Built Ecologies in Contemporary Palestinian Cinema

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A Thesis
in
The Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts (Film Studies) at

Concordia University

Montréal, Québec, Canada

January 2024

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

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Abstract

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This thesis puts formal analysis of films by Kamal Aljafari and Larissa Sansour in dialogue with scholarship on both contemporary Palestinian issues and their cinematic representations. Through this analysis I highlight the visuality of the ecological and architectural violence sustained by Palestinians and the resistance to these structures of oppression realized by Aljafari's and Sansour's images. Their films showcase a Palestinian perspective on spatial issues in their engagement with built and natural environments through film form, demonstrating how cinema can foster reimagined futures. Palestinian cinema provides a mode of resistance to Zionist spatial logic and to the occupation. To clarify this, I explore how Israel's settler colonial project uses infrastructure and ecology as tools to maintain control of Palestinian land through my analysis of a promotional video by Zionist tree-planting organization HaYovel. Palestinian cinema resists this and this thesis argues that many Palestinian filmmakers, including Aljafari and Sansour, reclaim Palestinian space using the medium of cinema and cinematic techniques. Because of the lack of physical access to Palestine for diasporic Palestinians, inhabiting space digitally and imagining new spatial configurations through cinematic techniques allow these filmmakers to experience a different kind of presence on the land. I analyze several recent short films by Aljafari and Sansour to demonstrate how editing, mise-en-scène, and dialogue allow for filmmakers to transgress imposed spatial boundaries and return to Palestine, if only digitally.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisors Kay Dickinson and Masha Salazkina for helping me so much in the long process of writing this thesis, and for being great professors; your teaching ultimately made me decide to take on this degree. Kay, thank you for sharing so much of your knowledge and guiding my research process. Masha, thank you for providing such useful feedback and helping me along in the writing process. Thank you to Dr. Peter Limbrick for agreeing to read my thesis and for all your kind words.

Thank you to Emma, Olive, and Max for writing with me – in cafes over slices of cake, in bootcamp-like scenarios, in Neukölln coffee shops, in what felt like every single study space in Montreal including the IKEA cafeteria. It was so nice travelling near and far to discuss, think, and write together.

Thank you to my Film Studies cohort and professors who made Zoom school so interesting and enjoyable even in the midst of a pandemic. Shout out to Prof. Joshua Neves for teaching the most awesome research-creation class, Digital Ethnography and Internet Methods; my friends and I still talk about how much fun we had that term.

To Hussam, my family, and my friends for the support, encouragement, and love ☺

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Introduction

In her essay "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin,"[1] artist Jumana Manna artfully describes her time in Shu'fat, East Jerusalem during the 2020 COVID-19 quarantine. Her daily walks in her neighbourhood and surrounding green spaces see her reflecting on the histories contained within stone, and within flora:

> I look at the limestone rocks peppered across the hills. They are inhabited by various growths, and marked by signs of former lives. Two palm-sized depressions are carved into a bed of limestone — ancient basins to collect rainwater for animals… Some contain signs of an oil or wine press, while others serve as habitats for plants, snails, the pods of microorganisms, and suntanning beds for lizards.[2]

Plants are a large part of Manna's artistic practice and also the focus of this essay, in which she writes about foraging native plants for Palestinian cooking, and her family's relationship to the natural landscape.[3] Between city, refugee camp, and Israeli settlement, the green space where she forages provides a rich backdrop onto which she intertwines colonial nature preservation laws, their effects on Palestinian foragers, and the infrastructural enforcement of these laws. For the Israeli occupation, both nature and the built environment have been mobilized as mechanisms of control, both of Palestinian land and daily life.

In conversation with Manna and other scholars and artists, this thesis explores questions of how settler colonial control intersects with infrastructure and ecology in the Palestinian context.

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[1] Jumana Manna, "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin," *E-Flux*, no. 113 (November 2020): 1–16.
[2] Manna, 6.
[3] See Manna's *Foragers* (film, 2022), *Wild Relatives* (film, 2018), *Post Hebrarium* (installation, 2016).

Through analysis of films by Palestinian filmmakers Kamal Aljafari and Larissa Sansour, I use an eco-critical framework to study how these intersections are represented cinematically. The following research questions guided my study of films and scholarship for this thesis:

- Given the importance of space in the geopolitical environment of Palestine/Israel, in what ways is this reflected in contemporary films by Palestinian filmmakers?
- What can Kamal Aljafari's focus on urban spaces and structures in his films say about Palestine's urban space under occupation?
- In what ways does Larissa Sansour's use of ecological imagery reflect Palestinian relationship to the natural environment? And how different is the Zionist relationship to the natural environment depicted in Zionist cultural objects?

This thesis argues that these Palestinian filmmakers reclaim space using the medium of cinema and cinematic techniques. To support this core argument, I examine several recent short films that contain thematic and stylistic elements that work to reappropriate space in different ways. I also look at a promotional video for a Zionist tree-planting organization, HaYovel, to illuminate what formal techniques they use to forward Zionist spatial discourse, to clarify how Palestinian filmmakers oppose this discourse in particular. *Recollection* (2015) is a meditative film by director and artist Kamal Aljafari that makes use of found Israeli archival footage of his hometown, and his next film *An Unusual Summer* (2020) consists of an accumulation of clips from a security camera. Despite the nature of the original source material, which connects the images with the infrastructural violence of occupation and surveillance, he fashions both sets of found footage into portraits of urban Palestinian communities. Through an understanding of how the built environment is often used in service of the occupation, I argue that Aljafari's

uncovering of concealed Palestinian presence through filmmaking techniques in a way evades infrastructural barriers. *In Vitro* (2019), directed by video and installation artist Larissa Sansour, is a fiction film that imagines Palestinian life underground after an eco-apocalypse, and explores the main characters' relationships to the new spatial order. When analyzed alongside data on how the Israeli occupation harnesses the natural environment to control space, we can certainly draw parallels between this subterranean concrete space and Israel's natural resource destruction in the Occupied Territories. To expand on this, I bring in HaYovel's promotional video *Greening Israel* (2022), which diverges in perspective, audience, and style, and provides an example of how Zionist tropes regarding the natural landscape and Israeli nation-building play out in tree-planting initiatives. As an Evangelical Christian organization working in the West Bank with settlers, their documentary is a useful example how Zionism's environmental initiatives are infused with colonial rhetoric, and how HaYovel in particular contributes to Zionist greenwashing. With an understanding of this, we can see the stakes of Sansour's depiction of natural environment in *In Vitro*.

As in Aljafari's filmmaking practice, Sansour is able to propose a pathway to environmental justice through the film itself, thereby using the medium of cinema to reaffirm Palestinian stewardship of the land. Aljafari and Sansour's films showcase a Palestinian perspective on spatial issues in their engagement with built and natural environments through film form, and demonstrate imaginative conceptions of how cinema can transgress realities on the ground. By putting my formal analysis of these works in dialogue with scholarship on both contemporary Palestinian issues and their cinematic representations, in this thesis I highlight the visuality of the ecological and architectural violence sustained by Palestinians, and how Aljafari and Sansour's images resist these structures of oppression.

Literature Review

The occupation and spatial control

To understand the significance of infrastructural and ecological violence that is highlighted by Palestinian filmmakers in their work, it is necessary to examine how the state of Israel has harnessed different means of spatial domination to maintain its settler colonial control of Palestine. Modern Zionism as a political movement began much before the establishment of the state of Israel, though, and we can chart its beginnings as an ideology back to the publishing of Theodor Herzl's early Zionist manifesto of sorts, *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State) in 1896, followed by two Zionist congresses in Switzerland.[4] Even before Herzl published *Der Judenstaat*, Jewish European immigrants began arriving in what was then Ottoman Palestine, but Zionists like Herzl maintained that only sovereignty would solve the "Jewish question."[5] The call for a Jewish state by early Zionist thinkers was explicitly a political response to anti-Semitism in Europe and elsewhere in the diaspora; for them, a Jewish homeland was the only solution to escape those structures of anti-Semitism.[6] For Herzl and the groups organizing the search for a space to claim, the question was whether to host the Jewish state in Argentina or Palestine, depending both on Jewish public opinion and of course on which world power would accommodate them.[7] The potential for taking over Palestine for the new state would result, according to Herzl, in the global benefit of having a European settlement in Asia: it would be "an

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[4] Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2022), 8.

[5] Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State (der Judenstaat)*, ed. Jacob M. Alkow, trans. Sylvie d'Avigdor (Project Gutenberg, 2008), https://www.gutenberg.org/files/25282/25282-h/25282-h.htm, 85, 95; Neville J. Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism before World War I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), xxiii-xxiv.

[6] Herzl, *The Jewish State.*

[7] Herzl, 94-6.

outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism. We should as a neutral State remain in contact with all Europe, which would have to guarantee our existence."[8]

The colonial nature of the Zionist movement is evident in the early texts in modern Zionism.[9] Yet today, many modern Zionist thinkers/pundits attempt to divorce Zionism from its colonial foundations by making claims to Jewish indigeneity to the land of historic Palestine, arguing that it is impossible to colonize land that is theirs to begin with.[10] Self-indigenization in new Zionism can be mostly sorted into two categories: a divine claim to the land, bestowed on the Jewish people by God,[11] or archaeologically-based proof of original presence on the land, with archaeological findings being intertwined with Israeli nation-building.[12]

Despite this recent distancing from the movement's colonial roots, the facts remain that the Zionist movement had support from world colonial powers, namely Britain and the United States. With the support of the United Nations, they created the state of Israel in 1948 out of the territory known as Mandatory Palestine, which had been ruled by the British following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. The partition happened despite the international legal rights violations against the Palestinian majority population that this required, according to legal scholar Ardi Imseis.[13] Achieving a Jewish majority for the new Jewish state

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[8] Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 96.

[9] Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 13-15; Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism before World War I,* 30; Uri Ram, "The Colonization Perspective in Israeli Sociology," in *The Israel/Palestine Question*, ed. Ilan Pappé (Routledge, 2002), 55–80; Gershon Shafir, "Zionism and Colonialism: A Comparative Approach," in *The Israel/Palestine Question*, ed. Ilan Pappé (Routledge, 2002), 81–96.

[10] Ilan Pappé, "Shtetl Colonialism: First and Last Impressions of Indigeneity by Colonised Colonisers," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 2012): 39–58.

[11] Exodus 6:4 and Genesis 15:18 are passages often cited.

[12] Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[13] Ardi Imseis, "The United Nations Plan of Partition for Palestine Revisited: On the Origins of Palestine's International Legal Subalternity" Stanford Journal of International Law, 57, no. 1 (Winter 2021): 35-7.

would require a large, methodical "population transfer" of Palestinians, which indeed happened following the partition in 1948. This mass displacement event is known as the *Nakba* to Palestinians, meaning catastrophe in Arabic, and resulted in 750,000 Palestinians being expelled or killed by Zionist militias.[14] Many Palestinians were made refugees by the partitioning of the territory and the forced displacement that came with it. The land of British Mandatory Palestine was partitioned into the state of Israel on most of the territory (78%), and Gaza and the West Bank were absorbed by Egypt and the new state of Jordan, respectively. Most Palestinians who lived in what became the state of Israel were displaced (80%) and the rest became citizens of Israel. [15] From this point on, the state of Israel grew in power and population: in 1967, Israel defeated Egyptian and Jordanian armies in the Six Day War and annexed the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan Heights.[16] The resulting further displacement and killing of Palestinians in those territories is referred to as the *Naksa*, meaning setback or defeat.[17]

Throughout the tumultuous 20th century, Palestinians have resisted the violence of the settler colonial state in various ways. It is impossible to summarize Palestinian resistance briefly, and inaccurate to present it as a series of isolated incidents; however, for the purposes of this thesis, I will reference a few such periods of resistance that are broadly documented elsewhere, focusing here on the images coming out of these periods of strife that brought Palestinian resistance into the international consciousness. In 1987, the First Intifada, or uprising, began in

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[14] Nur Masalha, "The 1948 Exodus," in *Expulsion of the Palestinians* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992), 178-9.
[15] Khalidi, 60.
[16] Khalidi, 97-8.
[17] Zena Al Tahhan, "The Naksa: How Israel Occupied the Whole of Palestine in 1967 | Features | Al Jazeera," Al Jazeera, June 4, 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2018/6/4/the-naksa-how-israel-occupied-the-whole-of-palestine-in-1967.

the Occupied Territories following two decades of occupation by Israel. Images of Palestinian youth throwing rocks in response to Israeli military brutality became a symbol of resistance, showing the David-and-Goliath proportions of Palestinian resistance and Israeli military response.[18] In the end, the First Intifada resulted in an eight-to-one casualty ratio of Palestinians to Israelis, with about a fifth of Palestinian victims being children,[19] which certainly adds weight to the enduring image of Palestinian children throwing rocks at tanks. In 1993 and 1995, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed the Oslo Accords, a controversial set of agreements negotiating territory and instating the Palestinian Authority to control certain parts of the West Bank. These territorial negotiations still had Israel possessing 80% of Palestinian land for its state, and as Israeli settlements encroached on Gaza and the West Bank as well, tensions mounted and the Second Intifada erupted in September 2000.[20] The Second Intifada was marked by a major escalation in violence and consequently, a shift in public opinion regarding Palestinians internationally: the earlier David and Goliath narrative became one of Israeli victimhood at the hands of terrorists, as resistance tactics escalated this time around.[21] The increased violence of this Intifada is encapsulated in the famous image of Muhammad al-Durrah, a young boy, being shielded from bullets by his father, Jamal al-Durrah, near Gaza City. This still from a video shot by journalist Talal Abu Rahma, along with the subsequent moment of Muhammad's death while still in his father's lap, were spread worldwide.[22] Although these

[18] Mazin B. Qumsiyeh, "*Intifadet Al-Hijara*, 1987-91," in *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment* (Pluto Press, 2015), 134–62.
[19] Khalidi, 167.
[20] Khalidi, 205-6.
[21] Khalidi, 208.
[22] Talal Abu Rahma, "Behind the Lens: Remembering Muhammad al-Durrah, 20 Years On," *Al Jazeera,* September 30, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/9/30/behind-the-lens-remembering-muhammad-al-durrah.

images from the Intifadas represent the horrors of the occupation and violence against Palestinians, they also tell a story of how the Palestinian reality is visualized and perceived internationally. Moreover, they represent the steadfast commitment of the Palestinian people to resist occupation, allowing us to consider the different forms that resistance can take.[23]

Following seventy-five years of occupation, the state of affairs in Israel/Palestine is one of continued violent negotiations of space: the Occupied Territories are the site of military violence and ever-growing illegal Israeli settlements. At the time of writing, the state of Israel is considered by many human rights organizations as an apartheid system, with unequal access and rights between Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, Palestinian citizens of Israel, and Jewish Israelis.[24] As I will explore below, infrastructural control allows Israel to maintain this apartheid system and suppress Palestinian resistance, and domination of the international discourse along with powerful Western allies allow this to continue with impunity. The importance of how this conflict has played out in spatial terms is at the core of this thesis, and the treatment of this issue in Palestinian cinema has been paramount to its contributions to resistance efforts.

Space and industry

As Joseph Massad has commented, "Palestinian cinema … has been integral to Palestinian resistance."[25] For decades Palestinian filmmakers have conveyed the geopolitical, cultural, and

[23] Qumsiyeh, 235.
[24] Amnesty International, "Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime against Humanity," report MDE 15/5141/2022, February 2022; Human Rights Watch, "A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution," April 27, 2021, https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution; United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem, and Israel." (Geneva: United Nations, May 9, 2023).
[25] Joseph Massad, "The Weapon of Culture: Cinema in the Palestinian Liberation Struggle," in *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*, ed. Hamid Dabashi (New York: Verso, 2006), 33.

spatial complications of the conflict in Palestine through their work. As we have seen, images of resistance coming out of Palestine have made their mark during times of conflict, and artistic production has also showcased Palestinian resistance, and developed despite real-world limitations. Palestinian cinema is uniquely positioned as a national cinema, given Palestine's contested status as a nation-state and its markedly diasporic population.[26] On the issue of exile and diaspora, Hammer and Schulz have written on identity formation in the Palestinian diaspora,[27] and Edward W. Said has written multiple critical essays reflecting on Palestinian exile in terms of, among other things, the geopolitical implications and the affective experience of exile.[28] Because of its unique status as a stateless diaspora, scholars of Palestinian cinema have discussed how much of a Palestinian cinema there actually is.[29] As an industry, a lack of production infrastructure, equipment, and people to produce regular cinematic output has caused relative decentralization: many Palestinian films are not made in Palestine, not screened in Palestine, and many Palestinian filmmakers do not live or work primarily in Palestine. Scholars have thus worked to chart Palestinian film's development, and what the literature makes clear is

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[26] Hamid Dabashi, "Introduction" in *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema* (London ; New York: Verso, 2006), 7.

