

### 3.2 'ROADBLOCK' FILMS, 'CHILDREN'S RESISTANCE' FILMS AND 'BLOOD RELATIONS' FILMS: ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN DOCUMENTARY POST-INTIFADA II

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*Outside of the West, documentary has long been a platform for the ongoing search to uncover and establish national identities. The more vexed the realpolitik, the more significant is this work. Nowhere is this better seen than in the Middle East and in its longest running conflict. The struggle to possess the documentary screen has become as real as the struggle for land, legitimacy and statehood.*

'The colonial situation, by its own internal inevitability, brings on revolt. For the colonial condition cannot be adjusted to; like an iron collar, it can only be broken'. (Albert Memmi)

Any analysis of the regional documentary cinema of Israel and Palestine must take several factors into consideration. The fact that 130 years have passed since the Zionist movement's return to, and settlement in Palestine during the 1880s makes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict one of the longest in modern history; it is a conflict that is constantly intensifying, escalating through the course of seven wars, two *Intifadas*,<sup>1</sup> and a series of short-term armed confrontations. Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the War of Independence/Palestinian *Naqba*,<sup>2</sup> an average of one war or armed conflict has occurred every six years.<sup>3</sup> The Israeli occupation (of 1948, but particularly of 1967) has enforced colonial and neo-colonial dependency and subjugating relations on Palestinian society. This has been evidenced by the eruption of two *Intifadas*, Palestinian suicide terrorism, and Israeli state terror; it has contributed to the sharp polarization of Israeli society into left and right camps and led to major political-religious upheavals, specifically the rise of the settlement movement and the growth of Jewish, as well as of Hamas and Islamic, fundamentalism. Since 1910, when the first documentary film was produced by the Jewish community in Palestine, and 1935, when the first was made by Palestinian Arabs, the ongoing endeavor of both sides of the conflict has been to cinematically constitute national identity and document their nations' coming-into-being as a 'community of memory' deeply attached to the region.<sup>4</sup> Both corpora simultaneously – although in different ways and to various degrees – are concerned with issues of identity (trans)formation and negotiation of the *I-other* in a condition of incessant conflictual and traumatic relations.

This chapter aims to analyze both corpora as cinema of conflict by focusing on the second *Intifada*, a major turning point in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and thus also in its representation.<sup>5</sup> Since the second *Intifada*, due to the dismantling of traditional contrasts (terror-war, sovereign state-legitimate authority, front-home, civilian-soldier, defense-offense, beginning-end, victory-defeat, moral-immoral), and particularly the 'deliberate targeting of non-combatants', the war has been conducted as a twenty-first century, 'new' war.<sup>6</sup> This drastic change in the style of war and the very fact of the second eruption of an *Intifada*, have

dramatically changed the nature of the conflict,<sup>7</sup> creating on the Israeli part a major moral breakdown and therefore various processes of humanization of the Palestinian other (both in public discourse and on television), and intensified on the Palestinian part the Palestinian claim to justice and endorsement of the culture of *shahidism*, 'martyrdom'

It is my contention that during the course of their evolution the corpora shared many characteristics: the dominance of collective, constitutive trauma (the Holocaust [*Shoah*] and the *Naqba*); an ethos of 'return' to one's homeland; the binary conceptualization of the subject positions of victim and perpetrator; claims to (post-traumatic) victimhood; the denial of perpetration; dialectic tension between the image of the refugee and that of the fighter/soldier; and the deliberate silencing of the other's master narrative. As the second *Intifada*'s documentary cinema demonstrates, it is despite, or rather because of this conspicuous similitude that their ideological and aesthetic routes as cinemas of conflict are totally different. Israeli cinema's most notable emerging trends relate to the loss of the moral high ground in what I describe henceforth as the 'good Israeli' films and perpetrator trauma films (relating, respectively to the Palestinian civilian and the Israeli soldier). Palestinian cinema relentlessly deals with the conflict's escalation in terms of films depicting the hardship of colonialism, as in the new subgenre of roadblock movie, and with the continuation of the struggle for liberation, as in the new subgenre of the children's resistance film. However, analysis of both corpora, based on the evolution of *I-other* cinematic relations, also reveals a progression toward (at least) a cinematic reconciliation. Both corpora strive to be reality-shaping, offering a new version – conflict-driven but also conflict-mediating – of docu-activism, a version which challenges both peoples' violent histories and their current fundamentalism.

The chapter outlines the disparate ideological and aesthetic routes taken by the two corpora and concomitantly the new, regional subgenres that emerged during the second *Intifada*. Proposing a taxonomy of conflict cinema is discussed in the conclusion as an evolution that triggers important positive cinematic change, attesting to the complex, fluctuating role of documentary cinema in crisis-ridden zones of protracted conflict.

### 'ROADBLOCK' FILMS

From its inception, Israeli documentary cinema, similarly to that of its Palestinian counterpart, was revolutionary, propagandistic, and nationalist. For almost eight decades between 1910 and 1987 it supported the Zionist project, reproduced its ideology, and endorsed the heroism and morality of the Israeli soldier who fights 'just wars'.<sup>8</sup> The few critical documentaries that appeared during this period were mostly made after 1967<sup>9</sup> and only retrospectively attained the status of ideologically pioneering, subversive works. However, over the course of its development, Israeli documentary cinema evinces major ideological

transformations with respect to Zionism, occupation and terror, and the ethnic-religious other: the Palestinian.

