dabashi who argues that the defining moment of Palestinian cinema is the central trauma of Palestine, that is the *Nabka*, the events of 1948, around which Palestinian filmmakers have articulated their aesthetic vision.[12] This further underlines the political nature of Palestinian cinema.

One can argue that one element that is specific to Palestinian cinema is that it is not so much directed at its people per se than it is directed at the international community in order to influence it into supporting the struggle of Palestinian people.[13] The theme of censorship, which is central in this work, is also particular in the Palestinian case because Palestinian directors run the risk of being censored by different parties, sometimes all at one, in opposition to Iranian directors who "only" have to confront their government. One more interesting element that will be dealt with in more detail in the third chapter, but which can be mentioned here already, is the fact that most of the Palestinian directors whose movies will be analyzed in this work are in fact Israeli citizens because they were born post-1948 to Palestinian families who remained in their homes after the Israeli state was created. This element adds a new dimension to the analysis and certainly a tension as well.

[12] Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*. Verso Books, 2007. Print, p. 11.
[13] Gugler, Josef. *Film in the Middle East and North Africa: Creative Dissidence*, p. 16.

This being said, both Iranian and Palestinian cinemas are inseparable from the question of politics. Indeed, once Iranian cinema diverged from commercial films (also known as *Film Farsi*, which translates to Persian Films) to socially and politically engaged movies, these have been utterly connected to the context in which they were made, that of tumultuous changes taking place in the country.

Also, both Iranian and Palestinian cinemas can be considered to belong to the category of Third Cinema as theorized by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino. Third Cinema theory was meant for political filmmaking which is in nature critical of neo-colonialism and which adopts a perspective that is counter-hegemonic as well as nationalist.[14] It would be relevant to distinguish between "national cinema", which I call both Iranian and Palestinian cinemas in the analysis, and "nationalist cinema". A national cinema, in the sense that it is used in this work, refers to a cinema, or a film industry, that is specific to a country, meaning that it contains a geographical dimension, and thus its production is limited to the area in question. It is a cinema that relates to a nation, which is, in the understanding of Michael Walsh, refers to "a conceptual or mental territory, and to the internalization of a set of cultural meanings."[15] This means that the films selected in the Iranian case study certainly belong to a national cinema, but this also explains why "national" is used between quotation marks throughout this work when speaking about Palestinian cinema. It is certainly not national in the sense that it is produced in one specific country, as this cannot be the case given that there is no Palestinian state; however, it is national in that it is Palestinian, and what constitutes a Palestinian film will be defined in the last subsection of the second chapter.

[14] Zeydabadi-Nejad, Saeed. *The Politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic* p. 14.
[15] Walsh, Michael. "National Cinema, National Imaginary." Film History, Vol. 8, No. 1, Cinema and Nation (Spring, 1996), pp. 5-17. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3815213. Web. p. 5.

Nationalist cinema, on the other hand, would refer to a cinema that responds to a specific national narrative, which is also the official narrative of the state. Michael Walsh understands nationalism as the view that one belongs to a "common group" whose members are linked by the same "cultural and historical experiences and traits".[16] In this sense, the Iranian movies selected do not fall under a nationalist umbrella as they do not put forth the Persian/Shia Muslim identity as the only identity of Iran, instead, most of them portray the country in its diversity, while also criticizing how the state deals with minorities. In the Palestinian case, however, movies are so obviously nationalist in nature since their purpose is to first make Palestinian people and their struggles visible, and second express the fight for national liberation by depicting the harsh reality of stateless people living in occupied territories or as second-class citizens within a sovereign state. They also use land, folklore and the Palestinian flag among other symbols rather generously. This being said, filmmakers such as Michel Khleifi or Elia Suleiman, as will be seen in more detail later in the analysis, seek to portray diversity in the experience of occupation, and so diverge from the idea of showing Palestinians as a homogenous nation for all of whom one unified narrative works out. In this sense, Palestinian films can be considered nationalist but a nuance has to be made about that.

Research questions & hypotheses

The research question or rather questions that this thesis intends to answer are: how does one get creative under constraint? What is specific to this kind of creativity,

[16] Walsh, Michael. "National Cinema, National Imaginary." Film History, Vol. 8, No. 1, Cinema and Nation (Spring, 1996), pp. 5-17. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3815213. Web. p. 5.

but overall to this kind of "doing politics"? Ultimately what are politics, or to where does "the political" extend? What is cinema (in philosophical and ideational terms)? And where do they both meet? And related to the specific case studies (Iranian and Palestinian cinema), another question is relevant to answer, that is: how does the nature of the people's dissident demands result in different ways of doing politics through cinema?

A few hypotheses can be provided for the time being as potential answers to these questions. First of all, when it comes to how one gets creative under constraint, the analysis of the movies shows that directors use story-telling as well as symbols of implicit nature in most cases to make political claims and send messages expressing their frustration in the face of domination (be it a governmental or a foreign one).

When it comes to answering the question of what is cinema in ideational and philosophical terms, this part will be answered using the works of Gilles Deleuze who is considered to be the only philosopher to ever think cinema philosophically. This in turn will allow to approach cinema in a more complex way than a means of entertainment, a propaganda tool, or an art form that is nothing else but that. In terms of what is specific to cinema that makes it a chosen means to express political statements in creative manners, one answer is that cinema is a great medium to use in creative settings because of the force that image has on the viewer. In terms of where cinema and politics meet, this question will be answered briefly through Jacques Rancière's use of the concept of "dissidence", where aesthetics can prove to be political as well. Finally, concerning the ways in which different demands in different contexts result in different ways of doing politics through cinema, a first element to take into consideration is how overtly political Palestinian cinema is in comparison to Iranian cinema which is much more implicit.

It is also worth noting that this work will keep as much as possible track of what the films directors (and the censors) relevant to this research understand by the political and how they define it, as well as their idea of dissidence, so as not to fall into a reading of their works which does not go in accordance with what they initially intended to express.

When it comes to the methodology of the thesis, the research is first of all entirely qualitative and interpretivist, since it is concerned with looking at an interpretation of movies and filmmaking in general that is political in nature in the Iranian and the Palestinian cases. The greatest part of the research and thus the principal method used will be the content analysis of a number of movies. What is meant by this method in terms of the present research is that these movies (a list of which was given above) will be visualized and analyzed in terms that will allow for answering the research questions at hand. This analysis will cover both technical aspects of movies, their storylines as well as the ways in which they are told, in order to apply a political reading to them, as relevant.

The sources from which data will be drawn vary from books and articles (secondary sources) concerned with studying cinema in relations to politics as a form of soft power, and more specifically sources devoted to Iranian and Palestinian cinemas. On the other hand, as has been mentioned, much will also be drawn from specific movies that prove to be relevant to such a research. The selection of these movies depends on a number of factors such as the censorship they were subject to by the government before, during and after their production, the position of and the relationship that the filmmaker has with the government, and the themes they deal with, as well as the symbolism contained in them, and which, in many cases are

instances of the expression of dissident views using the creativity which cinema can allow for.

This thesis will analyze 21 movies for each "national" cinema. The selection process depended on a number of elements. Some of the movies and/or directors I knew about beforehand and had a personal interest in, and from the beginning I was clear about how their films could function in this work. For instance, I watched Abbas Kiarostami's *Ta'm-e gilās (The Taste of Cherry,* 1997*)* and Jafar Panahi's *In film nist* (*This is not a film,* 2011) long before I began working on this thesis, so they automatically made their way into the film selection when I began thinking about it. Other movies/directors, such as Michel Khleifi on the Palestinian side or Amir Naderi on the Iranian side, I discovered in the literature; and others yet, I came across while listening to podcasts, such as Bahman Ghobadi's *Kasi az Gorbehaye Irani Khabar Nadareh* (*No One Knows About Persian Cats,* 2009*)* which I discovered in "Les Chemins de la philosophie", a daily podcast broadcasted by France Culture. There were also movies I had to leave out, some of them by directors I have selected, but I was not sure how they could be useful in the analysis: an example is Abbas Kiarostami's *Bād mā rā khāhad bord* (*The wind will carry us,* 1999); others could have been very relevant, one example being Dariush Mehrjui's *Gāv* (The Cow, 1969), which contained elements that would have been interesting to incorporate into the analysis, but which was made in 1969, at the time of the Shah, whereas this thesis, to remain concise, only focuses on post 1979 Iranian Revolution cinematic works. Finally, another film that had a lot of potential for this analysis but that I preferred not to include is *Homage by Assassination* by Elia Suleiman, because it is a short film (25 minutes), so I thought that to remain within an acceptable length it would be more relevant to focus rather on the filmmaker's feature films, especially that some of the

interesting aspects of this movie, which will be dealt with later, could also be found in the other longer films (as perhaps a sort of signature of the filmmaker). Now that the selection process has been detailed, the movies that were selected figure in the table below along with some details about them.

Iranian Cinema / **Title**	**Director**	**Year**	**Length**	**Type of film**
Davandeh (*The Runner)*	Amir Naderi	1984	94 min	Feature film
Bicyleran (*The Cyclist)*	Mohsen Makhmalbaf	1987	82 min	Feature film
Nobat e Asheghi (*A Time to Love*)	Mohsen Makhmalbaf	1990	75 min	Feature film
Nema-ye Nazdik (*Close-up)*	Abbas Kiarostami	1990	94 min	Feature film
Badkonake sefid (*The White Balloon)*	Jafar Panahi	1995	85 min	Feature film
Ta'm-e gilās (The Taste of Cherry)	Abbas Kiarostami	1997	95 min	Feature film
Banou-ye Ordibehesht (*The* May Lady)	Rakhshân Bani E'temâd	1998	88 min	Feature film
Rang-e Khodā (*The color of Paradise)*	Majid Majidi	1999	90 min	Feature film
Dāyereh (*The Circle*)	Jafar Panahi	2000	95 min	Feature film
Raghs dar ghobar (*Dancing in the Dust)*	Abolfazl Jalili	2003	95 min	Feature film
Kasi az Gorbehaye Irani Khabar Nadareh (*No One Knows About Persian Cats)*	Bahman Ghobadi	2009	106 min	Feature film
In film nist (*This Is Not A Film)*	Jafar Panahi	2011	76 min	Feature film

Palestinian Cinema / *Al Dhakira Al Khasba (Fertile Memory)*	Michel Khleifi	1980	100 min	Feature film
Urs al-Jalil (*Wedding in Galilee*)	Michel Khleifi	1987	113 min	Feature film
Sijill Ikhtifaa (*Chronicle of a Disappearance)*	Elia Suleiman	1996	88 min	Feature film
Ustura (*Legend*)	Nizar Hassan	1998	93 min	Feature film
Arba'a Aghani Li Filastin (*Four Songs for Palestine)*	Nada el-Yassir	2001	13 min	Short film
Yadon Ilaheyya (*Divine intervention)*	Elia Suleiman	2002	100 min	Feature film
Jenin, Jenin	Mohammad Bakri	2002	54 min	Feature film
Al Janna Al Ān (*Paradise Now)*	Hany Abu-Assad	2005	90 min	Feature film
The Time That Remains	Elia Suleiman	2009	109 min	Feature film

Literature Review

Now that the theoretical framework is set, some of the most central sources in the literature will be introduced in the rest of this part. It will be organized as follows: the first paragraph will mention a source that focuses on how fictional cinema can be closely tied to the documentary genre which can be very political in nature, then will be mentioned the major books and articles that have contributed to strengthening the arguments made in this research project, first dealing with Iranian cinema and then with Palestinian cinema.

In her book *Pour un nouvel art politique: de l'art contemporain au documentaire,* Dominique Baqué considers the political potential of the documentary genre as well as that of fiction movies pertaining to the neorealist genre. Indeed, Baqué considers that documentary films are today the last relay of a political art, which is increasingly fading.[17] The author mentions the case of what came to be known as *free cinema* in England during the 1950s, and which was interested in portraying the marginalized classes of society, but not so much with an end goal of inciting people towards a revolution than simply awakening their consciousness, while giving back to these classes their value, importance and dignity.[18] This last point is central to the ultimate importance of cinema as suggested in the present research, but which will be developed in more detail towards the end of the thesis.

Dominique Baqué also joins the idea that fiction and documentary are not as separate as one might originally think, an idea that has been explored above. She also tackles this link between documentary and fiction by looking at the Italian neorealist films

[17] Baqué, Dominique. *Pour Un Nouvel Art Politique: De L'art Contemporain Au Documentaire*. Paris: Flammarion, 2009. Print. p. 219.
[18] Ibid. p. 225.

which, according to her, shared the same social interests as the documentary film[19], and which is interesting since many Iranian filmmakers, and certainly many from the filmmakers selected for our purpose are said to follow in the footsteps of Italian neorealist filmmakers when it comes to how they approach their films, as will be later illustrated from many of the sources used in this research.

Now moving on to Iranian cinema, there is a considerable amount of works written on the politics of cinema, and much more on Iranian cinema given the international acclaim that this national cinema has and the interest it awakes, especially in light of the position Iran occupies on the international level at the strictly political arena. This being said, French scholar Agnès Devictor has devoted a number of works to the analysis of Iranian cinema at the political and social levels. Her book *Politique du cinéma iranien: de l'âyatollâh khomeini au président khâtami* is the most extensive piece of research she has written on the topic, and one of the prominent sources used in the present analysis. In this book, Devictor uses a political and institutional reading grid for her approach to Iranian cinema. The author opts for a traditional statist theoretical approach given the centralization of the Iranian government in the Iranian State. Thus, Devictor sheds light on the extent to which the Iranian state intervenes profoundly in the organization of the affairs of cinema. Among the most critical chapters of the book, especially for the present research, is the third chapter, which is concerned with the issue of censorship within the industry of cinema in Iran.

Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad's *The Politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic* (2011) is another valuable source in this analysis. Following how Iranian cinema has caught up with the social upheaval the country has witnessed since

[19] Baqué, Dominique. *Pour Un Nouvel Art Politique: De L'art Contemporain Au Documentaire*. Paris: Flammarion, 2009. Print. p. 219. p. 227.

the 1979 revolution, this book focuses on the mechanisms as well as the policies behind state control, especially for political films. One aspect that is very interesting about this book is that instead of treating the relationship between filmmakers and state control as a binary opposition, it demystifies this relationship instead, and one element through which this is done is by looking at the impact of the recent international acclaim of Iranian films on the politics of cinema in Iran. This book, then, does not simply look at the meaning of films, rather, it explores cinema, and Iranian cinema in this context, as a situated social as well as political practice.

Another important work for the framing of this thesis is Blake Atwood's *Reform Cinema in Iran: Film and Political Change in the Islamic Republic*, which uses an interesting theoretical framework, that of post-Third Cinema aesthetics concerned with local politics rather than organized transnationally, as well as a cinema that is state-controlled and that is thus political not only in the way it resists the control of the state, but the way Atwood sees it, in the way it can collaborate with mainstream political movements.[20] The chapter concluding this work, entitled "Iran's Cinema Museum and Political Unrest" proves to be insightful since it mentions the shocking inclusion of Panahi's *In film nist* (*This Is Not a Film*, 2011), one of the critical documentaries to be analyzed in this research. This inclusion is shocking because this documentary was made underground and smuggled out of Iran for it to be produced, yet, its poster figures among others in Tehran's Cinema Museum. This will be further discussed in the third chapter of this thesis.

Richard Tapper's *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity* is another extensive piece about Iranian cinema, especially post the 1979 revolution and its outcomes. The book mainly focuses on how Iranian cinema

[20] Atwood, Blake. *Reform Cinema in Iran: Film and Political Change in the Islamic Republic*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, pp. 10 - 11.

ascended since the revolution, and how it overcame the difficulties, logistical and financial, that it was facing in the beginning, before it became the internationally acclaimed national cinema that it is today. One of the contributors to this book happens to be Agnès Devictor who wrote a chapter entitled "Classical Tools, Original Goals: Cinema and Public Policy in the Islamic Republic of Iran (1979-97)", in which she discusses the role that the government occupied since the beginning in the cinema industry following the revolution. But one chapter that proves to be particularly interesting is Hamid Naficy's "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran: A Post-Khatami Update", which makes an important distinction between at least two waves of cinema that developed after the Iranian Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic, that is a "populist" cinema, working to affirm the Islamic values put forth by the government and portraying plots and themes that go hand in hand with its ideals, and an "art cinema", concerned with providing a critique of the social conditions under the Islamic government by engaging with its values first hand.[21] Needless to say that it is this second category of films that this work engages with in the analysis of Iranian movies, since it is interested in looking at how movies can be political in resistive dissident manners.

Hamid Dabashi, whose *Dreams of a Nation* is one of the major books used in this project as a source on Palestinian cinema happens to be an Iranian scholar who has also written about Iranian cinema, and dedicated an entire book to the oeuvre of Mohsen Makhmalbaf, also a friend of his. The foreword of this book entitled *Makhmalbaf at Large: The Making of a Rebel Filmmaker* was written by Makhmalbaf himself, who claims in the text that one of the things he came to realize was that Dabashi, by looking at his own films, was "trying to find out what happened to Iran in

[21] Naficy, Hamid. "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran: A Post-Khatami Update"in Tapper, Richard. *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*. London: Tauris, 2006. Print. p. 30.

the past two decades".[22] This passage in interesting because in a way it justifies looking at films to explain social or political phenomena, or in general terms, it justifies the interest that the present work has on cinema, and the specific approach it takes in doing so. But beside this interesting passage from Mohsen Makhmalbaf's foreword, this book also gives much insight in terms of the censorship that cinema encounters in the Islamic Republic, mostly from the experiences of Mohsen Makhmalbaf, although it mentions the cases of other filmmakers too; as well as the ingenious ways in which Iranian filmmakers work the limitations brought upon them into their creative process so that they still make the movies they envision while attempting to avoid harsh censorship and silencing.

Finally, Hamid Reza Sadr's *Iranian Cinema: a political history* offers the history of Iranian cinema from its earlier years, that is, beginning in the 1900s, till the first decade of the twenty first century, while analyzing it following a political lens. Given that this research only focuses on post-revolution cinema, the book is only interesting starting in the seventh chapter, in which it deals with the themes of post-revolution movies, the ways in which the new cinema became political in a new manner, and the place that women came to occupy in these films of a new era.