[27] Helena Lindholm Schulz and Juliane Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland*, 1st ed (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003); Juliane Hammer, *Palestinians Born in Exile: Diaspora and the Search for a Homeland*, 1st ed (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

[28] Edward W. Said, "States," in *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*, by Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 11–49; Edward W. Said, "Toward Palestinian Self-Determination," in *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 115–81; Edward W. Said, "Reflections on Exile," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Convergences (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), 173–86.

[29] Gregory A. Burris, *The Palestinian Idea: Film, Media, and the Radical Imagination*, Insubordinate Spaces (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2019); Livia Alexander, "Is There a Palestinian Cinema? The National and Transnational in Palestinian Film Production," in *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Rebecca L. Stein and Ted Swedenburg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 150–7.

the spatial impediments that have framed Palestinian film production,[30] and the necessity of resistance to these barriers for there to be a Palestinian film industry at all.[31]

After the First Intifada in the mid-1990s, Palestinian cinema shifted from being produced mainly abroad and often by non-Palestinians in solidarity, towards being produced primarily by Palestinians living in the West Bank, Gaza, and the state of Israel; now-renowned filmmakers such as Michel Khleifi and Elia Suleiman began making films in this period. In addition to more localized perspectives, film scholars note that post-intifada filmmaking saw a transition toward more individual-focused fiction films and experimental work, moving away from the militant, political documentaries garnering support for the Palestinian cause of the late 60s and 70s.[32] Despite the relatively more localized industry, Viola Shafik and Nurith Gertz & Michel Khleifi emphasize that recent Palestinian film production practices remain transnational due to persisting inaccessibility of production infrastructure within Palestine.[33] With more availability of

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[30] Nurith Gertz and George Kheifi, "A Chronicle of Palestinian Cinema" in Josef Gugler, ed., Film in the Middle East and North Africa: Creative Dissidence, 1st ed (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 189-91; Kay Dickinson, "The Palestinian Road (Block) Movie: Everyday Geographies of Second Intifada Filmmaking," in *Cinema at the Periphery*, ed. Dina Iordanova, David Martin-Jones, and Belen Vidal (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010).

[31] Viviane Saglier, "'Not-Yet' an Industry: The Temporalities of Contemporary Palestinian Cinema," in *Cinema of the Arab World*, ed. Terri Ginsberg and Chris Lippard (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 125–46.

[32] Although Terri Ginsberg demonstrates that Palestinian solidarity films live on, in her volume examining contemporary solidarity film (*Visualizing the Palestinian Struggle: Towards a Critical Analytic of Palestine Solidarity Film* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016)). See also Kay Dickinson, "Cinema Within Armed Struggle: 'Manifesto of the Palestinian Cinema Group' (1972) and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, 'The Cinema and the Revolution,'" in Arab Film and Video Manifestos: Forty-Five Years of the Moving Image Amid Revolution, ed. Kay Dickinson, Palgrave Studies in Arab Cinema (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 81–106; Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi, Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma and Memory (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 20-30; Viola Shafik, "Cinema in Palestine," in Companion Encyclopedia of Middle Eastern and North African Film, ed. Oliver Leaman, 0 ed. (Routledge, 2003), 525; Ella Shohat, *On the Arab-Jew, Palestine, and Other Displacements: Selected Writings of Ella Shohat* (Pluto Press, 2017), 150; Nadia Yaqub, *Palestinian Cinema in the Days of Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018).

[33] Viola Shafik, "Cinema in Palestine," 521; Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema,* 30-34.

production infrastructure and resources outside of Palestine, the Palestinian diaspora remains a sizeable contributing force to the filmic output of what we would call Palestinian cinema. Hamid Naficy in his book *An Accented Cinema* explains that “people in the diaspora… maintain a long-term sense of ethnic consciousness and distinctiveness” despite their distance from their home community; this “exilic cinema” does therefore fit within what we would call ‘Palestinian cinema,’ which Naficy clarifies throughout the book.[34] The films I study in the chapters that follow are themselves co-productions between various nations, with Aljafari and Sansour working primarily out of European countries; they therefore represent the exilic nature of Palestinian cinema, as films made in the diaspora that nonetheless still take place in Palestine. The films by Aljafari and Sansour thus represent the culmination of the Palestinian film industry’s development through the decades of its existence, and its persisting transnational nature.

Space through form and style

Given these industrial limitations, along with the general issues regarding mobility and loss of space for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, Israel, and the diaspora, these realities bleed into the themes and primary issues in Palestine’s cinema. The question of access to space and land in the Palestinian context is politicized, and resistance to these spatial limitations is a prominent theme in Palestinian films. Film scholars have proposed analyses of many Palestinian films that show the affective experience of these limitations, and how this can be represented

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[34] Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 14 and 18.

formally. Camerawork can portray the feeling of cramped and shrinking spaces,[35] of insurmountable walls,[36] of being in an expansive, ecologically abundant rural landscape.[37]

Roadblocks or checkpoints often feature in Palestinian films, punctuating a character's journey in what film scholars call a 'roadblock film.'[38] Formal choices in filmmaking often translate the sensory experience of the immobility of roadblocks: camerawork and editing styles are mobilized to convey fragmentation, with roadblocks not allowing for a sense of continuous, "harmonious" space.[39] Traveling shots abound in these films, usually shot from inside a vehicle. The framing of the landscape from the car window emphasizes the omnipresence of roadblocks and associated colonial control for filmmakers as they shoot their films: adopting guerilla methods is sometimes necessary given the unpredictable shooting environment in occupied territory.[40] Formal choices thus represent the fragmentary nature of Palestinian space, as well as the experience on the ground of traveling (and filmmaking) as a Palestinian.

The medium of cinema can also be a way to transgress spatial boundaries and limitations. Filmmakers film from above to refute Israeli control, gaining a privileged perspective from the sky on people or roadblocks, the height even allowing them to film where it is forbidden.[41] Long pans across space and invisible editing are other ways that space is enlarged by formal

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[35] Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema,* 103-4.
[36] Ana Cristina Mendes, "Walled in/Walled out in the West Bank: Performing Separation Walls in Hany Abu-Assad's *Omar*," *Transnational Cinemas* 6, no. 2 (July 3, 2015): 123–36.
[37] Shohat, *On the Arab-Jew, Palestine, and Other*, 152; Hamid Dabashi, "Introduction" in *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema* (London ; New York: Verso, 2006), 12-17.
[38] Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi, "Palestinian 'Roadblock Movies,'" *Geopolitics* 10, no. 2 (July 2005): 320-1.
[39] Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema*, 155.
[40] Kay Dickinson, "The Palestinian Road (Block) Movie: Everyday Geographies of Second Intifada Filmmaking," in *Cinema at the Periphery*, ed. Dina Iordanova, David Martin-Jones, and Belen Vidal (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 146.
[41] Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema*, 156.

techniques, defying borders and spotlighting expansive natural landscapes rather than static infrastructural entrapment.[42]

In terms of the films I look at in this thesis, formal analysis will illuminate the ways cinema can be used as an exploratory tool, and a means of return to Palestine for diasporic Palestinian filmmakers. I want to frame Aljafari's detailed inspection of urban with the words of Palestinian historian Elias Sanbar on the exilic experience: "An obsession with places, from general topography to the details of the tiniest street, would henceforth preoccupy them, with Palestine travelling around on the shoulders of its children."[43] On Sansour's part, her films demonstrate that imagining alternatives to the current spatial reality is also possible through cinema, and as Helga Tawil-Souri puts it, cinema is a "space to transgress Palestine's territorial trap."[44]

Outside film studies

Gaining and maintaining control of space is an essential part of the Zionist project. In order to understand the significance of spatial representations in Palestinian cinema, this thesis also examines how the Zionist occupation has been able to mold and constrict space according to this issue of control. In her article "Planting the Promised Landscape: Zionism, Nature, and Resistance in Israel/Palestine," Irus Braverman identifies the natural landscape and the urban cityscape as essential tools of Zionism, the design and planning of these serving to bring the early Zionist visions to life.[45] The built environment and natural environment are spaces in which

[42] Gertz and Khelifi, *Palestinian Cinema*, 82, 94.
[43] Elias Sanbar, "Out of Place, Out of Time," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 16, no. 1 (June 2001): 90.
[44] Helga Tawil-Souri, "Cinema as the Space to Transgress Palestine's Territorial Trap," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 7, no. 2 (January 1, 2014): 169–89.
[45] Irus Braverman, "Planting the Promised Landscape: Zionism, Nature, and Resistance in Israel/Palestine," *Natural Resources Journal* 49, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 340.

and *with* which Israeli occupation violence plays out. To appropriately contextualize the cinematic treatment of space in the chosen films, I have consulted scholarship outside of film studies on the nature of these spatial issues as they affect Palestinian daily life. Several scholars have used the term 'spacio-cide' for the Zionist project's diminishment of space for Palestinian life and livelihood, often through the use of infrastructure such as walls, borders, and settlements.[46] Sociologist Sari Hanafi emphasizes that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict hinges on control of space, and argues that accurate understandings of the conflict's toll must account for spacio-cide on top of the human element.[47] In documenting the toll this takes, as cultural objects, films demonstrate how these spatial issues are felt by people, and how people then articulate and visualize these relationships to space.

Methodology

To locate the connections between the spatial issues in Palestinian film and the spatial violence in the geopolitical reality, I look to several primary sources in the form of the short films identified earlier. I conduct a formal analysis of these films, focusing on the stylistic techniques the filmmakers employ that contribute to the meaning of the film. Beyond that Palestinian cinema generally sheds light on the daily Palestinian reality, the particular formal techniques employed by these filmmakers are significant to consider. In chapter one, I analyze montage and the use of archival or found footage as ways of considering Palestinian

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[46] Ahmad Barclay, "Resisting Spaciocide: Notes on the Spatial Struggle in Israel-Palestine," *Arena of Speculation*, nd, https://arenaofspeculation.org/research/publications/resisting-spaciocide/; Sari Hanafi, "Explaining Spacio-Cide in the Palestinian Territory: Colonization, Separation, and State of Exception," *Current Sociology* 61, no. 2 (March 2013): 190–205; Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London ; New York: Verso, 2007); B'tselem and Forensic Architecture, *Conquer and Divide*, June 5, 2019, https://conquer-and-divide.btselem.org/map-en.html.
[47] Hanafi, "Explaining Spacio-Cide int eh Palestinian Territory," 193-4.

relationships to urban space. In chapter two, I explain how settler colonial tropes related to natural environment show up visually and rhetorically in documentary, and how Palestinian changing relationships to the natural environment show up in the mise-en-scène and film dialogue. To structure and provide relevance to my film analysis, I look to other artistic mediums such as painting and poetry to situate the films within a broader art history in Palestine. Throughout the thesis, the importance of poetry and literature in Palestinian artistic heritage helps to inform my reading of the films, which includes consideration of the dialogue and word choice, intertitles, and credits. I also highlight motifs in painting to emphasize the importance of ecology in Palestinian daily life.

The method of eco-criticism heavily informed my reading of the films through formal analysis. Foundational eco-critical texts aided in this reading,[48] as well as analyses that used this method, of other films from the South-West Asia/ North Africa region[49] and of Palestinian literature.[50] Eco-criticism, in the context of film studies, is a way of approaching a film text that centers the ways that ecology and environment are present within it; this centering is part of the methodology's guiding ethical "commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather

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[48] Ursula K. Heise, "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism," *PMLA* 121, no. 2 (2006): 503–16; Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (University of Georgia Press, 1996); Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, Second edition (London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015); Salma Monani and Joni Adamson, *Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies: Conversations from Earth to Cosmos* (S.l.: ROUTLEDGE, 2020).

[49] Rachel Webb Jekanowski, "Land in Revolt," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 11, no. 3 (November 23, 2018): 248–73.

[50] Hamoud Yahya Ahmed and Ruzy Suliza Hashim, "Resisting Colonialism through Nature: An Ecopostcolonial Reading of Mahmoud Darwish's Selected Poems," *Holy Land Studies* 13, no. 1 (May 2014): 89–107; Raihanah M.M, Hamoud Yahya Ahmed, and Ruzy Suliza Hashim, "A Handful of Soil: An Ecocritical Reading of Land in Randa Abdel-Fattah's Where the Streets Had a Name," *Asiatic* 8, no. 2 (December 2014): 137–48; Hannah Boast, "'A River without Water': Hydropolitics and the River Jordan in Palestinian Literature," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 51, no. 2 (June 2016): 275–86.

than simply as an object of thematic study."[51] With the natural and built environment being at the forefront of my analysis, applying an eco-critical perspective allowed for interesting discoveries: in Sansour's films, I felt the minimal but persistent use of ecological imagery warranted study, and an eco-critical view of her films provided a reading that goes beyond what others have focused on, namely her use of sci-fi and futurist aesthetics[52] or imagery of ruins/architecture.[53] In the context of my study of Aljafari's focus on the built environment, despite the lack of ecological imagery in the films, eco-criticism is still a fruitful lens through which to look at his films in order to examine the significance of space. Recently, several Palestinian scholars use the term "ecology" to refer to urban spaces and dynamics, especially given the possibilities of human and non-human interactions/inter-mingling within the urban built environment.[54] With my analysis I am contributing to this broadening of the idea of ecology.

In my secondary research, as outlined in the literature review, I draw heavily on texts from outside of film studies, focusing on literature about the occupation of Palestine and its architectural and ecological manifestations. This scholarship comes from fields such as Palestine/Middle East studies, urban studies and urban planning, environmental studies, geography, and art history. This cross-disciplinary secondary research serves to aid my analysis

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[51] Simon C. Estok, "A Report Card on Ecocriticism," Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association 96, no. 1 (November 2001): 220.

[52] Jussi Parikka, "Middle East and Other Futurisms: Imaginary Temporalities in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture," *Culture, Theory and Critique* 59, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 40–58; Jareh Das, "Science or Fiction: Imaginary Narratives in the Works of Laylah Ali, Hamad Butt, Basim Magdy and Larissa Sansour," *Contemporary Practices: Visual Arts from the Middle East* 13 (2013): 44–49.

[53] Robert Duggan, "Larissa Sansour and the Palestinian Ruins of the Future," *Journal for Cultural Research* 24, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 69–83; Carol Que, "Mechanisms of a Settler Colonial Architecture in Larissa Sansour's Nation Estate (2012)," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 73 (Spring 2018): 124–39.

[54] See Helga Tawil-Souri, "Speculation on Infrastructural Ecology: Pigeons, Gaza, and Internet Access," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 40, no. 6 (December 2022): 1064–81; Abourahme, "Spatial Collisions and Discordant Temporalities"; Philip Dickinson, "Raja Shehadeh's *Palestinian Walks* and the Concrete Ecology of Settlement," *Interventions* 20, no. 2 (February 17, 2018): 294–307.

of the spaces depicted in the films by grounding them within their real-world context; as the Palestinian film industry, film style, and filmmaking process are all infused with and shaped by geopolitics.

Chapter breakdown

Both chapters examine how contemporary Palestinian filmmakers are able to mitigate the Palestinian relationship to space with filmic techniques; through cinema, the chosen filmmakers re-appropriate space to create alternative built ecologies that resist the realities of occupation and spatial violence.

In Chapter One, my formal analysis takes the form of considering the significance of footage sources and the formal interventions on this found footage in Kamal Aljafari's films *Recollection* and *An Unusual Summer*. As these films demonstrate a fascination with the built environment, I elaborate the barriers there are in Palestinian daily life when it comes to infrastructure and the urban milieu. To this end I consult research on infrastructure of the occupation such as the separation barrier, segregational urban planning, and the overall control of space by the Zionist occupation. Much of the footage in *Recollection* features ruins, which leads us to consider the destruction of the built environment by occupation forces as well. Beyond this, the artistic choice of using found footage holds significance, as the visuality of the source of that footage imparts meaning on the film; Aljafari's creative re-use of Israeli films in *Recollection* certainly designates a reappropriation of space. His use of security camera footage in *An Unusual Summer* is again a reappropriation, this time of securitization infrastructure that in the occupation's hands would be used to surveil and control Palestinians. Besides the use of footage, Aljafari also reclaims space through interventions on the found footage; through

montage, different actions of inhabiting space are possible. In *Recollection*, zooming into the original framing and meandering around the frames' margins permits Aljafari to digitally wander, mapping the city according to his own memories despite it not being his own footage. The stationary camera position in *An Unusual Summer* gives the effect of a loitering *flaneur*, which lends itself to discussions on Palestinian steadfastness (*sumud*) and the violence of the everyday; it also allows the filmmaker, and by extension the viewer, to inhabit the ecosystem of the neighbourhood in witnessing its daily patterns of movement.

