

Themes in Palestinian Film and Cinema

- A major theme in film is the **lack of freedom of movement** experienced by Palestinians,
- and the **collective Palestinian understanding of the 1948 Partition** (the Israeli wall) **as a “Catastrophe”**. It is a collective trauma that arguably affects all Palestinian products including film making.
- Remember, when analysing and unpacking films:
Political context is important in understanding the cultural nuances of any region.

Palestinian Film and Cinema

Scholars divide the history of Palestinian cinema into **four periods**:

1. **Up until 1948**: mainly documentaries
2. **60s & 70s**: centred on the idea of a lost homeland and the desire for a collective identity. Films were often made at the behest of PLO, so a majority of films were propaganda films or of revolutionary themes.
3. **1980s**: more pluralistic and questioning films of Palestinian identity
4. **1990s onwards**: marks a return to the idea of collective idea. Films increasingly include checkpoints and the security wall, and lack of freedom of movement as notable themes.

Example of well-known Palestinian film-makers:

Michel Khleifi - **Wedding in Galilee** (1980s)

Trauma and Collective Guilt

- The idea of trauma is a huge aspect of Palestinian film. It affects the present by retaining the vision of the traumatic past, like a bad memory, that they cannot let go off. It becomes a “traumatic realism”.
- Trauma remains unchanged and persistent, acted out in the present, unable to be reconciled so it becomes a cycle of unending trauma
- In cinema this manifests as a “subdued anger, perturbed pride.”
Palestinian cinema is an “aesthetic under duress”.

- Though one of your readings (a critique) feels that films have the capacity to affect change and allow for the catharsis of the trauma to happen.
- Palestinian identity rests on the trauma and catastrophe of the event.
- Palestinians are diverse in religion, culture, and territories but this event of collective memory/trauma is a unifying force that they all seem to hold in common regardless of differences in circumstances.
- Film makers want to reflect on this and find ways to work through the traumas through their films. Film becomes a really important avenue for Palestinians to explore this. They can problematise the idea of “collective trauma as a unifying event” and be critical enough of it to try to work through and advance.

Cameras in Palestinian Film

- Idea of **Witnessing**, or placing the audience as a Witness is also prevalent in Palestinian cinema.
- Camera is literally the witness of any events in the film.
- Cameras are used as a tool in Palestine to empower younger people in terms of telling stories and expressing themselves.
- Diaspora (definition):
A community that left the homeland and is distributed over a number of territories;
A group of people who despite their geographical distances retain their sense of cultural and national identity, e.g. Armenians, Kurds, it is not just Palestinians who don't have a homeland to return to.
- Palestinians have **no official nation state**.
Palestine is still not fully recognised as a nation state, so its people are often regarded as stateless.
This “puts the people in a constant state of temporary transience”.
This idea of not having a nation state creates **a constant sense of displacement**.

Exile

- Palestinian Cinema becomes exilic.
It is **structurally exilic**
 - Internally: so even if they are *in* the homeland, they still feel excluded and as if they don't belong.
 - Externally: when they move to other countries.

- A large number of Palestinians live in Europe or America.
- Film making in Palestine is difficult. There is no film school, little chance for funding, no cinemas, and the complications of continued curfews imposed by Israeli defence force.
There's also the difficulty of moving around, meaning films could get confiscated at borders or treated with suspicion by authorities.
It's also difficult as certain Palestinian groups demand they get represented in a certain way (pressure to tell stories in a particular way from Palestinian authorities). This causes film makers to leave and create films elsewhere.
- Usually, films are made with the help of European funding and are often multinational products
e.g. today's film was financed and created with the help of Holland, and produced in Deutsche. This German production company seems to have found a niche in producing Palestinian films.
- "National cinema of Palestine" is a term that is still used despite implied contradiction as there is no official state of Palestine.
- "Accented cinema" - shares the experience of being deterritorialised.
An accent is acquired through multinational, multilingual and transcultural mode of production.
It's not just the accent of commonality but also **hybridity due to the international input working on the films.**

Borders

- Contemporary Palestinian films regularly features **borders & checkpoints**; often considered as "**roadblock movies**".
- **Checkpoints** are a depiction of every day life, and shows the oppression of Palestinian people.
The meaning of checkpoints is that the every day lives of Palestinians are under a constant state of being under siege or of being stuck.
- **Borders** symbolise Palestinians and Israelis never making a connection and cannot come together despite their linked histories.
- Israeli Jews & Palestinian collaboration does occur on occasion, even in film making but it is a very limited cultural exchange.
- Cinema arguably has power to overcome roadblocks and cross borders.
- Film makers often use other elements to symbolise crossing borders, e.g. animals.