While attempting to cope with the psycho-political-moral crisis exposed by the first, and particularly the second *Intifada*, left-wing documentary cinema, influenced by the shift toward the other at the beginning of the 1980s, known as the Palestinian Wave films<sup>10</sup> and post-Zionist trends denying Zionism as a revolutionary movement of Jewish renewal,<sup>11</sup> ruptured the Zionist ethos and shifted the 'collective voice' to an 'anti-collective' voice. Negotiating the power of prevailing binarisms – Zionism-post-Zionism, victim-perpetrator, state violence-terror, recognition-disavowal, and even Left-Right – becomes critical in light of the changing nature of the war, emphasizing the unbearable transition from Zionism's New Jew to the 'new (war) soldier', a soldier who encounters a civilian population on a daily basis. Through self-critical, un-hegemonic, and ideologically-fractured films, documentary cinema criticizes the occupation, portrays the Palestinian as the ultimate victim, and expresses a heartfelt sense of soldierly and civil (uncathartic) guilt.<sup>12</sup> Two major trends on the Left that emerged during the second *Intifada* embody these ideological transformations, creating what I consider two subgenres that I call the 'good Israeli' films and perpetrator trauma films. Both trends negotiate Israel's post-Holocaust claim to victimhood, and thus the binarism of victim-perpetrator that is at the heart of cinematic representations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The deepening of the inherent splits inside Israeli society in terms of right-left, secular-religious, and Zionist-anti/a-Zionist is further enhanced by the emergence of a reactionary, religious, national-Zionist trend, mainly on the Right.

Unlike the major trends of the first decade of twenty-first century docu-activism in world cinema – mainly in Michael Moore's post-9/11 work – in post-second *Intifada* 'good Israeli' docu-activism, it is not the director-celebrity who is the hero, but rather the ordinary Israeli assisted by the director, who is often a political-social activist. At center stage are their relentless efforts to lend visibility to the emblematic Palestinian experience – subjugation to an 'intolerable, illegitimate exercise of power',<sup>13</sup> which is rendered invisible, and repressed by many sectors of Israeli society and public discourse – and to promote an improvement in Palestinian daily routine. Therefore, the unavoidable blurring of distinction between docu-activism and social activism defines the 'good Israeli' films.<sup>14</sup>

The activism of the 'good Israeli' trend reveals a spectrum on one side of which films like *9 Stars Hotel* (Ido Haar, 2006), lend visibility to Palestinian misery, and entail the director's cooperation with Palestinians who are transgressing Israeli law. *9 Stars Hotel* depicts the lives of Palestinian laborers building the new city of Mod'in who are forbidden to stay in Israel. Summer and winter, they live in inhuman conditions in the hills surrounding the city and engage, with the director, in a constant game of cat and mouse with the army and border police. In the middle of the spectrum are films whose directors, as political activists, document their own active participation with, and contribution to the Palestinian political struggle. *Bil'in My Love* (Shai

Carmeli-Pollack, 2007), for instance, depicts in a harsh, direct style a year of participating in, and documenting the weekly demonstrations against the separation wall and the expropriation of land in the West Bank village of Bil'in. The director occasionally interviews the leaders of Bil'in's 'Popular Committee Against the Fence', tries to mediate with the Israeli commander before the riot escalates, and finally dedicates the film to the victims of the struggle. At the other end of the spectrum, the films depict Israeli political-social intervention on behalf of the Palestinians. The director documents other social activists, as in *The Human Turbine* (Danny [Nokio] Varta, 2009). Moving beyond the 'permanent emergency' cliché to deal with the specificity of living conditions, this documentary details three years of Israeli activism: in joint meetings between local residents and group members, four Israelis have created a renewable energy project at the Hebron village of Susia, supplying electricity to residents living in tents and caves. The film follows the project's development up until the activists manage to make another way of life possible for the residents, who are shepherds, by providing them with the option of selling refrigerated milk to make a living, and finally supplying the entire village with electricity.

Although this form of docu-/social-activism is driven by a profound humanistic attitude of 'doing' it is paradoxically limited. The paradox derives from the 'good Israeli' trend's grounding in Israeli long-time colonizer complex: the Israeli Left's harsh condemnation of the occupation, while practically and/or symbolically retaining the colonizer's subject position. As the 'good Israeli' films demonstrate, the 'good Israeli' identity is articulated as a movement caught between defying, and belonging to the Israeli colonial regime, between Antigone-esque aspirations and pre-constituted Creon-like sovereignty. In other words, although this docu-activism is critical-affective, it is subjected, through pre-constituted colonial power relations, to a system that reasserts itself through both humanitarian, pseudo-humanitarian, and de-humanitarian acts.

The roadblock movie, which emerged during the second *Intifada* as a unique, regional subgenre, encapsulates this long-time colonizer complex and because of the spatial regime of the occupation, the paradox of socio-cinematic intervention it entails is extreme. Expressing the 'good Israeli' syndrome, roadblock movies, such as Ram Levi's *Close, Closed, Closure* (2002), Yoav Shamir's *Checkpoints* (2003), and Simone Bitton's *Wall* (2004), are highly critical, yet prove the spatial, and thus symbolic and ethical limitations of this criticism. Depicting a situation where the map becomes a crucial signifier of control over place, which is not 'simply there', but is in a continual process of being 'written', that is, presenting arbitrariness as a major characteristic of the Palestinian experience, these films are a testament to the roadblock's power over the inscription of being. In other words, the roadblock movie exposes to Israeli spectators the checkpoint as a major signifier of ethnocentricity and homogeneity, assumed and/or imposed by colonialist cartography and routines. Thus, these documentaries became part of the 'spatial turn' in Israeli discourse on the occupation, which helps extend Israelis' political understanding of the conflict to a physical, geographical reality.

Assuming the 'good Israeli' subject position depends, thus, 'upon establishing an interstitial space of identification',<sup>15</sup> which involves the irresolvable tension between personhood – doing good deeds – and the historical and geographical colonized locations in which they occur. Only in the few 'good Israeli' films employing a self-reflexive mode is the camera able to document the over-complexity of the politics of separation in this 'Escher-like territorial arrangement' <sup>16</sup> in a way that clearly demonstrates its own limitations.