Both the reappropriation of disparate footage sources and the exploratory montage style encourage my analysis that these techniques allow Aljafari to inhabit Palestinian space, even digitally. This is complicated by the fact that Aljafari, like many Palestinian artists, is making these works from outside of Palestine; this makes digital presence in Palestinian space all the more significant. I touch on some other examples of artists entering Palestinian space from afar through the medium of film/video: Till Roesken's *Vidéocartographies : Aïda, Palestine* (2009) and Razan AlSalah's *Your Father Was Born 100 Years Old and So Was the Nakba* (2017) both use maps as ways of retracing the steps (their own, or of elders) from a distance. As I will explain, Mahmoud Darwish's concept of absent presence connects with the problematic of distance in the Palestinian exilic experience, but the medium of cinema helps to bridge the spatial gap and allows Palestinain space to be inhabited *even from* that distance – presence.

Chapter two again elaborates the central argument that Palestinian filmmakers reclaim space through cinema, this time through the lens of the natural environment. First, I examine the context of how the natural environment has been implicated in the occupation, especially given the importance of ecological imagery for nation-building for both the Palestinian and Zionist causes. To this end, I outline the ways Zionist settler colonialism has relied on narratives of

incompetent stewardship and terra nullius to justify occupation of Palestinian land. "Making the desert bloom" is a popular saying in Zionist spaces that describes how Zionism has remedied environmental problems through taking control of Palestinian lands, and shows how much the natural environment is implicated in colonial rhetoric and violence. On this subject, I look to Israel's greening projects as evidence of how environmentalism is mobilized for settler colonial gain, through scholarship on their public relations materials such as posters and websites and the rhetoric and imagery therein. This provides insight for my own analysis of a particular greening organization, HaYovel, and their documentary *Greening Israel.* Despite its substantial differences in terms of perspective and format from the Palestinian films I analyze in this thesis, this documentary contains rhetoric and visuals that reflect a Zionist perspective on ecology and Palestinians: scarcity characterizes the time before Zionists took control of the environment, and abundance the time after. The ways this abundance has been achieved is violent, but greenwashing, or green colonialism, refer to the practice of covering up harmful practices (like colonization) with perceived good deeds related to environmental conservation. Being an Evangelical Christian organization, HaYovel also engages in what I call Biblewashing in *Greening Israel*, in that they cover up the realities of tree-planting exclusively in the West Bank by relying Biblical place-names and stories. Overall, this film exemplifies the ways that Zionism mobilizes the natural environment to further the occupation, using a variety of narratives to justify this.

Regarding this thesis's main argument as it relates to this chapter, I argue that Palestinian filmmaker Larissa Sansour is able to reclaim space through her film *In Vitro*, since it refutes these settler colonial narratives of ownership over space, through the medium of cinema. In introducing Palestinian perspectives on ecology and the natural environment, I look to motifs in

Palestinian art history that demonstrate ecological abundance being associated with the past before Israeli occupation, and imagery related to ecological scarcity featuring prominently after occupation. Through analysis of mise-en-scène and dialogue, I demonstrate that *In Vitro* fits into this pattern in Palestinian artistic heritage, and thus stands in opposition to the Zionist narratives of ecology and stewardship. The film's eco-apocalypse reflects the anxieties of environmental collapse in Palestine under occupation, and pokes holes in Zionist greenwashing tactics; reports on environmental problems in the West Bank also challenge Zionist narratives of ecological abundance under their stewardship. The mise-en-scène depicts scarcity due to the eco-disaster, but an underground orchard, flourishing even without sunlight, is evidence of the steadfastness of Palestinian environmentalism. Cinematic techniques therefore make it possible for Sansour to stake a claim to Palestinian space through an emphasis on steadfast environmentalism.

Chapter One: Uncovering Palestinian urban life in Kamal Aljafari's *Recollection* and *An Unusual Summer*

A wide frame captures a large open square, populated by several concrete and brick buildings, a clothesline with garments hanging motionless, abandoned cars, and piles of rubble. We cut closer in and meander around the square - perhaps aimlessly, perhaps scanning for signs of life. We pass over rooftops, terraces, walls, and foundations in wandering through this square. Cut to a medium shot of an alleyway, perhaps off this square, where we take in a cobblestone walkway and doorways before we suddenly close in on a balcony; after a second, the reason for the quick zoom-in becomes clear as several blurry human figures move around the balcony.

…

The dusty ground is littered with rocks, where a telephone pole stands and, further back, where a stone building sits firmly, crumbling at the corners. We slowly approach the stone building then jolt forward, zeroing in on a blurry head peeking around the corner of the building.

This is an average minute of Kamal Aljafari's *Recollection* (2015), wherein he digitally wanders through streets and alleyways captured in old film clips, attempting to find signs of Palestinian life. The streets in question are in his hometown of Jaffa, the filming site of many Israeli and American action films that are Aljafari's main source of footage. The city itself and its structures become the foreground once Aljafari digitally removes the actors and the action from each frame, to reveal empty streets and wide open spaces for the viewer to contemplate. For the first ten minutes, it seems like a ghost town, bereft of human life; gradually, we begin to notice figures in the background who had been obscured by the original film's action, hidden behind walls, cars, or lattices on balconies. The encounters with these blurry figures hidden in

the city's structures become more and more frequent as the film progresses. With Aljafari's foregrounding of buildings, streets, and alleyways towards the beginning of the film, both as structures unto themselves and later as hiding places, as viewers we might consider how these structures interact with or reflect Palestinian daily existence. In other words, as architect Eyal Weizman puts it, considering space as more than "an abstract grid on which events take place"[55] reveals aspects of the Palestinian everyday, including the reality of Israeli occupation.

Kamal Aljafari is a filmmaker, artist, and film producer born in Ramle, Palestine and working out of Berlin, Germany. His work spans multiple genres and modes, from fiction with *Port of Memory* (2009) to documentary with *The Roof* (2006), to feature-length experimentations in editing that are the object of analysis of this chapter. Besides *Recollection*, we will look at his 2020 film *An Unusual Summer*, wherein the role of urban structures on Palestinian daily life becomes a question of observing this daily life through a single vantage point—that of a surveillance camera on a street corner. Again, structures are foregrounded by Aljafari, but this time through honing in on the aesthetic characteristics of the surveillance camera: the way we view this neighbourhood alleyway and its activity is impacted by the nature of this camera as a surveillance structure.

This chapter argues that through the medium of film, Aljafari is able to reclaim Palestinian space; namely, Aljafari uses editing techniques to add new meaning to found footage, and in doing so reveals and reaffirms Palestinian presence in urban space. First, I discuss how the built environment is used by the Israeli occupation to maintain control over Palestinian daily life. An analysis of the verticality of space helps us understand the visual power of walls and ruins – occupation infrastructure and the destruction left in its wake. With this in mind, I then turn to

[55] Weizman, *Hollow Land,* 7.

analyzing Aljafari's films, in which he uses certain types of found footage, filmed for disparate purposes. Ruins in Jaffa, in the background of Israeli B-movies, and a street corner filmed by a surveillance camera, are the images he makes use of: I examine the implications of using images from the occupier's cinematic output and surveillance footage in a heavily militarized environment like Palestine/Israel. Moreover, Aljafari's editing choices when re-appropriating this footage illuminate how the re-use of archival footage can constitute an anticolonial reclamation of urban space. Through the act of editing, digital presence in Palestine is possible, allowing for Palestinian filmmakers like Aljfari to disrupt the colonial spatial order and be repatriated in some capacity. As I will elaborate, Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish's dichotomy of absent presence[56] when it comes to Palestinians' relationship to the homeland, which alludes to a state of in-betweenness while waiting for an opportunity to return, is relevant when discussing these filmmakers' ability to be present in Palestine from afar, if only digitally. Cinema thus plays a part in the larger de-colonial movement of a return to Palestine.

Cinematic and material occupation

In his films, Aljafari re-appropriates cinematic documentation of Palestinian life. The images he uses prove to have unconventional sources: this found footage consists of Israeli and American B-movies starring the likes of Chuck Norris, and static surveillance camera footage of a driveway. His transformation of these images through formal interventions distances them from their original context; this speaks to Aljafari's imaginative approach to reformulating found images of Palestine and Palestinians. Indeed, images can have disparate functions as a result of the system that produces them, and as artist-archivist, Aljafari brings that to the forefront through

[56] As explored in Darwish's literary work, *In the Presence of Absence*.

his use of images that represent, in their own ways, the Israeli occupation. In *An Unusual Summer*, he uses surveillance camera footage to build a portrait of an urban community, and in *Recollection*, he transforms the B-movie footage into a study in Palestinian architecture and steadfastness.

The streets of Jaffa become a character in *Recollection*, with human figures reappearing only ten minutes into opening exploratory sequence. The slow, meditative pace of *Recollection* forces us to ponder the materials, textures, patterns in tiles and mouldings, style of door handle, etc. in the footage of Jaffa, as seen in the Israeli war films Aljafari draws from. This foregrounding of the built environment necessitates some consideration of the building of the Israeli state and the destruction of Palestinian urban space for these means. The vertical plane the occupation resides on becomes a useful site for analysis for us to consider the upward and downward directions of spatial appropriation: the building of the state of Israel requires digging downwards for evidence of belonging and constructing upwards to give permanence to the settler state. The occupation being everywhere – up, down, across – and constantly mutating in its approach to spatial domination reflects what we can call chaos as strategy: Weizman describes an encouragement of complexity in the rhetoric behind Israel's colonial project that creates confusion for outsiders and thus discourages international intervention. Strategic complexity in the management of space has also created an "irresolvable geography" of constantly-multiplying settlements in the Occupied Territories, for instance, complicating any path forward towards Palestinian sovereignty.[57] Aljafari maintaining a slow pace in the montage of *Recollection* troubles this intentional chaos; zooming in on elements in the background limits the chaos, framing it out entirely. His illumination of these details in the built environment draws into

[57] Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 8.

question their significance as evidence of Palestinian presence within the architecture: what story do the buildings tell of occupation and resistance?

Vertical power

Eyal Weizman is concerned with what he calls 'the politics of verticality'[58] in his work, and geographer Stuart Elden doubles down on this consideration of the vertical plane in his discussion of the 'volume' of space[59] — seeing space as more than just a flat area of land by also accounting for the crucial role of airspace in exercising spatial control. Considering the width and depth as well as the height of controlled spaces like the Palestinian territories allows us to see a multiplication of the possibilities of where power can be played out. This vertical framework is especially useful in the Palestinian context, where the occupation strives to "secure the volume," as Elden puts it, by both delving downwards and climbing upwards to add to its command over the land.[60] Digging into the past, often literally so through revisionist archaeological projects,[61] attempts to give justification for the colonial present, and constructing overtop this past secures a colonial future. Indeed, considering the depth and height of the occupation is necessary to fully understand its power over space. The 'politics of verticality' in Palestine/Israel lead us to the hilltop settlements of the West Bank, the Israeli-only highways

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[58] Eyal Weizman, "Introduction to The Politics of Verticality," OpenDemocracy, April 2002, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/article_801jsp/.
[59] Stuart Elden, "Secure the Volume: Vertical Geopolitics and the Depth of Power," *Political Geography* 34 (May 1, 2013): 2.
[60] Elden, "Secure the Volume."
[61] Archaeology is often used politically in Israel as a justification for land claims, digging for evidence of Jewish presence on the land before Arabs. The goal of this practice is to 'indigenize' Israeli people and therefore reverse the dynamics of their settler colonialism. See Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

circulating above their Palestinian counterparts on the ground, the separation wall standing eight meters high.[62] Indeed it also leads us to see differently the layers of a film like *Recollection*, that examines who is foregrounded and who remains behind layers of background elements like buildings, walls, and balcony trellises. Who is relegated *underneath?*

The occupation seeps into the ground — inside the soil, dust, stones, building materials — sinking out of sight in an act of subterfuge.[63] The details that make up built structures are tools of the settler colonial state, however inconspicuous this may be on a day to day level. Weizman considers these "mundane elements" to be worthy of study given their power as a "means of dispossession"[64] in a context like the Israeli one, that associates the national identity so closely with (constructed) historical evidence of belonging.[65] An important mundane element to consider is the materials used to build up newly-established Israeli cities and settlements. The choice of building materials was not purely based on the accessibility of local stones; the visual language of newer Jewish neighbourhoods in Jerusalem, for instance, was intended to convey a sense of historic presence despite their recent construction. [66] Aljafari's slow-paced exploration of Jaffa in *Recollection* allows the viewer to be attuned to small, perhaps overlooked details in the architecture, important to consider given Jaffa's transformation from ancient Palestinian port city to a becoming part of a ultra-urban tech hub like Tel Aviv.[67]

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[62] Weizman, "Introduction to The Politics of Verticality."
[63] Elden, "Secure the Volume," 6.
[64] Weizman, *Hollow Land,* 5.
[65] Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 43.
[66] Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 26.
[67] Andrew Ross, *Stone Men: The Palestinians Who Built Israel* (London ; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2019), 57-67.

To this end, in the development – or re-development – of cities in the new Israeli state, planners and architects made choices that allowed for new construction to blend in with existing older buildings. A 1968 'master plan' for developing new neighbourhoods in Jerusalem included requirements to use stone cladding on new construction so that it matched with the Old City, for instance; according to Weizman, this 'historified' cladding strategy also reflects Israeli architects' fascination with "Palestinian vernacular" of architecture.[68] This reflects the importance placed on materials for the building of a national consciousness that emphasizes an ancient, Biblical connection to the land; Weizman highlights in particular the consideration made by the 1968 plan's authors of the affective projection of certain materials. The thought was that the look of a particular type of stone can "carry emotional messages that stimulate other sensations embedded in our collective memory," and extend the Old City's ancient appearance into new residential neighbourhoods around it.[69] Materials have meaning, and Zionist architects capitalized on this in the wider settler-colonial project, particularly in the realm of urban development. Circling back again to Jaffa, destruction of historic Palestinian neighbourhoods like Manshiya in Jaffa had the intention of modernizing the built environment with the associated consequence of displacing Palestinians.[70] On the labour front, concrete, which some call "the stuff of Zionism,"[71] was used to build Tel Aviv as of the 1920s instead of local *kurkar*, a yellow-hued stone that made up old Jaffa. Using concrete as a substitute conveniently did away with the need for Palestinian quarries and stoneworkers, as unskilled Jewish immigrants from Europe

[68] Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 44.
[69] Weizman, 28.
[70] Or Aleksandrowicz, "The Camouflage of War: Planned Destruction in Jaffa and Tel Aviv, 1948," *Planning Perspectives* 32, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 177.
[71] Ross, 56.

could easily take their place to work with concrete.[72] This choice of materials thus proved conducive to nation-building as the Zionist movement was putting down roots in Palestine, segregating the workforce and constructing a modern urban centre fit for a burgeoning state. Tel Aviv's construction demonstrates one part of the two-pronged approach in the urban development leading up to statehood: in a city like Jerusalem with heavy Biblical associations, a historicized look was cultivated, whereas in Tel Aviv/Jaffa, a more contemporary style allowed for an integration of an Israeli metropolis into the capitalist world stage. In both cities, rapid destruction and its accompanying construction of the Israeli state was not done just to settle the land, creating a sense of permanence to the exodus of one people and the settlement of another; it also served to integrate segregation into the literal foundations of the new state. In *Recollection*, we see this practice of segregation played out cinematically in the foregrounding of the Israeli film production against ruined Palestinian buildings, with this urban architecture also acting as a structure of concealment of Palestinians in the background.

"Us here, them there"[73]

In considering the volume of space, the occupation resides in the planes above the ground, which allows for the cultivation of a sense of belonging to the land in the Israeli consciousness without being present in the same space as Palestinians. Above-ground, Israeli-only highways and hilltop settlements raise settlers above the realities of Palestinians, the brutality of life in the Occupied Territories out of sight, out of mind. The separation barrier also manages to frame

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[72] Ross, 56-60.

[73] Slogan frequently used by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak (in office 1999-2001), who favoured hardline separation policies and was elected on a campaign based on this; Ehud Barak quoted in David Makovsky, "Barak's Separate Peace." *The Washington Post (1974-),* Jul 16, 2000: B1.