Among the numerous books that contribute to this work on the Palestinian side, one book brings insight even more particularly to the upcoming chapter, and specifically the part devoted to how creativity is used concretely in some of the movies analyzed in this work, and that is Gayatri Devi and Najat Rahman's *Humor in Middle Eastern Cinema.* Najat Rahman's chapter "Humor, Loss, and the Possibility for Politics in Recent Palestinian Cinema" is an exploration of "cinema's aesthetic

[22] Dabashi, Hamid. *Makhmalbaf at Large: The Making of a Rebel Filmmaker*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2008. p. xv.

power to represent the violence dealt by history."[23] In this chapter, Rahman looks at the radical contingency through which the three movies of her choice (Elia Suleiman's *Divine Intervention,* Hany Abu-Assad's *Paradise Now* and Rashid Mashrawi's *Laila's Birthday*) employ humor, which also allows for pointing to the way in which cinema offers an "emancipatory aesthetic" that may help overcome "deadening political realities."[24] Thus, this book allows for a reading of cinema, and its use of humor in certain cases, as a potential tool for resistance in complex political circumstances, such as in the Palestinian case.

In their introduction to *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma, and Memory*, Gertz and Khleifi speak of Palestinian films as a confrontation and parody of the Israeli narrative, arguing that in fact some of them even attempted to replace the latter, with a separate, Palestinian narrative. In other words, they attempt to deviate from what in their case is the "hegemonic history". The idea here of resistance against hegemony is thus relevant, but the hegemony this time is that of history itself, the rewriting of history by the side that has so far been the victorious one at the expense of the Palestinian people, their past, present and future. Having said this, Gertz and Khleifi's book offers an extensive history of Palestinian cinema, and is the most concise book of all the ones consulted in this research when it comes to chronicling Palestinian cinema from its beginnings to where it is at today.

In their major work *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture,* Rebecca Stein and Ted Swedenburg frame their research following Stuart Hall's theories on Cultural Studies. The authors find that focusing on analyzing cultural elements or manifestations provide a more concise chronicle of politics and power in the context they have chosen than even disciplines such as political economy or

[23] Devi, Gayatri, and Najat Rahman. *Humor in Middle Eastern Cinema*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014. Print. p. 20.
[24] Ibid. p. 32.

diplomatic history.[25] In this sense, Stein and Swedenburg justify the choice of analyzing the political potential of cultural expressions.

Hamid Dabashi's *Dreams of a Nation* is one of the most cited sources in this thesis. It is invaluable in that it not only contains analyses pertaining to Palestinian cinema and the political, social as well as aesthetic roles it plays, but also in that some of the chapters are written by Palestinian filmmakers themselves, such as the ones by Annemarie Jacir, Michel Khleifi or Nizar Hassan, and so they provide a more internal and intimate look at what Palestinian cinema strives for, the achievements it has come to make, and more importantly the challenges it has yet to overcome, or at least navigate around, given the context in which it has been evolving.

One of the most important journal articles used for the Palestinian case study is Helga Tawil-Souri's "Where is the political in cultural studies? In Palestine", which is interesting in terms of the core of the article, that is its larger aim as a piece of scholarship written about Palestinian culture, and which goes hand in hand with the larger aim of the present research as well. Tawil-Souri argues that ultimately, this type of scholarship to which her article belongs, serves to demonstrate that the political is not reduced to what takes place in "the realm of government or legal agreements", but rather that it incorporates the everyday aspects of life; that her article is also important in demonstrating how the *Nakba* is still the founding event that shapes the lives of Palestinians to this day, and ultimately, that her work contributes to putting the political back into the cultural and cultural studies more generally.[26] All of these points fall under the exact path that shapes the present work and the aim around which it is framed, making this article a valuable contribution in terms of the sources that

[25] Stein, Rebecca L., and Ted Swedenburg. *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. Print. p. 11.
[26] Tawil-Souri, Helga. "Where is the political in cultural studies? In Palestine." International Journal of Cultural Studies, 14(5), 2011, pp.467–482. DOI: 10.1177/1367877911408656. Web. p. 477.

have allowed for an argument to be made and tentatively strengthened.

Chapter Two – Theoretical framework

This part will delimit the theoretical framework within which the relationship between cinema and politics as approached in this work is conceptualized, and the analysis of movies conducted. But before diving into that, the key concepts of the present work are to be determined and closely scrutinized in order to make more sense of the specific direction that this research takes. The first part of this chapter will be concerned mainly with defining the fundamental concepts. In this part, it is first a matter of a sort of deconstruction of the concept of politics, so as to redefine it in terms that go hand in hand with how this research conceptualizes "politics" or the "political". The works of two political theorists will be important in this chapter, these being Jacques Rancière and Gilles Deleuze for being what Kennan Ferguson calls "aesthetic-political theorists"[27]. Secondly, the concept of "dissidence" will be defined and put in relation to politics, thus determining where dissidence becomes political when expressed in films. The last subsection of the first part is concerned with defining creativity, specifically cinematic creativity, to allow for the possibility of positioning dissidence in cinema, and thus the obtaining of a cinema that is political in nature.

Ultimately then, the redefining of politics is to allow for it to be set in a broader realm where it can be put in conversation with dissidence and creativity used in such a way in cinema that they make for political films. In other words, the use of creativity by an artists who dissents against the socio-political reality in which they

[27] Panagia, Davide. *Impressions of Hume: Cinematic Thinking and the Politics of Discontinuity*. Lanham: Rowman Et Littlefield Publ., 2013. Print. p. xxi.

live leads them to create political films that speak to the audience they are meant for, or to all audiences potentially, in a manner that transcends mere entertainment, but rather one that moves them, makes them think, and that gives voice to subaltern groups of the society. Following this first part will be the actual theoretical framework which is based on the works of Deleuze, Frantz Fanon, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino.

Deconstructing the political to redefine it

Defining the "political"/"politics"

Before moving into the specifics of what makes the work of Rancière so relevant to the theoretical framework of the current thesis, the core idea behind this interest can be found in the abstract to the article "Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Rancière on art/aesthetics and politics: the origins of disagreement, 1963–1985" by Derek Robbins, where the author speaks of a continuous commitment, throughout Rancière's oeuvre, to "the potential of aesthetic expression as a mode of political resistance".[28] This very idea; that aesthetic expression, cinema being one form among others of aesthetic expression, can be a medium that opens up the possibility of political resistance, that is, on the one hand, it is essentially political, and on the other it contains within it elements that permit resistance; is the thrust of the research at hand.

[28] Robbins, Derek. "Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Rancière on Art/Aesthetics and Politics: The Origins of Disagreement, 1963-1985: Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Rancière on Art/Aesthetics and Politics.", *The British Journal of Sociology* 66, n° 4 (décembre 2015): 738-58, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12148. Web. p. 738.

But in order to be able to analyze the ways in which cinema can be political, a different definition, or even a redefinition of politics is required, to distinguish it from the conventional one, which is attached to conventions ruled and incarnated by institutions. For this purpose, Jacques Rancière's definition of the concept seems relevant to this case. This is because Rancière's politics refuse to reduce the concept to the affairs of government, and by extension, reduce the people to "the population".[29] According to Rancière, the political activity is meant to shake the order, that is, the order of the police, which assigns to each a role and a space. And the political theorist to add that politics ultimately "fait voir ce qui n'avait pas lieu d'être vu, fait entendre un discours là où seul le bruit avait son lieu."[30] For him, politics is profoundly and essentially contentious. Indeed, he argues "politics is a coming together which can only occur in conflict".[31] Politics is about conflict because it divides the social order, bringing forth what Rancière calls "dissensus."[32] Dissensus, as defined by Samuel Chambers is "the disruption of the given order of domination (the police order) by a political subject that only emerges after the moment of politics", meaning that this subject only comes to existence through their political act.[33] But the idea of equality is also of utmost importance in Rancière's dissensus. The political theorist argues that equality is in fact the logic upon which his conception of politics rests, just as every hierarchy rests upon a logic of the "proper", that is the delimited realm assigned to each and everyone, which politics works to

[29] Rancière, Jacques, and Steve Corcoran. *Dissensus: On Politics And Aesthetics*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. Print. p. 5.
[30] Rancière, Jacques. *La mésentente*, Éd. Galilée, 1995. Print, p. 53.
[31] Rancière, Jacques. *On the shores of politics* / Jacques Rancière; translated by Liz Heron, Verso London ; New York, 1995. Print, p. 49.
[32] May, Todd. "Jacques Rancière and the Ethics of Equality". *SubStance*, Vol. 36, No. 2, Issue 113: The Future of Anarchism (2007), pp. 20-36. University of Wisconsin Press. Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/25195123. Web. p. 25.
[33] Chambers, Samuel A. "Jacques Rancière and the problem of pure politics." *European Journal of Political Theory* 10, no. 3 (2011): 303-26. doi:10.1177/1474885111406386. Web. p. 307.

disrupt.[34] In this sense, Rancière's politics also allow for a margin where resistance can take place, as came up in Robbins's view. This is an idea expressed in Davide Panagia who interprets Rancière's dissensus as "a polemical interruption of the forces of continuity that structure daily life", where the entities that have no count, whom Rancière refers to as "the part that has no part", impose a discontinuity by making their actions perceptible. [35]

Rancière is not only important in redefining politics but also to the research question exploring to where the political extends, because what he does, as Kennan Ferguson claims, is that he expands the category of the political.[36] In this sense, the "political" can be extended not only to much more than the conventional definition of politics allows for, but also to more than what Rancière has theorized, so long as his logic is kept intact and justified throughout.

To go back to the topic of this research, one can possibly link Rancière and his conceptualization of politics to cinema as being political by engaging with politics as being the act of making seen what was not supposed to be seen and heard as speech what was meant to remain only noise. This is precisely the essence of Rancière's definition if one is to use it in the context of a cinematic analysis. Many of the Iranian films analyzed in the present work either have been censored or had to resort to certain creative measures in order to evade it, and that is for no other reason that they have, either directly (when the end result is blatant censorship) or indirectly (when they are able to evade censorship), shown something that was not meant to be seen, or made audible what was supposed to remain ignored as simply noise.

---

[34] Rancière, Jacques, and Steve Corcoran. *Dissensus: On Politics And Aesthetics*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. Print. p. 5

[35] Panagia, Davide. *Impressions of Hume: Cinematic Thinking and the Politics of Discontinuity*. Lanham: Rowman Et Littlefield Publ., 2013. Print. p. 24.

[36] Ibid. xx.

But for the Palestinian cinema, Rancière's conception of politics is relevant on an even more fundamental way: indeed, Palestinian cinema makes seen what is not supposed to be seen and heard as speech what was meant to be noise only, that is, the existence of the Palestinian people, always defying the dispossession they have been subjected to, not only of their land but of their very self, as conducted by the Zionist narrative. Author Najat Rahman uses Rancière in her approach to Palestinian cinema, and wonders that if according to Rancière very little politics happen today (given his specific and narrow definition of politics), then could art, and she adds specifically film, be the displaced space where it happens nowadays?[37] This confirms that Jacques Rancière's politics can indeed be used as a framework to think cinema and its role in different instances, such as Iran and Palestine for instance, as chosen here.

Defining "dissidence" and putting it in relations to politics and cinema

Now that the main concept, that of "politics", or the "political" as understood in this work has been defined, the present and next sections will briefly define and introduce the concepts of dissidence and creativity, since both relate to cinema and its capacity to be political in the sense of this research.

The concept of dissidence is important to define and justify because one of the research questions explores how creativity, which cinema as an aesthetic expression allows for, can become a means to express dissident demands and views. According to academic Robert Ivie, "dissent" can refer to "an act of protest" but not only, as it

[37] Rahman, Najat. "Humor, Loss and the Possibility for Politics in Recent Palestinian Cinema" in Devi, Gayatri, and Najat Rahman. *Humor in Middle Eastern Cinema*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014. Print. p. 32.

can also be a "discourse of confrontation, and condition of alienation that is contrasted with consensus or even as a goad to a new consensus."[38] Kendall R. Phillips adds to this that dissent originates from "within the gaps and contradictions inherent in the existing formation of discourse".[39] This is to say that its starting point is the very context, or the established consensus, in which dissenters evolve and which contains a number of contradictions that they can no longer neither sustain nor evolve within, in the way that they choose for themselves, be it artistically or as individuals in general.

Thus, having defined 'dissidence', and established that its core resides in the act of challenging an established order or protesting against it in a way or another, it becomes clear where it relates to politics in the Rancierian way of conceptualizing it, that is they both represent a challenge, a calling into question of an arbitrary order that places some in a subordinate position, with no well-founded legitimacy, while placing others in a superior position.

This being said, this work uses the term "resistance" quite generously. It is evident that dissidence and resistance have different meanings, but they are also close to one another in the present work. This is because when an individual, or rather an artist for our purpose, dissents about something in their society and acts upon it, and makes a movie to express their dissent in the face of whatever it is that they disagree with, this is nothing short of resistance.

[38] Ivie, Robert L. "Enabling Democratic Dissent", *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 101:1, 46-59, 2015. DOI: 10.1080/00335630.2015.994900. Web, p. 47.
[39] Phillips, Kendall R. The Event of Dissension: Reconsidering the Possibilities of Dissent, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 101:1, 60-71, 2015. DOI: 10.1080/00335630.2015.994899. Web, p. 63.

Defining creativity as a mode of resistance

The works of art, that is, the films analyzed in this work, are not dissident in explicit shouting ways. They do not fall within a specific ideology, do not contain political slogans, and their directors do not engage in hardline politics, they are full-time artists "only". This is to say that the political, but also the dissident quality of their work resides in their creativity and the creative process that guides the making of their movies. That is why a definition of the function of creativity that would allow for portraying it as a mode of resistance, and linking it to politics so as to show how it matters for this realm, is necessary.

Writer and aesthetic theoretician Friedrich von Schiller considers that art is not foreign to our needs, and that even the solutions of political problems can be found in the aesthetic realm, considering that "it is through beauty that we arrive at freedom."[40] Another way of putting it is that this is the realm of imagining the different possibilities that the human being can attain, a life where beauty has a proper function, where emancipation can possibly become a reality. It is not necessarily a realm where these ideals are reached, but one where they are at least pursued. Creativity is thus political to its core because it allows for imagining a different future, while reflecting on the problematic present and dissenting in its face, and therefore allowing for the creative process to make a change, or at least attempt to by imagining things differently.

This idea is further confirmed in the reading of Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, where she interprets the potential that Schiller sees in the aesthetic realm, the realm

[40] Schiller, "Letters Upon The Aesthetic Education of Man". http://public-library.uk/ebooks/55/76.pdf. Web. p. 3.

where creativity has most ground to flourish. According to Schiller as reported by Hayes, it can only be through the sensitivity that the aesthetic experience awakens in one that human beings can aspire to reach a peaceful equilibrium, and thus only in the "fictional" realm of art, that we have a potential to be "truly human".[41] What one derives from this reading or use of Schiller is that the aesthetic realm, which allows for the manifestation and prospering of the creativity of the individual, holds the promise of a change through imagining reality in different, better forms, as well as that of becoming "truly human", which resonates with the idea expressed in the introduction of living in harmony with the 'other'.

Solanas and Getino, in their manifesto "Toward a Third Cinema", which will be dealt with in more detail in an upcoming section can in fact already be relevant at this point when speaking about creativity, and can in a way contribute to defining it in ways that matter for this work specifically. Indeed, for Solanas and Getino, creativity is accompanied with creation, but before that with destruction. The cinema that they argue in favor of is one of destruction and construction, which in a context of cinema rimes with creation. The two authors write in the context of neocolonialism in Latin America, and think of Third Cinema (which will be defined later in the work) as a cinema of destruction, in that it destroys the discourse that neocolonialism creates both of itself and of the neo-colonized, and a cinema of construction in that it creates a "throbbing, living reality which recaptures truth in any of its expressions."[42] Although Solanas and Getino write in the specific context of neocolonialism in Latin America, their views can easily be applied to the context of a clerical government's hegemony, especially over artistic creation as well, and to that of Israeli occupation of

[41] Hayes, Christa-Maria Lerm "Sandra Johnson: Doubt, Gesture, Love, and the Paradoxes of (Political) Art in Northern Ireland" in Johnston, Sandra. *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*. Lit, 2014. Print. p. 20.
[42] Solanas, Fernando and Octavio Getino. "Toward A Third Cinema". Cinéaste, Vol. 4, No. 3, (winter 1970-71), pp. 1-10. Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/41685716. Web. p. 6.

all forms of Palestinian life. Thus, creativity seems to be the meeting point between the political and the dissenting on the one hand, and cinema on the other.

Cinema & politics – Theoretical Part

Storytelling/Symbolism/The Power of the image

This part is mainly concerned with justifying the choice of cinema as a case for the present work. Politics can be interpreted and linked to a myriad of disciplines or arts, but why choose cinema specifically? Where or how is cinema so powerful as to be one of the choices to analyze in parallel with the realm of politics? And it is important to keep the concept of power, in mind, because it is vital to the idea of politics, as some would even argue that all of politics comes down to power and the exercise of it. The choice of cinema and the idea of linking it to politics have been brought up in different sections above, but this one will attempt to concretize this relationship even more, while using the appropriate literature.

Before moving to the concrete aspects of cinema that make it powerful, it is worth noting how the Septième Art proves to be effective in general terms. Annemarie Jacir shows the power that cinema can have in terms of the violent responses that took place in an attempt to cause the cancellation of a Palestinian Film Festival which she participated in organizing. Jacir wonders in her chapter "who opposes *film festivals?* What is so threatening about such an event?"[43] It was the use

[43] Jacir, Annemarie. "'For Cultural Purposes Only': Curating a Palestinian Film Festival" in Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*. Verso Books, 2007. Print. p. 28.

of imagery that represented the symbolic unity of all Palestinians in terms of their land in the poster for the festival (this poster showed a map of historic Palestine) that was perceived as a threat.[44] And yet, one can easily realize that even more fundamentally, it was in fact showing that a Palestinian cultural production persisted and was alive and well, at least enough for a Film Festival to be organized in its name in New York, which really threatened the extremist groups who went so far as to issue death threats to stop this film festival from happening.[45] This idea makes perfect sense in continuity with the attempts to silence, if not kill, Palestinian cultural life manifestation which Annemarie Jacir wrote about in the chapter, the most concerning of which was the list of great artists and intellectuals targeted by an Israeli campaign to eliminate them from the 1970s onwards.[46]

Perhaps the fundamental element that makes cinema so effective is the power of the image, which is the fundamental element composing cinema, a film being first and foremost a sequence of images. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze was the first to write an extensive body of work in which he thought cinema philosophically, and which is condensed in his *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image.* Before speaking of these books in themselves, it is interesting to acknowledge that Deleuze claims that "there is a fundamental affinity between the work of art and the act of resistance."[47] This is an interesting idea to base the discussion of this part on, considering that it perfectly sums up the aim of the present research, since it is mainly a matter of looking at individual films as acts of resistance on the part of their filmmakers. Going back to Deleuze's aforementioned books, the philosopher

[44] Jacir, Annemarie. "'For Cultural Purposes Only': Curating a Palestinian Film Festival" in Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*. Verso Books, 2007. Print. p. 28-29.
[45] Ibid. p. 29.
[46] Ibid. p. 25-26.
[47] Deleuze, Gilles. "Having An Idea in Cinema" in Kaufman, Eleanor, and Kevin Jon Heller. *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. Print. p. 18.

acknowledges the way in which cinema stands out in comparison to other art forms, in its quality of being automatic and immediate, in contrast to other arts which are "immobile in themselves so that it is the mind that has to make movement".[48] This makes cinema stand out with regards to other art forms and justifies the interest that the present research shows this particular medium.

