On What Was, and What Remains: Palestinian Cinema and the Film Archive

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Abstract

Palestinian cinema is intricately tied to the memory of a pre-1948 Palestine and the desire of return; one that must be understood in the context of sixty years of exile and dispersion. It is also concerned with making what has been forcibly made invisible, visible. The individuality of the Palestinian people and their cultural identity, which is frequently marginalised in today's media, is given a chance to rediscover its voice in films that are fuelled by an archival fever (Derrida & Prenowitz 1995). Items like keys, title deeds, family photographs, newspaper clippings, school certificates, and marriage licenses are the foundation of Palestinian memory, and hence are a decisive part of Palestinian cinema, alongside landscape and trauma. Although the Palestinians are a dispersed people, and their films originate from different places: the West Bank, Gaza, the Arab world, Europe and the United States, they represent a collective identity, an identity that is primarily based on ancestral memory and one which is facing continual crises that threaten its existence. This paper is about Palestinian cinema and the themes of disaster, displacement and memory. It also focuses on the Palestinian Film Archive that went missing during the Israeli siege of Beirut in 1982. The archive is perhaps the ultimate representation of the silenced Palestinian with no permission to narrate (Edward Said, 1984). I take a close look at two short documentaries made about the archive, as well as interviews and personal accounts, deeply rooted in nostalgia, twice removed from the memories of a utopian Palestine.

Keywords: Palestine, cinema, archive, memory, displacement, film, politics, representation, narrative.

Here, on the slopes before sunset and
At the gun-mouth of time
Near orchards deprived
Of their shadows
We do what prisoners do:
We nurture hope.

Mahmoud Darwish

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

It is unclear whether any non-war related films were made during the First World War, and even if any were, none of them survive. However, there were British and Australian cameramen stationed in Palestine between 1914 and 1917 who did take some footage of the war. Although most Palestinian films that are known internationally were made during the 1970s, for reasons I shall discuss later, it is a misconception to believe that only European men carried out filmmaking during the first half of the twentieth century.

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

Sirhan bought his manual camera for 50 liras in Tel Aviv. He was self-taught, and relied on books and instructional manuals to learn filming, developing and editing techniques, reportedly assembling his editing table himself. Sirhan collaborated with Jamal al-Asphar, the cinematographer who filmed

King Saud's visit, and together, the two men are considered to be the founders of Palestinian cinema. They went on to produce a forty-five minute film called *Realized Dreams* (1940) about Palestinian orphans. The film also self-consciously aimed to prove that Palestinians, and not just Europeans, were capable of producing movies about Palestine. Their next documentary was about a member of the Arab Supreme Council, for which they received three hundred Palestinian liras (Gertz & Khleifi 2008).

Sirhan, together with Ahmad al-Kilani – a Palestinian who studied film in Cairo – founded a production studio called 'Studio Palestine' in 1945. The studio produced several feature-length films that were screened in Palestine and neighbouring Arab countries. There were a number of other prominent figures that played an important role in shaping Palestinian cinema during this same period, such as Mohammad Kayali and Abde-er-Razak Alja'uni, who also produced several films in Palestine, all of which are now lost (Gertz & Khleifi 2008).

In order to explain how this happened, it is first necessary to provide some historical context. In 1917, when Palestine was under the British Mandate, the Balfour Declaration was drafted: a paragraph-long letter from the United Kingdom's foreign secretary Arthur Balfour to the leader of the British Jewish community Baron Rothschild, which stated that Palestine was to be the national home for the Jewish people. This declaration was put into effect in 1948 and as a result, more than 700,000 Palestinians were forced into exile. Palestinians were driven out of their homes and many had to go to refugee camps. Palestinians refer to the events of 1948 as the *Nakba*, which literally means 'catastrophe' in Arabic. Of course, the historical context to *al-Nakba* is more complicated that this paragraph-length introduction can convey. The Balfour Declaration was only one part of a sequence of events, yet ultimately it had important, life-changing consequences for all Palestinians.