The camera in *Checkpoints*, for instance, seems unaware of its highly ambivalent 'good Israeli' attitude. Its omnipresence and all-encompassing movement stands in ironic juxtaposition with the life it strives to document. In contrast, *Close, Closed, Closure*, for instance, detailing endless lines of people from a distance, offers a subversive look at Gaza checkpoints; by keeping the camera at a distance, and limiting its movement and ability to trespass, it demonstrates an awareness, rare in the roadblock subgenre, of its own helplessness, stuck as it is in the territorial design. In other words, in (un-reflexive) roadblock movies the ability of the camera, symbolizing the privileged status of the Israeli subject, to surmount walls and borders, police surveillance, and army orders, and to traverse the 'land of checkpoints',<sup>17</sup> makes the ethical encounter at the checkpoint an experience of being-in-difference.

Whenever the 'good Israeli' films do more than scratch the surface by articulating or addressing the conditions that produce or foment violations of human rights and by exposing the treacherous means through which subordination is achieved and regulated through the description of a spectrum of causes, decisions, fallacies, and consequences, they rupture the possibility of being simultaneously politically essential and politically regressive. In these cases, they therefore subvert the 'good Israeli' 'humanitarian paradox'. This is clearly discernible, for instance, in Eli Cohen's television mini-series *Fence, Wall, Border* (2006), which analyzes the human rights violations caused by the three-year construction of the separation wall.

Furthermore, Israeli intimacy with, and proximity to Palestinian life in 'good Israeli' films might be perceived as a somehow reversed position of Bhabha's paradoxical strategy of mimicry (the colonized ambivalent replication of the colonizer). It is not only the mimicry, as Bhabha suggests, but also this 'reversed mimicry', apparently a de-authorization, that signifies both intimacy and menace because those Palestinians accepting Israeli assistance might be accused by their fellow Palestinians of collaborating with the Israeli regime and also since, as a moral project, the films' absurd ad-hoc limitation re-enhances colonial dependency and discriminatory power. Thus, the 'good Israeli' film in fact creates another authorized version of otherness. By their very proximity to the Palestinians' daily hardship, the 'good Israeli' embodies a resemblance, based on alleged shared humanity, to the Palestinian; however, it is – to cite Bhabha's famous phrase – 'almost total but not quite'.<sup>18</sup> Staged around temporary proximity, the films, despite their docu-activist nature, unwillingly reveal not only an encounter of 'symbolic sameness', but also of 'practical difference'.

I claim that the 'good Israeli' trend, inevitably dependent on a particular ambivalent and contingent double consciousness, involves a certain degree of misrecognition of socio-political differences, which makes its exceptional – ideological and spatial – status as a trend irresolvable. On the other hand, by presenting the everydayness of physical violence and human rights violations, these documentaries fracture the ongoing denial and repression of the occupation prevalent in narrative, mainstream cinema. Moreover, the films (and actions) create a new 'imagined community' of 'good Israelis', as opposed to the settlers and right-wing directors, and thus they play a significant role in terms of social responsibility. However, as Žižek contends,

[it]is not so much identification with the Law that regulates the community's normal everyday circuit, but rather identification with a specific form of transgression of the Law, of the Law's suspension (in psychoanalytic terms) with a specific form of enjoyment.<sup>19</sup>

The fantasy of the colonizer that she/he has managed to free himself/herself from the most dominant aspects of colonial legacy and practice is embodied in the documentarist's fantasmatic *jouissance* over his/her unique actions of transgression of the law.

The irresolvable tensions embodied in various layers of the paradox that define the 'good Israeli' trend (celebrity/ordinary, docu-/social-activism, colonizer/colonized, symbolic sameness/practical difference, imagined community/transgressive *jouissance*) confirms the suggestion 'paradox appears endlessly self-canceling, as a political condition of achievements perpetually undercut... and hence a state in which political strategizing itself is paralyzed'.<sup>20</sup> By focusing on, and assisting, the Palestinian as the ultimate victim of the occupation, the 'good Israeli' film shifts the Israeli post-Holocaust claim to victimhood, but, paradoxically, also maintains the binarism of victim-perpetrator. However, this period, as suggested above, also witnesses a new development in regard to this binarism: the perpetrator trauma film. This new subgenre, a pioneer in world cinema, neither focuses on the trauma of the victimized Palestinian, nor the Israeli victim of suicide terrorism, but rather on that of the Israeli soldier (male or female) who has become a perpetrator. Films such as Ari Folman's *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), Avi Mograbi's *Z32* (2008), Tamar Yarom's *To See If I'm Smiling* (2007), and Nurit Kedar's *Concrete* (2011) depict the post-traumatic subject position of the perpetrator of atrocities. I regard these films – as I have claimed in other forums<sup>21</sup> – as neither absolving Israeli soldiers from wrongdoing, nor as offering the Israeli audience a spectatorial experience based on a cathartic guilt-freeing, but rather as displaying a mature cinematic-social phase. Unprotected by a moral environment, they give 'a causal or functional account of the mechanism of evil'<sup>22</sup> they participated in either directly or indirectly. Thus, these ex-soldiers' accounts pave the way for Israelis to assume moral responsibility for the deeds carried out in their name in the occupied territories.

This genre caused the major ideological transformation undergone by documentary cinema, a schizoid cinematic reality exacerbated by the emergence of a new religious wave following Yitzhak Rabin's assassination in 1995. It was only after the assassination that, for the first time in forty years, Israeli documentary and religious cinema began to address the drastic socio-political shift rightward. The new religious wave embraced the Haredim (ultra-Orthodox, anti- or a-Zionist Jews) to a degree never before witnessed. Although still far from the dominance of left,

secular film production, mainly due to the fact that most of the directors in the Israeli film industry belong to the left-secular camp, and despite the fact that 'inside' critical voices are heard from within the religious community<sup>23</sup> – right-wing film Zionist-national production is expanding both within and without the settler community.<sup>24</sup>

### 'CHILDREN'S RESISTANCE' FILMS

In contrast to Israeli cinema's deep ideological split between documentary and narrative, and between left- and right-wing films, Palestinian documentary (and narrative) cinema, as cinema of the colonized, has, since its inception<sup>25</sup> and up to the second *Intifada* period, been exclusively devoted to the Palestinian cause and to mediating international attitudes toward Palestinian national goals through film. As a post-'Third Worldist' cinema<sup>26</sup> devoid of affiliation with an independent state and trapped in a colonial situation and blocked space, Palestinian cinema expresses a unified and collective voice that addresses a large, international, community. This voice is derived from a profound claim to justice, which overcomes any internal (spatial, social, cultural, or other) difference, and in fact pre-destined the cinematic constitution of Palestinian subjectivity. Be it a first- or fourth-Naqba generation, a town or refugee camp resident, modern-secular or religious-fundamentalist, the Palestinian subject's claim to justice, resting on victimhood, becomes the major characteristic of his/her subjectivity, and the films' rationale for representing persistent struggle.