There is also a certain connecting aspect to the medium. Indeed, Solanas and Getino bring up the power of films by emphasizing the role they play as a form of communication, as well as "*their particular characteristics"*, such as their ability to draw and gather audiences, and their "capacity for synthesis" as well as "the penetration of the film image". [49] The authors also bring up the idea of film/documentary arguing for all the possibilities that filming "living document and naked reality" offer, as well as the "power of enlightenment" inherent in films in a way unlike any other communication medium.[50]And more needs to be said about the power that can be attributed to documentary films. Not all of the works selected in this thesis are fiction films, as some of them are in fact documentaries, while others yet mix documentary with fiction, resulting in original and particular works. One of the authors who wrote about the potential of documentary cinema is Mike Wayne, who provided a commentary on Third Cinema (yet to be introduced in the next section), suggests that one particularity of Third Cinema is how it often mixes between documentary and fiction, which is crucial in contributing to the struggle for liberation (and this kind of struggle is relevant both in the Iranian as well as the Palestinian case studies in different degrees and ways) in the sense that it makes an

[48] Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps*. Collection Critique, 1985. Print. p. 203.
[49] Solanas, Fernando and Octavio Getino. "Toward A Third Cinema". Cinéaste, Vol. 4, No. 3, (winter 1970-71), pp. 1-10. Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/41685716. Web. p. 5.
[50] Ibid.

intervention in the viewer's very consciousness, culture as well as identity, while at the same time providing a cultural, political and military critique.[51]

Again, this idea of mixing documentary with fiction is found in another scholar's work, Haim Bresheeth, who also links the whole to story telling, one of the crucial elements discussed in this part. This being said, the strong relationship between Palestinian cinema and storytelling will be developed in the upcoming part which will analyze the relationship between cinema and politics in concrete terms in Iranian and Palestinian cinema. However, it is still relevant to mention Haim Bresheeth's passage concerning storytelling in Palestinian cinema, where he wonders how one can make a film about people and places that "do not exist" (referring to the denial of the existence of a historical Palestine, and of the Palestinian people as a result). The answer, according to Bresheeth lies in story and storytelling, where the place of home (the lost *Heimat*, as the author calls it) is taken by the narrative icons of the *Nakba*, the origin of all the suffering and destruction, and reacted by film. Film, thus, becomes the realm where what is lost is encountered again, and where the memory of those who suffered a great loss is recreated once again for everyone to see. It is in this sense that Palestinian cinema exists, according to Bresheeth, "between narrative and narration, between the story and its telling, between *documentary* and its *fiction"*.[52] That is where the power of storytelling lies, in the eyes of Haim Bresheeth: in bringing an end to personal and political trauma. To get there, "one must tell stories."[53] This idea finds a sort of confirmation in Rancière. Indeed, some interpretations of his work function in a way so as to put him in direct relation with

[51] Wayne, Mike. "The Dialectics of Third Cinema" in Tzioumakis, Yannis and Claire Molloy. *The Routledge Companion To Cinema And Politics*. London ; New York : Routledge, 2016. Print. p. 18.
[52] Bresheeth, Haim. "The Continuity of Trauma and Struggle: Recent Cinematic Representations of the Nakba", in Abu-Lughod, Lila, and Ahmad H. Sadi. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory (Cultures of History)*. Columbia University Press, 2007. Print. p. 184
[53] Ibid.

the power that cinema can have on the viewer as well as its potential for even broader, and thus more significant change. For instance, Christa-Maria Lerm brings up Rancière to remind the reader of his arguing that we are all "capable of making our own stories", which Hayes understands as a shared human ability to have as well as interpret aesthetic experiences in ways that "productively alter the distribution of the sensible i.e. have effect in the real world".[54] This is a subtle way to link storytelling, the power it has on the people, and to show that it has an inherent political side in that it alters the sensible, as Rancière refers to the world.

Symbolism is yet another element that makes cinema effective and powerful. The poetic image that cinema allows for invites the use of symbolism in the filming of movies, which work to express messages in discrete subliminal ways. But symbolism does not simply refer to what is contained in movies. The very means of making a movie can in fact become symbolic as well, such as can be derived from Solanas and Getino who claim: "The camera is the inexhaustible *expropriator of image-weapons*; the projector, *a gun that can shoot 24 frames per second.*" This quote attests to the degree to which film can be powerful according to the two essayists.

Finally, film is also important in the sense that it can invite the spectator to be part of it, and not simply remain a consumer, which is an attitude that many filmmakers, who are against any form of passivity, adopt when it comes to the relationship between the audience and the film. Many authors as well as filmmakers respond to this, considering it a need even. First, Solanas and Getino, whose Third Cinema manifesto will be analyzed in the next section can be mentioned once more in relations to their belief that the audience is part and parcel of films and of the process of making films. Olivier Assayas, a French filmmaker who happens to be an

[54] Hayes, "Sandra Johnson: Doubt, Gesture, Love, and the Paradoxes of (Political) Art in Northern Ireland" in Johnston, Sandra. *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*. Lit, 2014. Print. p. 20-21.

independent movie director also criticized the entertainment industry which makes the audiences feel like they can only sit back and consume what is being screened to them, without the possibility of the existence of a personal or political relationship, thus making them passive before the system.[55] Michel Khleifi also shares this view when he claims to "always believe in active viewers and never in passive ones."[56] Finally, in his interview with Nathalie Handal, Elia Suleiman, while commenting on the use of silence in his movies, and justifying that the use of silence "can be intimidating, sometimes provocative, sometimes a form of resistance because it dislocates", adds that he also employs silence because it allows to leave a space (perhaps of participation in addition to interpretation?) that the spectator can fill.[57]

Fanon, Culture and national liberation / Third Cinema

Before diving into the work of Fanon and how it relates to this research specifically, a few points need to be clarified. It is first important to mention that using the thought of Fanon in this work is in terms of a reading, or perhaps a critique of Fanon's work that would allow its application to the present work. Initially, Fanon writes about the conditioning of the African people under colonialism. In fact, one of his major works is entitled "Towards an African Revolution", where he deconstructs the workings of colonial domination to keep the colonized subjected, and where he

[55] Assayas, Olivier., "Making a Connection between the Cinema, Politics and Real Life: Steve Erickson Interviews Olivier Assayas", *Cinéaste* 22, n° 4 (1997): 6-9, Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/41688949. Web. p. 8.
[56] Khleifi, Michel. "From Reality to Fiction – From Poverty to Expression". In Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*. Verso Books, 2007. Print. p. 52.
[57] Suleiman, Elia. "The Other Face of Silence: Nathalie Handal Interviews Elia Suleiman." *Guernica: A Magazine of Arts and Politics*, May 1, 2011. https://www.guernicamag.com/suleiman_5_1_11/. Web.

presses for the need of a liberating African revolution. His work is set in the specific realities of the different African contexts at the time of colonization, and was meant to be the intellectual basis that would lead to the liberation of the subjected and colonized African people.

Doing a specific reading of Fanon can make his work relevant to the case studies of this research, though he proves more relevant to the Palestinian case, if first the limits of using his work are listed. The first limit is how Fanon, as has been mentioned, situates himself in the context of colonialism, whereas the Palestinian case vis-à-vis Israel is more complicated than that. It is not a classic case of colonialism where a foreign power extends to territories outside its sovereignty and occupies them with the intention of exploiting their resources and their inhabitants for its personal interests, and where, although this power changes the structures of the previous system, it does not demolish it altogether. The case here is instead one of a state being created after the event of a massive migration following an ideology (Zionism) that was not that of the majority of the people native to the land, and which, at worst turned them into stateless persons, or refugees, and "at best" into second-class citizens of a newly created state that was foreign to them. The second element is that when talking about "culture" Fanon refers to literature, dancing, singing, traditional ceremonies, without ever mentioning cinema in his analysis. This part will however apply the logic of his writings concerning the role of national culture in the context of national liberation to Palestinian cinema and its role in the Palestinian struggle for national liberation.

But before getting into linking Fanon's work to cinema, it is important to show in what way Fanon's work is first and foremost valuable in underlying the importance of the realm of culture. In his classic book of essays *The Wretched of the*

Earth, Fanon conceptualizes culture as "the last front of resistance to the colonizer", and one that is more powerful than land even when it comes to containing identity and differentiating the colonized from their colonizer.[58] This is how Fanon explains why culture is viewed as a threat by the colonizer and is among the first elements that is attempted to be destroyed, so that the colonizer's claim that before their arrival there was nothing more than "barbarism, degradation, and bestiality" can be maintained.[59]

Now moving on to the core of the present research, and beginning with Palestinian cinema, it is relevant to use the works of essayist Frantz Fanon considering the fact that Palestinian cinema is centered on the idea of national liberation. Fanon, especially in the aforementioned book *The Wretched of the Earth,* has written about culture, expressed in different forms, and its relation to national struggles and affairs in general, and to national liberation even more specifically. This can be a very insightful lens through which to analyze Palestinian cinema. In the chapter "On National Culture", Fanon argues: "A culture is first and foremost the expression of a nation, its preferences, its taboos, and its models…National culture is the sum of all these considerations, the outcome of tensions internal and external to society as a whole and its multiple layers…National liberation and the resurrection of the state are the preconditions for the very existence of a culture."[60] From there it becomes clear that analyzing Palestinian cinema as a tool among others in the struggle for national liberation would be highly insightful. That is to say, Palestinian cinema, as a cultural expression, serves to express the demands and needs of Palestinian directors, and from there, of Palestinian people, for a state. This being said, this analysis cannot agree with the affirmation that national liberation is a precondition of

[58] Fanon, Frantz, Richard Philcox, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Homi K. Bhabha. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2017. Print. p. 214.
[59] Ibid. p. 211.
[60] Ibid. p. 177.

the existence of culture, as in the Palestinian case, national liberation has not been achieved and the Palestinians are still either living under the sovereignty of the state of Israel as second-class citizens, under Israeli military occupation in the West Bank or Gaza, or as refugees scattered around the globe. But even among such a chaotic situation, one can nonetheless speak of a national culture, of cultural productions by the Palestinian people despite national liberation not being achieved. In this sense, the argument of Fanon seems to make more sense in the context of European colonization of Africa, where for there to be a true, that is a *decolonized* culture and cultural productions, national liberation from colonialism, that is decolonization is a prerequisite and has to happen at the deepest level. The Palestinian situation is not exactly a case of colonialism where the land and the people, though exploited and subjected in terms of their identity, culture, and very humanity, still exist as "X" people, and the country still exists as "X"; in the Palestinian situation, the very identity and the very existence of a pre-1948 Palestine are denied, and the "Palestinian people" reduced to inexistent, though they do in fact exist, which is why it is all the more important for them to produce a culture, and why that culture is so necessary to national liberation, even with the latter not being achieved, but why it is in fact *through* the culture, and cultural creation, such as cinema, that such national liberation can be achieved, because it not only proves that the Palestinian people exist and create, but that they are struggling through these cultural creations to give life to a Palestine lost but not forgotten or abandoned the idea of its recuperation. These words resonate with Fanon's arguing: "it is the struggle for nationhood that unlocks culture and opens the doors of creation."[61] That he speaks of creation makes this quote even more relevant for this work as creation, or creativity which is directly related to it, is

[61] Fanon, Frantz, Richard Philcox, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Homi K. Bhabha. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2017. Print. p. 177.

one of the fundamental concepts of the present thesis, and the one that in fact allows film to be political even in the face of constraint.

But Fanon can also be related to the Iranian case. Surely the case of Iran is different both from the context in which Fanon wrote (French occupation of Algeria), and from the Palestinian case where there is an instance of occupation by another actor (the state of Israel); but the idea of national liberation somewhat remains. Iran's context is that of a country that witnessed a popular mass revolution, where different ideologies and groups struggled in parallel to overthrow a regime they deemed as corrupt and nepotistic among other things, and which resulted in a conservative clerical regime taking over the country. Given the nature of the new government, art was in a way taken hostage, and too became subject to the new ideology. That is where Agnès Devictor speaks of "clean art", or rather, "'pure' cinema"[62], which is what the government encouraged, and anything that did not fit into this category, that is morally acceptable art that responded to Islamic codes, risked censorship. Hamid Naficy links this idea to how although originally Khomeini had a negative view on cinema, he later claimed that cinema could be adopted by the regime he created, however only if it was approached "properly" and "ethically".[63]

Fanon's theory has also been directly linked to and considered as a major influence on Third Cinema as a theory, be it at least by authors such as Robert Stam, Teshome Gabriel or Mike Wayne. Third Cinema was originally theorized by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, and proves relevant in analyzing Iranian and Palestinian cinema, as both "national" cinemas can be considered to belong to this theory. Third Cinema, according to Solanas and Getino, should be a means for

---

[62] Devictor, Agnès. "Classic Tools, Original Goals: Cinema and Public Policy in the Islamic Republic of Iran (1979 – 97)" in Tapper, Richard. *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*. London: Tauris, 2006, p. 67.

[63] Naficy, Hamid. "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran: A Post-Khatami Update" in Tapper, Richard. *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*. London: Tauris, 2006. Print. p. 28.

resistance. Thus, this category of cinema is meant, in the eyes of the two theorists, to fight the system, which is dominated by a certain group and subjects the rest of society to its domination. This is what explains the attempts, according to the two authors, to remove from these cultural forms (cinema being one of them) their "*politicization"*.[64] Mike Wayne confirms how Third Cineastes were at the same time writers and thinkers who forged for cinema a distinct role in the struggle for liberation.[65] But for our purpose, this liberation advocated for by the filmmakers dealt with in the present research is not achievable only through guerrilla armed struggle, but by the resistance of the filmmakers in the face of all the constraints they face, using their creative minds, in order to depict their ideas and positions on matters pertaining to their societies, and to be active members of these societies, using the medium of film. This is where a critique of Third Cinema theory can be provided. It is important to note that the authors Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino write from a socialist perspective in the context of imperialist domination and colonialism, pushed for by an aspiration for a revolution, one which would comprise all sectors, that is, not only a revolution aspiring to political power, but also one that ventures to redefine culture making it proper to the people creating it, revolutionary in essence, and not a byproduct of the outsider/imperialists; a revolution that would liberate the nation and its people from hegemonic (be it imperialist or bourgeois) dominance. This research, however, does not look at the potential of cinema in spreading ideas pertaining to certain political ideologies, unlike how Third Cinema, in its original theorization by Solanas and Getino, demands the making of revolutionary films by "vanguard artists". What is rather of interest in the concept of Third Cinema, is simply the way in which

[64] Solanas, Fernando and Octavio Getino. "Toward A Third Cinema". *Cinéaste,* Vol. 4, No. 3, (winter 1970-71), pp. 1-10. Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/41685716. Web. p. 3.
[65] Wayne, Mike. "The Dialectics of Third Cinema" in Tzioumakis, Yannis and Claire Molloy. *The Routledge Companion To Cinema And Politics*. London ; New York : Routledge, 2016. Print. p. 19

it provides cinema with a political resistance potential. It is more related to the authors' emphasis on Third Cinema having to be a cinema of "becoming".[66] It also goes back to the idea of the "documentary" aspect of these films. Third Cinema strives for films that are at once semi-documentary and semi-fiction, films that thus depict, and at the same time help shape/change the ways in which the social consciousness of developing nations evolve.[67]

Briefly going into the specifics: how closely Iranian and Palestinian cinemas are tied to politics

This part is dedicated to showing the meeting point between politics and cinema. First of all, in theoretical terms, Jacques Rancière brings once more valuable input to this question. Indeed, in his introduction as the editor of *Dissensus*, a volume containing a number of essays by Rancière, Steve Corcoran argues that Rancière considers art to have a transformative power and creative action, which can alter "the realm of the possible" in the context of oligarchic domination.[68] Corcoran further states that, for the political theorist, both art as well as politics are to be considered what he calls "forms of dissensual activity" of which the goal is to use their inherent potential for innovation in order to shake different instances of domination.[69] If art in general, and cinema, one of its most popular forms, can break forces of domination and alter reality, which includes the political realm under which one lives and within

[66] Solanas, Fernando and Octavio Getino. "Toward A Third Cinema". *Cinéaste*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (winter 1970-71), pp. 1-10. Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/41685716. Web.p. 10
[67] Gabriel, Teshome H. *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982, p. 6.
[68] Rancière, Jacques, and Steve Corcoran. *Dissensus: On Politics And Aesthetics*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. Print, p. 14.
[69] Ibid. p. 15.

which one creates, then one can fairly argue that cinema and politics can be joined and influence one another. Palestinian scholar Edward Said also made the link between politics and aesthetics in the Palestinian context in his interviews with David Barsamian, where he states: "there is no necessary contradiction between aesthetic merit and political themes. In the Arab and specifically the Palestinian case, aesthetics and politics are intertwined."[70]

Moving on to Iranian cinema, one way in which it can be linked to politics, and which has not been mentioned yet, is the way in which it responds to former Iranian president and political reformist Mohammad Khatami's call for a "dialogue among civilizations", including in the domain of cinema, where the Iranian film industry would work as a diplomat or cultural interlocutor.[71]

The remaining ways in which Iranian cinema has close ties to politics can be deducted from how involved the government is in cinematic affairs, and how it also is extremely involved when an Iranian movie is screened at an international festival, or when an Iranian film director receives a prize internationally. All of these matters will be discussed in further detail in different parts of chapter three, and so for the time being, the remainder of this part will focus more on the tight link between politics and Palestinian cinema.