The events of the *Nakba* and its aftermath are not well documented in tangible form other than oral histories and personal testimonies. There are several explanations as to why this may be. First of all, the majority of Palestinians back then were farmers and peasants, and had been connected to their land in an organic and intimate manner for generations. Heavily dependent on oral traditions, as opposed to the written word, they did not see a need or a reason to document their history in writing; they simply belonged to the land and it belonged to them. Secondly, most of the Palestinians suffered from posttraumatic stress after the *Nakba*, experiencing a collective sense of, but not limited to, denial, guilt, shame and a general difficulty in coming to terms with the facts of their situation and the loss of their homeland. Practically no Palestinian films were made between 1948 and 1967. It is therefore dubbed the epoch of silence, and historians view this as the second era of Palestinian cinema (Gertz & Khleifi 2008: 11).

The era of silence ended in 1968, when the third period of Palestinian cinema began. This happened on the heels of yet another significant and devastating event for the Palestinians: the 1967 Arab–Israeli war, the *Naksa*, during which Israel defeated the Arab forces and occupied the Gaza Strip and took the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria (Gertz & Khleifi 2008). Several Palestinian institutions, such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) that had been formed during the years preceding the 1967 war, were greatly strengthened as a direct result of the conflict. Most Palestinian cinema of this era was made

by exiled filmmakers who resided in Amman and Beirut. As the PLO was also based in Jordan from 1969 to 1971, it provided a makeshift sanctuary for these filmmakers. In view of the involvement of the PLO and other Palestinian organizations, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP), the film production body of this period is referred to as the 'Cinema of the Palestinian Revolution,' or the 'Cinema of the Palestinian Organizations' (Gertz & Khleifi 2008: 12).

In 1967, Sulafa Mirsal a young Palestinian who studied photography in Cairo set up a small photography unit in her kitchen. Her equipment was primitive and her techniques were basic, and she mostly worked with images of Palestinian casualties, the *shahids* (Abu Gh'nima 1981 cited in Gertz & Khleifi 2008). Her work was transferred to Amman, Jordan, where the PLO offices were located and the Department of Photography was established. Mustafa Abu-Ali and Hani Johariya, both Palestinian filmmakers who were living in Amman, joined Mirsal. The two of them worked for Jordanian television, and regularly borrowed cameras and film from the station to document protests, public gatherings and cultural events related to the Palestinians. The first movie produced in the third period; *Say No to the Peaceful Solution* (1968), was a collaboration between Abu-Ali, Johariya and Salah Abu Hannoud. The film documented the demonstrations of the civilians who objected to the 'peace solution' suggested by US Secretary of State William Rogers, as they believed it neglected the interests of the Palestinian people (Gertz & Khleifi 2008: 21).

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

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

During this time, Abu-Ali, along with several other Palestinian filmmakers, decided to set up a Palestinian Film Unit/Archive (private interview with Ghaleb Sha'ath, Jerusalem, 1995 cited in Gertz & Khleifi 2008). Their main intention in doing this was to create a history of Palestinian identity, especially since many pro-Israel politicians had renewed the 'Palestinians don't exist' campaign. In setting up an official archive, they also wanted to unite the efforts of Palestinian filmmakers worldwide and hoped to give Palestinian cinema better recognition and status (private interview with Khadijah Abu-Ali, Ramallah, 2003 cited in Gertz & Khleifi 2008). The archive included over one hundred films, dating from pre-1948 and up until the early 1980s, as well as all the

films directed by the group. Since materials from past films were constantly being used as footage in newer films, a systematic and easily accessible method for storing the films was needed. Khadija Abu-Ali, the first Palestinian woman filmmaker and the wife of Mustafa Abu-Ali (Hillauer 2005: 209), was in charge of screening and received archival training to respond to the growing need to access the films. The budget – not surprisingly - was minimal and the films they had were stored in boxes marked with the film type and date of filming. No computers were available and thousands of meters of celluloid were categorised manually.

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

Literature concerning the lost archive is sparse. Aside from the occasional article, two books concerning Palestinian cinema; Hamid Dabashi's *Dreams of A Nation: On Palestinian Cinema* (2006) and Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi's *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma and Memory* (2008) touch upon it briefly. It was therefore quite a revelation to come across two recent films that have been made about the lost archive. The first and most recent is a short eight-minute experimental film essay by Sarah Wood entitled *For Cultural Purposes Only* (2009). The film starts with a flickering image of what looks like a film certificate. It states the name of her film, but we see several shots each with a different price marked on them, the last one marked being fifty pounds. Black and white film footage from what appears to be 1930s Palestine is displayed on the screen next, with the word 'cinema,' first in French then in English, juxtaposed over the moving image. Next we see a great number of people walking about, and several camels as well, in what appears to be archival footage. A black blank screen then appears, and we begin to see a sentence slowly being typed in white, 'What would it feel like to never see an image of the place that you came from?' More black and white footage follows, but this time of a small child sliding playfully on top of a tent, and the word 'cinema' in Arabic on top of him.