The films display this subjectivity at their core as a sort of substantiation of the nation. The performance of subjectivity on display is rendered solely as a first step toward future liberation, to be enacted on a national scale. In this sense, the director/social actor's performance is a suspended one, a micro coming-into-being of subjectivity in the service of larger powers that have not yet emerged. Acknowledging in advance the power of the camera to induce the display of subjectivity, this version of 'suspended subjectivity' attached to a demand for international recognition, is unique. The tension between constituting a unified self and collective memory and affecting international audiences characterizes many films. Inner differences; a lack of home audiences, both in the occupied territories and in Gaza; the existence of diasporic audiences; the difficulty of distributing films in Arab countries; and the acclaimed presence of leading (mostly narrative) film directors in international film festivals all intensify this tension.

Moreover, and unlike its Israeli counterpart, Palestinian documentary cinema has no film industry. Suffering from periods of complete lack of production (1948-1967 and 1982-1987) and an ever-present struggle to survive, the lack of national institutions, television support, production companies, film laboratories, skilled film crews, and movie theaters<sup>27</sup> have made internal and external exile more prominent. Being 'structurally exilic',<sup>28</sup> Palestinian documentary cinema has the option of obtaining either international or Israeli film industry assistance. However, directors who were beneficiaries of Israeli aid, such as Hany Abu Assad, Tawfik Abu Wael, Nizar Hassan, Michel Khleifi, and Elia Suleiman were later accused of betrayal and collaboration with the enemy.<sup>29</sup> At a later stage, some rejected any 'normalization' with Israelis in the post-second *Intifada* period.

The complex conditions that construct this 'cinema of displacement', as Hamid Nafici defines it, exert their influence on the films, especially those produced during the two *Intifadas*. This influence is conspicuous on six levels: First, the vast majority of Palestinian directors, 'caught in historical discontinuities during times of movement toward political self-determination', and involved in a 'passionate search for national culture',<sup>30</sup> have indeed remained committed to producing highly realistic documentaries. Though the films have already begun shifting from the essentialist rhetoric of the early propaganda videos produced from the 1940s to the 1970s into a post-revolutionary stage of artistic production from the 1980s into the twenty-first century, they are still firmly embedded in a manifesto-like rhetoric. Second, the films portray narratives of victimhood in harsh settings of despair and violence. They defy the Israeli occupation, denounce the humiliating and brutal behavior of Israeli settlers, police, and soldiers toward Palestinian civilians, and generally dehumanize the Jewish Israeli. Third, the desire for social usefulness and popular impact link specific devices of portrayal to feeling rather than to knowing, while compelling the spectator to explore the ethics of dramatization or the nature of the documentary effect itself creates a deep tension within the text. Fourth, the corpus emphasizes the factual-ontological status of the image, which is depicted more than epistemological pre-conceptions. This inclination makes the chronicle of events and personal diary forms highly popular. Fifth, the representation of the *Naqba* is connected to the urge to make it a lived and visible memory. Retrieving repressed histories, many films use the iconography of the *Naqba* to represent the *Intifada*. Sixth, linking images and (past) imagination indicates a new conception of the director's voice that is not based on his/her authority as a documentarist, but rather, on a profound claim to justice.

The dominance of victimhood as a national subject position, torn between passivity and active resistance, is also manifested in representations of the suicide bomber as heroic freedom fighter, a *shahid* (martyr) in the service of the Palestinian liberation struggle. Shot entirely in Dheisheh refugee camp, Dahna Abourahme's *Until When* (2004), for instance, portrays a group of four boys who discuss their desire for martyrdom. In contrast, Azza El-Hassan's *3 Centimeter Less* (2003) demonstrates an unusual, ambivalent attitude toward this issue. The director describes how she accompanies her protagonist, Ra'eda, in search of information about Ra'eda's father, killed during the attempted hijack of a Sabena plane in 1972. In order to assist her, the director casts Juliano Mer-Khamis, an actor, in the role of her late father's friend to enable Ra'eda to ask the questions that have been tormenting her and thereby derive some comfort. Mer-Khamis and Ra'eda, who is unaware that he is an actor, are seen arguing over the question of terrorism with Mer-Khamis claiming that her father was a terrorist and Ra'eda insisting that he was a freedom fighter who sacrificed his life – and family – for the Palestinian cause. However, we hear only a few sentences from the heated discussion because the director intervenes to inform us that the quarrel raged for hours. The casting of Mer-Khamis, an Israeli-Arab actor and director, is ambivalent, as is the director's decision not to show the entire dispute.<sup>31</sup>

Although internal critical voices are heard, especially women's voices speaking out against their oppression by Palestinian, male-dominated, traditional society, Palestinian documentary cinema for the most part remains committed to representing external oppression. Even though some narrative film directors, in particular Elia Suleiman, paved the way for internal criticism,<sup>32</sup> documentary cinema silences Palestinian society's acute internal



problems, such as *shahidism* as a culture of death, the corruption of the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, Fatah-Hamas relations, and the growing power of religious fundamentalism.

During the second *Intifada* the women's film becomes a two-fold genre: portraying women's lives and protesting their double (internal and external) repression, and foregrounding the 'children's resistance' film. Sobhi Al-Zobaidi's *Women in the Sun* (1998), for instance, tackles issues relating to gender, violence against women, fundamentalism, and women's rights; Alia Arasoughly's *This is Not Living* (2001) describes eight Palestinian women and their struggle to live normal lives amidst the degrading drama of war, terror, and military occupation. Similarly, Mai Masri and Jean Chamoun's *Wild Flowers – Women of Southern Lebanon* (1986) and Ibtisam Mara'ana's *Badal* (2006), *Three Time Divorced* (2007) and *Lady Kul El Arab* (2009), depict various facets of women's desperate struggle for personal liberation under highly repressive familial and social laws.