In the Palestinian case, producing culture that is Palestinian is nothing short of resistance, thus, it is political by definition: this is the main argument that Helga Tawil-Souri makes in her article "Where is the political in cultural studies? In Palestine." Tawil-Souri is not the first to make such an argument. Indeed, director Omar al-Qattan claims that one of the things he has learned making movies is how

[70] Said, Edward. *Culture and Resistance : Conversations with Edward W. Said (Interviews by Barsamian D.)*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2003. Print. p. 163-4.
[71] Atwood, Blake. *Reform Cinema in Iran: Film and Political Change in the Islamic Republic*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. Print. p. 200.

organically linked are "the struggle for Palestine and the strategies deployed for making films on and in it".[72] In the same spirit, author Joseph Massad makes the claim that since the beginning, Palestinian cinema has been an integral part of Palestinian resistance.[73] Later in the chapter, the author considers this national cinema to be conducting a battle of images aimed at countering the Zionist-friendly media coverage of Israeli occupation.[74] Director Michel Khleifi, on the other hand, dreams of a cinema that is decolonized and free of any form of domination. He makes films as part of a school of thought belonging to what he calls "direct cinema" which has two objectives: liberating languages from their ruling systems, be they ideological or commercial in nature, and representing people's reality, a cinema, that is fiction, but which is indistinguishable from documentary.[75]

But this argument, though it highly affirms the logic of the present research, raises an important question in turn: if any cultural product that is Palestinian is political in essence, then the question is no longer how is Palestinian cinema political but rather what is Palestinian cinema, how does one define it? And this is an even more relevant question considering that many of the Palestinian directors, and most of those selected in the present work, are in fact Israeli citizens of Palestinian origins. It is relevant then to raise the question of what it means to be Palestinian and to then make a Palestinian movie. It is necessary to specify that the answer provided below is simply an answer that works for the direction this study in particular is meant to take, but it is certainly not up to me, a non-Palestinian, to decide what constitutes a Palestinian work versus what does not. This being said, Tawil-Souri herself brings up

[72] al-Qattan, Omar. "The Challenges of Palestinian Filmmaking (1990 – 2003)" in Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*, p. 110.
[73] Massad, Joseph. "The Weapon of Culture: Cinema in the Palestinian Liberation Struggle" in Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*, p. 31.
[74] Ibid. p. 36.
[75] Khleifi, Michel. "From Reality to Fiction – From Poverty to Expression" in Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*, p. 47.

other limits of asking this question. First of all, posing it suggests that there exists a "true" Palestinian culture (which implies as opposed to one that would not be "truly" Palestinian), and this presupposes that culture is homogeneous and static, which the author does not agree on; but this is also problematic in the Palestinian case because the Palestinian people are highly de-territorialized post-1948, and the majority of Palestinians today are actually residing outside of Palestine, with no citizenship and no permit to return to their homeland.[76] Now that these limits are posed, it still remains necessary to at least contextualize what is considered a Palestinian work, for purposes of rigor. What is considered a Palestinian film then for this work is a film that locates Palestinian memory and identity in the *Nakba* in a way or another. In other words, it is a film where the trauma of the *Nakba* is ever present, whether directly or symbolically, thus leaving the place for melancholia to settle in, as Bresheeth argues in both of his sources used in this work; where melancholia, conceptualized here as a pathology, takes the space where mourning cannot happen, as what is lost is not dead, in fact it is still there, but it is lost nevertheless. Tawil-Souri also concurs with this as she also argues in her aforementioned article that Palestinian cultural productions all respond to the determining event of the *Nakba*. The framing of the Palestinian trauma in melancholia by Bresheeth following a Freudian classification will be discussed more in detail later in the work, but it was important to mention it here in order to clarify what would be considered a Palestinian cinematic work, since, following Tawil-Souri's article, it becomes clear that at least attempting to define it is in fact necessary. Finally, Hamid Dabashi also provides with a rather original definition of what makes a Palestinian work of art, and in fact specifically Palestinian cinema, and that is "the mutation of a [subdued/repressed

[76] Tawil-Souri, Helga. "Where is the political in cultural studies? In Palestine." International Journal of Cultural Studies, 14(5), 2011, pp.467–482. DOI: 10.1177/1367877911408656. Web. p. 472.

anger] into an aestheticized violence – the aesthetic presence of apolitical absence. The Palestinians' is an aesthetic under duress."[77] This way of defining it is also relevant to our purpose, and in fact in a way goes hand in hand with thinking of Palestinian cinema as responding to the decisive moment (although it is a historical moment that has constantly continued to be part of the present) of the *Nakba*, which represents among other things a repressed anger and violence permanently shaping the lives of millions of Palestinians.

Having discussed this, one more interesting aspect about Palestinian cinema is how it derives a lot of its political potential from the way in which it seems to blur the boundaries between documentary and fiction, especially using narration and story telling in the films. Gertz and Khleifi claim that Palestinian cinema exists in what they have termed a "Third space", which Haim Bresheeth explores into more detail, locating this Third space in Palestinian cinema existing "on a series of exilic interstices - between fact and fiction, between narrative and narration, between the story and its telling, between documentary and fiction."[78] Later on, in his contribution to Abu Lughod and Sa'di's collaboration, Haim Bresheeth once more gives further insight on the link between Palestinian cinema, the *Nakba* and storytelling which unite between all the movies while at the same time causing them to operate within the boundaries of documentary cinema.[79]

This focus on the story is justified because, as Bresheeth once more points to, the whole idea is that the power exercised on the Palestinian people did not limit itself to the land, but rather extended to the story, as well as "meta-narrative of *truth* and

[77] Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema.* Verso Books, 2007. Print. p. 11.
[78] Bresheeth, Haim. "A Symphony of Absence: Borders and Liminality in Elia Suleiman's 'Chronicle of a Disappearance'". *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, Vol. 43, No. 2, Middle-Eastern Media Arts (Fall 2002), pp. 71-84. Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/41552334. Web.
[79] Bresheeth, Haim. "The Continuity of Trauma and Struggle: Recent Cinematic Representations of the Nakba", in Abu-Lughod, Lila, and Ahmad H. Sadi. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory (Cultures of History)*. Columbia University Press, 2007. Print. p. 163.

memory."[80] This is why the storytelling in Palestinian films, where the existence and the struggle of Palestinian people is rendered visible, is powerful: because they counter a parallel narrative that denies their existence, that speaks of the rebirth of a people, in fact built on the ruins and death of another, but with the latter part of the narrative being erased and silenced.

There is also the power of story telling, and the way in which it is approached in certain movies. Storytelling is powerful because it can convey experiences of trauma, such as what the *Nakba* represents for the Palestinian people. One of the most interesting examples for this purpose is Nizar Hassan's *Ustura* (which can be translated into fable or story). In this movie, storytelling proves to be powerful when taking the form of a myth/legend and turning it into a way of resistance. In an interview that Hassan gave, which shows also how his movie works into a sort of blurring of the boundaries between fiction and documentary, the filmmaker made the following statement:

> "Reality turned into a catch, and this catch is our fate….I had only one choice left: grasp my fate and construct an order for myself. This I could do only through a mythical story. One cannot undermine a mythical story, a legend. It cannot be challenged, and I don't want anybody challenging my existence."[81]

In his analysis of *Ustura,* Haim Bresheeth considers that the story told in this film is in fact the "anchor for identity – personal and national" because the story of one single family in this case overlaps with that of an entire nation, since no Palestinian family avoided separation and destruction amid the creation of the state of Israel; and thus, narrative, as well as myth turn out to be the "organizers of reality and of the

[80] Bresheeth, Haim. "The Continuity of Trauma and Struggle: Recent Cinematic Representations of the Nakba", in Abu-Lughod, Lila, and Ahmad H. Sadi. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory (Cultures of History)*. Columbia University Press, 2007. Print. p. 165.
[81] Ben Zvi, Tal. "Aval ani ve-rak ani asaper et ha-sipur sheli" [But I and only I can tell my story]. Plastika, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 75-81. p. 80.

past", echoing with what John Grierson, as quoted in Bresheeth, terms "the creative treatment of actuality".[82] This is one more account of the extent to which the narration contained in films plays an important role in the reality, which justifies the blurring of reality and fiction, and which also shows, especially with the insight derived from Grierson, how it matters in the treatment of reality, but also in a creative way, which goes back to one of the fundamental concepts of this research, that is creativity and its close ties to cinema. Moreover, and always in relation to Bresheeth's contribution to the analysis of *Ustura*, the success of Hassan in relating the story of this family, according to Bresheeth lies in the fact that he engages the social actors of his story intimately, in a way that documentary theorists Anderson and Benson deem direct/observational cinema should be "organized", with enough ethical integrity in the sense of benefitting from the informed consent of the subjects contained in it.[83]

Finally, one more thing that distinguishes these films is the way in which they contribute to "fact-checking" reality. Some of the Palestinian movies, and certainly Nizar Hassan's *Ustura,* which is analyzed in this work, are originally based in the village of Saffuriya, a small Palestinian town that was razed by the Israelis following 1948, and that was left partially in ruins, but with a park grown in the middle of it. Bresheeth comments on the symbolism behind this park: "The story of Palestinian ruin and expulsion is turned into a positive narrative of Zionist rebirth, with the European fig tree as its potent symbol."[84] This goes in parallel with the denial of the injustice that the Palestinians faced, but it can also be used in making a parallel with the Iranian case study. This forced positive turning of history has also occurred in Iran where the Islamic republic has forged a narrative for itself as the model that saved

[82] Bresheeth, Haim. "The Continuity of Trauma and Struggle: Recent Cinematic Representations of the Nakba", in Abu-Lughod, Lila, and Ahmad H. Sadi. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory (Cultures of History)*. Columbia University Press, 2007. Print. p. 174.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid. p. 164.

Iran from the corruption and deviance it had been in under the regime of the Shah, thus purifying the country and putting it back on the "righteous path". But what the movies show, on the other hand, is the darker side of this republic where censorship is common practice, women's potential (both in what the movies depict, but also in their very making) is limited because of whatever inferior status a certain interpretation of religion gives them, and a sort of fatalism where it is easier to justify injustice with the "will of Allah" than actually fight it.

Chapter Three: Cinema & politics – Practical section – Content analysis of films

Creativity vs. Constraint

Institutions (that Iranian and Palestinian directors need to navigate around to have their movies pass)

Given the sense in which politics, or the political, is used in the present work, it surely does extend to cinema both in the Iranian and the Palestinian cases. This section will move to the concrete cases chosen for this thesis in order to illustrate this idea. Beginning with Iran, this can be shown simply by looking at the extent to which the government is involved in cinema, thus making the film industry part of the political life of the Iranian state. The first state-backed institution was the Farabi Cinema Foundation, created in 1983 with the goal of reorganizing the film industry and ensuring tasks such as providing equipment and supporting projects.[85] However, the main institution responsible for cinematic affairs is the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG). The MCIG, which contains many offices that deal with the affairs of cinema, is extremely involved in the process of filmmaking. This process begins with directors having to submit the full scenario of the movie they intend to make to the MCIG, then a detailed budget project, all of the costumes that will be worn by the actors, the names of the latter, and once permission is given with the necessary changes that the MCIG judges need to be made, if any, only then can production begin.[86] This being said, even after permission is granted for script,

[85] Devictor, Agnès. "Classic Tools, Original Goals: Cinema and Public Policy in the Islamic Republic of Iran (1979 – 97)" in Tapper, Richard. *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*. London: Tauris, 2006, p. 68.
[86] Devictor, Agnès. *Politique du cinéma iranien: de l'âyatollâh Khomeini au président Khâtami,* p. 92.

filmmakers have no guarantee that it will continue to be valid.[87] And even on the set of filming, there is always at least one member of the MCIG or of the Ministry of Intelligence to make sure that the shooting respects Islamic law.[88] The state is also the sole actor responsible of censorship in the country.[89] Naficy adds to this that the Ministry also reviews the completed film and issues an exhibition permit, which determines in which specific cinemas the approved movie is to be screened.[90] This strict regulation lasted from the establishment of the post-revolutionary government to mid-1989.[91] That the state would dedicate as many resources to the filmmaking process and to the film industry in general gives Iranian cinema systematically a political nature.

In the Iranian case, however, a nuance has to be made. Although the institutions that Iranian filmmakers have to navigate around are among the biggest constraints that these artists have to face, the relationship between filmmakers and government is not at all that black and white. Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad equates Third Cinema (as theorized by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino) with the characteristic of being "anti-hegemonic", which he understands as that which cannot be co-opted by the hegemonic forces, rather, it is meant to specifically fight these.[92] Iranian cinema has already been framed within Third Cinema theory above. However, this claim by Zeydabadi-Nejad, though it has been implemented to Iranian cinema, cannot be done so entirely because the case of Iranian cinema appears to be slightly

[87] Dabashi, Hamid. *Makhmalbaf at Large: The Making of a Rebel Filmmaker*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2008. p. 14.
[88] Devictor, Agnès. *Politique du cinéma Iranien: de l'âyatollâh Khomeini au président Khâtami*. p. 93.
[89] Devictor, Agnès. "Classic Tools, Original Goals: Cinema and Public Policy in the Islamic Republic of Iran (1979 – 97)" in in Tapper, Richard. *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity,* p. 68.
[90] Naficy, Hamid. "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran: A Post-Khatami Update" in Tapper, Richard. *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*. London: Tauris, 2006. Print. p. 39
[91] Ibid.
[92] Zeydabadi-Nejad, Saeed. *The Politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic*. Routledge, 2011, p. 14.

more complex than that. Indeed, even though some Iranian directors make movies that go against the consented discourse of the state, and rather express dissidence in creative ways (in order for their movies to pass censorship), they simply cannot make films and have them produced in Iran without cooperating with the state since the latter has to be involved in the process of filmmaking. Thus, Iranian movies can be anti-hegemonic and fight the dominant system, and yet they have to go through this very system in order to have their films reach the public, which is the very reason why they resort to creativity and cannot be overtly political and anti-regime. That is not to say that creativity and political opposition are two opposites, as one can very easily make a work that is both creative artistically speaking and overtly anti-regime/government, but in the Iranian case, creativity has to take over in order for cinematic works not to be censored and for them to reach the public they are meant for. Alla Gadassik provides with a concrete example to this idea with the case of filmmaker Amir Naderi. Gadassik reminds the reader of how the mixture of local knowledge as well as cinematographic expertise allowed for Naderi to earn both recognition and funding at the national level.[93] Yet, Amir Naderi chose to exile himself to the US at some point of his filmmaking career, which came at a price despite the freedom of artistic expression which he gained by leaving Iran: Naderi no longer had any institutional nor economic support comparable to the one he had back in Iran.[94]

In the Palestinian case, it can be even more complicated to get a movie to be produced due to the political context in which Palestinian artists find themselves navigating within. Authors Stein and Swedenburg make a parallel between the

[93] Gadassik, Alla. "A National Filmmaker without a Home: Home and Displacement in the Films of Amir Naderi", Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, 31 no. 2 (2011): 474-86, https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-1264361. Web. p. 479.
[94] Ibid. p. 479

absence of a sovereign state and the absence of (cultural) institutions, which are necessary for any artistic work to be produced at a national level. There is in fact no Palestinian cinema, nor a Palestinian film industry; rather there are simply Palestinian filmmakers, whose movies more often than not fall into the category of "accented" cinema of "exilic and diasporic filmmaking", as Hamid Naficy calls them.[95] The authors argue that this is what explains why there are far less Palestinian movies than Israeli ones in the market, and why the ones that do get produced originate from many different locations.[96] Stein and Swedenburg point to the fact that there is no place where Palestinian films "accumulate into an aggregate body of work, about which genres and periodizations are asserted or debated by film critics", which makes it impossible to map Palestinian cinema along the political-historical timelines such as in other national cinemas.[97] Michel Khleifi echoes this same huge limitation. The filmmaker speaks of the difficulty of conversation between as well as access to Palestinian works and artists. Khleifi recounts how, in the making of his *Canticle of the Stones,* he had needed a film called *Local* made by three filmmakers based in Ramallah. Getting the tape was the first difficulty, but Khleifi goes farther to speak of the challenge of even locating Palestinian films and filmmakers, since there is no central location, be it an archive or institution, where one can access information on them.[98] Rather, Palestinian filmmakers are pretty much scattered around Palestine and the rest of the world, and depend on their specific environments, wherever they live, to fund and produce their movies. But Haim Bresheeth also reminds us of the

[95] Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. Print. pp. 10-11.
[96] Bardenstein, Carol. "Cross/Cast: Passing in Israeli and Palestinian Cinema" in Stein, Rebecca L., and Ted Swedenburg. Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. Print. p. 106.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Khleifi, Michel. "From Reality to Fiction – From Poverty to Expression". In Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*. Verso Books, 2007. Print. p. 54.

previous inability for Palestinians to produce films independently until about the event of the first *Intifada.* Indeed, it is only due to some important technical innovations post the Oslo process, that Palestinians became able to produce more quality films.[99] That being said, the sensitivity of the Palestinian question vis-à-vis the state of Israel creates certain tensions and makes the latter over critical of certain portrayals of Israel and its treatment of the Palestinians. Elia Suleiman's *The Time That Remains* (2009) is a more autobiographical work beginning with how Suleiman's father experienced the fall of Nazareth to the Israelis, his struggle to resist nonetheless, the childhood of Elia growing up with a sense of alienation, and his visit, years later, in fact at the time of making the film, and how he still feels like a stranger in his own home. In his same old fashion, in the *Time That Remains* (2009), Suleiman represents Israeli occupation with the same critical eye and the same humor of the absurd, which led to an attempt from a member of the Knesset to declare him an enemy of the state.[100] In the same way, Mohammad Bakri has faced even more adversity for his documentary *Jenin, Jenin* (2002)*,* filmed at the Jenin refugee camp following the war crimes that were perpetuated against its inhabitants by the Israeli Defense Forces in 2002. Bakri was sued twice, first by five soldiers who participated in "Operation Defensive Shield" which resulted in the battle, but whose lawsuit was rejected by the court, and a second time by a soldier who appears in the documentary while the narrator recounts the events of the operation.[101] In Bakri's opinion, these lawsuits, which can be considered as a form of censorship since the filmmaker is

[99] Bresheeth, Haim. "The Continuity of Trauma and Struggle: Recent Cinematic Representations of the Nakba", in Abu-Lughod, Lila, and Ahmad H. Sadi. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory (Cultures of History)*. Columbia University Press, 2007. Print. p. 184.
[100] Suleiman, Elia. "Hope and action despite pessimism : Daniel Tkatch interviews Elia Suleiman." *Political Critique*, September 5th, 2016. http://politicalcritique.org/world/2016/filmmaker-suleiman-hope-and-action/. Web.
[101] "Israel attorney general joins lawsuit against Palestinian filmmaker", *Middle East Monitor,* December 21st, 2017. https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20171221-israel-attorney-general-joins-lawsuit-against-palestinian-filmmaker/. Web.

being sued for a film he has made and which became popular, are nothing but a way to silence him.[102]

But to link the two "national" cinemas, although each of them has to navigate around different obstacles when it comes to the institutions that allow for movies to be produced, both groups of directors find themselves alienated and not necessarily able to work under the ideal conditions that a creator would dream of, that is the right to create in a free way without having to compromise one's ideas and one's creative process for the sake of being able to produce something as opposed to nothing at all.