Wood then takes us through a series of 'remembered' Palestinian films that were mostly made in the 1970s, and lost with the archive. The details of each film, such as title, name of director, year made and the person whose memory retained that lost film, are displayed on the image of a folder. Wood narrates the memory, while the hand of an illustrator reconstructing the film with pen and paper appears on the screen. Sometimes the directors themselves are the ones providing the memory of the film, and sometimes parts of the film footage is still available, and Wood uses it with the illustrations. Towards the end of Wood's film essay, the illustrator starts erasing, very slowly, a

drawn image of an archive, wiping out the cabinets, the reels, and the room, until we are left with a white image. Wood also makes use of quotes throughout her film, as well as one-word title cards such as 'memory' and 'lost.' She also uses an animation that shows the loss of Palestinian land to the emerging state of Israel, from pre-1948 to the present day, interjected with film footage of Palestinians children in refugee camps.

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

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

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

Hiba Joharia, who is El-Hassan's childhood friend, provides the most intriguing insight into the importance of the film archive. Joharia is the daughter of Hani Joharia, a member of the PLO film unit who was also one of those responsible for creating the archive. He was killed in Lebanon while filming the Palestinian resistance in combat. The feeling of compounded loss of both the Palestinian people and Hani Joharia's legacy is palpable when narrated from the perspective of his daughter, especially when Hiba Joharia and El-Hassan examine the very camera that her father was using when he was killed from the shrapnel of a bomb that landed half a meter away from him. Naturally, the camera is barely recognizable. She urges El-Hassan to look for the archive, saying:

> Even if you don't find them [the archives], it's good to look and to make your own film telling the world we've lost something we once had and we'd love to find it again. Then maybe someone you don't meet during your search will see the film and tell us something about the archive.

Throughout her search, El-Hassan indirectly communicates the everyday life of Palestinian people – mostly refugees – through their personal narratives. Their sense of dislocation is exemplified in one man's frustration about his inability as a refugee to work or buy land. 'We're not only ghosts, it's as if we're living in another century. We're on the margins of society. We're not living,' he says. El-Hassan's attempt to find the lost archive is understandably perceived by some as a futile attempt, especially since the Palestinians are still living under what many call an apartheid rule. Questions of cinema are naturally considered to be less important than the day-to-day struggle of people's lives. One Palestinian woman bluntly tells El-Hassan: 'If you want drama go to the checkpoint. Go and watch men being tied up.'

There are a number of theories surrounding the disappearance of the archive and its possible whereabouts today. The most common one is that Israel's military or spies intentionally destroyed the archive during the siege (Dabashi 2006). Khadija Abu-Ali claims that she personally approached Yasser Arafat – then chairman of the PLO – and his top aide, Khalil el-Wazir, to ask them to protect the archive. They promised they would, but a few days before leaving Beirut, they informed her that they couldn't transport the archive out of Beirut under the current circumstances. However el-Wazir told Khadija Abu-Ali that they had contacted the French embassy, whose officials had agreed to help secure the archive. Khadija Abu-Ali and the group were nevertheless eventually left to their own devices. They rented a basement and paid two years' rent in advance. In an interview with Mustafa Abu-Ali in *Kings and Extras*, he stresses that one of their main concerns was finding a safe and cool place to avoid the degradation of film. Beirut is extremely hot and humid during the summertime, so there was a risk that the films would rapidly degrade. The basement that they eventually found was in a relatively safe street but wasn't equipped with an air conditioner, so they had to buy an air conditioning unit and install it.