Palestinians out on the horizontal plane. Saree Makdisi discusses the separation wall as a case in point of this *architecture of erasure*: not only does the wall hide any sign of the Palestinian reality from view, but the wall's very presence is erased in convenient ways for settlers to avoid confronting this at all. On the Palestinian side, the wall's brutalist style remains as-is, conveying a carceral message; on the Israeli side, however, its height is played down through landscaping techniques. Interestingly, a pleasant landscape is sometimes painted onto the wall itself on the Israeli side, effacing any sign of concrete brutality.[74]

Figure 1: A landscape painted onto the separation wall at Gilo. Photo by W. J. T. Mitchell.[75]

[74] Saree Makdisi, "The Architecture of Erasure," *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 3 (March 2010): 535.
[75] W. J. T. Mitchell, "Christo's *Gates* and Gilo's Wall," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 4 (June 2006): 587–601.

While the Palestinian side of the wall is free from these airbrushing techniques, there is graffiti highlighting the resistance to Israeli occupation, represented by this built structure. The wall art on the Palestinian side has the goal of "constantly disrupt[ing] a 'natural' reading of walls,"[76] which could also be said about the art on the Israeli side, albeit for completely different purposes. The difference between the two sides of the wall – one trying to blend in while the other calls attention to its brutality by acting as a canvas for anti-occupation sentiments and art, shows who has the burden of being in the reality that the occupation has created. The erasure of Palestinians for the benefit of settlers is thus twofold in that the wall physically hides them from view, and this hiding from view is itself hidden from view. This covering up of the separation barrier is emblematic of the covering up of the entire architecture of the settler colonial state, all to create a sense of belonging in settlers without any reminders of the people they live alongside. Cinema can serve a similar purpose to uphold this, as is evidenced through Aljafari's interventions on Israeli films that frame Palestinians out completely – or at least attempt to.

Despite its stature and immovable appearance, the wall has been re-routed multiple times in different places as a result of court rulings, protests, and expansion of settlements.[77] As part of the Israeli arsenal of security structures, the wall is one of the tools by which Israel holds Palestinians responsible for acts of resistance.[78] It is a physical manifestation of Israel's "fantasy of containment," a concept put forth by political theorist Wendy Brown. This fantasy is held especially by states whose "waning sovereignty"[79] requires it to use exaggerated force to

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[76] Ana Cristina Mendes, "Walled in/Walled out in the West Bank: Performing Separation Walls in Hany Abu-Assad's *Omar*," *Transnational Cinemas* 6, no. 2 (July 3, 2015): 125.
[77] Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York : Cambridge, Mass: Zone Books; Distributed by the MIT Press, 2010), 31.
[78] Brown, 31.
[79] Brown, 117-8.

maintain the status quo, which in Israel's case is segregation.[80] Of the psychic political defenses Brown outlines in her book *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty,* this fantasy of containment and the fantasy of impermeability are certainly emblematized by the sheer scale of Israeli securitization through imposing structures and military presence. The use of the word 'fantasy' by Brown indicates that a 'subordinate' population cannot ever be completely contained, and that these containment methods will never be impermeable. However, these fantasies result in very real violence to uphold them.

The West Bank, punctuated with surveillance structures, walled-off settlements, and checkpoints, exemplifies what Mendes calls "carceral urbanism," an urban planning phenomenon present in other places like Los Angeles, but arguably to a lesser degree than in the Occupied Territories.[81] The ubiquity of these carceral structures makes them almost blend in, "becoming part of the landscape."[82] Naturally, films set in this context tend to reflect this reality, often incorporating these infrastructures into the narrative, as a backdrop for everyday life but also as a representation of the power of the occupation.[83] In describing Aljafari's filmmaking style, film scholar Peter Limbrick proposes that Aljafari's focus on built spaces "render[s] visible the logics of Israeli urban planning, historiography, and spatial conquest."[84] To Limbrick, Aljafari's oeuvre "exhibits a documentary attention to built environments," saying this about his

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[80] *Hafrada*, meaning 'separation' in Hebrew, has been made equivalent to the term apartheid by several scholars, including Jon Soske and Sean Jacobs in their article "Apartheid/Hafrada: South Africa, Israel, and the politics of historical comparison" in Jon Soske and Sean Jacobs, eds. *Apartheid Israel: The Politics of an Analogy*. Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2015, 1-18.

[81] Mendes, 124.

[82] Mendes, 125.

[83] Mendes, 127.

[84] Peter Limbrick, "Contested Spaces: Kamal Aljafari's Transnational Palestinian Films," in *A Companion to German Cinema*, ed. Terri Ginsberg and Andrea Mensch, Wiley-Blackwell Companions to National Cinemas (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 230.

earlier films *The Roof* and *Port of Memory*; I propose that we can extend this to also cover *Recollection* and *An Unusual Summer* because of their attention to the built environment itself and the life that inhabits it.[85]

The footage Aljafari draws from for *Recollection* and *An Unusual Summer* depicts Jaffa and Ramla respectively, both located since 1948 within the State of Israel, neighbouring hyper-urban tech centre Tel Aviv. Jaffa and Ramla are both known as 'mixed cities' within Israel because of their more substantial population of Palestinians living alongside Jewish Israelis.[86] This is certainly a different environmental reality than urban centres in the West Bank, occupied almost two decades later in 1967, but the concept of carceral urbanism as Mendes lays it out is certainly still worth examining in relation to Aljafari's films. I will address the architecture of surveillance in this context later in my section on Hypervisibility, drawing particularly on *An Unusual Summer*.

So far, we have examined different architectural elements of this environment: carceral urbanism; use of certain materials and Palestinian architectural vernacular to create a narrative of historic presence; archaeological tools and built structures like highways, walls, and settlements that allow the occupation command over the volume of space. Another important facet of the built environment to which we will now pivot is ruins, given the armed conflict waged by the occupation to assert ownership of the land and the destruction that accompanies this. In *Recollection*, the built environment is in ruins, and these were not fabricated for the purposes of the action movies the footage is drawn from. The ruins in Jaffa were a particular draw for the original films' sets because they needed ruins anyway for their story, and they found them there

[85] Limbrick, 235.
[86] Ghazi Falah. "Living Together Apart: Residential Segregation in Mixed Arab-Jewish Cities in Israel." Urban Studies 33, no. 6 (June 1996): 823–57.

ready for shooting. In *Recollection*, Aljafari emphasizes these ruins by digitally removing the action sequences and characters from the original films and focusing on the stones and walls in the background. So what can an image of ruin suggest? The image of a ruin or indeed just the ruin itself can be a way of visualizing the vertical power we just discussed. The idea of a built structure crumbling down brings us to think of architecture, and the urban environment in general, in the vertical plane. If the occupation of high-up places, and even of the sky, accords power, then what does it mean when a building is diminished in stature? What does this downward process of decay tell us about vertical power?

The ruin and vertical power

Recollection features many shots of conspicuous ruins: structures that once stood tall are, in the images, piles of rubble, and Aljafari tends to linger on these. Ruins can be a visual representation of the destruction that the occupation causes, and so their appropriation on film sets violently removes them from their context. Aljafari's interventions on the source footage illuminate the ruins themselves; in this section I will examine how foregrounding images of ruins is significant to the work of reappropriation that Aljafari does through his filmmaking.

In Walter Benjamin's writing on allegory, he draws a certain equivalence between the allegory and the ruin: as a genre, allegory contains a hidden meaning, and the ruin, having been imprinted by time, contains - or hides - the history that it has witnessed.[87] In Benjamin's words, "in allegory the observer is confronted with the facies hippocratic of history as a petrified, primordial landscape."[88] The *facies Hippocratica* (Hippocratic facies) is a pale, sunken face,

[87] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: NLB, 1977), 177-9.
[88] Benjamin, 166.

glistening with cold sweat: as a medical term, it describes the physical state of a patient whose death is imminent. It is the picture of human decay, or in Benjamin's own words, "death's head."[89] If history has been absorbed by the physical spaces that played host to this passing time, then its tragedies, losses, and sorrows are reflected in these spaces — just as illness and suffering are on the Hippocratic facies. The deterioration of the human body or our built structures is ubiquitous, but is at the same time an arresting sight: both disrupt boundaries and what we conceive as the natural order of things. A ruin, which we can think of as a sort of composite image, is a spectacle of "irresistible decay" that projects evidence of multiple realities at once.[90] The ruins we see in *Recollection* are real ruins in Jaffa, the remains of the former built environment bulldozed to construct the Israeli state, now being used as a film backdrop.[91] The films' stories collide with the Palestinian reality on the surface of these ruins, an entanglement of Palestinian loss and narratives of Israeli heroism. If ruins have absorbed the history they have witnessed, as Benjamin says, what does it mean to capture these ruins in images and remove them from their real-world context?

The intense specificity and affective impact of ruins is stripped completely in the context of *Recollection*'s source footage. Aljafari has called this a 'cinematic occupation,' which emphasizes the important role film and images can have in a settler colonial project.[92] Keeping with this linking of the filmic image and infrastructural decay, in his article "*Lapsus Imaginis*: The Image in Ruins," comparative literature scholar Eduardo Cadava likens the image to a ruin,

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[89] Benjamin, 166.
[90] Benjamin, 178
[91] Farah Atoui. "Appropriate, Re-Mix, Erase, Zoom-in: The Transformative Power of Film-Making in Kamal Aljafari's Recollection." *Offscreen* 20, no. 10 (October 2016).
[92] Gil Hochberg, "From 'Cinematic Occupation' to 'Cinematic Justice': Citational Practices in Kamal Aljafari's 'Jaffa Trilogy,'" *Third Text* 31 (July 4, 2017): 533–47.

in that both represent a moment lost to time, with just a remaining trace of it in the form of stones, or pixels, remaining.[93] In its basic, definitive qualities, an image is a time capsule allowing us to look at an ephemeral moment in time; the movement of that moment brought to a standstill, we see "the dialectical transfer between the Then and the Now" giving the still image an inherent sense of temporal multiplicity.[94] In *Recollection*, Aljafari zooms in on Palestinians in the background of these Israeli action movies, capturing people peeking around corners and over balcony railings, observing the action scene being shot among the ruins of former houses, schools, shops… These formerly standing structures, and indeed these images of them, "bear witness to the enigmatic relation between death and survival, loss and life, destruction and preservation, mourning and memory."[95] The focus on the accidentally-captured Palestinians, thanks to Aljafari's formal interventions, centres them as a witness of all this too.

The images that Aljafari uses – from various collected action films – are ultra-pixellated as a result of his interventions. Focusing in on small parts of the original found footage, re-rendering it, and other editing processes certainly leave their mark on the image's visual qualities. In her essay "In Defense of the Poor Image," Hito Steyerl contends that a "poor image" — one with diminished quality, missing pixels, colour changes — is a popular image. As we keep in mind the likening of an image to a ruin, these marks of decay in the poor image constitute another element that connects images and ruins. As Steyerl describes, poor images bear the marks of their circulation, having been saved and screenshotted, re-saved and re-screenshotted so many times that their travel through Internet space becomes visible.[96] In other

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[93] Eduardo Cadava, "'Lapsus Imaginis': The Image in Ruins," *October* 96 (2001): 35–60.
[94] Cadava, 38.
[95] Cadava, 35.
[96] Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," in *The Wretched of the Screen*, E-Flux Journal (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 41.

words, archival images absorb the traces of those who use them. In Aljafari's case, the saving and re-formatting of the movie footage, which could have been of shoddy quality in the first place, is visible in the quality of the image as well. As such, the poor image "embodies the afterlife" of what it once was: its fall from relevancy is reflected in the poor quality of the image that remains.[97] The fate the image has endured is therefore imprinted on the image itself, much like what happens to ruins per Benjamin's analysis: "In the process of decay, and in it alone, the events of history shrivel up and become absorbed in the setting."[98] The poor image's diminished quality is evidence of its "displacement,"[99] and I would argue the same would go for a ruin, in keeping with this comparison. Ruins signify displacement in their inability to be used as buildings any longer—the former occupants must leave. A ruin – or an image of a ruin – thus causes us to think about *who* is displaced, gone, missing – a question Aljafari hones in on in *Recollection* in his centring of Palestinians relegated to the margins.

Disrupting the archive

In considering both *Recollection* and *An Unusual Summer* as re-appropriative of Palestinian space through formal techniques, in this section I propose that the types of footage Aljafari uses — their sources — are just as important as the ways he manipulates this footage. Film scholar Catherine Russell engages with Benjamin's theories in relation to archival images, like the ones Aljafari uses in *Recollection*, in her book *Archiveology. "*Death, ruin, and loss" are ubiquitous in the study of archival images, and Russell makes use of archiveology as a method of study to examine works that use archival footage. Archiveology as a term was coined by Joel

[97] Steyerl, 44.
[98] Benjamin, 179.
[99] Steyerl, 38.

Katz in 1991; following Benjamin's theories on culture, archiveology allows for ample consideration of how "remixing, recycling, and reconfiguring" archival images can change how we see history, the past, and the images themselves.[100] In keeping with Benjamin's logic on ruins and allegory mentioned earlier, which Russell also refers to throughout her book, these film fragments act as ruined buildings in that they absorb the history, and can thus be used and interpreted in different ways. Because of Russell's use of the word 'inscribed' and her reliance on Benjamin throughout her discussions, we are invited to see film as a physical object impacted by time. Indeed, celluloid can be physically marred, but these ideas also allow us to consider the ways Aljafari interacts with the physicality of the *digital* image through his editing. By peeling back layers of the image through the removal of actors from a shot, he treats the digital image as if there are physical layers to be removed; when buildings decay, the supporting beams or the inside of the walls are revealed, and in doing so reveal traces of the past.

Russell introduces *Recollection* as a good example of archiveology at work, in that Aljafari fundamentally changes the archival images he uses and through this, constructs new images. Because of archiveology, we are aware that history "does not need to be written … it can also be constructed, cut and pasted together."[101] Aljafari's work certainly has a priority to collect images of Palestinian cities to preserve the past, but it also exhibits the decision to frame out evidence of occupation.[102] The "archive effect" is film scholar Jaimie Baron's term for the experience of consuming reformulations of archival media like Aljafari's —and how a viewer noticing these reformulations as having taken place creating a sense of nostalgia, loss, or

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[100] Catherine Russell, *Archiveology: Walter Benjamin and Archival Film Practices* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 11.
[101] Russell, 29.
[102] Gil Z. Hochberg, *Becoming Palestine: Toward an Archival Imagination of the Future* (Duke University Press, 2021), 66.

irony.[103] As an example from *Recollection*, the irony in Aljafari's appropriation of older Israeli films is in his editing out of the principal actors to focus on what is captured in the background; in doing so, Aljafari removes the settler and thus their use of ruined Jaffa as a cinematic playground from the footage. In Baron's words, "the archive effect is defined by the recognition or inference of an 'other' meaning – stemming from an 'other' context, temporal and intentional, in which a given document meant (or was intended to mean) something else."[104] In some instances towards the beginning of *Recollection,* Aljafari wipes the footage of the presence of actors in real time, the figures evaporating before our eyes. In so doing, he creates an 'other' meaning that allows viewers to know both the original context of the images and how they are being used anew.

In dealing with archival images and experiencing the archive effect, Baron highlights the associated affect that stems from looking at images of the past. With her concept of the archive effect, Baron focuses on the nostalgia of working with archival images, and other affective experiences for the archivist. She classifies this nostalgia as either productive, leading to useful reflections on the passing of time, or reactionary, with a goal to restore the present to be like the past in the images.[105] Aljafari does edit the images he uses in *Recollection* as if to restore an ideal past, making Baron's reactionary nostalgia a somewhat appropriate label: he removes layers of the image as if to uncover and restore what is underneath, or what was there before. However, what remains in the background is not the same Jaffa as before the Occupation, and Aljafari makes that clear through his lengthy shots of crumbled buildings and streets of rubble. Thus, his

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[103] Jaimie Baron, *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History.* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 17-19.
[104] Baron, 37.
[105] Baron, 130.

use of the found footage allows for an imagining of an alternative present, without a colonial presence, while still bearing witness to the architectural consequences of war and occupation. On Aljafari's image reappropriation in particular, comparative literature scholar Gil Hochberg reframes it as future-oriented imagination rather than nostalgia, although both affective states seem to be held within his work. In films like Aljafari's that make use of the archive, Hochberg emphasizes the forward-looking dimension of working with images from the past; manipulating these images and changing them allows for new possibilities and new futures.[106] Russell's analysis of Benjamin similarly sees history (and its artefacts) as a malleable material that lends itself to creating social transformation for the future.[107] Hochberg's book title, *Becoming Palestine*, reflects this idea: that "becoming Palestine" does not necessarily mean returning to the *same* Palestinian reality as before.[108] This all helps us understand the deep impact that each formal decision makes on the archival footage being used, and how this contributes to the affective experience of both making and viewing.