Having said this, although the institutions in the case of Palestinian filmmakers are much more diverse depending on where each filmmaker turns to have their movies funded, and which may seem like a great constraint, it is not necessarily so, as will be seen in the section dealing with creativity.

Government Censorship/themes that are more likely to be censored

In general terms, one element that makes the films analyzed in this work, and which has been brought up in a previous section, is their documentary-like filming style. Some of the films are in fact documentaries, but the majority are fiction films which adopt a documentary-like film style. Solanas and Getino in their Third Cinema manifesto bring up how "every image that documents, bears witness to, refutes or deepens the truth of a situation is something more than a film image or purely artistic fact; it becomes something which the System finds indigestible."[103] This is the

[102] "Israel attorney general joins lawsuit against Palestinian filmmaker", *Middle East Monitor,* December 21st, 2017. https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20171221-israel-attorney-general-joins-lawsuit-against-palestinian-filmmaker/. Web.
[103] Solanas, Fernando and Octavio Getino. "Toward A Third Cinema". Cinéaste, Vol. 4, No. 3, (winter 1970-71), pp. 1-10. Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/41685716. Web. p. 6.

primary explanation for why these films tend to get censored, and it is also the subject of the present section.

The first part of this section will deal with the issue of constraint facing both Iranian and Palestinian directors, which will later help show how they go about in trying to evade censorship. Beginning with Iranian cinema, Iranian directors face many constraints. Iranian cinema, and especially since the 8-year war with Iraq ended, (a period during which mostly war films glorifying the figure of the brave and often martyred soldier were made), has seen a predominant genre, that of social drama. This genre, as one can guess, is meant to represent the ills of society and, in many cases, to give a voice to the most powerless sections among it, who are easily forgotten about. This being said, a poorly represented Iran is subject to criticism and censorship. Agnès Devictor in the chapter "Themes of social drama" (2004) gives a number of examples of movies that were prohibited by the regime because they were judged too pessimistic or giving a negative image of Iran. One of them is Abolfazl Jalili's 2003 *Raghs dar ghobar* (*Dancing in the Dust*) which tells the story of the difficult life of a young boy working in a brick oven in south Teheran, and which was not allowed to be released because it was considered too dark.[104] This movie was released internationally, however. One of the ways directors used to get around this issue was by blaming the old regime for the negative aspects of society that they were showing, but that was not a possible alternative for too long.

But poverty and a "poor representation of Iran" are not the only themes that face such restrictions. Other issues are also so taboo they cannot be represented on screens, or else certain additions have to figure in the movie for it to be produced. Perhaps the best example to illustrate this idea is Abbas Kiarostami's 1997 *Ta'm-e*

[104] Devictor, Agnès. *Politique du cinéma iranien: de l'âyatollâh Khomeini au président Khâtami*. Editions du CNRS, 2004, p. 156.

gilās (*The Taste of Cherry*) which deals with a highly taboo theme in Iran: that of suicide. In this movie, the main character, Mr. Badii, is trying to find, throughout the plot, someone who, in exchange of a great sum of money, would come to a deserted place outside of town at dawn, where he has dug a grave and will be lying after attempting suicide, call his name, if he answers he would take him by the hand and get him out of the hole, and if he does not, would have to throw dirt at him till he is completely buried. Kiarostami, however, did try to get around the censorship in this movie, but the way he did that is related to the use of creativity in order to counter censorship, or at least attempt to counter it, so it will be dealt with in the last sub-section of the present part of the research.

In Iran, avoiding censorship had to come at the price of compromising between what one desires to show and what the government allows to be shown. When the filmmakers were unwilling to compromise, it led to blatant censorship, such as in the case of Makhmalbaf's 1990 *Nobat e Asheghi* (*A Time to Love),* which cost the film to be relegated to "archival shelves, underground circuits and foreign markets".[105] This film was censored because of its portrayal of the theme of love, which can be subject to censorship in conservative Iran. *Nobat e Asheghi* was specifically banned because of its "bold treatment of a love triangle" in Hamid Naficy's words.[106]

Moving on to Palestinian cinema, it also faces many constraints and is subjected to the censorship of not only one but many governments depending on the country releasing the movie (since that cannot be done in Palestine itself), thus making it a difficult task for Palestinian directors to make movies. However, perhaps

[105] Naficy, Hamid. "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran: A Post-Khatami Update" in Tapper, Richard. *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*. London: Tauris, 2006. Print. p. 50.
[106] Naficy, Hamid. « Theorizing "Third World » film spectatorship : The case of Iran and Iranina cinema" in Guneratne, Anthony R., and Wimal Dissanayake. *Rethinking Third Cinema*. New York: Routlede, 2003. Print. p. 197.

the biggest obstacle that these directors face is their very identity. To illustrate this idea, one good example is that of Elia Suleiman's *Yadon Ilaheyya* (*Divine Intervention,* 2002). This movie has been at the origin of a debate in the world of cinema, and the cause is that after its release, the movie was refused to be nominated for the Oscars by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences because its director, Elia Suleiman is a stateless person.[107] The Academy gave two reasons for that: first, an official said that it does not accept films from countries unrecognized by the UN, and second that for a movie to be eligible for the Best Foreign Film category, it had to be first released in the country of its origin, knowing that this condition cannot be met in the Palestinian case since, first, Palestinian territories are under Israeli military occupation, second, there are few functioning cinemas left, and third, few Palestinians have the financial means to attend them.[108] This example shows how Palestinian cinema can be condemned not to reach a maximum audience simply for being Palestinian. This being said, this particular film has however had a better reception in Europe where it won two prizes: The Jury Prize at the Cannes Festival and the European Film Award for Best Non-European Film in 2002.

Staying with the films of Elia Suleiman, these can prove to be interesting once more in the way that they portray certain realities in the form of fiction, but these realities inform of the censorship that Palestinian directors have to face when making movies in and about Palestine. For example, in *Yadon Ilaheyya* (2002)*,* the only place where the character of E.S. could meet the woman he loves was in the parking of the no-man's land of the checkpoint, which Haim Bresheeth suggests is no longer

[107] Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*. Verso Books, 2007. Print, p. 8.
[108] Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*, p. 8.

possible as Israeli soldiers do not allow for such meetings to happen anymore.[109] But the checkpoint itself, which is supposed to be the Al-Ram, had to be reconstructed elsewhere where Suleiman had to set the scenes with the woman he loves because he was not allowed to film in the actual checkpoint.[110] This is in a way a case of reality imitating fiction and vice versa.

But for Palestinian filmmakers, censorship can also continue even after a movie is shot and finished. Michel Khleifi, for instance, recounts how after he had finished shooting a film in Palestine and was about to leave from Ben Gurion Airport, the Israeli airport security confiscated his film for "security concerns" after interrogating him for several hours about details such as the names of the cast and crew, during which he had long missed his flight, and which to him was a clear indication that the concern was not for the security of the flight but rather about "the deep unease about the fact that a Palestinian had simply made a film."[111]

This section is rather short because censorship in many cases is evaded with the use of creativity to which the next section is dedicated.

Creativity

Having discussed some of the numerous constraints that both Iranian and Palestinian directors face, it is imperative to look at how the latter are countered through the film directors' use of creativity while making their movies.

---

[109] Bresheeth, Haim. "The Continuity of Trauma and Struggle: Recent Cinematic Representations of the Nakba", in Abu-Lughod, Lila, and Ahmad H. Sadi. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory (Cultures of History)*. Columbia University Press, 2007. Print. p. 185.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Khleifi, Michel. "From Reality to Fiction – From Poverty to Expression". In Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*. Verso Books, 2007. Print. p. 54.

Azadeh Farahmand discusses how the fear or anticipation of government censorship of films that contain controversial themes leads to self-censorship on the part of the directors. Farahmand, however, specifies nonetheless that this self-censorship does not mean that the artists have to give up on making critical movies altogether, as she argues that such conditions are in fact responsible for pushing the artists to "invent indirect means of expressing their ideas and creatively to seek metaphors and allusions."[112] This is an idea that is echoed by Cardullo who argues that "the kind and degree of censorship in Iran have served to make many artists all that much more skilled, resourceful and determined."[113] This means that in this specific case, censorship enhances creativity, as it is the only way artists can make the movies they want and send out their messages.

When it comes to creativity, there is an array of means that allow filmmakers to go around censorship. Iranian cinema, and surely a number of the movies analyzed in this research, have one important element in common: the use of children as the main characters of the movie. This could be interpreted as a creative element because it is as though, by using children as the main characters, the directors benefit from their accountability of what is said in the movies being reduced because the words are coming from the mouth of a child who cannot yet be accountable for what he or she says. They can be corrected, even punished, but they are not accountable for the things they say because they do not always realize their gravity or their seriousness at the very least. One such example is in Majid Majidi's *Rang-e Khodā* (*The Color of Paradise,* 1999) where there is at one point a total rejection of the arbitrariness of accepting all the ills of life by using the uncontestable figure of God and his

[112] Farahmand, Azadeh. "Perspectives on Recent (International Acclaim for) Iranian Cinema" in Tapper, Richard. *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*. London: Tauris, 2006. Print. p. 92.
[113] Cardullo, Bert. *In Search of Cinema: Writings on International Film Art*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2004. Print. p. 23.

unchallengeable will. In the most heart-tearing scene, Mohammad, the main character, a child who was born blind and was separated from his loving grandmother and sisters by his father to be left at the care of a carpenter in Tehran (who also happens to be blind just like him, but who makes a living independently thanks to his profession), as his father wanted to remarry and did not want to remain burdened with his blind son. In between sobs, Mohammad cries to the carpenter he was left at the care of that his teacher in Tehran always told his students that God loved them because they were blind, but he then goes on to protest: "but if God truly loved us, why did he make us blind in the first place?" And the viewer to watch the carpenter simply tear up as well, then calmly get up and leave, thus leaving the boy confronted to silence, as opposed to scolding him or insisting that the teacher was right.

If this scene made it through the censorship, it can only be because the "blasphemous" words are uttered by a young boy, exceeded by the hardships life has sent his way since his youngest years, and who also finally lets sink in the idea that his father abandoned him, after several previous instances where he held a careless attitude towards him. With the empathy and compassion that the viewer increasingly feels for the boy, it is practically impossible to hold his statements against him. But if such a statement gets to pass, it actually holds within it more than the cry of a boy exceeded by the circumstances he has to face and that pained him so deeply at such a young age. The statement is still very strong and it questions an arbitrariness on which the whole country is based, as it is an authoritarian regime whose principal leader is a religious clerk backed by a powerful clergy. The Iranian regime is portrayed as the rightful regime, that which is righteous. But the boy's questioning of God's plan leaves the space open for any other challenging of any of God's plans.

Another film that uses a child as its main character in what is thought to be a semi-autobiographical movie is Amir Naderi's *Davandeh* (*The Runner,* 1984). The use of a child as the main character of the film allows for a tackling of social issues that can avoid censorship. As Alla Gassadik puts it, this film destabilizes the idea of "home", which would be a unified and welcoming place[114], since what Naderi depicts is rather a hostile society. In *Davandeh*, Amir Naderi depicts an orphan child who makes ends meet by taking different street jobs while living in an abandoned boat by the sea. The movie shows the hardships that the young boy has to go through and the exploitation as well as humiliation he endures in order to survive in a port-city whose inhabitants are poor and are ready for anything to make a little bit of money. Throughout the movie, the boy is seen to feel an overwhelming excitement and begins screaming at the top of his lungs at any engine he sees – from plane to boat, as they represent a means that could take him out of his unbearable situation.

Going back to Abbas Kiarostami's aforementioned movie *Ta'm-e gīlās*, it is very interesting to look at how Kiarostami attempted to counter censorship which he was naturally going to face given the central theme of the movie as well as the fact that the character of Mr. Badii is not even vilified, nor does the director intend to express morale from telling his story. Kiarostami still tried to make the movie pass the harsh censorship laws, and his strategy was to add behind-the-scenes shots at the end where the main character is seen walking and talking to the director himself and members of the crew, in other words, where he is alive. This is despite the fact that the ending scene of the movie is inconclusive as one cannot exactly tell if the character does die or not. That being said, we learn from Azadeh Farahmand that

[114] Gadassik, Alla. "A National Filmmaker without a Home: Home and Displacement in the Films of Amir Naderi", Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, 31 no 2 (2011): 474-86, https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-1264361. Web. p. 478.

Ta'm-e gīlās was in fact banned from Iran.[115] But the additional scenes at the end of Kiarostami's movie can also be attributed to Kiarostami's attempt to make the spectator a part of the film process, and make them think instead of being passive in their relationship to viewing a movie. This also seems like a legitimate idea given that these last scenes shake the spectator at first, as there is a huge contrast between the dark scene they were previously exposed to of Mr. Badii laying in his self-dug grave, and the bright sunny day in which he is seen, along with the crew members and Kiarostami himself, walking around, smoking a cigarette, being alive, in other words. This recalls Elia Suleiman's claim that a truly political film is one that enables the creation of an open space in which the viewer participates in the meaning-making of the images provided, thus emancipating themselves.[116] The approach Kiarostami takes to making a movie as well as the creativity that he demonstrates within the highly constraining environment in which he works were beautifully reported by Cardullo who considers the filmmaker to be "a species of existential philosopher trapped or paralyzed inside an autocratic theocracy, an Ingmar Bergman of the Islamic world […] whose camera would represent reality at the same time as it exposes the means of its representation."[117] The last line is very reminiscent of the last scene in *Ta'm-e gīlās,* as the means of representing the suicidal Mr. Badii pursuing his act are exposed in the last scene, which is experienced as a sort of shock.

One of the directors whose work is analyzed in this thesis is Jafar Panahi. Jafar Panahi is the very figure of government resistance in Iranian cinema. Indeed, since

[115] Farahmand, Azadeh. "Perspectives on Recent (International Acclaim for) Iranian Cinema" in Tapper, Richard. *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*. London: Tauris, 2006. Print. p. 95.
[116] Suleiman, Elia. "Hope and action despite pessimism: Daniel Tkatch interviews Elia Suleiman." *Political Critique*, September 5th, 2016. http://politicalcritique.org/world/2016/filmmaker-suleiman-hope-and-action/. Web.
[117] Cardullo, Bert. *In Search of Cinema: Writings on International Film Art*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2004. Print, p. 60.

2010, Panahi has been prohibited from writing scenarios, making movies or leaving the country. And yet, he has been making films and exploiting the various ways in which cinema can be a tool for political resistance. The most interesting work that Panahi has made in this context is his documentary *In film nist* (*This Is Not a Film*, 2011), and this documentary can be considered an example of creativity at work. Indeed, first of all, beginning with its title, it is undeniably provocative, since it is nothing other than a film be it at least because Panahi has begun "filming" himself, first, then, called his friend and fellow director Mojtaba Mirtahmasb to take the role over. In *In film nist*, Jafar Panahi is waiting for his sentence to be pronounced. He is at home, on the phone with his lawyer who tells him he will for sure be banned from making movies and risks even going to jail. After the lawyer, Panahi calls Mirtahmasb, and when the latter comes, Panahi asks him to start filming him while he simply recounts the script of the last movie he wanted to make but was not granted permit to shoot. On his rug, Panahi uses tape to delimitate the space as he had imagined it in the script and starts reading the scenario in front of the camera, while repeating from time to time to the viewer that he and his collaborator were not shooting a movie and therefore not breaking the law.

Another aspect that comes out of the movie, and which might be directed at the hostile government, is a profound humanization of the director who is seen in his daily routine, drinking his tea, talking to his daughter's pet iguana, phoning his wife, refusing to keep his neighbor's dog because it scares the pet, talking to the young man responsible of taking the trash of the building out and asking him about his life, etc. In other words, instead of a dangerous or subversive individual, the viewer simply sees a man who lives through his creative mind, by making movies and trying to stay close and attentive to the life around him. It is the severity of these constraints that obliges

Iranian directors to turn to creativity in order to represent what they wish to. In this context, Agnès Devictor speaks of a "new cinematographic language" with its proper "grammar of the image".[118] But to go back to the fact that this film is provocative, the context within which it emerges (Panahi being in the midst of a trial and even risking prison), making such a "non film" is nothing short of an act of resistance, that is a political resistance.