By foregrounding children, the women's film has created what I consider a new subgenre - the 'children's resistance' film. Some films portray children working to support their poor families. In Abdel Salam Shehadeh's *Little Hands* (1996), for instance, filmed in Gaza, the camera follows four boys between the ages of eleven and fifteen from early morning until late in the evening. They work in low-income jobs, such as delivering gas balloons and picking oranges. The mother, crying over the hopeless future of her son, emphasizes the tragic irresolvable condition of refugee life.

The narrative of the second- or third-generation child-refugee turned freedom fighter is central in most of the films. This subgenre attests to the importance assigned to the third- and fourth-generation children of the *Naqba* who, in many films, such as Mai Masri's *Children of Shatila* (1998), express their intergenerational ties and commitment to the right of return. Masri's camera films the children using small video cameras to interview their actual or symbolic grandparents about the past, thus participating in the role of documentation and remembrance ('When you return to Palestine, what is the first thing you will do?' 'The first thing is rebuilding my home'). Importance is also assigned to the pivotal role the 'stone-throwing children' play in the current Palestinian struggle, as in Hanna Musleh's *I Am a Little Angel* (2000) and *Dignified Life* (2002). Depicting the daily lives of refugee children in the West Bank 'ghost town' of Ramallah, Azza El-Hassan's *News Time* (2001) is unique. As a resistance film immersed in manifesto-like rhetoric, it tells the story of a child killed during a riot and culminates with the representation of a huge demonstration in which the other children participate. But *News Time* is also a meta-reflection on the journalistic function of the documentary, and on news and film industry discourses. Combining the genres of resistance film, chronicle, personal diary, and women's autobiography film, it manages to feature the hybridism endorsed by Said as the preferred form with which to describe the Palestinian experience.<sup>33</sup>

In many respects, the 'children's resistance' film draws its strength from the symbolic mother figure, the director, who epitomizes both the untraditional Palestinian woman figure and the mythic role of 'mother of the revolution'. Expressing anger, violence, and the will to resist power, the children's film becomes a radical extension of the women's film. Mai Masri's *Frontiers of Dreams and Fear* (2001), for instance, traces the friendship between Mona, a resident of Beirut's

Shatila refugee camp, and Manar, who lives in Jerusalem's Dheisheh refugee camp, contrasting the experiences of exile and life under occupation. In many scenes, the children perform adult roles, indicating the inseparateness of the first and second *Naqba* generations and their own inevitable and untimely, rapid transition to adulthood. The film portrays the children as victimized heroes through the aesthetics of a plethora of close-ups, intensified sentimentality, and emotion-driven encounters.<sup>34</sup> When, for instance, Manar's grandfather takes her on a trip to the site of the village of his birth, destroyed in 1948, she gazes upon the ruins and tells the camera, 'I felt that my land calls me: Come. Take a tent and stay!'

The verbal and visual *J'accuse* format is typical of the 'children's resistance' film. Ghada Terawi's *Staying Alive* (2001), for instance, examines the motives of Palestinian youths who risk their lives to throw stones at Israeli soldiers. The questions the director asks – 'Why don't they fear death or injury? What political thoughts drive them to go and possibly fight to their deaths?' – are meant, above all, to reproduce the mythicization of the children. This mythicization becomes particularly pervasive throughout, and after, the media dispute over Mohammad al-Dura's case (2000-2005).<sup>35</sup> In many films shot in the West Bank, the camera reveals from time to time walls covered in graffiti where the huge portrait of Mohammad al-Dura, seen everywhere – in the street, in the schoolyard – symbolizes the necessity of violent resistance, reflects on the children's heroism, and justifies it in advance.

Apart from the 'stone-throwing children' imagery, the military checkpoint became an expressive icon of the occupation. Perhaps more than any other symbol of the occupation, the Palestinian roadblock subgenre reflects the destruction of what Jacques Derrida calls 'national ontopology', that is, the sense of naturalness and givenness of territorialized 'national belonging'.<sup>36</sup> Disconnected from a defined territory, on the one hand, and embodying the 'hollow land' on the other, the Palestinian roadblock movie documents the psychological-social-political aspects of the checkpoint experience. As Hagar, one of the protagonists of *3 Cm Less* puts it: 'We pretend that we do not see them [the soldiers at the checkpoint]. The problem is that they see us'. The Israeli panoptical gaze, directed at the 'invisible' nameless Palestinian, is felt by Hagar as an extremely objectifying experience that she seeks to defy, ignoring the onlookers by turning herself into an un-seen-able person. The doomed-to-defeat, unbearable dynamic described by Hagar represents the checkpoint experience even though, or rather because the films are emblematic not only of unstable boundaries and partitions, but, symbolically, also of the rejection of the right of return. This is rendered, for example, in Sobhi al-Zobaidi's *Crossing Kalandia* (2002), Hany Abu-Assad's *Ford Transit* (2002), and Hanna Elias' *Roadblocks* (2002).

Depicting daily and detailed checkpoint routines the roadblock genre exposes the contradictory characteristics of this place/non-place/space experience: a constant state of transition versus closure, order versus chaos, inside versus outside, observation and control versus partition, rationality versus

idiosyncrasy, temporariness versus permanent-ness, permeability versus impermeability, connection versus disconnection, and distinction versus contamination.