Hypervisibility: Images as evidence

As in *Recollection*, *An Unusual Summer* again sees the source footage removed – or at least pivoted away – from its original context. Aljafari's father installed a surveillance camera outside his home in Ramle after his car was vandalized; the camera records all day and night in order to catch the culprit should they return. This also means, though, that the comings and goings of the neighbourhood at large are captured through the vantage point of his father's driveway. People drive to and from work, return home with their shopping, take an afternoon stroll, or ride back

[106] Hochberg, *Becoming Palestine,* 15.
[107] Russell, 46.
[108] Hochberg, *Becoming Palestine*, 9.

and forth on their bicycles. In the film, Aljafari zooms in on these blurry figures onscreen, reducing them to pixels and emphasizing their status as people-turned-captured images. As Lamia Abukhadra puts it in her article about the film, the surveillance image "makes the bodies captured by its infrastructures anonymous and inhuman"[109] – so it is worth examining how Aljafari's use of this footage challenges this notion. Although this is Aljafari's father's own surveillance camera, it is nonetheless worth considering how surveillance images function more generally, and the relevance specifically of surveillance technology in the occupied territories and Arab-majority parts of the state of Israel.

The footage in *An Unusual Summer* is of Aljafari's father's driveway in Ramle, a city south-east of Tel Aviv known as a "mixed city" for its higher proportion of Palestinians compared to the segregation of non-mixed cities.[110] Tel Aviv is a hub for the development of surveillance technologies, including AI and facial recognition, and is home to the infamous NSO Group developing spyware such as Pegasus.[111] These surveillance technologies have made Israel a frontrunner in the field, and not for nothing: we have already discussed the extent to which surveillance structures punctuate the Occupied Territories. Because of this, images of Palestinians are valuable currency to the occupation – so how do these ideas figure in Aljafari's use of his father's security camera footage, naturally filming Palestinians? Before exploring this

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[109] Lamia Abukhadra, "Life Must Be Disrupted in Order to Be Revealed: The Recording as Record and the Hyper-Surveilled Entity Not Meant to Exist in An Unusual Summer," *Mizna* (blog), March 22, 2021, https://mizna.org/film/life-must-be-disrupted-in-order-to-be-revealed/.

[110] Falah, "Living Together Apart."

[111] Eyal Weizman et al., *Digital Violence: How the NSO Group Enables State Terror* (London: Forensic Architecture, 2021), https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/digital-violence-how-the-nso-group-enables-state-terror.

question, it would be useful to examine the current state of affairs with regards to surveillance technology development and its place in Palestine/Israel.

The surveillance camera, as a structure, is a physical manifestation of securitization and is thus on par with walls, borders, and other security structures. All of these, including the camera, can be considered oppressive structures in the context of the occupation. The camera acts as the eyes of the occupation, as an auxiliary, a potential deterrent. The power of the camera as a physical structure is augmented by the additional degrees of control its images are able to exert on its captured subjects — more than a live feed, these surveillance images are stored and archived, biometric data extracted and analyzed. The camera as a structure of control has a certain temporal transcendence given how long a digital image can last and be copied, distributed, or multiplied.

Images of people, and particularly of their faces, have become data currency in the algorithmic development of digital surveillance technologies. One such technology at the forefront of the corporatization of surveillance is facial recognition, which uses algorithms that can analyze human faces and differentiate tiny details on them. This analytic capability is learned once the algorithm has had access to hundreds of thousands of faces, gleaned from different sources; for instance, in 2019 IBM took to the photo sharing website Flickr to amass a diversity of faces.[112] In reporting such as Olivia Solon's for NBC, the ethical murkiness of using public-access photos of regular people as data is called into question, with the possibility of future use for surveillance purposes as a main point of contention. Especially of concern is the likelihood of

[112] Olivia Solon, "Facial Recognition's 'Dirty Little Secret': Social Media Photos Used without Consent," *NBC News*, March 12, 2019, https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/internet/facial-recognition-s-dirty-little-secret-millions-online-photos-scraped-n981921.

facial recognition technologies to disproportionately affect minority groups.[113] The material and on-the-ground realities of this kind of technological surveillance has already been evidenced, though, in the occupied Palestinian territories, where facial recognition systems are part and parcel of ongoing Israeli securitization.

In late 2021 the *Washington Post* broke a story about the alarmingly extensive facial recognition program the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) have been building in the West Bank for the previous two years. The technology used for amassing a database full of images of Palestinian faces, young and old, included specialized face-scanning systems at checkpoints, security cameras at every corner, and good, old fashioned competition: IOF soldiers were reportedly encouraged to personally collect as many photos of Palestinians as possible, in competition with other units. This collected photographic data was then available through an app called Blue Wolf so that soldiers could easily access photos, biographical information, and security ratings for the Palestinians they encountered. A parallel app called White Wolf was also developed for settler civilians to use for similar purposes, mainly to prevent entry of Palestinians into settlements.[114]

This type of settler colonial control is often concealed from view through language of 'security,' an attempt to absolve perpetrators of responsibility by painting the groups they control as dangerous. In other words, as John Collins explains in his book *Global Palestine*, securitization in the settler colonial context does the work both of maintaining this system and of

[113] Solon, "Facial Recognition's 'Dirty Little Secret'."

[114] Elizabeth Dwoskin, "Israel Escalates Surveillance of Palestinians with Facial Recognition Program in West Bank," Washington Post, November 8, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/israel-palestinians-surveillance-facial-recognition/2021/11/05/3787bf42-26b2-11ec-8739-5cb6aba30a30_story.html.

hiding this maintenance process from view.[115] In the context of Israel/Palestine, the idea of security is paramount in political and military decisions, and evidently it is also top of mind in the lives of settlers. On the international stage, this is evident in an example Collins shares: a report by the United Nations Human Rights Council on Israel's 2008 Operation Cast Lead siege on Gaza mentions the word 'security' 400 times, "effectively constituting the discursive envelope with which the entire narrative is contained."[116] Israel's separation barrier is perhaps the most ostentatious demonstration of their prioritizing "security," although it should be noted that such a barrier has its place among the many other divisive border constructions at the service of settler-colonial countries like the United States and Australia.[117] This tells us that many separation and surveillance technologies have their place in Israel as much as in settler colonial nations hundreds of years older, thus emphasizing the speed at which Israel has become a leader in surveillance technology. In this environment of securitization, the civilian White Wolf app in particular encourages a "social militarization"[118] in that it is designed for settlers to maintain control of their environment by directly imitating military practices. It thus becomes clear that with everyday devices like smartphones, larger systems of settler colonial control are able to find new ways of calling on settlers to participate. As Collins posits, the intense need for security is predicated on the fundamental insecurity of a settler colonial state. In this environment of intense securitization, the state of Israel has evidently chosen to combat this unpredictability with technological means. As a hot spot for both unrest and surveillance technology, it is clear that these two things feed off each other. As is now evident, surveillance cameras have particular

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[115] John Collins, "Securitization," in *Global Palestine* (London: Hurst and Co., 2011), 51.
[116] Collins, 52.
[117] Collins, 49-50.
[118] Collins, 51.

power in the lives of Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories and the state of Israel, and how this power via images in the digital age is exerted over space and also time.

To return to our discussion on *An Unusual Summer*, the security footage Aljafari uses – although in the shadow of Tel Aviv – is not directly used as part of the securitization frenzy of the settler state. However, being that this footage films Palestinian neighbourhood life in the state of Israel, it stands as an interesting document to use given its context. With this footage, Aljafari creates a meditative film out of mundane daily activities caught on camera. Through this vantage point on the neighbourhood, we get a portrait of a community, this portrait humanized by Aljafari's interventions, namely his addition of intertitles throughout the film that break up the surveillance footage of the driveway. The intertitles serve to provide context and introductions of the figures in the footage—neighbours, uncles, acquaintances—who pass by. They range from more direct description ("My brother drives to work" or "A man stops to tie his shoes") to musings about these people he knows that suggests a deep curiosity about the video subjects. Abukhadra calls attention to the level of care that these intertitles demonstrate towards the video subjects; observations such as "He is tired," as Abukhadra cites, or "Abu Rizeq—what is he doing so early in the morning?" These expressions of familiarity with his neighbours' daily routines, or their body language as Abukhadra emphasizes, transform the surveillance footage: "Such attention to detail, such care, is not possible within apparatuses of state surveillance."[119] The intertitles – and the film as a whole – do not spend much time on addressing the original purpose of the camera, which was to catch the vandal of Aljafari's father's car. Save for a few brief reminders – an image of a stranger on screen followed by the text "Is it him?" – we are encouraged through the montage and the intertitles to look beyond this surveillance context.

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[119] Abukhadra, "Life Must Be Disrupted in Order to Be Revealed."

At the end of both *An Unusual Summer* and *Recollection*, in the style of rolling credits and similar in style to the intertitles, both films present longer-form poems that delve deeper into family stories and memories, evidently prompted by the images that preceded. As in the film's images, there is an emphasis on place and the structures that house these memories; Aljafari expresses familiarity with the faces captured in passing, the blurry silhouettes on balconies, the empty set of stairs, the stone on the corner. His mentions of weddings and other happy memories set within these structures are interspersed with mentions of checkpoints and wrongful arrests. These are all part of Palestinian daily life, "infused with lurking brutality."[120] As film scholar Kay Dickinson explains, Palestinian cinema is often characterized by this tendency to capture everyday life as it is, demonstrating the everyday-ness of the brutality and the resilience that must accompany these experiences.[121] Like in the occupation's scrutiny of surveillance images, Aljafari has pored over this footage and looked closely at the Palestinian faces he sees. Instead of looking for suggestions of potential threat, or a face on a list, he is looking for people and places he knows.

> The corner where the blue car is parked
> faces the house of my grandparents.
> The car was the taxi owned by Ahmad Farraj
> my grandmother's relative.
> It sits by the corner built of limestone
> I liked leaning my back into it as a child.
> It is where my grandfather sat

[120] Dickinson, "The Palestinian Road (Block) Movie," 145.
[121] Dickinson, 145.

with his small transistor radio in the summer afternoon.[122]

—*Recollection*'s "end credits"

These spaces, structures, and the people within them occupy his memory and stand as symbols of his daily life in Palestine. Concrete and stone house memory — "every rock has a name."[123]

Aljafari's commentary on the found images he uses via intertitles and end credits calls attention to his status as collector and editor, holding him at a distance from the world of the footage, not quite inhabiting it but hovering above. During more abstracted montage sequences in *Recollection*, of different structural elements like tile patterns and door handles flashing in quick succession, the formal elements specifically do not replicate the gaze of an eye but rather fragmented flashes of past memories, adding an element of temporal distance. As Aljafari cuts from one image to another, the click of a keyboard can be heard, bringing him and us out of the streets of Jaffa and into an editing room in Berlin. Other explicitly digital elements, like the sudden removal of the film characters from the shots with digital film editing techniques, or the rapid zoom-ins, call attention to the fact that Aljafari is doing a second pass on images that are not his own. As I will explain further in the coming section, Aljafari strikes a delicate balance in these films between entering the environment of the footage and remaining conspicuously outside it, both of these through montage choices. The distance, both temporal and spatial, brought on by his interventions contrasts with his deep involvement with this space, with these people, and the idea that he might well be, if a little older, one of the figures in the footage.

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[122] Aljafari, "End Credits."
[123] Aljafari, "End Credits."

Mapping as presence in Palestine

The visibility of Aljafari's editing strategies may suggest a distance between filmmaker and subject to the viewer watching these strategies play out onscreen. As I have emphasized though, editing and other filmmaking techniques can allow a filmmaker to re-appropriate space—that is, to make a case for their belonging in a space, when that belonging has been contested or their access to it has been limited. Especially in a case like this one where Aljafari is manipulating footage of a particular space and working with small details within the frame, this process allows the filmmaker to be integrated into the space by being a participant in the ways this space is laid out or lived in. The manipulation of the image allows these alterations to be absorbed into the image and therefore into the buildings onscreen, meaning the act of editing transposes the filmmaker into the image and its built environment. As such, despite the real-world distance between filmmaker and subject, the act of editing allows for them to exist in the world of the footage. In *Recollection* and *An Unusual Summer*, we can observe two differing modes of being in the world of the footage—wandering through it, and remaining still within it as the world passes by. As I will explain, the editing replicating physical actions (walking, standing) makes the case for cinema as a method of repatriation.

The frame's meandering in *Recollection* becomes like eyes scanning the built environment, searching for something. As the frame moves forward down alleyways, we hear the non-diegetic sound of footsteps, associating digital movements with a certain physicality. Presence in the source footage's urban environment is simulated in *An Unusual Summer*, in turn, by its still frame void of any movement. The wide shot of a driveway that comprises the entire film forces the viewer to contemplate a single area, as if gazing out of a window people-watching. The act of people-watching requires the watcher to loiter, to an extent, as it is a lazy

activity; the frame's restrictive boundaries therefore cause the viewer to embody the stillness of a loiterer. The movement and stillness granted by the films' formal decisions thus simulate the actions of wandering and loitering, respectively. These modes of digital embodiment lend themselves to the concept of absent presence, a commonly explored idea in Palestinian creative works, and one that is at the centre of Mahmoud Darwish's literary work *In the Absence of Presence.*[124] Aljafari's play between digitally removing characters from the footage and emphasizing the presence of bystanders in *Recollection* certainly reflects the states of absence and presence in a literal sense. Darwish, considered by many as Palestine's national poet, spoke to the Palestinian experience of exile and displacement. *In the Absence of Presence* is one of Darwish's last published works before he died, and represents a convergence of opposing ideas (as the title suggests) that is difficult to classify in a single genre.[125] This unclassifiable aspect of Darwish's work as a whole is why literary scholar Anna Ball sees it as naturally connecting to video art, in addition to the imagery-heavy nature of his prose and poetry.[126] The works that I analyze by Aljafari also have this nebulous quality, in that they combine different types of footage that makes classification in any one genre tricky; the simultaneity of absence and presence in his work as editor and image collector also gives the films a Darwish-like quality, with *An Unusual Summer* embodying presence through patient observation.

The film consists of a single angle of a back alley, allowing the viewer to get to know the function of this space, or how it is used by people in their daily routines. The alleyway that is onscreen for the entire duration of *An Unusual Summer* is clearly a liminal space: people walk

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[124] Darwish, *In the Presence of Absence*.
[125] Antoon, "Translator's Preface," 5–9.
[126] Anna Ball, "Communing with Darwish's Ghosts," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 7, no. 2 (2014): 141.

through it on their way somewhere else, or get in their cars to travel elsewhere. The surveillance camera footage through which we see the daily activity in this alleyway thus bears witness to the everyday workings of a community. Urbanist and political theorist Nasser Abourahme thinks of in-between spaces like this, and particularly the checkpoint in his analysis, as a "built microcosm of wider reality." To him, checkpoints, as an example of liminal spaces that are also heavily militarized in places like Palestine, represent not only "people's daily relationality to the occupation regime," but also everyday, apolitical acts such as commuting.[127] This intersection between benign daily routine and the occupation happens within these built structures. In his article "Spatial Collisions and Discordant Temporalities," Abourahme positions the liminal space of the road to Qalandia checkpoint in North Jerusalem, between separation wall and refugee camp (and the checkpoint itself separating two urban centres) as "a built and interactional ecology."[128] I propose using this designation of a particular urban space as an ecology of Palestinian daily experience to characterize the space in Aljafari's *An Unusual Summer.*

For the whole duration of the film, we are shown one angle of one alley/corner/liminal urban space, passively captured by the filmmaker's father on his security camera. This use of only one angle is a unique choice that has meaning: through this focused observation of a single space, we become familiar with the comings and goings of the neighbourhood's residents. The foot traffic patterns, changing sunlight, even plastic bags blowing in the wind become part of this observed ecology of a street corner. Much like the surveillance systems in place at any checkpoint, the security camera capturing Aljafari's father's driveway bears constant witness to this routine movement. Kay Dickinson notes the "stamina required for quotidian (versus

[127] Abourahme, 453.
[128] Abourahme, 454.

"spectacularized") existence under occupation,"[129] that is, the minutiae of everyday life that surrounds big, tragic events that one would hear about in the news. In *An Unusual Summer*, we certainly see the daily back-and-forth of commuting, shopping, and errands, and as viewers it requires some stamina to watch such quotidian activities from a single camera angle for the whole 80-minute film. With its stationary position, we become like a flaneur, a loiterer, watching people through the camera in their regular routines without any direct representation of war or conflict. In the ecosystem of a neighbourhood, a surveillance camera would normally have a punitive goal; with Aljafari's treatment of the footage, however, including intertitles stating observations of the passersby, the camera becomes a people-watcher, making benign and non-punitive observations. The oppressive structure of video surveillance takes the position of loiterer, a vague legal term used to punish those who have nowhere to go, overstaying their welcome in a certain space. "No Loitering" signs are typically accompanied by a camera to catch flaneurs in the act; here though, the camera is the loiterer as it embodies this position of daily observer.