Going back to Blake Atwood's experience of visiting the Cinema Museum, the author wrote an entire passage where he focuses on the poster of *In film nist* that figures among a few others in one part of the museum. He brings up how the poster conveys the strong links made between technology, politics and storytelling in the film, but he especially points to how shocking it is for the poster to be there in the first place since the movie was in fact produced underground, as it could not have received a permit, given that Panahi was banned from making films in the time he made that movie, and thus it "defiantly pushes back on the twenty-year ban on filmmaking that the Islamic republic's Revolutionary Court issued Panahi on December 2010."[119]

What comes out of much of the analysis on Iranian cinema is that it is mostly restricted for moral and religious reasons. One element, for instance, that could never make it past the censorship is the non-respect of wearing the headscarf while representing women. This is not much of an issue for directors when shooting an outside scene, however, in intimate settings, it can represent a huge incoherence. It does not make sense that a woman at her home or even in bed would still be wearing a headscarf. Hamid Naficy also comments on this aspect, claiming that this regulation causes the films to have unrealistic portrayals of women, since they would be shown

[118] Devictor, Agnès. *Politique du cinéma Iranien: de l'âyatollâh Khomeini au président Khâtami*, p. 116.
[119] Atwood, Blake. *Reform Cinema in Iran: Film and Political Change in the Islamic Republic*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. Print. p. 200.

covering themselves even from close kin, which is obviously not something they would do in real life.[120] In order to get around such a constraint, directors find creative ways in order not to sacrifice coherence for the moral code that their movies have to respect. One example is Rakhshan Bani Etemad's 1998 *Banou-ye Ordibehesht* (*The May Lady,* 1998) in which when the protagonist arrives at her home, the camera zooms on her hand putting down her black veil, without her hair ever being shown.[121]

Moving on to Palestinian cinema, the condition of the Palestinian people is even more of a constraint than being denied the right to have a nation, a citizenship, and living under constant humiliating occupation. This condition is also a constraint on the creative level for many artists. The Palestinian cause is so sensitive and so urgent, that artists are in a way compelled to work in ways so overtly political and that martyrize the entire population. But this, in turn, has the consequence of presenting the Palestinians as a homogenous group living the same experiences and aspiring to the same goals, while giving the same meaning to symbols such as the land, the flag etc. Some of the directors focused on in this work have tried to deviate from what one can perhaps call the "tyranny of the Cause". Michel Khleifi, who happens to be the first Palestinian filmmaker ever to produce a full-length film, has since the beginning deviated from this train of thought by taking into account internal contradictions of the Palestinian people in their fight for emancipation, and re-envisioning Palestine so as to offer a "heteroglossic multiplicity of trajectories and temporalities", thus showing diversity in experiencing occupation.[122] But Khleifi's films are also interesting in the sense that they create a new reality through the movie director's creative mind. Speaking of his film *Al Dhakira Al Khasba* (*Fertile Memory,* 1980),

[120] Naficy, Hamid. "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran: A Post-Khatami Update" in Tapper, Richard. *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*. London: Tauris, 2006. Print. p. 47.
[121] Devictor, Agnès. *Politique du cinéma Iranien: de l'âyatollâh Khomeini au président Khâtami,* p. 108.
[122] *Courtisane Festival*. 9 December, 2015. https://www.courtisane.be/nl/event/fertile-memory. Web.

Khleifi claimed: "*Fertile Memory* was for me the vision of the present towards the past for a better future. I tried to push the real scenes from daily life towards fictionality, by exploring the two women's external and internal worlds. I had to suppress the boundaries between reality and fiction, document and narration. Is not Palestine the essence of the mythical country, in spite of its reality?" In other words, Khleifi has used creativity in *Al Dhakira Al Khasba* to shape the present in the way he sees it and the way he wants it to be, or simply, in the way it should be.

In the same way, Elia Suleiman is another example of an artist who thinks and creates both from inside his experience as a Palestinian but also outside of it. And one interesting way Elia Suleiman has been creative is through his use of humor. Humor offers the possibility of "desacralizing", which in turn allows for reflecting upon the Palestinian situation in a clearer manner and with full accountability. Though the Palestinian cause generally is one that calls for solemnity and seriousness, as it not only involves trauma but also the loss of an entire way of life, the erasure of a history, the denial of the very existence of an entire people, in addition to a high level of casualties and a dominant culture of martyrdom, some filmmakers, such as Elia Suleiman, have opted for humor to express their ideas through their films. In his interview with *Guernica magazine*, Suleiman spoke of humor as "a tool of resistance", but when specifically mentioning the character of the old man in *The Time that Remains* (2009) who is constantly trying to self-immolate, he mentioned that this character represents "a ghetto humor—drunk, unemployed, and nuts. On the other hand, it is the humor of despair".[123] Thus, even when using humor, the latter is politically charged, it is not an innocent kind of humor employed simply to entertain the audience and make it laugh, rather the audience laughs bitterly as it is reminded

[123] Suleiman, Elia. "The Other Face of Silence: Nathalie Handal Interviews Elia Suleiman." *Guernica: A Magazine of Arts and Politics*, May 1, 2011. https://www.guernicamag.com/suleiman_5_1_11/. Web.

that the funny scene it is watching is not devoid of a deep tragedy, that of a suffering people. Another interesting scene where humor is deployed, again in *The Time That Remains,* is when a young boy is walking around selling two different newspapers, one called 'The Nation', the other 'All the Arabs', while yelling their prices as he walks around "'The Nation' for one Shekel and 'All the Arabs' for free" (which in Arabic is translated literally to "'All the Arabs' for nothing"), and when Elia's friend tries to buy 'The Nation' the boy realizes he ran out of them and says "the nation is gone, what is left is all the Arabs". This is a humorous indication of the failure of Arab states to ever show true unity and actually stand up for the Palestinian question instead of only speaking of doing so and showing solidarity only at the oral level. Having said this, sure one can argue that such a position (employing humor in a situation as desperate as that of Palestine) comes from the privilege of being able to live in exile, and thus not living under direct Israeli military occupation everyday, which allows for a distancing that not every Palestinian can afford to have, and even less the Palestinians without citizenship living either in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip.

Silence is another form of exercising one's creativity when it comes to making a type of movies that is political in nature. When asked about his generous use of silence in his movies, the same on which Haim Breesheeth also commented calling it an "expressive silence"[124], Elia Suleiman responded with how silence allows for questions to come out, but also how it is "intimidating to those who should be intimidated such as certain power structures. They don't adhere to silence. They want as much noise as possible so they can capitalize on it, so they can contain and control. The same thing I say about silence I could say about poetry. People in power tend to

[124] Bresheeth, Haim. "A Symphony of Absence: Borders and Liminality in Elia Suleiman's 'Chronicle of a Disappearance'". Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media, Vol. 43, No. 2, Middle-Eastern Media Arts (Fall 2002), pp. 71-84. Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/41552334. Web.

find poetry dangerous to them because it is dislocating, they can't catch it, can't control it. They prefer coherence, what's blunt and has clarity."[125] And at another instance, Suleiman claimed that "silence can be intimidating, sometimes provocative, sometimes a form of resistance because it dislocates."[126] This shows the importance of silence when employed in the movies of Suleiman and how through the use of silence he gives his films a political dimension, one that allows him to resist Israeli occupation as a Palestinian artist. It is also interesting that the filmmaker brings up poetry. Poetry is another element composing the creative process of Suleiman, and it is a powerful one. Indeed, a poetic image sticks in one's mind, it can have a great influence on the audience. And it can be political as well, as Suleiman himself argues in his interview with *Political Critique*: "For me, composing a poetic image is a political act."[127] Bresheeth considers Elia Suleiman's movies, and particularly *Sijill Ikhtifaa* (*Chronicle of a Disappearance,* 1996) to contain elements of documentary, docudrama, fiction, as well as elements characteristic of the *Theatre of the absurd*."[128]

Having mentioned before the fact that the identity of Palestinian filmmakers often proves to be a constraint for them in terms of making movies, there is still a nuance to make with regards to this idea. Gertz and Khleifi mention a very interesting point where this constraint is in fact not "fixed" through creativity but actually permits, or gives place for creativity to fully be expressed. Indeed, what has been mentioned as probably the biggest constraint to Palestinian cinema, that is the

[125] Suleiman, Elia. "The Other Face of Silence: Nathalie Handal Interviews Elia Suleiman.".
[126] Ibid.
[127] Suleiman, Elia. "Hope and action despite pessimism : Daniel Tkatch interviews Elia Suleiman" *Political Critique*, September 5th, 2016. http://politicalcritique.org/world/2016/filmmaker-suleiman-hope-and-action/. Web.
[128] Bresheeth, Haim. "A Symphony of Absence: Borders and Liminality in Elia Suleiman's 'Chronicle of a Disappearance'". *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, Vol. 43, No. 2, Middle-Eastern Media Arts (Fall 2002), pp. 71-84. Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/41552334. Web. p. 73.

inexistence of a national film industry, which in turn makes it more difficult for directors to find funding for their films to be produced, the two authors argue that precisely this absence of institutional support has provided Palestinian directors with more space to be creative.[129] In opposition to the case of Iranians where they have to go through their government in order to obtain funding to make their movies, or else no movie can be made, Palestinian filmmakers have a larger margin in order to obtain funding and support, which in some cases offers more space for creativity to take place.

Different creativities for different dissident demands

Identity & exile

Moving on to the last part of the research, the aim here will be to see the extent to which different dissident demands, the ones on the Iranian side which are different from the ones on the Palestinian side, lead to different ways of "doing politics" through creativity. This first part deals with the importance that identity as well as exile, play in each of the case studies at hand.

In Palestinian films, one major aspect of identity that often comes out as a symbol is land. Gertz and Khleifi mention the shift that occurred in Palestinian cinema in the 1980s where filmmakers such as Michel Khleifi began attempting to

[129] Gertz, Nurith, and George Khleifi. Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma and Memory. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. Print. p. 12.

excerpt the Palestinian narrative from the story of the land itself.[130] Edward Said, commenting on Michel Khleifi's *Al Dhakira Al Khasba* (*Fertile Memory,* 1980) mentions the moment in which we see Farah, one of the two women protagonists, visiting her land, the land that was taken away from her by the Israeli authorities which were leaving her no other choice but to sell it, a decision she has refused to take despite her son pressing her to do so, and despite the fact that she is not getting her land back either. Said calls this scene, or any picture which represents the "solidity of Palestinians in the interior", a "utopian image making possible a connection between Palestinian individuals and Palestinian land."[131] In the same manner, Helga Tawil-Souri also links Khleifi's pursuit of identity to the land, claiming that the director invented a cinematic aesthetic language that is "tied to a political project of searching for and asserting Palestinian identity by way of folklore, memory and attachment to land." [132] The element of folklore, which appears in Michel Khleifi's films, will be discussed further in the last part concerning visibility.

Elia Suleiman also plays on symbolism in his use of poetic images. For instance, in *Yadon Ilaheyya*, in a scene where he tries to distract the soldiers at the checkpoint to sneak his girlfriend into Jerusalem, where she cannot go, being from Ramallah, he blows up a red balloon on which is stamped a picture of Yasser Arafat, and which goes flying over the checkpoint until it reaches al-Aqsa Mosque. Haim Bresheeth claims that through the "pastiche of Arafat on a pumped-up balloon", Elia Suleiman "connects the hopes of Palestine to the symbol of its identity, the Al-Aqsa

[130] Gertz, Nurith, and George Khleifi. Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma and Memory. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. Print. pp. 4-5.
[131] Said, Edward W., and Jean Mohr. *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. p. 82.
[132] Tawil-Souri, Helga. "Where is the political in cultural studies? In Palestine." *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14(5), 2011, pp.467–482. DOI: 10.1177/1367877911408656. Web. p. 473.

mosque".[133] Here, one of the biggest symbols of land for Palestinians, the Dome of the Rock, is reached, and the people are connected to it, and thus connected to their lost country, the people here being represented by the figure of Yasser Arafat. This being said, there is certainly also an implicit criticism of Palestinian leadership through the fact that it is represented by nothing other than a balloon.

This element of identity, that is land, links us to another manifestation of identity, and a major one, which has been alluded to, and that is the identity of the Palestinian directors themselves almost all of whom have one common element, and a rather conflicting one: being Israeli Palestinians, that is Palestinians with an Israeli citizenship. This is a very complex situation wherein filmmakers identifying as Palestinian hold an Israeli citizenship and navigate within the state of Israel. These Palestinian directors with Israeli citizenships are not Israeli by choice but because they were born in the Israeli-controlled part of Palestine post-1948 and pre-1967. The films of Elia Suleiman always almost automatically contain this dimension. As Carol Bardenstein argues, Suleiman casts a "sharp, wry eye on the experience of being a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship inside of Israel".[134] Here identity meets with exile, the feeling of being at home while also feeling like a total stranger, when home is exile, just like elsewhere. Bresheeth puts it into words in a better manner, when mentioning the character of Elia Suleiman in *Sijill Ikhtifaa* who is: "coming from exile in New York to a double exile at home in Nazareth and ending up in a worse exile yet – that of Jerusalem under occupation."[135] This is how the author interprets

[133] Bresheeth, Haim. "The Continuity of Trauma and Struggle: Recent Cinematic Representations of the Nakba", in Abu-Lughod, Lila, and Ahmad H. Sadi. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory (Cultures of History)*. Columbia University Press, 2007. Print. p. 176.
[134] Bardenstein, Carol. "Cross/Cast: Passing in Israeli and Palestinian Cinema" in Stein, Rebecca L., and Ted Swedenburg. Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. Print. p. 117.
[135] Bresheeth, Haim. "The Continuity of Trauma and Struggle: Recent Cinematic Representations of the Nakba", in Abu-Lughod, Lila, and Ahmad H. Sadi. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory (Cultures of History)*. p. 176

the title of the movie: as the film goes on, "Suleiman is gradually and painfully disappearing – a simile disappearance of Palestine, and of the Palestinians."[136] And going back into the idea of the poetic image, Bresheeth sees the ending of the movie as the exiled director choosing to disappear, carrying "a proverbial suitcase", which reminds one, as Bresheeth rightly recalls, of the famous poem by Mahmoud Darwish, in which "home is a suitcase."[137] Suleiman seems to be condemned to eternal exile wherever he goes, and so "home" ends up being the suitcase he carries his things in, the only element that is constantly there, unlike a home.

But land is not the only symbol to identity and belonging, as the flag, and the symbolism of its colors, is also often rendered in a unique aesthetic form. In her short film *Arba'a Aghani Li Filastin* (*Four Songs for Palestine*, 2001), Nada el-Yassir organizes the film following the four colors of the Palestinian flag and placing each one of them in a different activity in the daily routine of a Palestinian woman under Israeli curfew. The color black remains in the background throughout the movie, threatening to take over, while red manifests itself when the woman accidentally cuts her finger while slicing tomatoes, green through the color of fresh mint when the woman prepares tea, and white is represented in her milk when she embraces her child and begins nursing it.[138]

Throughout the film, a television station broadcasts the demonstrations led by young Palestinians against occupation, which led to twenty of them being shot and killed, which is also the only reflection the woman gets when she looks at herself in the mirror.[139] The fact that this woman's identity remains a mystery, and that she is never

[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Massad, Joseph. "The Weapon of Culture: Cinema in the Palestinian Liberation Struggle" in Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*. p. 38.
[139] Massad, Joseph. "The Weapon of Culture: Cinema in the Palestinian Liberation Struggle" in Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*. p. 37.

given a chance to speak in the movie recalls the silence in Suleiman's movies and its potential as a force of resistance. And perhaps this movie also follows the footsteps of Michel Khleifi who's *Al Dhakira Al Khasba* (*Fertile Memory,* 1980)*,* in the words of the *Courtisane* platforms, puts "a distinctively feminine expression on the ordinarily violent and male dominated face of Palestinian resistance"[140], as so too does *Arba'a Aghani Li Filastin by* insisting on the central place occupied by motherhood and maternal nurturing in the struggle and resistance for Palestine.[141] That is especially true since the white color of the flag is represented by the woman/mother's milk when nursing her baby.

When it comes to Iranian cinema, the element of identity comes up in two ways. First, there is the matter of clashing with a clerical and conservative regime for the most part while not necessarily agreeing with the regime on an ideological level. This shows in different movies and in the cases of different filmmakers who see themselves unable to make movies entirely the way they intended to. One example is Bahman Ghobadi's *Kasi az Gorbehaye Irani Khabar Nadareh* (*No One Knows About Persian Cats*, 2009), which the director shot within 17 days, using the permit a friend of his had received to shoot a film.[142] Ghobadi would certainly not have received a permit to shoot this film had he asked for one himself since the movie portrays the underground music scene in Iran, and how they have to resort to the black market if they want to get visas to perform abroad, since the government does not permit that, even less so as the couple that the movie follows is composed of a man and a woman,

[140] *Courtisane Festival*. 9 December, 2015. https://www.courtisane.be/nl/event/fertile-memory. Web.
[141] Massad, Joseph. "The Weapon of Culture: Cinema in the Palestinian Liberation Struggle" in Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema* p. 38.
[142] "Philosophies d'Iran (4/4): Un pays sous le regard des cineastes". Les Chemins De La Philosophie by Adèle Van Reeth. 14 December 2017.https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/les-chemins-de-la-philosophie/philosophies-diran-44-un-pays-sous-le-regard-des-cineastes. Web.

knowing that it is forbidden for women to sing in Iran, and even less so in a rock band.

Another way in which Iranian cinema deals with the concept of identity is in the portrayal of characters of other ethnicities such as Kurds and Afghans and how they struggle within Iranian society which has a strong national narrative of being Iranian, and which comes at the expense of the people of other origins. One film that portrays the hardships that foreigners face is Makhmalbaf's *Bicycleran* (*The Cyclist, 1987)*. In this film, the action turns around an Afghan immigrant, an extremely impoverished man who desperately needs money to pay for his hospitalized wife's operation. Stephen Weinberger is yet another author to make a parallel between an Iranian movie, in this case *Bicycleran*, and an Italian neorealist film, *The Bicycle Thief*. First, in both movies the main character is a good but poor man, in the first case Nasim, in the second, Antonio, for whom the bicycle is the ultimate way to solve their problem, and second, these two men live in poor societies where everyone else is absorbed in their own daily struggles and thus have no room for compassion or concern for their hardships.[143] Nasim's origins are shown to be different when, after he was informed by the doctor that the operation would not take place unless he pays for it and that if his wife dies it would not be the doctor's fault, he attempted to pay with the little money he had, which was refused because it is Afghan money, and so of no use to the hospital.

Panahi's *Badkonake sefid* (*The White Balloon*, 1995) also portrays the idea of feeling alienated and lonely due to one's different origins. The film is named after the last scene which shows an Afghan boy who makes a living selling balloons in the street, and who had tried to help the little Razieh and her brother recollect the large bill that

[143] Weinberger, Stephen. "The Cyclist (Bicycleran)" . *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Summer 2006), pp. 47-50. Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/fq.2006.59.4.47. Web. p. 48.

was blown beneath the curbside cellar grate of a closed shop. When they finally succeed in getting the bill back, everyone is off to their homes to begin the celebrations of the new year, and the Afghan boy is left alone, holding his white balloon in the deserted street.

When it comes to exile, some directors have chosen exile in a search for more artistic freedom. Examples such as Amir Naderi or Mohsen Makhmalbaf at some point come up to mind of Iranian filmmakers who chose a self-imposed exile when the government censorship became a lot harder to handle. But as has been mentioned above with Amir Naderi's case, there is a nuance that comes into play in the matter. As much as the Iranian government lacks in allowing movie directors to express whatever they wish in the way they have chosen for themselves, it still remains their only hope when it comes to funding movies. Amir Naderi, once he left Iran, surely had more incentives to create movies as he wished, but he lost the economic support he had back home, as he found himself just one foreign filmmaker with no name to himself in the U.S, having to start anew and build a reputation for himself in a new country.