The emphasis on the representation of the 'ugly (soldier/policeman/settler) Israeli' and the absence of the left-wing activist figure (who is a major part of the Israeli roadblock genre) is meant to cinematically break the 'dependency complex'<sup>37</sup> between the colonizer and the colonized, as well as any normalization of the occupation machine. In this regard, the major contribution of this new genre is its definition of the space as a category of difference that refuses to adhere to normalizing forms, such as the interpellation of shared interests. Under the forced elasticity of the space, the genre insists on understanding national consciousness not only in terms of acting out and/or working through past traumas (that is, in terms of temporality), but also as a spatial consciousness. In other words, the documentary film's performative mode (as defined by Bill Nichols) means, in this context, an incessant representation of the space, with its complex, contradictory checkpoint system, and the constant movement along separate shards, fragments, and discontinuous vectors of the separation wall. Rendering the struggle in spatial, and not merely temporal relations has become the major characteristic of this kind of (docu)activism. Making the checkpoint a symbolic difference staged across disjunctive boundaries confers the docu-activist with agential action and leads the roadblock film toward affective immediacy.

#### 'BLOOD RELATIONS' FILMS: TOWARDS A CINEMATIC RECONCILIATION?

Undoubtedly, in its reframing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, documentary cinema's new set of representations, which emerged during the second *Intifada*, elevates the urgent ethical aspects of the new war. Incessantly representing the new war paradigmatic encounter, the major new forms of Israeli and Palestinian docu-activism ('good Israeli' and perpetrator trauma; roadblock and 'children's resistance', respectively), are centered on the ordinary, daily-based performance of coping with the occupation's evils. Thus, notwithstanding the differences, both corpora offer an ethical concretization of the 'action-able'. Addressing its audience's ethical stand, the docu-social/activism formed in these years inhabits an in-between, hybrid position of practice and negotiation.

On one hand, as described above, the corpora indeed take dissimilar routes: the Palestinian films represent resistance to the occupation and claim victimhood; Israeli films are critical of the occupation and in the first decade of the twenty-first century also break the binarism of victim-perpetrator (although, as mentioned, right-wing documentary cinema is gradually developing as well). On the other hand, tracing how the new trends/subgenres are in-formed by the epistemological and psychic orientations that shifted with the changing of the nature of war, that is, the undermining of binary subject positions (*I-Other*, 'us'-'them', victim-perpetrator), reveals an evolution. The horrific dismantling of these binarisms, typical of the new war, becomes in the post-second *Intifada* period a positive cinematic imagining of an extension of family relations. I consider this a humanistic orientation un-immersed in the systematically ambiguous humanitarian paradox of colonial relations described earlier. Concerned as it is with shared personal evil and tragedy, it proposes a shared ethical stand.

Analyzing conflict cinema from the perspective of 'wounded attachments', to use Wendy Brown's vivid metaphor, shows an evolution from ethnonational-centric films, which depict a one-sided perspective of the conflict and exclude that of the other, via confrontation films – usually armed confrontation – using competing images and narratives, to cooperation films, whereby co-producing a film becomes a means for both Israeli and Palestinian directors to share their mutual perspectives on the conflict, and finally to 'blood relations' films, which describe real or symbolic blood relations between the two nations. These categories are not exclusive of one other and, in fact, indicate the simultaneous co-existence of a multitude of attitudes toward the other and the conflict; however, as a taxonomy they also reveal a progression toward at least a cinematic-symbolic interrogation of possible reconciliation. This phenomenon has become conspicuous, since in recent years the amount of films that tell the story of blood relations continues to grow, thus, the taxonomy might be applicable to any documentary corpus that represents protracted, ethno-religious armed conflict in world cinema.

In order to reflect on the ethical imperative embodied in this evolution, I briefly outline the pervasive themes that dominate each category and indicate typical, prominent films. The ethnonational-centric category includes Israeli films concerned with terror or war casualties, such as *One Widow, Twice Bereavement* (Orna Ben-Dor Niv, 2005) portraying a group of women who have lost two close relatives – a husband and a child – in the same terror attack; and *Red Dawn* (Jasmine Kainy, 2005), which depicts the lives of Israeli children in the southern city of Sderot under Kassam rocket attacks. It also includes Palestinian films that describe extradition, displacement, and the occupation's wrongdoings like *Legend* (Nizzar Hassan, 1998), which recounts the history of three generations of Naqba refugees and their relentless efforts during the past five decades to reunite; and *My Name is Achlam* (Rima Essa, 2010), in which the director accompanies the mother of a child who has cancer in her struggle against both her patriarchal family and the checkpoints.

The confrontation films represent competing narratives and images. The most heightened cinematic confrontation during these years was performed by the films that represented Operation Defensive Shield in the West Bank refugee camp of Jenin in 2002 and the battle in Jenin. The Palestinian film *Jenin Jenin* (Mohammad Bakri, 2002) describes the battle as genocide<sup>38</sup>; *Invasion* (Nizzar Hassan, 2003) focuses on both the heroism of two thousand refugee camp residents who participated in the battle with minimal, low-tech, means, and on the ruins.<sup>39</sup> The Israeli film *Jenin Diary* (Gil Mezuman, 2003), also shot during the operation, tells the story of the director's reserve unit that lost thirteen soldiers during the battle. All three narratives – a massacre, a heroic resistance, a tragedy of defeat – claim to perform an ethical testimony of the battle.<sup>40</sup>

The cooperation films foster a common political-cinematic identity that transcends the separate ethnic identity of each director. This category includes films such as *Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel* (Eyal Sivan and George Khleifi, 2004), a four-and-a-half-hour film, travels the length of the proposed 1947 border that would have divided Israel into Jewish and Arab states. The route is named for the UN resolution that established the State of Israel. In two languages the directors interview Palestinians and Israelis living near the route about

their homes about the history of the place, the *Naqba*, and their view on the conflict and the other; *Gaza-Sderot* (Arik Bernstein, Osnat Trabelsy, Serge Gordey, Alexander Brashe, and Yousef Atwa, 2008) brings testimonies from the two sides of the same border; and *Jerusalem Moments* (artistic producer: Yael Perlov, 2009), a joint project of Palestinian and Israeli cinema students, reflects different facets of life in Jerusalem.