This deliberate stillness, thanks to Aljafari's editing choices, can reflect the very Palestinian quality of steadfastness. In her book *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, Laleh Khalili studies commemorations of events and people in the history of Palestinian resistance. In such commemorations, a common thematic is the idea of *sumud*, or steadfastness:

> A narrative of *sumud* recognizes and valorizes the teller's (and by extension the nation's) agency, ability and capacity in dire circumstances, but it differs from the heroic narrative in

[129] Dickinson, "The Palestinian Road (Block) Movie," 144.

> that it does not aspire to superhuman audacity, and consciously values daily survival rather than glorious battles.[130]

Gertz and Khleifi define *sumud* as a realization of one's connection to one's homeland, and it reflects the importance of the home in Palestinian exilic culture.[131] In both descriptions of the concept, a sustained presence is implied, even if that presence is from afar; memory keeps Palestinians connected to the land, and everyday existence solidifies a steadfast presence even despite distance.

Wandering the digital map

As an editor, Aljafari's style of honing in on tiny details in every frame is like the work of poring over an old census, or digging into the ground for evidence of forgotten foundations: as Aljafari himself acknowledges, "there is an archeologist inside me."[132] Certain editing decisions emphasize this kind of researcher's gaze, such as adding the sound of keyboard clicks and the vanishing of the original movie characters from thin air through digital manipulation. These formal interventions call attention to the source footage as something that is being examined and dissected from a temporal and spatial distance. Editing, then, is an archaeological tool, and also a way of entering this distant environment that no longer exists in the same way. The sound of footsteps being added overtop the image lends a certain physicality to the frame's slow but constant movement through the streets of Jaffa, personifying the editing. In an interview with Nathalie Handal for Guernica, Aljafari interestingly attributes the movements of the frame in

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[130] Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration*, Cambridge Middle East Studies 27 (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 101.
[131] Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema*, 77-79.
[132] Nathalie Handal, "Kamal Aljafari: Unfinished Balconies in the Sea," *Guernica*, February 18, 2016, https://www.guernicamag.com/kamal-aljafari-filming-ghosts-and-unfinished-balconies/.

Recollection to a "character in the movie who films."[133] With this way of looking at it, he creates the image of a wandering person determined to capture details of Jaffa. He expresses frustration in the interview that his city became a mere backdrop, an occupier's filmmaking playground, something this "character" aims to set right by foregrounding Jaffa itself. Aljafari calls this act of digital wandering "cinematic justice."[134] The attributing of the meandering frame to a character, and not simply to himself as editor, allows us to consider the frame's movements as happening within the streets of Jaffa, and not with clicks of a mouse. In this way, the editing both emphasizes distance from the time and space of the built environment we see in *Recollection*, and is a point of entry to inhabit this space as a character.

This duality between distance and closeness, or absence and presence, is also typified by mapping, which can be seen as a response to absence. In works like *Recollection*, Aljafari is essentially mapping the Jaffa he remembers onto the images we see in the source footage, particularly through his intertitles. Recollections like "My mother was born in the house with the cement stairs," and "My uncle Mahmoud walking in Ajami neighbourhood" allow us to know that he is retracing his steps, and his community's steps, in the old neighbourhood. This type of distanced exploration of Palestinian urban space is also exemplified in other works. In *Your Father Was Born 100 Years Old, and So was the Nakba* (2017), filmmaker Razan AlSalah adopts the persona of her grandmother, Oum Ameen, as she digitally wanders through the streets of Haifa in search of familiarity. She does so using Google Streetview technology that has charted this area, allowing for a digital exploration of Haifa, the only way for her grandmother to return because of the occupation's travel restrictions for Palestinians in exile. It is worth noting

[133] Handal, "Kamal Aljafari: Unfinished Balconies in the Sea."
[134] Handal, "Kamal Aljafari: Unfinished Balconies in the Sea."

that both Aljafari and AlSalah conduct this digital mapping of space with a character in mind, one that is supposed to be on the ground themselves; their editing actions being tied to these characters solidifies the idea of formal decisions being a pathway to being present in the physical space.

At several points in the short film, AlSalah interacts with the apparatus itself, focusing in on the blurry human figure directly below Google's 360° camera, who is evidently carting us around. Through these on-the-ground images as well as the satellite-captured images of the city from high above in the sky, it becomes clear that a corporation like Google grants access to space, and that AlSalah uses that access to inhabit it. In their films, Aljafari and AlSalah move through space in a similar way, aesthetically and conceptually, as their digital counterparts meander through town, paying special attention to the infrastructure and the figures they pass. In *Your Father Was Born 100 Years Old*, Al-Salah's character Oum Ameen stops and 'stares' at a woman in a blue shirt captured by the Google Maps photographer, wondering aloud through voiceover, "Do I know her?" This moment, so similar to Aljafari's intertitles in both *Recollection* and *An Unusual Summer*, captures the dialectic of proximity and distance that AlSalah and Aljfari have struck with these spaces and these images. Despite so intimately observing the details of the environment — a stone on a corner, a person's expression — they remain above the image, removed from it, controlling a sort of avatar from above. For these filmmakers, this observation from a distance is simply a way to inhabit a time or a space no longer accessible to them, retracing their steps and digitally creating a cartography of the past.

Maps – visual traces of history, sovereignty, ownership – often hold an important role in Palestinian activism, serving as visual evidence of Palestinian land loss in a format that is easy to understand. In these maps, contrasting colours depict the changing proportions of Palestinian

land vs. land occupied by the state of Israel. In other circumstances, though, maps represent colonial power and do not reflect land struggles in this same way; groups with differing ideologies may map the same geographic location differently, depending on their views on power and self-determination of different groups in the region.[135] In their article "Visualizing Sovereignty: Cartographic Queries for the Digital Age," Bonilla and Hantel argue that it is crucial to re-examine the methods we use to visually represent sovereignty, especially in regions where sovereignty has been contested by forces like colonialism.[136] The authors bring into question the validity of drawing maps based on rigid definitions of sovereignty without accounting for these complicating factors. Since "the visualizing power of the map preceded the formation of sovereign states and created the conditions of possibility for colonial expansion," Bonilla and Hantel contest that time-lapse maps that visually represent changes to land 'ownership' in settler-colonial contexts are more appropriate to represent shifting regional histories. They reference Claudio Saunt's time-lapsed mapping project *The Invasion of America: How the United States Took Over an Eighth of the World*, which animates the violent seizure of Indigenous lands in the United States through a changing map.[137] A project accomplishing similar goals is B'tselem and Forensic Architecture's collaborative mapping project *Conquer and Divide,* which charts conflicts, annexations, and border changes since 1967 in Palestine/Israel on a digital map that changes with each major event.[138] Visually documenting changes using maps can lend legitimacy to regional narratives, and in the context of

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[135] Lewis, Martin W. and Kären E. Wigen. *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
[136] Yarimar Bonilla and Max Hantel, "Visualizing Sovereignty: Cartographic Queries for the Digital Age," *SX Archipelagos*, no. 1 (May 1, 2016).
[137] Bonilla and Hantel, "Visualizing Sovereignty: Cartographic Queries for the Digital Age."
[138] B'tselem and Forensic Architecture, *Conquer and Divide*, June 5, 2019, https://conquer-and-divide.btselem.org/map-en.html.

Palestine/Israel, combat the secretive nature of Israel's constantly-expanding illegal settlements.[139] And as we have seen through the films, using maps has its place in documenting personal histories as well.

In Till Roeskens' film *Vidéocartographies : Aïda, Palestine* (2008), residents of Camp Aida, located between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, draw aerial maps based on their memories of the camp's layout as they describe each tent, house, and apartment building along with who lived there. They speak about how they interacted with these structures in instances like the Intifada in 2001, when the houses' proximity allowed one resident to jump from roof to roof for a faster route away from Israeli snipers. The mapping activity serves to document the built environment and how it was used by residents; an oral history with a mapping component. These different mapping strategies—digital images via Google Maps for Al Salah, pen to paper from memory for the residents of Aida camp, and through the unlikely source of B-movie footage for Aljafari—each serve to visualize Palestinians' memories of the built environment. The act of mapping allows them to wander through a place and time tangibly unavailable to them, which emphasizes not only their absence from the space, but also the power of images and of film to reclaim it. In *Recollection* especially, this reclamation happens through digital manipulation of the images of others, placing Aljafari's "character" within the environment. Editing allows this avatar to place two feet on the ground and wander freely, in search of cinematic justice.

Conclusion

In *Recollection* and *An Unusual Summer*, Aljafari's documentation of Palestinian urban life is possible through the creative reuse of footage from disparate sources— those being Israeli

[139] Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability* (New York: Zone Books, 2019), 140-1.

cinema and surveillance camera footage. In his commitment to foregrounding blurry figures captured by accident in both the surveillance footage and the Israeli films, he reaffirms Palestinian presence and thus the resilience (*sumud*) required to live everyday life under occupation. Moreover, the formal techniques used to humanize these figures and explore the urban environment of the footage illuminate an interplay between absence and presence, the editing strategies allowing Aljafari to both enter the world of the footage and remain outside as a researcher. With this reappropriation of footage that is often used in service of the Israeli occupation, as well as editing choices that allow for digital presence in Palestine from afar, Palestinian filmmakers like Aljafari are able to refute the colonial spatial order and use cinema as a means for return. So far, we have remained in the urban space of Aljafari's films; in chapter two, I will expand our view of the environmental implications of the occupation by pivoting to the natural environment as a space in which the struggle of occupation and resistance plays out.

Chapter Two: Mobilizing anxieties of ecological scarcity in Zionist media and Larissa Sansour's *In Vitro*

Ecological imagery in Palestinian and Zionist art and media has long been used for political means. In an extensive repository for such media, The Palestine Poster Project Archives, eco-imagery represents a large proportion of the iconography the archivists have documented.[140] Many of these posters are intended to galvanize the public towards supporting a political cause, and others stand as advertisements of the land's natural resource offerings; this tells us that plants and landscape are deeply-held symbols of nation, resistance, belonging, ownership. In this chapter, I chart the use of ecological scarcity and abundance as tactics in several cultural documents and artistic works to elucidate how ecology figures in Zionist nation-building and Palestinian resistance. The themes of scarcity and abundance in the natural environment are constantly at play in the media and art works, and in the larger political discussions that surround them. As in chapter one, we will discuss how the environment is used in service of the occupation, and I will also show how Palestinian filmmakers refute this by reappropriating space through the filmmaking process.

To this end I use greening organization HaYovel's promotional film *Greening Israel* as a cultural document, illustrating how Zionist tree planting organizations (even other than the monolithic Jewish National Fund) use colonial rhetoric and greenwashing as public outreach strategies. Reparative agricultural labour is portrayed as both necessary and godly by this organization as a response to environmental scarcity due to perceived incompetent stewardship of the land by Palestinians. Palestinian art represents an opposite worldview, with imagery

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[140] Liberation Graphics, "Iconography List," The Palestine Poster Project Archives, 2009-2019, https://www.palestineposterproject.org/browse/iconography-list.

reflecting ecological abundance of the past being usurped by occupying forces; visual art by Palestinians demonstrates the ways that they respond to loss of land and natural landscape following occupation. I use an eco-critical framework to analyze Larissa Sansour's film *In Vitro* (2019), where these views of ecological scarcity are represented through the mise-en-scene of the characters' concrete subterranean village keeping them safe from the inhabitable air post-eco-apocalypse. The ways that ecocide and occupation go hand in hand in the Palestinian artistic imaginary also means that caring for plants can correspond to anticolonial resistance: more elements of the mise-en-scene in Sansour's film reflect a Palestinian alternative environmentalism, which associates the natural environment with steadfastness and return.

In using these two pieces of media with very different goals and intended audiences, I work to emphasize the disparate views on environmental care and stewardship that Zionists and Palestinians take on in their cultural output. *Greening Israel* is representative of the Zionist greening movement, as I will explain, in its promotional feel and rhetoric strategies, but also adds something different than similar organizations' promotional materials as an American and non-Jewish import in the Zionist space, and as a freely-available video on YouTube. *In Vitro*, on the other hand, is a two-channel sci-fi film commissioned for the Venice Biennale – a very different piece of media. It is in line, as I will argue, with decades of Palestinian cultural output that connects anticolonial resistance and the natural environment. With an absence of state support, alliance with Western power, and funding, organizations comparable to HaYovel and JNF do not exist on the Palestinian side, so I turn to arts and culture, since this thesis is particularly concerned with how the cinematic medium in particular works to resist structures of oppression. As different as these cultural objects are, they are worth comparing because they both represent outlooks on the environment, care, and belonging.

Ecology and control in Zionist nation-building

"Zionism essentially saw Palestine as the European imperialist did, as an empty territory paradoxically 'filled' with ignoble or perhaps even dispensable natives."[141]

–Edward W. Said

In *Settler Colonial Studies'* special issue called "Past is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine," editors Omar Jabary Salamanca et al. locate Palestine's occupation within the framework of settler colonial studies, effectively making the case that Israel follows the settler colonial formula of other nations like Canada, US, Australia, South Africa.[142] In associating Palestine with other settler colonial contexts it can also be useful to examine the narratives used to justify land claims as they appear in all settler colonial contexts, and how Zionism makes use of these in particular. Two such narratives, opposite in nature but used to the same end, are meant to invalidate Palestinian claims to the land: *terra nullius* and the 'incompetent stewards' trope. Both narratives share the common theme of emphasizing the scarcity of the past in order to justify land claims under occupation. Scholar on Middle East issues Alan George in his article "'Making the Desert Bloom' A Myth Examined" explains that these two narratives essentially covered all bases in keeping international opinion positive vis-à-vis the Zionist project: those who knew about Palestinians already living in Palestine could be fed the incompetent stewards talking point, while those who did not were sold the *terra nullius* narrative.[143]

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[141] Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 81.

[142] Omar Jabary Salamanca et al., "Past is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 2012): 1–8.

[143] Alan George, "'Making the Desert Bloom' A Myth Examined," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 8, no. 2 (Winter 1979): 88.

The use of *terra nullius* as an idea is not by any means unique to the context of Israeli settler colonialism; there is extensive legal scholarship that has pinpointed this discursive technique in settler colonial nation building contexts of Canada, the United States, and Australia. From the Latin for "nobody's land," *terra nullius* was used in legal settings to designate land that had no "civilized" inhabitants and was thus able to be claimed by colonizing powers as part of the Doctrine of Discovery, attributing ownership to whoever first "discovered" a land deemed empty.[144] The term *terra nullius* and the meaning it connotes appear also in popular understandings of history. For instance, in North American popular culture it is common to see Europe and North America referred to as the Old World and New World respectively, or the colonization of North America called the "discovery" of the continent. Both of these position North America as a blank slate and effectively erase the presence of Indigenous peoples on the lands, since it is impossible to "discover" a "new" world that has a long history of people living there. In the Zionist context, early Zionists used words such as "desolate" and "decrepit" to describe the land of Palestine before Jewish immigration, suggesting a barren wasteland bereft of any people. Of course, "A land without a people for a people without a land" is an oft-quoted phrase first said by Yisrael Zangwil, Zionist pioneer and close associate of the father of Zionism Theodor Herzl, which exemplifies early Zionist erasure of Palestinian existence.[145] In *The Question of Palestine* Edward W. Said discusses Herzl's characterization of the Indigenous population of Palestine as "irrelevant,"[146] signifying foundational Zionism's disregard for the inhabitants of that land. The tendency to refer to Palestine before the arrival of Zionists as empty

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[144] Robert J. Miller et al., *Discovering Indigenous Lands: The Doctrine of Discovery in the English Colonies* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012).
[145] Noga Kadman, *Erased from Space and Consciousness: Israel and the Depopulated Palestinian Villages of 1948*, trans. Dimi Reider (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2015), 37.
[146] Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 71.

and barren certainly works to justify land claims by Zionists, removing them from the settler colonial framework by suggesting that the land was lacking ownership in the first place. In the Zionist context, the idea of *terra nullius* invalidates Palestinian claims to the land in emphasizing both the land's emptiness and its desolation, or environmental scarcity.

The second narrative justifying settler colonialism with the help of references to environmental scarcity is the trope of incompetent stewardship. This trope opposes the *terra nullius* narrative since it does acknowledge that there were people in the land prior to colonization; however this acknowledgement only serves to paint the indigenous people as incompetent in caring for the land. The colonial dichotomy between civilized and un-civilized peoples certainly applied to the stewardship of the land given colonial Europe's natural resource exploitation interests; as Said puts it, "A civilized man, it was believed, could cultivate the land because it meant something to him … For an uncivilized people, land was either farmed badly (i.e., inefficiently by Western standards) or it was left to rot."[147] In general, settler colonial land claims in part rely on "appeals to 'proper use'" to disregard indigenous claims to the land.[148] The settlement of Palestine and the intensity of the subsequent agricultural and afforestation work helmed by Israel are intertwined with the two complimentary narratives of scarcity. As Ruba Salih and Olaf Corry eloquently synthesize, "Palestine becomes not only a 'land without a people' as the idiom has it, but in particular a 'waste-land', a desertified and motionless place."[149]

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[147] Said, *Question of Palestine,* 75.