These details are important, as they show the lengths that a few people went to in order to protect the heritage of a nation. It goes without saying that they did so during a time of great danger, with bombs literally exploding around them every day. Transporting the archive to somewhere outside of Beirut proved too difficult, and thus they had to settle for what they believed would be the safest option – leaving the archive in Beirut, before leaving the city themselves, as most people did for their own personal safety. Abandoning the archive was not an option. Omar a-Rashidi – a cinematographer who worked in the institute – and two clerks from the institute's staff, were asked to guard the archive, but due to escalating violence in the area, a-Rashidi was compelled to leave Beirut. The two remaining clerks were extremely worried about its safety and eventually turned to the Palestinian Red Crescent for help. The Red Crescent stored the archive in their hospital at Akka for a short time, undoubtedly in unfit conditions, before having to relocate it, fearing that it would make the hospital a target. Some believe that the hospital staff buried the archive in a nearby Palestinian graveyard under unidentified gravestones. Others have speculated that Hizballah managed to seize the archive and transport it to Iran, and there are also rumours that a pro-Syrian group stole the archive and sold it to Israel. Whatever the truth, Khadija Abu-Ali is not optimistic about its fate, and fearing that the memories of several generations have disappeared forever (Gertz & Khleifi 2008: 30).

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

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

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

Annemarie Jacir, a Palestinian filmmaker who curated the *Dreams of Nation* film festival in 2002 in New York City speaks of the difficulty and duress of acquiring material for the festival:

> Curating the film festival from New York hinged on having someone in Palestine who could physically gather the tapes – since Palestinians in various parts of the West Bank and Gaza are under different levels of military curfew and are often not allowed to leave their homes, let alone venture to a post office to mail videotapes. This made even the mundane details of receiving copies of films for the festival a major difficulty, often requiring sophisticated planning and execution by parties both inside and outside of Palestine (Dabashi 2006: 27).

On several occasions the films never showed up, and upon investigation Jacir was informed that the films were held under Israeli authority for security purposes. Thankfully, these were usually copies and not originals. Despite the delays and the frustrations, the festival was deemed a success, which can be attributed both to the importance of cinema to the Palestinian people and their attitude towards their struggle, characterised by *sumood,* which is Arabic for 'perseverance.' However, the considerable effort required to make the festival a success demonstrates the extreme challenges involved in making and preserving films in Palestine, as well as in achieving visibility with the appropriate audience and benefiting from this visibility.

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

The lost archive is perhaps the ultimate representation of the Palestinian struggle, and Palestinian cinema itself; made under the harshest of circumstances, aspiring to attain recognition in mainstream narrative, but ultimately silenced. The documentaries *Kings and Extras: Digging for a Palestinian Image* and *For Cultural Purposes Only* show that Palestinian cinema is also deeply rooted in nostalgia, albeit one that is twice removed from the memories of a utopian Palestine. In a direct correlation to the Palestinian crisis, many Palestinians similarly cling to what was in the archive and what it contained, as they cling to notions of what Palestine was before the creation of Israel. Jacques Derrida names the compulsion to collect and store in the wake of an ever-receding memory as the 'archive fever' (Derrida & Prenowitz 1995). He also contends that there would be no 'archive fever' without the imminent death of the 'archive drive,' which is precisely why the Palestinian's obsession with memory and past events is a case in point. The compulsion, he argues, does not stem from a need merely to accumulate the past, but rather to provide grounds for a future based upon it. The most important thing to note, perhaps, is that these films *existed*, not the fact they were destroyed or lost. Made by Palestinians about the Palestinians themselves, they document the on-going struggle of identity and displacement that is experienced by every Palestinian. To focus solely on their loss is, in a way, to deny their existence, akin to how the Palestinian's existence is denied.

In a world where images hold such importance and, more importantly, permanence, it is crucial for the Palestinian cause to have an uncontested history rooted in film and image. That is not to say that the Palestinians will cease to exist because certain parties have denied the legitimacy of Palestine,

but it is *easier* to make such claims when there isn't a solid library of documentation that proves their existence for centuries before. Recently, President Obama was accused of not being a true American citizen because the White House refused to publish an image of his birth certificate online. Images have become equivalent to evidence since their inception; and it is likely they will continue to be regarded in the same manner for many centuries to come. The plight of the Jewish people in the Second World War reached millions across the globe largely due to their diligence in taking photographs during the Holocaust, and making these photographs widely accessible after the war. The need for preserving and disseminating the Palestinian image is not only for the sake of history and memory, but also for the sake of the Palestinian cause, as the two are intricately bound together.

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