The ethnonational-centric and confrontation films, and even the cooperation films, which are few and relatively rare, reveal the huge rift between these corpora as cinemas of conflict. In contrast, the blood relations films which, by definition, transcend ethnic-conflictual boundaries, offer the extension of imagined communities. This is not based solely on a traditional representation of inter-ethnic marriages, but rather on inter-ethnic caring. Based on an autobiographical story or a highly personal relationship that develops between two people, caring becomes in these films indeed 'the cement of an ethical community'.<sup>41</sup> The blood relations, caring films have three major themes: reconciliation with, and support for, a convicted terrorist (*My Terrorist* [Yuli Gerstel-Cohen, 2002] and *One Day after the Peace* [Erez Laufer, 2012]), or a family who believes in *Shahidism* (*Precious Life* [Shlomi Eldar, 2009]); shared meetings and/or activism for peace between Palestinian and Israeli mothers and fathers who lost their children during the *Intifada* (*Lullaby* [Adi Arbel, 2004], and *To Die in Jerusalem* [Hilla Medalia, 2007]); and real or symbolic kinship stories (*Arna's Children* [Juliano Mer Khamis and Dannie Daniel, 2004], *Citizen Nawi* [Nissim Mosek, 2007], *Blood Relation* [Noa Ben Hagai, 2008], and *77 Steps* [Ibtisam Mara'ana, 2010]).

In the blood relations films, forgiveness becomes a performative act, '[a] case of overcoming resentment and vengefulness, of mastering anger and humiliation....a result of a long effort'.<sup>42</sup> In these films, this long process, which finally becomes an achievement, re-enacts the dynamics of difference and sameness. Making difference into sameness and sameness into (another, ethical-based) difference, the blood relations films acknowledge their own hybridity as an epistemology that rejects essentialism. Mer Khamis's presentation of the Jewish origins of his mother simultaneously with the portrait of the Palestinian children whom she taught at the Palestinian theater in Jenin, one of whom became a suicide terrorist, another was killed in a battle with Israeli soldiers; Mosek's detailed documentation of his constant efforts to protect his Palestinian lover from the police and to live a normal family life together in Jerusalem; Ben Hagai's rendering of her troubled journey to Nablus, where she meets and tries to assist her recently-found Jewish-born Muslim relatives (the children of her grandmother's aunt, who was banished from her Jewish family, married a Muslim, and became a refugee in Nablus in 1948); Mara'ana's humorous depiction of her (eventually failed) love affair with a Jewish American-Israeli – all assume multiple identities, and are engaged with fluid, fundamentally ambiguous, and modifiable practices, which affirm an imaginary post-colonial subject position. Instead of an economy of complicity and guilt or ghostly colonial powers, the blood relations films break internalized authoritarian epistemology that reproduces power relations, and thus make these powers contestable.<sup>43</sup>

The blood relations films and the evolution toward reconciliation suggested by this taxonomy reflect the maturity of documentary cinema made in the post-second *Intifada* period. As Edward W. Said contends:

No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except reason and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about.<sup>44</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Palestinian uprisings.

<sup>2</sup> The Palestinian term for the war meaning disaster.

<sup>3</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military\\_operations\\_conducted\\_by\\_the\\_Israel\\_Defense\\_Forces#Additional\\_Israeli\\_military\\_operations\\_3](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_operations_conducted_by_the_Israel_Defense_Forces#Additional_Israeli_military_operations_3) [accessed 31 August 2012]

<sup>4</sup> Margalit, Avishai (2002) *The Ethics of Memory*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> During the second *Intifada* there were eleven times more Israeli casualties than in the first *Intifada* (87 Israelis were killed between 1987 and 1991, compared to 996 Israelis killed between 2000 and 2005).

<sup>6</sup> See Kaldor, Mary (2001) *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

<sup>7</sup> See Morag, Raya (2008) 'The Living Body and the Corpse – Israeli Documentary Cinema and the *Intifadah*' *Journal of Film & Video*, 60.3-4 Fall/Winter, pp. 3-24.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, two major television documentary series: *Pillar of Fire* (1981), and *Tkuma: The First Fifty Years* (1998).

<sup>9</sup> For example, Ram Levy's *Barricades* (1969), a portrait of an encounter between two families, Israeli and Palestinian, who lost their sons in 1948.

<sup>10</sup> See Shohat, Ella (1989) *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, [Revised Edition London: I. B. Tauris, 2010].

<sup>11</sup> See Yakira, Elhanan (2010) *Post Zionism Post Holocaust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>12</sup> For a differentiation between cathartic and un-cathartic forms of guilt embodied in soldiers' accounts, see Morag, Raya (2012) 'Perpetrator Trauma and Current Israeli Documentary Cinema' *Camera Obscura* 27.2 80, pp. 93-133; and Morag, Raya (2013) *Waltzing with Bashir: Perpetrator Trauma and Cinema*. London and N.Y.: I.B. Tauris.

<sup>13</sup> Bhabha, Homi (1984) 'On Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse' *October* 28, p. 319.

<sup>14</sup> In its fervent support of Palestinians and of Israelis who devote their time and efforts to the other, it is no wonder that this kind of intimate documentation completely vanished at the height of second *Intifada* suicide terrorism (2000-2004).

<sup>15</sup> Bhabha, Homi (1997) 'Editor's Introduction: Minority Maneuvers and Unsettled Negotiations' *Critical Inquiry* 23.3 Spring, p. 438.

<sup>16</sup> Weizman, *Hollow Land Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. London: Verso, p. 182.

<sup>17</sup> See Bishara, Azmi (2004) *Checkpoints: Fragments of a Story (Resis'ai Sipur: Kisufim b'Eretz Hamachsomim)*. Tel-Aviv: Babel Press: 100.

<sup>18</sup> Bhabha, Homi (1984) 'On Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse' *October* 28, p. 324.

<sup>19</sup> Žižek, Slavoj (1994) *Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality*. London: Verso, p. 55.

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<sup>20</sup> Brown, Wendy (2002) 'Suffering the Paradoxes of Rights' *Left Legalism / Left Critique* (Wendy Brown and Janet Halley, eds) (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, p. 432.