[148] Sara Salazar Hughes, Stepha Velednitsky, and Amelia Arden Green, "Greenwashing in Palestine/Israel: Settler Colonialism and Environmental Injustice in the Age of Climate Catastrophe," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, May 16, 2022, 3.

[149] Noga Kadman cited in Ruba Salih and Olaf Corry, "Displacing the Anthropocene: Colonisation, Extinction and the Unruliness of Nature in Palestine," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 5, no. 1 (March 2022): 387.

Figures 2-4: A sequence in the video "Planting Trees – Pushing back the Desert" on KKL-JNF's YouTube channel shows a man on his hands and knees planting a JNF tree, followed by an edited aerial shot that zooms out to reveal an entire desert landscape, bare except for the one dedicated tree planter. The video description reads: "How do you push back centuries of desertification?"[150]

Both of these tropes have a long history in Zionist discourse and constitute a popular Zionist worldview. The phrase "Making the desert bloom," popular parlance in Zionist spaces, was first said by founding father of Israel and its first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion.[151] The phrase and its continued use demonstrate a reliance on both the *terra nullius* and incompetent steward tropes to discredit Palestinian claims to the land. It also suggests that the entirety of Israel was a desert before the arrival of the Zionists; Alan George challenges this by analyzing data on cultivated and cultivable land in Palestine's regions as well as demographic data. Despite an objectively large amount of land development done by Zionists, his research concluded that this statement is still promoting an inaccurate idea of the land before Zionism. The idea that all of Palestine was an uncultivated desert before Zionist intervention is false: the northern half has a Mediterranean climate and was always cultivated by Palestinians.[152] Demographic data from just before the *Nakba* in 1944 also demonstrates an impossibility that the entirety of Palestine was desert, since 60% of Palestinians were classified as rural and non-nomadic, which

[150] Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael KKL-JNF, "Planting Trees - Pushing Back the Desert," YouTube video, 5:54, 12 Feb. 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDjW8WvFcGQ.
[151] David Ben-Gurion to Amos Ben-Gurion, Oct. 5, 1937, trans. Institute of Palestine Studies, Beirut from the original Hebrew letter at Ben-Gurion Archives, https://www.palestineremembered.com/download/B-G%20LetterTranslation.pdf.
[152] George, 89-90.

necessitates the land being cultivable and cultivated.[153] This is only a short summary of George's extensive data analysis on the subject but it is clear that "making the desert bloom" paints a picture in which Zionists have saved a barren land from underdevelopment. The context surrounding this phrase in Ben-Gurion's personal correspondences makes clear that both the *terra nullius* and 'incompetent stewardship' tropes are inextricably tied to Zionist environmental development. In a 1937 correspondence he writes:

> Palestine is grossly under populated. It contains vast colonization potential which the Arabs neither need nor are qualified (because of their lack of need) to exploit.
>
> Let us assume that the Negev will not be allotted to the Jewish state. In such event, the Negev will remain barren because the Arabs have neither the competence nor the need to develop it or make it prosper.[154]

Despite the direct connections to colonization and racism in these surrounding passages, the phrase continues to be used today, as evidenced by some of today's Israeli agricultural scholars, such as Alon Tal.[155] His article "To Make a Desert Bloom: The Israeli Agricultural Adventure and the Quest for Sustainability" reveals even just in its title the uncritical use of this phrase to describe Zionist agricultural success. Tal attributes the 'blooming' of the 'desert' to the Jewish people being farmers in Biblical times, channeling that impulse into agricultural labour

[153] George, 94-5.
[154] Ben-Gurion, 3-4.
[155] See Alon Tal, *Pollution in a Promised Land: An Environmental History of Israel* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2002).

upon settlement in the 19th and 20th centuries, and the Zionists' superior technological prowess.[156] Meanwhile, several scholars have written about JNF's mass planting of non-native species of trees – particularly the pine tree – for many years, negatively impacting the ecosystem and thus agriculture as a result.[157] Tal glosses over the pine tree issue while praising Zionist afforestation efforts, preferring to focus on presenting "Arab disturbances" as the foremost threat to JNF's pine forests. It is clear that Tal's point of view on the subject of the environment and Palestinians does not noticeably differ from Ben-Gurion's despite 70 years having passed between their texts.

Implemented abundance: JNF, HaYovel, and *Greening Israel*

Israel has done an extraordinary amount of land 'revitalization' work since Zionism's beginnings. Israeli greening organizations – ones that focus on afforestation, agricultural development, and the creation of national parks – are prolific in their work: the Jewish National Fund (JNF) reports an 1800% increase in forested areas since their founding.[158] As is now clear, this work was propelled by environmentally-related scarcity narratives which are directly linked with settler colonialism. Greening organizations themselves have been essential to settlement and therefore to Israel's very existence as it is today. JNF has been at the forefront of the greening movement since settlement began. Founded in 1901 by Theodor Herzl (quoted earlier), settling

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[156] Alon Tal, "To Make a Desert Bloom: The Israeli Agricultural Adventure and the Quest for Sustainability," *Agricultural History* 81, no. 2 (2007): 230.

[157] Lubna Alzaroo, "Settler Colonial Infrastructure: Necropolitics and Ecology in the U.S. and Palestine" (Seattle, WA, University of Washington, 2020), Proquest (28023311), 54; Irus Braverman, *Planted Flags: Trees, Land, and Law in Israel/Palestine*, Cambridge Studies in Law and Society (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 88-90; Manna, 11.

[158] "Plant A Tree, Combat Climate Change," KKL-JNF, accessed October 2023, https://www.kkl-jnf.org/climate_crisis_fight/tree-planting/plant-a-tree-combat-climate-change/.

as much land in Palestine as possible has always been a goal at the foundation of JNF's mission.[159] Under the British Mandate, the land purchased by the JNF was secured for exclusive Jewish use and ownership, barring Palestinians from buying, living, or being employed on a piece of land once the JNF bought it.[160] Hand in hand with stipulating exclusive Jewish use is the forced removal of Palestinians from their lands, something that JNF's Land Settlement Department director Joseph Weitz arranged during the Mandate period.[161] Besides facilitating settlement through land grabs, the JNF also had afforestation and land development as major goals; JNF's afforestation efforts began to materialize early on, in JNF's second decade since founding.[162] Settlement and tree planting thus go hand in hand under the JNF umbrella for the majority of their existence as an organization. This pairing of ecology with settler colonialism is evident in posters directed toward the Zionist general public, as demonstrated by Considine and Gruber's study of Zionist posters featuring ecological imagery.[163] One such example is a JNF poster from 1967 that centres the phrase "Plant the Victory Forest in Jerusalem Restored"; the date of this poster is key, given that "Jerusalem Restored" refers to the 1967 annexation of East Jerusalem following the Six-Day War. This phrase solidifies JNF's commitment to using "afforestation as a tool for legitimating a claim to recently appropriated land," as Considine and Gruber put it.[164]

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[159] "Our History," JNF Canada, accessed October 2023, https://jnf.ca/history.asp.
[160] George, 91.
[161] Salih and Corry, 386.
[162] "The Second Decade: 1911-1920," KKL-JNF, accessed October 2023, https://www.kkl-jnf.org/second_decade_1911_1920/.
[163] Megan Clare Considine and Max Gruber, "Notes on the Palestine Poster Project Archive: Ecological Imaginaries, Iconographies, Nationalisms and Knowledge in Palestine and Israel, 1947–Now," Third Text, November 10, 2022, http://thirdtext.org/palestineposterproject.
[164] Considine and Gruber, "Notes on the Palestine Poster Project Archive."

Indeed, the history of JNF's using trees as place-holders on occupied land is detailed by Irus Braverman in her 2009 book *Planted Flags.*[165] Braverman conducts a fulsome analysis of JNF's structure, operations, and funding campaigns when it comes to tree planting specifically. An essential source of funding is through the international diaspora,[166] who can be persuaded to support JNF's settlement efforts through appeals to environmental development, such as "Your gift will make Israel greener and help heal the environment," a prompt on JNF's Click&Plant page.[167] Unlike the Victory Forest poster, which contains a direct reference to occupation, these newer funding campaigns focus on appeals to environmentally conscious individuals, but do not distance themselves entirely from JNF's main mission, which is settlement. Environmental literature scholar Lubna Alzaroo also charts how JNF began using environmentalism to further their settlement goals after 1948, and looks especially at the establishment of national parks and nature reserves in Israel: many were built on top of the sites of razed Palestinian villages.[168] In terms of how JNF addresses these issues in their public outreach material, Alzaroo analyzes their use of language on their U.S. website and notes a distinct lack of the words "Palestinian" or "Palestine," a rhetoric strategy matching their track record of concealing evidence of destroyed Palestinian villages by landscaping or planting trees over top.[169] Returning to JNF's Click&Plant prompt on their main website, the donor is being told that the tree they are purchasing to plant will *heal* the environment, suggesting that JNF's work repairs past mistakes, i.e. incompetent stewardship from before the arrival of the Zionists. To the same end, the ethos of reparative

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[165] Braverman, *Planted Flags*, 61.
[166] Braverman, "Planting the Promised Landscape," 322-4.
[167] "Plant Your Tree in Israel," KKL-JNF, accessed October 2023, https://salkkl.kkl.org.il/haklek_veta/e_yaar.aspx?lang=en.
[168] Alzaroo, 50-51.
[169] Alzaroo, 51-4.

agricultural labour is central to Zionist nation building as Israelis and diasporic Jews are encouraged to feel an emotional connection to the land and thus its betterment. JNF has always emphasized that agricultural labour provides an intimate experience of the land to planters, and that donating to the planting project solidifies diasporic Jews' connection with the land of Israel by proxy.[170]

The idea of reparative agricultural labour having a spiritual significance is nowhere more obvious than in the work of another greening organization working in Israel, HaYovel. HaYovel is an organization also focused on tree planting, but it targets an entirely different demographic than JNF and ultimately has different goals. As Braverman and Alzaroo do with JNF,[171] I will conduct a (shorter) analysis of HaYovel's work and outreach with the goal of illuminating how another greening organization employs ideas of scarcity and incompetent Palestinian stewardship to promote their planting activities. Importantly, HaYovel's mid-length promotional video – which they call a documentary – *Greening Israel* rife with imagery that reflects the ecological narratives of scarcity and promotes the believed benefits of reparative agricultural labour in Israel. The language used by the project's leaders aligns with familiar Zionist tropes of ecological scarcity and the tying of the act of greening to a 'return' to the land to care for it 'properly.' Despite this similarity in talking points, HaYovel has a mission that has made them distinct from existing greening groups. JNF, with its ties to Zionist leaders and the Zionist government throughout its existence, is an easy comparison given the groups' similar end goals; HaYovel has however been clear about what they offer that is different than JNF. The following are some key differences between the two, making clear what HaYovel uniquely has to offer:

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[170] Braverman, *Planted Flags,* 77; Braverman, "Planting the Promised Landscape," 324.
[171] Braverman, *Planted Flags;* Alzaroo, "Settler Colonial Infrastructure."

JNF	HaYovel
Is a Jewish organization	Is an Evangelical Christian organization
Plants only within Israel's 1948 boundaries; does not plant in West Bank[172]	Plants only in West Bank[173]
Is known for planting non-native species such as Aleppo pine[174]	Emphasizes that they plant and harvest native species exclusively[175]
Principal mission is to acquire, settle, and transform land	Does not have settlement as a goal of its own; works on farmland that is already settled by occupiers
Appeals to the desire to build up modern Israel in its recruitment and fundraising efforts	Appeals to the dream of resurrecting Biblical landscapes in its recruitment and fundraising efforts

Expanding on the last point of comparison, HaYovel has a distinctly past-oriented mission that aims to restore ideal ancient landscapes, which is necessary to examine given the future-oriented stance of the JNF and the Israeli nation-building project in general. Essentially, the other differences in mission between the two groups hinge on this distinction. HaYovel is an Evangelical Christian organization helmed by brothers Nate and Josh Waller, who feature

[172] "Forests, Parks and Sites," KKL-JNF, accessed October 2023, https://www.kkl-jnf.org/tourism-and-recreation/forests-and-parks/.
[173] "Our Vision and Mission," HaYovel, accessed October 2023, https://serveisrael.com/vision-and-mission/.
[174] See Braverman, *Planted Flags.*
[175] The Israel Guys, "Transforming Israel's Barren Terrain Into Green Forests | GREENING ISRAEL OFFICIAL DOCUMENTARY," YouTube video, 36:13, 10 April 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sotko8Um9e0.

heavily in *Greening Israel*. The group's goals are to return the 'heartland' of Israel to the state it was in during Biblical times by planting trees and aiding in the agricultural harvest of grapes. Per their website, volunteers are enticed to travel to the West Bank to join other Christians in standing with the people of Israel as they agriculturally transform what they call 'Judea and Samaria' (the West Bank) into the Garden of Eden. The draw is also to bask in familiar locations: as per HaYovel's volunteer page, "every place we volunteer is a place you can read about in your Bible!"[176] The choice to plant exclusively in the West Bank is thus not explicitly to further the illegal occupation and settlement of Palestinian land, but to keep to the areas in which Biblical events take place (although it does both in the end). This is also why HaYovel places such importance on planting only native species of plants: how can the volunteers have a truly Biblical experience without the trees to match?

What is unusual about HaYovel is that unlike the usual Evangelical Christian groups that do work overseas, their goal is not to convert locals to their faith, but rather for North American Christians to learn about Judaism, hear from Israeli "pioneers and influencers,"[177] and support local *Jewish* farmers and merchants (this is specified). In this way, HaYovel seems to retreat into a niche that does not aim to play a vital role in Israeli future-building as JNF does, but rather to appeal to North American Christians' fascination with ancient Biblical lands. Many Evangelical Christian groups including HaYovel align themselves with Israel because taking control of the entire territory of *Eretz Israel* (traditional Biblical name for the land of Israel) is setting up the prophetic conditions for the Messiah to return, something Evangelical Christians want.[178] It is

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[176] "Volunteer with HaYovel," HaYovel, accessed October 2023, https://serveisrael.com/volunteer/.
[177] "Volunteer with HaYovel."
[178] Tristan Sturm, "God's Just Gaza War: Futurity Foreclosed through Evangelical Apocalypse as Orthogonal Promise of Eretz Israel," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 103, no. 4

therefore in HaYovel's own religious interests (in addition to their business interests) to join forces with Zionists to expel Palestinians. In doing so, they have landed on a comfortable combination of being able to make money providing foreigners with the settings and tools to 'play Bible,' while still acting within the interests of Israeli settlers and ultimately the Israeli nation-building project, which secures HaYovel's presence in the Occupied Territories. In one scene of *Greening Israel*, Nate Waller collaborates with the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) to stage a rescue mission for one of their guard dogs, presumed to be in the captivity of "local Arabs" in the nearby Palestinian village. This level of collaboration, helped by Waller speaking Hebrew, is made possible due to the supportive position HaYovel has maneuvered itself into with regards to occupation forces; HaYovel protects the Jewish state so the Jewish state protects HaYovel, while both are in active conflict with the nearby Palestinian village.

While the core group behind HaYovel, the Waller family including the brothers Waller, has relocated to the West Bank full time to lead the organization's operations, the volunteers are North Americans who return home once their volunteering stint is over.[179] The organization is therefore seemingly not invested in attracting Christians to settle their planting grounds, but rather to support the Israeli settlers already there to maintain their lands.[180]

In examining the differences between JNF and HaYovel's promotional materials, both organizations use visual strategies that reflect their different audiences despite their common goal. In *Greening Israel,* the visual strategy makes it clear that the viewers they intend to reach are fellow Americans who would be drawn in by familiarity. For the first minute and a half, we

(October 2, 2021): 301–19; Samuel Goldman, *God's Country: Christian Zionism in America* (Philadelphia: (Penn) University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

[179] "Our Vision and Mission," HaYovel, accessed October 2023, https://serveisrael.com/vision-and-mission/.