The demands

This part will deal with what the dissident demands of Iranian and Palestinian filmmakers are. The first section will deal with the two separately as certain demands are particular to each of their cases, and then the second section will deal with how these demands tend to intersect ultimately.

Beginning with the case of Iran, Iranian filmmakers, as has been argued over and over, face many constraints due to government censorship, and the many restrictions on what can versus what cannot be portrayed on the screen. Iranian filmmakers have in fact issued direct demands to their government concerning the state of the film industry. As Hamid Naficy states, in mid-1995, a group numbering 214 film workers wrote an open letter to the MCIG in which they demanded that the latter reviews the strict procedures which govern film production in Iran, asking for a margin to allow for independent work, and that the industry moves out of the political and into the professional,[144] meaning that filmmakers are left to do their "job" as artists and follow their creative process and make their films as they have envisioned them. Over two decades later, these demands have remained such, as they have not been met.

The demands of Iranian film directors vary in their nature and importance. First, there is the question of the portrayal of women in post-revolutionary Iranian films. Following the revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic, which also imposed Islamic clothing on women, the portrayal of the latter became very restricted. Women could no longer be portrayed unless they were wearing the hijab, including in an intimate setting with supposedly only kin present with them. But the limitations on the portrayal of women are not only restricted to the dress code, the way women are portrayed was also to change. As Hamid Naficy claimed, Muslim women were also to be shown as chaste, with their important role in society being more confined to the private space, especially when it comes to raising "God-fearing and responsible children."[145] One can easily imagine how such an expectation puts a

[144] Naficy, Hamid. "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran: A Post-Khatami Update" in Tapper, Richard. *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*. London: Tauris, 2006. Print. p. 52.
[145] Naficy, Hamid. "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran: A Post-Khatami Update" in Tapper, Richard. *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*. London: Tauris, 2006. Print. p. 46

huge limit on the possible scenarios that a film director might wish to write and film. One film for instance which deals with a category of women left "undefined or misrepresented by official Revolutionary discourse"[146], as William Over puts it, is Jafar Panahi's *Dāyereh* (*The Circle*, 2000) in which he portrays women ex-convicts released from prison, and how they struggle to find a place within society, sometimes after being rejected by their families who do not want anything to do with them anymore in order to avoid shame. Through this film, Panahi challenges the idea that the Revolution was backed by the poor categories of Iran whose interests were going to be addressed by the Revolution.[147] *Dāyereh* shows how in fact the urban poor, unemployed, beggars and prostitutes are the forgotten of the Revolution, people who perhaps believed in it as well, but who were left at the margins of society. In addition to sex work, this film also deals with abortion and how some women have to resort to it illegally when they have no better choice in front of them. It is easy to imagine this film would have been banned, and what allowed for it to come to existence is Panahi waiting for the newly elected parliament at the time (under Khatami) to allow for the distribution of *Dāyereh*.[148]

Moving on to Palestinian cinema, the first and most pressing demand in this case is to show that Palestinians exist and that their history has been erased for another history, written by the "victorious", to take its place. As Haim Bresheeth puts it, Palestinian films use the framework of the Nakba and the destruction that resulted from it as a referent.[149] This thus says a lot about Palestinian cinema and about the

[146] Over, William. "Worlds Transformed: Iranian Cinema and Social Vision". *Contemporary Justice Review* . Vol. 9, No. 1, March 2006, pp. 67–80. DOI: 10.1080/10282580600564933. Web. pp. 78-79.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Over, William. "Worlds Transformed: Iranian Cinema and Social Vision". *Contemporary Justice Review* . Vol. 9, No. 1, March 2006, pp. 67–80. DOI: 10.1080/10282580600564933. Web. p. 79.
[149] Bresheeth, Haim. "The Continuity of Trauma and Struggle: Recent Cinematic Representations of the Nakba", in Abu-Lughod, Lila, and Ahmad H. Sadi. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory (Cultures of History)*. p. 167.

demands that may be expressed through it.

One good example to illustrate this idea is Nizar Hassan's *Ustura* (*Legend*, 1998). This film is a personal one for Hassan on different levels, as will be seen. First of all, Hassan not only tells the audience the story, he in fact partakes in it in the prologue. In a scene later in the movie, Hassan is seated among the sons of Fatima, while she faces the family to tell them a story, after which the movie is titled. To this story, Hassan relates himself, as his own mother told him a similar story when he was a child.[150] Bresheeth speaks about how this private event is transformed into a public one with Nizar Hassan sitting in line with Fatima's sons, thus becoming, along with his camera crew, a son too.[151] This recalls the expression "the personal is political". Indeed, through cinema and storytelling, the Palestinians tell what was reduced to personal, intimate stories by the official history, into History itself. They are saying that these are not personal and specific family stories, but are the very history of the Palestinians as a whole, driven out of their homes, and as Bresheeth often says, out of their *Heimat* ("home" in the sense of "homeland"). Earlier, always in reference to this film, Bresheeth claims that "history becomes a story", but the opposite is also true, as the story (of this family) is also telling of the history of the Palestinian people in a broader sense. This movie is even more so linked to politics because, as Bresheeth informs us, the family's first meaningful reunion only takes place because of the shooting for Hassan's film.[152] A little background is necessary here: this film is based on the story of a family from Saffuriya, a village that was bulldozed by the Israelis

[150] Ben Zvi, Tal. "Aval ani ve-rak ani asaper et ha-sipur sheli" [But I and only I can tell my story]. *Plastika*, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 75-81. p 80.
[151] Bresheeth, Haim. "The Continuity of Trauma and Struggle: Recent Cinematic Representations of the Nakba", in Abu-Lughod, Lila, and Ahmad H. Sadi. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory (Cultures of History)*. p. 171.
[152] Bresheeth, Haim. "The Continuity of Trauma and Struggle: Recent Cinematic Representations of the Nakba", in Abu-Lughod, Lila, and Ahmad H. Sadi. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory (Cultures of History)*. p. 171.

after its inhabitants were driven out of it in 1948. Some of the family members of the movie stayed behind while others left for Lebanon and were to never reunite again until they did so because of Hassan's film.

Another example of expressing a subtle message, and more importantly a demand, through the dialogue and the elements combined in a shot, is in Michel Khleifi's *Urs al-Jalil* (*Wedding in Galilee*, 1987) where soldiers made it a condition that for a wedding to happen in the village where the action takes place, and in which there is normally a curfew, they too have to take part in it. Not only was their only presence problematic for the villagers attending the wedding, but they also came in wearing their military uniforms, which led to a scene where the groom's sister tells them "if you want to join the celebrations, you must take off your military uniform." The message here being, as Omar al-Qattan rightly expressed it, that "coexistence is not possible under military occupation".[153] This speaks both to Palestinians living within Israel and those living in the occupied territories as the injustices of occupation fall on both groups, between being reduced to second-class citizens and being restricted from the freedom of movement and facing checkpoints everywhere they try to go. As such, these stories translate the experiences of the Nakba and enormity of loss, and offer a voice to the "unheard continuing tragedy of Palestine",[154] with an emphasis on the "unheard", which makes cinema a chosen tool in the first place. In other words, this is the ultimate demand of Palestinians: that they exist, that these are their stories, and that this is their (erased) history.

Bringing Elia Suleiman back once again, in *Yadon Ilaheyya* (2002), the director presents a more intimate, human demand, perhaps one could say the demand

[153] al-Qattan, Omar. "The Challenge of Palestinian Filmmaking (1990 – 2003)" in Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema,* p. 115.
[154] Bresheeth, Haim. "The Continuity of Trauma and Struggle: Recent Cinematic Representations of the Nakba", in Abu-Lughod, Lila, and Ahmad H. Sadi. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory (Cultures of History)*. Columbia University Press, 2007. Print. p. 165.

of being able to pursue love. This movie is an account of how the Israeli occupation of Palestine can render a love story difficult between a man and a woman, given that the protagonist E.S. lives in Jerusalem and the woman he loves is from Ramallah and thus cannot go to Jerusalem. The only place in which they can meet is the "no-man's land" of the checkpoint. In other words, in occupation there is no place for a human feeling as simple and basic as love.

Hany Abu Assad's *Al Janna Al Ān* (*Paradise Now*, 2005) can also be relevant for this part. One demand that can be retrieved from this movie is perhaps that of looking deeper into terrorism than simply condemning it, which is something obvious but that does nothing to put an end to it. If one wants to truly put an end to terrorism, one would need to attempt to explain it, which is very different from justification. The use of terror could never be justified, however, if it is not explained, and the variables that lead to it thus never addressed, it could never be completely eradicated. What this movie does is dissect the reasons that lead an individual to commit terror. It first deconstructs the idea that terror is necessarily linked to religion, and that religion is the source where it finds its justification. Although the protagonists of this movie, Said and Khaled, are promised eternity in heaven, it is most certainly not the reason that leads them to engage in that path. In fact, Khaled decides not to commit a suicide attack in the end, showing once more that the promise of paradise is not much of a motivation. Said, on the other hand, who ends up committing until the end, does so not with the hope of finding what he was promised by his recruiter, but to wash away the shame in which his family was covered after his father was killed while collaborating with Israel.

Having brought up all these cases where specific demands can be retrieved from the films, sometimes, however, the demands are not such in the sense that they

require something out of a situation, but they can be to simply make visible the pain and the trauma. Mohammad Bakri's *Jenin, Jenin* (2002) shows the destruction that the inhabitants of the Jenin camp have endured, destruction both material, of their homes, their schools and their hospital, and moral, of their hopes and dreams, but especially of any possible reconciliation with the side that has come to represent the personification of a death penalty reserved for them as long as they merely exist. Many of the Jenin refugees interviewed in the documentary expressed the same idea: that peace was no longer an option with the Israelis and their military might. A claim that is even more powerful as it comes from the underprivileged side, which does not have the same defensive (or offensive) capacities, or the same impunity on the international level. Thus, when the very people who still live under daily occupation and humiliation claim to give up on the possibility of reconciliation or peace, then what demands are there left to make? Perhaps simply the demand of bearing witness to their struggle, as they cannot do it for themselves when not only has their history been erased and replaced by the Zionist narrative of a people finally finding respite, but so too has their existence been denied.

Now that each of the two cinemas has been dealt with separately, it would be interesting to see in what sense the demands of Iranian and Palestinian directors also intersect. Ultimately, directors from both backgrounds just want to give free rein to their imagination and creative abilities, tell the stories they have to tell, and be in line with the societies they live within, and with the struggles of the people they identify with. Alla Gadassik speaks of how directors remain close to their societies through cinema. The author is yet another one to make the parallel between Iranian cinema, and in this instance Amir Naderi's *Davandeh* (1984) and Italian neorealism, through their shared focus on disenfranchised people, but most importantly, the use of

amateur, non-professional actors, in order to document scenes of the everyday life.[155] Similarly, Kiarostami also preferred working with non-professional actors, as he thought they were "less theatrical or self-dramatizing – and therefore more realistic."[156] *Nema-ye Nazdik* (*Close-up,* 1990) is a great example of a documentary film where not only is a disadvantaged member of society represented and given a voice, but it is the very person in the real story who plays himself and who thus speaks for himself without it needing to be Kiarostami indirectly speaking for him. The way in which *Nema-ye Nazdik* brilliantly blurs the lines between reality and fiction, between what is real and what is acted serves to show how thin that line is, and therefore how cinema can have a concrete impact on the audience, and how, ultimately, it is political in the sense that it contains a potential to disrupt the everyday life. Such choices also recall Rancière and his conception of politics as consisting in the moment in which the marginalized, those who were excluded from "the political order" finally stand up and speak for themselves.[157]

And this is also true for Palestinian filmmakers. For instance, Michel Khleifi in *Urs al-Jalil* (1987) wanted to erase the boundaries between fiction and reality in his movie, so as to depict the reality of Palestinians living under Israeli military occupation in their villages. For this purpose, he chose to work with non-professional actors who resembled the characters from the scenario he wrote himself.[158] One can see how in such examples, reality and fiction fuse together, perhaps because the weight of reality is impossible to get rid of even when the artists have a platform to

[155] Gadassik, Alla. "A National Filmmaker without a Home: Home and Displacement in the Films of Amir Naderi", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 31 no 2 (2011): 474-86, https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-1264361. Web. p. 474.
[156] Cardullo, Bert. *In Search of Cinema: Writings on International Film Art*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2004. Print, p. 60.
[157] Rancière, Jacques, and Steve Corcoran. Dissensus: On Politics And Aesthetics. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. Print. p. 6.
[158] Khleifi, Michel. "From Reality to Fiction – From Poverty to Expression". In Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*. Verso Books, 2007. Print. p. 50.

give life to fiction by being creative. The urgency of their demands, as people who are oppressed by one system or another, finds its way through their artistic production. Ultimately then, the demands, for both parties, are for emancipation, the emancipation of art and of the people, as well as their liberation. This joins Solanas and Getino's arguing that "our culture is an impulse towards emancipation"[159] All cultures of all the subjected people and artists who are not able to create freely, to live freely, are cultures for emancipation, because what else can someone living under injustice possibly ask for?

Visibility

The concept of visibility is important both in the case of Iranian and Palestinian cinema. Indeed, beginning with Palestinian cinema, as there is more to say about visibility when it comes to the Palestinian case study given the reality of the situation, visibility matters in order to see the degree to which Palestinian cinema is a struggle for making the Palestinian people and the Palestinian question visible and shedding light on it. One of the manifestations of visibility in Palestinian cinema is in showing the everyday suffering of ordinary Palestinian people, and some directors know how to make choices that underline the invisibility to which Palestinians are subject to, but which ultimately makes them visible as these movies become accessible to different audiences. One example is Elia Suleiman in *Sijill Ikhtifaa* (1996) or *Yadon Ilaheyya* (2000) in which he occupies a starring role, but never does the viewer hear his voice. In *Sijill Ikhtifaa*, Suleiman's character is invited to speak

[159] Solanas, Fernando and Octavio Getino. "Toward A Third Cinema". *Cinéaste*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (winter 1970-71), pp. 1-10. Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/41685716. Web. p. 2.

about his experience as a filmmaker in an event held in Nazareth, however, he is unable to due to the microphone failing to work and the phones of some of the guests ringing incessantly. In Joseph Massad's opinion, this expresses the idea that even with a silenced voice, Suleiman's imagination is still free to wander.[160] In other words, as much as Palestinian people are subject to injustices and the violence of occupation, and as much as they are made invisible, their minds, intellects and creativities can never be taken away from them, and it shall be what makes their voices heard before the world.

In other times, the visibility serves to bring light on historical events that have been denied or silenced. When asked about a scene in *The Time that Remains* (2009) representing Israeli militaries stealing embroideries from the abandoned house of a Palestinian family (a scene made even more personal as it is shot from the point of view of the character of Fuad Suleiman who is no other than Elia's father, as his film *The Time that Remains* is actually based on the notes left by Elia Suleiman's father), the film director answered with the following:

> "It wasn't initiated…perhaps in the back of my mind. Israel, the Israelis, and the rest of the world have been brainwashed. They don't think of pre-1948, they have no idea Palestinians were in Israel, who we were before '48. As if we were born in 1948 according to them. They have no notion that we had a country, houses, rebelled against the Ottomans and the British. They think history in that region started in that moment. The influence that brings this kind of scene in carries the burden of all these questions and preconceptions that a lot of people have or don't know about the history of the region. About the looting in particular…I was shooting for a location in my neighborhood, and told a neighbor I wanted to shoot a scene from her balcony. She told me, "Come, I'll show you something." She showed me bullet holes in walls of her house. She explained that in 1948, she had just returned from her honeymoon in Beirut where she bought embroideries and other souvenirs. One day she walked into

[160] Massad, Joseph. "The Weapon of Culture: Cinema in the Palestinian Liberation Struggle" in Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema,* p. 39.

her house and found the Haganah wrapping all the embroideries and gold. They were looting her house. When her husband tried to prevent one of them (from the looting), they scared him by shooting. While telling me the story, she started to tear up. Sixty years later and it was as if it had just happened to her. I was so moved, disturbed, and angry, I told her I was going to take some revenge for her by creating this looting scene. I shot it outside of her house."[161]

But visibility both turns outward and inward. Michel Khleifi's selected films manifest the former category of expressing visibility. In both *Al Dhakira Al Khasba* (1980) and *Urs al-Jalil* (1987), Khleifi connects between sections of shots by including a voiceover of women singing segments of Palestinian folk songs. This can be analyzed as an affirmation that what connects between different shots — that is moments of the present, or simply the present (since a cinematic shot is lived, especially from the viewer's perspective, as a substitution for the present) — is the past, always being brought back, always extending its shadow because the past here is the experience of a trauma which cannot simply be repelled, and which thus is ever present. But this brings us back to Khleifi and Gertz's idea that Palestinian cinema serves an attempt to "invent, document, and crystallize Palestinian history" by confronting the trauma.[162] This has been previously seen with the insight that Haim Bresheeth brings concerning trauma and melancholy in his article about borders and liminality in Elia Suleiman's *Chronicle of a Disappearance*.

But visibility, of course, is also turned outward, that is for the rest of the world, or a specific group to see the struggle of Palestinians. Helga Twil-Souri stresses the extent to which Palestinian cultural studies contain the idea of resistance at their very heart, in order to emphasize that: "Palestinians are not silenced, not

[161] Suleiman, Elia. "The Other Face of Silence: Nathalie Handal Interviews Elia Suleiman." *Guernica: A Magazine of Arts and Politics*, May 1, 2011. https://www.guernicamag.com/suleiman_5_1_11/. Web.
[162] Gertz, Nurith, and George Khleifi. *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma and Memory*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. Print. p. 3

erased, not 'disappeared'. Palestinians exist."[163] This idea seems to speak directly to Elia Suleiman's *Sijill Ikhtifaa* and Bresheeth's comment on it mentioned above. If Suleiman's aim is to show that the Palestinians, for everything they have gone through and still do, and all the occupation they have endured, which extends to different complex levels of their lives, are now disappearing, the fact that he chooses to shoot it, to showcase it in a film is nothing short of paradoxical in this case, and in fact joins Tawil-Souri's quote. As long as they exist, the Palestinians cannot disappear, and so the chronicle of their disappearance can be read in a different way: it is a dissident act to make them visible, to document their lives, in short to resist.