<sup>21</sup> See Morag, Raya (2013) *Waltzing with Bashir: Perpetrator Trauma and Cinema*. London and NY: I.B. Tauris.

<sup>22</sup> Margalit, Avishai, (2002) *The Ethics of Memory*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, p. 170.

<sup>23</sup> This is exemplified, for instance, by the rise of the religious-queer film.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, *The Skies Are Closer in Homesh* (Manora Hazani-Katzover, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> The starting point of Palestinian cinema occurred in 1935. See Gertz, Nurith and Khleifi, George (2008) *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma, and Memory*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, pp. 11, 13.

<sup>26</sup> See Shohat, Ella (2006) 'Post-Third-Worldist Culture: Gender, Nation, and the Cinema' *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader*. (Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden, eds). New York: Routledge, pp. 39-56.

<sup>27</sup> See Gertz, Nurith and Khleifi, George (2008) *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma, and Memory*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, pp. 33-37.

<sup>28</sup> See Naficy, Hamid (2006) 'Palestinian Exilic Cinema and Film Letters' *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*. (Hamid Dabashi, ed) London: Verso, p. 91.

<sup>29</sup> On the accusations against *Chronicle of Disappearance* (1996), for instance, see Bourlond, Anne (2000) 'A Cinema of Nowhere: Interview with Elia Suleiman' *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 29.2 Winter, pp. 95-101.

<sup>30</sup> See Fanon, Franz (1968) *The Wretched of the Earth* Preface by Jean-Paul Sartre. (Constance Farrington, trans) New York: Grove Press, p. 209.

<sup>31</sup> Juliano Mer-Khamis, the son of a Jewish mother who converted to Islam and a Muslim father, followed in the footsteps of his mother and after her death became the artistic director of the Freedom Theater in Jenin. He was shot dead in Jenin on 4 April 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Elia Suleiman's narrative film *Divine Intervention* (2002) is unique in sketching some of Nazareth's internal problems.

<sup>33</sup> See Said, Edward W. (1986) *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*. New York: Pantheon, p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> On the tradition of the victim, see Brian Winston's (1988) pioneering work 'The Tradition of the Victim in Griersonian Documentary' *Image Ethics: The Moral Rights of Subjects in Photographs, Film and Television* (Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz and Jay Ruby, eds) New York: Oxford UP, p. 34-57.

<sup>35</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad\\_al-Durrah\\_incident](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_al-Durrah_incident) [accessed 7 September 2012]

<sup>36</sup> See Derrida, Jacques (1994) *Spectres of Marx*. London: Routledge.

<sup>37</sup> Memmi, Albert (1957 [1991]) *The Colonizer and the Colonized* Introduction by Jean-Paul Sartre (Boston: Beacon Press), p. 88.

<sup>38</sup> *Jenin Jenin* fueled a furious controversy and a demand for censorship. Bakri appealed to the Supreme Court to reverse the decision not to screen the film. On March 2003, the Supreme Court ruled that the film could be screened. See [http://www.the7eye.org.il:80/Verdicts/freedom\\_of\\_speech/Pages/bakri\\_movie\\_jenin.aspx](http://www.the7eye.org.il:80/Verdicts/freedom_of_speech/Pages/bakri_movie_jenin.aspx) [Hebrew].

<sup>39</sup> It is noteworthy that an old man (Ali Yoseph Faid) appears in both Bakri and Hassan's films; however, in Bakri's film he recounts that he was wounded by an Israeli sniper, while in an unedited scene in Hassan's film he makes a full account, including a description of the Israeli soldier who bandaged his leg and the tank which brought him to hospital.

<sup>40</sup> Pierre Rehov, a French-Algerian film director made *The Road to Jenin* (2003) as a response to *Jenin, Jenin*.

<sup>41</sup> Margalit, Avishai (2002) *The Ethics of Memory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 75.

<sup>42</sup> Margalit, Avishai, (2002) *The Ethics of Memory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 204.

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<sup>43</sup> See also Izzeldin, Abuelaish's (2011) famous autobiographical novel *I Shall Not Hate*. New York: Walker & Co.

<sup>44</sup> Said, Edward W. (2006) 'Resistance, Opposition and Representation' *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds.) Second Edition, London: Routledge, p. 98. The quote is taken from Tiffin, Helen (1987) 'Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse' *Kunapipi* 9.3, pp.17-34.



In *Claiming the Real*, Brian Winston rewrites the history of documentary film to take account of technological change. He subjects the great figures of the past--Grierson, Flaherty, Dziga-Vertov--to a searching critique, and examines both the principles and practice of the major movements in documentary such as *cinema verit  *. He offers a revised definition of the essential In *Claiming the Real*, Brian Winston rewrites the history of documentary film to take account of technological change. He subjects the great figures of the past--Grierson, Flaherty, Dziga-Vertov--to a searching critique, and e Brian Winston pp.98-109 Palgrave MacMillan London. Data (PDF Available)    November 2013 with 274 Reads. Cite this publication.   ABSTRACT: This chapter investigates the relationship between ethics and aesthetics in forms of documentary arts and film practice, with a focus on the tension between   responsibility  <sup>TM</sup> and   artistic freedom  <sup>TM</sup> as interpreted by documentary artists and filmmakers. Based on original research and interviews conducted by Rughani, the chapter offers new insights into methodologies of ethically-challenging filming practices, with reflections from leading practitioners including Frederick Wiseman and Peter Kosminsky. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. vii + 230 pp. Bibliography. Index. Cloth. \$99.99. ISBN: 978-1-137-57987-4. - Piotr Cieplak, director. *The Faces We Lost*. 2017. Documentary film. 60 minutes. Kinyarwanda and French with English subtitles. Rwanda. [www.faceswelostfilm.com](http://www.faceswelostfilm.com). Alison MacAulay (a1). (a1). 1University of Toronto Toronto, Canada [alisonc.macaulay@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:alisonc.macaulay@mail.utoronto.ca).