When it comes to Iranian cinema, visibility is relevant in terms of looking at the extent to which Iranian cinema is directed at an international audience, and what that means. For this purpose, Jafar Panahi's *In film nist* (2011) can be brought up once more as it is also relevant to the idea of visibility. This documentary ultimately conveys to the viewer a profound frustration while watching this film director who is very creative but who cannot give life to his creative ideas because the government has decided to prevent him from ever making films again inside of Iran. The demands in this case can be as fundamental as to be free to give voice to one's creative mind. Going back to the idea expressed previously in the present chapter, the creative idea— that Panahi resorts to in order to give an idea of the new movie he wanted to make but was not going to receive an authorization for, as he was in the middle of a trial and even risked going to jail— of physically performing the script of the movie, by putting tape on his rug to delimitate the space he has in mind where the first scene of the movie would take place, and seeing him going back and forth confined in that imagined room, finally makes him give up when he realizes he cannot convey much

[163] Tawil-Souri, Helga. "Where is the political in cultural studies? In Palestine." *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14(5), 2011, pp.467–482. DOI:10.1177/1367877911408656. Web. p. 478.

through recounting the script and putting tape on his rug. This is a very visual instance of constraints being clearly filmed for the audience to watch.

Moreover, in his chapter "Iran's Cinema Museum and Political Unrest", Blake Atwood recounts his visit to the Cinema Museum in Tehran, and among the elements that caught his attention in the museum is the poster for *In film nist,* which occupies a large space in the museum's third hall. The poster represents a black and white sketch of Jafar Panahi from the scene where he was filming with his iPhone. Atwood has an interesting interpretation of this poster as he sees that the phone is pointed at the visitor, as if Panahi was recording us, "and implicating us in some larger project of witnessing."[164] This interpretation in interesting in two ways: first it emphasizes on the fact that Panahi is trying to make visible to the rest of the world the extent to which he is being silenced because he tries to speak freely and lets his creative mind turn his (dissident and subversive) ideas into movies, which is even clearer from the fact that he had to smuggle the tape of *In film nist* outside of Iran for it to be produced and released; but it also brings back the idea that is central to Third Cinema of implicating the audience so that it is not simply passive to the content that it watches, because if you turn your viewer into a "witness", they are automatically implicated in your story and can no longer remain outside of it.

In an attempt to bring both cinemas together, one can say that they both speak to their own people but also to an international audience as a sort of "call for help". To put it simply, the dissident demands that Iranian directors may express are directed first and foremost at their government for fewer restrictions, more freedom of speech and freedom to shoot their movies in the aesthetic form that they have imagined for them. They seek to put an end to the interdictions on some of them to make movies

[164] *Atwood, Blake. Reform Cinema in Iran: Film and Political Change in the Islamic Republic. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. Print.*p. 200.

altogether simply because the conservatives do not agree with what they have to show. They also wish to be able to depict women in more complex ways than the figure of the pious and pure mother/wife/sister. On the other hand, Palestinian cinema is aimed at showing the hardships faced by a people without a state, and thus without rights. They try to depict life under occupation and the injustices and wounds that it causes for them to endure. It is a cinema that tries to represent life itself, to tell the rest of the world that Palestinians exist, and that these are their stories. Palestinian cinema is thus about the humanization of a people and their cry for national liberation.

Conclusion

This thesis had the aim of reexamining the place of the cultural sphere, by looking specifically at cinema, in Middle Eastern studies and politics. Choosing to focus on Iranian and Palestinian cinema, the goal here was to see in what way these two "national" cinemas can be political and express dissident demands of the Iranian and Palestinian people through the medium of film. For this purpose, the research explored a number of questions. First of all, given that both Iranian and Palestinian filmmakers face many constraints specific to their cases, it was interesting to look at how a filmmaker can get creative under constraint, for them to still express the ideas they have while also evading censorship. This is done, as was seen throughout the research, by using creativity, thus allowing for their demands to be expressed indirectly using their unique aesthetic expressions, but also through the use of storytelling, as well as symbols of implicit nature for most cases that allow them to make political claims and send messages expressing their frustration as artists in the face of a governmental or foreign domination. Ultimately, this work allowed for a deconstruction of politics for the purpose of redefining it in a way that is different from how politics are conventionally conceptualized, that is in the sense of the institutions and individuals who have a saying in the organization of the public life, and who are chosen through voting and representation. Politics here were defined as the challenge of the hierarchical order, a challenge that allows those without a voice to speak for themselves and seek out emancipation from a system oppressing them. Such a conception of politics, derived from the works of Rancière, allowed for the possibility of extending "the political" to the realm of cinema and allowing for them to meet at an intersection.

Another question that was interesting to look at is the way in which the difference in dissident demands between Iranians and Palestinians lead to different ways for creativity to be manifested, but also different ways of "doing politics" through cinema. Obviously, the demands are different in each case (though they were also brought together as some of the demands are more "universal" in this sense), and the different contexts in which both directors navigate lead them to approach this in different ways, mainly, in the Iranian case, directors turn to indirect ways of being political, such as the use of children as their main characters to name but one example, whereas Palestinian directors are more able to be overtly political in their movies, as long as they are able to secure funding.

Looking at cinema in ideational ways allows for approaching it in a more complex way than simply an entertainment or an art among others that has no other function but to be an art that is consumed by an audience. This approach to cinema sheds light on its potential to be a chosen tool to express political statements in creative manners, due to the force that the image has on the viewer. Art, and cinema particularly, due to the power that image has of moving human beings, of stirring their emotions, making them think, of its power to stick with the viewer long after the credits have rolled, makes us more human than ever, and by making us think, makes us question the wrongs around us. That is where the power of cinema resides, and that is where it is political and strives, and certainly *does* make a change.

There is also an aspect of a saving grace to this emancipation. This recalls an interview that Hamid Dabashi made with Makhmalbaf where the latter claims: "When I was a child, I started going to the mosque; I wanted to save humanity. After growing a little older, I wanted to save my country; now, I think, I make films in order to save

myself."[165] Cinema has this potential. It also has a potential for the restoration of dignity. In short, to make more politically conscious audiences, while also leaving them the freedom of choosing their own ideology or opting out of one altogether, but an audience that can aspire to emancipation through compassion, a conscious awareness of the weight of history, and a critical reflection upon the latter. This is a cinema that is political in its ability to be poetic while taking birth in the very reality in which the viewer lives. It is also a cinema that start with the self of the filmmaker, as that is where everything starts, but which also gives one awareness of their capacities and the potential results that they can achieve by also starting from themselves. It is a cinema that reflects the uniqueness of each case, but that ultimately brings them together nonetheless by emphasizing their common humanity at the deepest level, and creating the possibility of realizing new political realities in our shared world with less emphasis on difference and more bringing everyone together. A world where creativity is given outmost importance, because that is where hope of existing in harmony resides: it starts with imagining it. This brings us back to the fundamental research question guiding this work, namely "how does one create under constraint?", while twisting it into "*why* does one create under constraint?", and the answer is *because it is necessary.*[166] There is a necessity, one can even claim an urgency, in making the personal political, and the political universal. This is the only way to imagine what Rancière calls humanity *sans frontières.*[167]

[165] Dabashi, Hamid. Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present, and Future. London: Verso, 2001. Print. p. 211.
[166] This recalls Gilles Deleuze's claim "A creator is not a being who works for pleasure. A creator does only what he or she absolutely needs to do". Deleuze, Gilles. "Having An Idea in Cinema" in Kaufman, Eleanor, and Kevin Jon Heller. *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. Print. p. 15.
[167] Rancière, Jacques. *Disagreement: Politics And Philosophy*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008. Print. p. xiii.

Filmography

Iranian Cinema

— Bani E'temâd, Rakhshân, *Banou-ye Ordibehesht* (*The* May Lady, 1998).

— Ghobadi, Bahman, *Kasi az Gorbehaye Irani Khabar Nadareh* (*No One Knows About Persian Cats*, 2009).

— Jalili, Abolfazl, *Raghs dar ghobar* (*Dancing in the Dust,* 2003).

— Kiarostami, Abbas, *Nema-ye Nazdik* (*Close-up,* 1990).

— Kiarostami, Abbas, *Ta'm-e gilās (The Taste of Cherry,* 1997).

— Majidi, Majid, *Rang-e Khodā* (*The color of Paradise*, 1999).

— Makhmalbaf, Mohsen, Bicyleran (*The Cyclist*, 1987).

— Makhmalbaf, Mohsen, *Nobat e Asheghi* (*A Time to Love,* 1990).

— Naderi, Amir, *Davandeh*, (*The Runner*, 1984).

— Panahi, Jafar, *Badkonake sefid* (*The White Balloon*, 1995).

— Panahi, Jafar, *The Circle* (2000).

— Panahi, Jafar, *In film nist* (*This Is Not A Film*, 2011).

Palestinian cinema

— Abu-Assad, Hany, *Al Janna Al Ān* (*Paradise Now*, 2005).

— Bakri, Mohammed, *Jenin, Jenin* (2002).

— el-Yassir, Nada, *Arba'a Aghani Li Filastin* (*Four Songs for Palestine*, 2001).

— Hassan's Nizar, *Ustura* (*Legend*, 1998).

— Khleifi, Michel, *Al Dhakira Al Khasba* (*Fertile Memory*, 1980).

— Khleifi, Michel, *Urs al-Jalil* (*Wedding in Galilee*, 1987).

— Suleiman, Elia, *Sijill Ikhtifaa* (*Chronicle of a Disappearance*, 1996).

— Suleiman, Elia, *Yadon Ilaheyya* (*Divine intervention*, 2002).

— Suleiman, Elia, *The Time That Remains*, 2009.

Bibliography

Atwood, Blake. *Reform Cinema in Iran: Film and Political Change in the Islamic Republic*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. Print.

Abu-Lughod, Lila, and Ahmad H. Sadi. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory (Cultures of History)*. Columbia University Press, 2007. Print.

Assayas, Olivier., "Making a Connection between the Cinema, Politics and Real Life: Steve Erickson Interviews Olivier Assayas", *Cinéaste* 22, n^{o} 4 (1997): 6–9, Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/41688949. Web. p. 8.

Baqué, Dominique. *Pour un nouvel art politique: de l'art contemporain au documentaire*. Paris: Flammarion, 2009.

Ben Zvi, Tal. "Aval ani ve-rak ani asaper et ha-sipur sheli" [But I and only I can tell my story]. *Plastika*, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 75-81.

Bresheeth, Haim. "A Symphony of Absence: Borders and Liminality in Elia Suleiman's 'Chronicle of a Disappearance'". *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, Vol. 43, No. 2, Middle-Eastern Media Arts (Fall 2002), pp. 71-84. Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/41552334. Web.

Cardullo, Bert. *In Search of Cinema: Writings on International Film Art*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2004. Print.

Chambers, Samuel A. "Jacques Rancière and the problem of pure politics." *European Journal of Political Theory* 10, no. 3 (2011): 303-26. doi:10.1177/1474885111406386. Web.

Courtisane Festival. 9 December,2015. https://www.courtisane.be/nl/event/fertile-memory. Web.

Dabashi, Hamid. *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present, and Future*. London: Verso, 2001. Print.

Dabashi, Hamid. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*. Verso Books, 2007. Print.

Dabashi, Hamid. *Makhmalbaf at Large: The Making of a Rebel Filmmaker*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2008.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinéma 1: L'Image-Mouvement*. Collection Critique, 1983. Print.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps*. Collection Critique, 1985. Print.

Devi, Gayatri, and Najat Rahman. *Humor in Middle Eastern Cinema*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014. Print.

Devictor, Agnès. *Politique du cinéma iranien: de l'Ayatollah Khomeini au président Khatami*. Editions Du CNRS, 2004. Print.

Fanon, Frantz, Richard Philcox, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Homi K. Bhabha. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2017. Print.

France Culture. "Philosophies d'Iran (4/4): Un pays sous le regard des cineastes". *Les Chemins De La Philosophie* by Adèle Van Reeth. 14 December 2017. https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/les-chemins-de-la-philosophie/philosophies-diran-44-un-pays-sous-le-regard-des-cineastes. Web.

Gabriel, Teshome H. *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982. Print.

Gadassik, Alla. "A National Filmmaker without a Home: Home and Displacement in the Films of Amir Naderi", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, n° 2 (2011): 474–86, https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-1264361. Web.

Gertz, Nurith, and George Khleifi. *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma and Memory*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. Print.

Gugler, Josef. *Film in the Middle East and North Africa: Creative Dissidence*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011. Print.

Guneratne, Anthony R., and Wimal Dissanayake. *Rethinking Third Cinema*. New York: Routlede, 2003. Print.

Human Rights Watch. "Israel, The Occupied West Bank And Gaza Strip, And The Palestinian Authority Territories. Jenin: IDF Military Operations.", Vol. 14, No. 3 (E), May 2002. https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/israel3/israel0502.pdf. Web.

"Israel attorney general joins lawsuit against Palestinian filmmaker", *Middle East Monitor,* December 21st, 2017. https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20171221-israel-attorney-general-joins-lawsuit-against-palestinian-filmmaker/. Web.

Ivie, Robert L. "Enabling Democratic Dissent", *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 101:1, 46-59, 2015. DOI: 10.1080/00335630.2015.994900. Web.

Johnston, Sandra. *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*. Lit, 2014. Print.

Kaufman, Eleanor, and Kevin Jon Heller. *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. Print.

Khatib, Lina. *Image Politics in the Middle East: the Role of the Visual in Political Struggle*. I.B. Tauris, 2013. Print.

Lane, Melissa, "Ancient Political Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/ancient-political/>. Web.

Leftwich, Adrian (ed.), *What is Politics? The Activity and Its Study*. Cambridge: Polity, 2004. Print.

Makhmalbaf, Mohsen. "Filmmaking in Iran today". In *Mohsen Makhmalbaf: From Discourse to Dialogue*, ed. Fernando González García, 223 – 229. Madrid: Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Cultura, 2008. Print.

May, Todd. "Jacques Rancière and the Ethics of Equality". *SubStance*, Vol. 36, No. 2, Issue 113: The Future of Anarchism (2007), pp. 20-36. University of Wisconsin Press. Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/25195123. Web.

Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. Print.

Nashef, Hania A.M. "Demythologizing the Palestinian in Hany Abu-Assad's Omar and Paradise Now", *Transnational Cinemas*, 7:1, 82-95, DOI: 10.1080/20403526.2015.1080984. Web.

Nichols, B. (ed.), *Movies and methods*, volume I, Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976. Print.

Over, William. "Worlds Transformed: Iranian Cinema and Social Vision". *Contemporary Justice Review* . Vol. 9, No. 1, March 2006, pp. 67–80. DOI: 10.1080/10282580600564933. Web.

Panagia, Davide. *Impressions of Hume: Cinematic Thinking and the Politics of Discontinuity*. Lanham: Rowman Et Littlefield Publ., 2013. Print.

Phillips, Kendall R. "The Event of Dissension: Reconsidering the Possibilities of Dissent", *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 101:1, 60-71, 2015. DOI: 10.1080/00335630.2015.994899. Web.

Rancière, Jacques. *On the shores of politics* / Jacques Ranciere; translated by Liz Heron Verso London ; New York, 1995. Print.

Rancière, Jacques. *La mésentente*, Éd. Galilée, 1995. Print.

Rancière, Jacques. *Disagreement: Politics And Philosophy*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008. Print.

Rancière, Jacques, and Steve Corcoran. *Dissensus: On Politics And Aesthetics*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. Print.

Robbins, Derek. "Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Rancière on Art/Aesthetics and Politics: The Origins of Disagreement, 1963-1985: Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Rancière on Art/Aesthetics and Politics.", *The British Journal of Sociology* 66, no 4 (décembre 2015): 738‑58, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12148. Web.

Sadr, Hamid Reza. *Iranian Cinema: A Political History*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2006. Print.

Said, Edward W., and Jean Mohr. *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. Print.

Said, Edward. "Cultural Politics", *al-Ahram Weekly*, 4 – 10 May 2000. Online ; available at http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/Archive/2000/480/cu2.htm. Web.

Said, Edward. *Culture and Resistance : Conversations with Edward W. Said* (Interviews by Barsamian D.). Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2003. Print.

Schelfhout, Dorien. "Cinephile collective Sabzian selects 10 of its favourite Belgian movies". *The Word Magazine*, february 28, 2017. http://thewordmagazine.com/art/cinephile-collective-sabzian-selects-10-of-its-favourite-belgian-movies/. Web.

Schiller, "Letters Upon The Aesthetic Education of Man" http://public-library.uk/ebooks/55/76.pdf. Web.

Solanas, Fernando and Octavio Getino. “Toward A Third Cinema”. *Cinéaste*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (winter 1970-71), pp. 1-10. Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/41685716. Web.

Stein, Rebecca L., and Ted Swedenburg. *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. Print.

Suleiman, Elia. “The Other Face of Silence: Nathalie Handal Interviews Elia Suleiman.” *Guernica: A Magazine of Arts and Politics*, May 1, 2011. https://www.guernicamag.com/suleiman_5_1_11/. Web.

Suleiman, Elia. “Hope and action despite pessimism : Daniel Tkatch interviews Elia Suleiman.” *Political Critique*, September 5th, 2016. http://politicalcritique.org/world/2016/filmmaker-suleiman-hope-and-action/. Web.

Tapper, Richard. *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*. London: Tauris, 2006. Print.

Tawil-Souri, Helga. “Where is the political in cultural studies? In Palestine.” *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14(5), 2011, pp.467–482. DOI: 10.1177/1367877911408656. Web.

Tzioumakis, Yannis and Claire Molloy. *The Routledge Companion To Cinema And Politics*. London ; New York : Routledge, 2016. Print.

“UN releases report on recent events in Jenin, other Palestinian cities”. *UN News*, August 1st, 2002. https://news.un.org/en/story/2002/08/41692-un-releases-report-recent-events-jenin-other-palestinian-cities. Web.

Walsh, Michael. “National Cinema, National Imaginary.” *Film History*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Cinema and Nation (Spring, 1996), pp. 5-17. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3815213. Web.

Weinberger, Stephen. “The Cyclist (Bicycleran)” . *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Summer 2006), pp. 47-50. Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/fq.2006.59.4.47. Web.

Zeydabadi-Nejad, Saeed. *The Politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic*. Routledge, 2011. Print.