[180] Although it can be argued that the large Waller family has themselves built up a small settlement.

see a montage of the Wallers and their volunteers working the soil and riding in golf carts, with Nate preaching in voiceover in a Southern accent. With the accented preaching, the men dressed in plaid shirts, cowboy hats, and baseball caps, the video is American-coded and we might assume they were in the United States if not for it saying "Samaria, Israel" onscreen. I would argue that this level of visual familiarity for American viewers would encourage them to continue watching, therefore being drawn into HaYovel's mission and perhaps their volunteering program. Their mission is to connect the present landscape with the Biblical past, so *Greening Israel* is also not concerned with depicting modern Israel.

Figure 5: HaYovel's Nate Waller (center right) directs his team of volunteers.[181]

JNF, on the other hand, is a much larger organization with more international clout and heavy support from the Israeli government; they therefore have less of a need to shore up business than HaYovel does, hence the more targeted visual strategies on HaYovel's part towards Americans. Instead, JNF is mostly visually invested in portraying today's Israel in a positive light. A visual strategy they use in most of their promotional materials is a reliance on shots of children planting trees; this aligns with JNF's historic tendency towards children- and

[181] The Israel Guys, "Transforming Israel's Barren Terrain Into Green Forests."

family-centric campaigns.[182] These shots also lend themselves to reaching a wide, international audience, since children doing something is usually seen as a universally positive image. Through images like these, their promotional videos project Israel as an idyllic society where all Israelis young and old contribute to the betterment of society through greening.

Figures 6-8: Children participating in JNF tree-planting with their families in several videos on the KKL-JNF YouTube channel.[183]

Greenwashing, Bible-washing

The practice of justifying colonization with the incompetent stewards trope is also used heavily in greenwashing, a method by which a group (such as Israel) attempts to cleanse its international reputation by way of activism and perceived good deeds related to the environment. Essentially, greenwashing gives Israel the reputation of being the "responsible and by proxy legitimate

[182] Braverman, "Planting the Promised Landscape," 322 and 330.

[183] KKL-JNF, "Security Planting - A Green Shield for the Gaza Envelope," YouTube video, 1:41, 5 June 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FlsVX_1Y2Zs; "Planting Trees - Pushing Back the Desert," YouTube video, 5:54, 12 Feb. 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDjW8WvFcGQ; "Growing Forests in the Desert," YouTube video, 6:42, 18 Feb. 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eK0nEV5dWBA.

steward of Palestinian lands" as Sarah Salazar Hughes et al. put it in their article on the subject.[184] Another way of phrasing it would be 'green colonialism,' which is the term environmental scholar Ghada Sasa uses: in her article "Oppressive Pines" she uses the term to describe the process of Israel buying land and turning it into 'protected areas' such as forests and national parks. Essentially, at face value these things contribute positively to environmental conservation, but examining how the land was acquired and who used to own it, as Sasa does, reveals a sinister reality underneath.[185] Greenwashing (or green colonialism) is a favourite tool of the greening organizations I have looked at so far, especially now that environmental consciousness and global warming concerns are at an all-time high. Although JNF has never hidden the fact that the organization was created with the goal of land grabbing and settlement, they have more recently focused on promoting the environmental sustainability-related results of their work in public relations materials.[186] For members of the public who lack outside context, hearing about JNF's work for the environment leaves a good impression without them having to think about the darker implications of this work.

In HaYovel's *Greening Israel*, a similar result is achieved; it is a promotional video for their organization, but the use of documentary aesthetics and tropes gives the piece an air of authority on the subject. Drone shots of the landscape mixed in with handheld ones of the brothers Waller hard at work in the fields, talking-head segments of the Wallers, and Ken-burns style presentation of archival photos and newspaper clippings all contribute to the impression of this being a documentary. Whether or not this piece can be considered a documentary is not

[184] Hughes et al., 2.
[185] Ghada Sasa, "Oppressive Pines: Uprooting Israeli Green Colonialism and Implanting Palestinian A'wna," *Politics*, October 8, 2022, 1-17.
[186] Braverman, "Planting the Promised Landscape," 329.

useful to dwell on here, but what is worth considering is how these documentary aesthetics serve HaYovel's greenwashing by glossing over problematic realities of their work. To many viewers, a slick documentary with a high production value is highly persuasive in its attempt to portray the information within it as unbiased, factual, and well-researched. As such, the presentation of their work and mission as both ecologically beneficial and a net positive to the community would seem accurate to most viewers who are caught up in the polished aesthetics. For example, although they are in the West Bank, the presence of Palestinians is a subject that the Wallers avoid throughout the documentary, save for the scenes in which the group deals with the after-effects of Palestinian resistance to their planting efforts. When reflecting on the aforementioned guard dog incident, or other incidents in which Palestinian villagers have burnt newly planted trees, the Wallers always return to their central talking point that "everyone benefits": to them, while HaYovel is doing work that is beneficial to the earth and to everyone on it, Palestinians insist on ruining that. As Nate Waller puts it, "We're just planting trees, you know? … You don't have to get political." This is yet another example of the incompetent steward trope at play, the logic being that American transplants know how to better care for the earth than the Indigenous people. This is also standard greenwashing, in that the documentary's audience is being told that HaYovel's mission to green Israel is being stymied by pesky locals who want to keep the land barren. As they skirt past these issues of conflict quite briefly, they keep the focus on their tree planting being beneficial to all, thus covering geopolitics with fantasies of environmental saviourism through glossy documentary aesthetics. To emphasize the righteousness of their mission from an environmental standpoint, the brothers Waller use the word 'desolate' seven times just in the introduction of the documentary to describe the land they are greening. I would

argue that this word is a dog-whistle, and the use of it signals both green colonialism and also the Biblical nature of their mission.

Indeed, the Wallers explain that the land has been desolate since 2000 years ago when the Israelites were exiled and other forces came to destroy the land's natural beauty (they keep this vague). The prophets predicted a return of the exiled, and a return of the land to the Garden of Eden, which HaYovel is there to facilitate. Their mission is strongly Biblically-oriented, almost more than environmentally so, and is presented in the documentary as a noble cause for pious folk to take part in. In a similar way to greenwashing, HaYovel engages with what I will call Bible-washing, providing a polished sheen of Biblical call-backs and reverence towards the ancient version of that land to hide the present-day reality. The most obvious point of contention that HaYovel's talking heads Bible-wash is the fact that they work in the occupied West Bank with settlers. However, by using the designation Judea and Samaria instead of the West Bank, the Wallers divert attention from this geopolitical context and instead attempt to transport their viewers to Biblical times. Harnessing the power of language by changing place names to Biblical or Hebrew names has been essential to Israel's nation-building process,[187] and this particular example is a well-known one. In the late 1970s, Israel's sixth Prime Minister Menachim Begin popularized using 'Judea and Samaria' in place of calling it the West Bank in the Israeli mainstream. Palestine scholar Jorgen Jensehaugen suggests that choosing the name Judea and Samaria denotes the West Bank as *terra Morata*—a land "frozen in time," with whatever happened during the lull being irrelevant.[188] With Begin (and HaYovel)'s rhetoric, the history of this land is broken up into relevant or irrelevant time periods, effectively removing the West

[187] In that they turn Arabic place names (from village names to the names of mosques) to Hebrew ones.
[188] Jørgen Jensehaugen, "*Terra Morata* : The West Bank in Menachem Begin's Worldview," *Contemporary Levant* 5, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 56.

Bank of the present day from time and history. Doing so eliminates the possibility of sympathy for anyone there during the irrelevant periods, since they essentially do not exist in this cultivated worldview. What this Bible-washing is able to accomplish, along with greenwashing, is a diversion of complicity in the violence of occupation, with the common enemy being Palestinians who they associate in *Greening Israel* with ecological scarcity and destruction.

Ecological abundance in Palestinian art

In opposition to the Zionist narrative of environmental scarcity that characterizes JNF and HaYovel's views of the past, the Palestinian worldview when it comes to ecology and environment is one of abundance. This idyllic agrarian past, so different from the desolation with which Zionists characterize the history of the land, is plentifully illustrated by Palestinian artists. The relationship between *fellahin* (farmers) and their land is depicted in many pastoral scenes in painting, and artists like Sliman Mansour have even integrated natural materials like straw, mud, and soil into their artistic practice.[189] Besides the manual bond with the earth illustrated in agrarian painting, the joy of being in nature is portrayed through the motif of women dancing in the outdoors among trees, which comes up in many paintings by Palestinian artists.[190] Of course, paintings of the olive or orange harvest are many, as this pastoral activity is inextricably linked to Palestinian heritage; [191] this visualization of identity is in direct contrast with the Zionist view of Palestinians as incompetent or destructive of the natural environment, like in *Greening Israel* for instance.

[189] Gannit Ankori, *Palestinian Art* (London: Reaktion, 2006): 80.
[190] Ismail Shammout's *The Spring that Was* (1966); Tayseer Barakat's *Path of Love* (1989); Maher Naji's *Folk Dance* and *Dabka*; Malak Mattar's *The Olive Harvest* (2019) and *My Skin is Not a Sin* (2020).
[191] Sliman Mansour's *Yaffa* (1979) and *Orange Picking* (1980s); Maher Naji's *Jaffa Oranges* and *Olive Season*; Najat El-Taji El-Khairy's *Salam* series (2004-22), to name just a few.

Beyond just painting, a discussion on Palestinian artistic practices cannot be without the consideration of poetry; Palestinian artist and art historian Kamal Boullata emphasizes the importance of the spoken word in writing that "today, still, it is the poet, not the 'image-maker' who has the singular power to move the national soul."[192] Nonetheless, in his article "Facing the Forest" Boullata covers important developments in Palestinian art by outlining a diversity of artists' approaches to depicting landscape, and in keeping with his assertion, also demonstrates how these visual depictions are intimately related to the spoken and written word. Representation of landscape in the Palestinian painting tradition is relatively recent and corresponds to the integration of Western painting principles into artistic practice in the mid-20th century.[193] In this way, a consideration of the importance of language and the spoken word when encountering Palestinian visual art would steer analysis in a culturally-specific direction. Boullata pays close attention to the titles of Walid Abu Shakra's pastoral drawings, for instance, which illuminate the artist's careful documentation of place names for each drawing produced; the significance of the work thus hinges on the written word as much as the visual element. Only taken together are we able to read the significance. Keeping this in mind for film analysis, Boullata's characterization certainly works well for reading film texts, being a medium that ties poetry and the spoken word with the image.

In Larissa Sansour's film *In Vitro* (2019), the characters live underground after an eco-apocalypse has rendered Bethlehem unliveable. The two characters have differing relationships to the outside world of before—the older character, Dunia (Hiam Abbass), has memories of her home, the landscape, her olive harvest, and her family. The younger character, Alia (Maisa Abd

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[192] Kamal Boullata, "Facing the Forest: Israeli and Palestinian Artists," *Third Text* 3, no. 7 (June 1989): 80.
[193] Boullata, 80-81.

Elhadi), is in fact a clone of Dunia's late daughter, with memories of the world planted in her mind, but no actual lived experiences of life on the outside. Essential to the post-apocalyptic world Sansour has created for this film are glimpses of a past before the ruination – images of a destroyed world are all the more meaningful when considered along with images of what once stood in the ruins' place. Memories of abundance, when put together with the present's hollow void, make clear just how much was lost. In *In Vitro*, these memories of the world before come in the form of flashbacks that resemble the olive harvest paintings discussed before; beautiful shots of the characters in their olive grove, market scenes full of an abundance of spices and bread, groups of nuns walking around happily. Foliage is abundant, expansive rolling hills surround the characters' home, but these images are all still behind a veil of monochrome, the true beauty of the flora's colours inaccessible to us in the same way as for the protagonists. In addition to the desaturation, these similarities of the flashbacks to common motifs in Palestinian painting are also troubled by the characters' words: Alia reveals that none of these memories are hers, but rather an amalgamation of memories that, as a clone, she has been designed to store for an indefinite future. Incredibly, she also houses sensory memories: she recounts, "I remember walking through the rain and feeling my shirt sticking to my skin. The flames of a bonfire heating my face." Alia rejects the burden of these memories because she knows nothing else than her underground concrete home. In this way, Alia is a representation of an imagined future of scarcity, the personification of the inability to properly access a natural environment and the anxieties that this produces.

Her character's story, told through her own words, can be seen as a metaphor for diasporic Palestinians' relationship to Palestine through inherited memories in the absence of physical presence on the land. Social anthropologist Nayrouz Abu Hatoum writes on the

temporal fragmentation that the occupation creates for Palestinians and the affective experience of this; violence ruptures time, making the future difficult to conceptualize. This suspended future creates a period of waiting – for return, for the end of the occupation – that is characterized by uncertainty.[194] As she puts it, "the future for Palestinians becomes an imaginative space where suspicion and hope coalesce,"[195] and we can see this coalescence materialized in the underground world of *In Vitro*. The characters make it clear through their dialogue that they are waiting to return overground, but the architectural permanence of their concrete home suggests an uncertainty that this future of return will come to pass. Dunia and Alia's dialogue about loss and the atemporality of their lives is also reminiscent of the way Mark Fisher writes about hauntology and lost futures.[196] Alia, as a clone of a deceased person and a store for memories of other deceased people, is a repository of the past in service of an uncertain future. Alia's story can therefore also be read as a personification of the mourning for lost futures in the wake of environmental destruction. Her existence is for the purpose of storing a collective longing for the past, in response to the suddenly lost future that her community has experienced; as they reside underground indefinitely, Alia is a collection of ghosts waiting for a future that may never happen. Dunia emphasizes how Palestine, as a holy site, is particularly haunted by the past: "Bethlehem was always a ghost town. The present upstaged by the past." Now that it has been destroyed by an eco-disaster, Bethlehem is doubly a ghost town, frozen in time by Biblical history and environmental destruction. Alia, then, is a representation of specifically Palestinian lost futures.

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[194] Nayrouz Abu Hatoum, "Decolonizing [in the] Future: Scenes of Palestinian Temporality," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 103, no. 4 (October 2, 2021): 397–412.
[195] Abu Hatoum, 398.
[196] Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester, UK, Washington, USA: Zero books, 2014), 12-35.

Imagined futures of scarcity

In Vitro sees the world going underground, the streets uninhabitable because of a thick, black liquid coursing through them. In flashback, Dunia and her family run away from a burning Bethlehem, their houses abandoned. To determine how Palestinian art reflects anxieties about environmental collapse like in this film, it is useful to look at the current environmental realities in the West Bank. Reports from various human rights organizations such as Al-Haq and the UNRWA have found that people in the West Bank disproportionately suffer the consequences of environmental crimes, which come as a result of Israeli policies, industry, and infrastructure. Authors of the 2015 Al-Haq report documented a long list of environmental crimes in the West Bank and Gaza, including industrial pollution of residential areas,[197] drinking water contamination by waste dumping,[198] and landscape deprivation (which covers its spiritual significance as well as issues of mobility within these landscapes).[199] They detail how these practices violate the Oslo Accords[200] and international laws regarding the responsibilities of an occupying power toward civilians under belligerent occupation.[201] On the issue of water access, the UN's Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People highlights Israel's disproportionate water provision to its own citizens (and settlers within the Occupied Territories) compared to Palestinians.[202] Hydrologist Clemens Messerschmid

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[197] Benjamin Pontin, Vito De Lucia, and Jesus Gamero Rus, "Environmental Injustice in Occupied Palestinian Territory: Problems and Prospects" (Al Haq, 2015), https://media.business-humanrights.org/media/documents/files/documents/Environmental.Injustice.Report.En_.pdf, 25.
[198] Pontin et al., 26-7.
[199] Pontin et al., 30.
[200] Pontin et al., 47.
[201] Pontin et al., 37.
[202] Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, "Key Issues at Stake - Water," United Nations: The Question of Palestine, accessed April 20, 2023, https://www.un.org/unispal/permanent-status-issues/.

substantiates this in his 2007 talk on the subject of Zionist intervention and water scarcity.[203] Finally, the UNRWA's Barrier Monitoring Unit found that Israel's separation barrier limits Palestinians' water source access and full use of agricultural lands divided by the barrier; the barrier and its construction also drastically affects ecosystems, agriculture, and soil erosion.[204]

Given the persistence of these man-made environmental issues, it makes sense that many Palestinian artists use ecological imagery in ways that emphasize these realities on the ground, as well as a possible future bereft of natural environment. Sliman Mansour's painting *From the River to the Sea* (2021) is of a woman holding onto an intertwined orange and olive tree, with holes dug all around the otherwise-empty landscape, suggesting that this is the last tree left. The title paired with the imagery connects Palestinian resistance with protection of the environment against colonial forces. Similarly, Ismail Shammout's painting entitled *Where to..?* (1953) depicts a refugee family against the backdrop of a barren landscape after the Nakba, with a bare tree behind them. Here, the occupation is directly connected with environmental scarcity, and the title suggests an uncertain future; the date of this painting demonstrates anxieties of environmental destruction already present in the period immediately after the Nakba.

Moving to more contemporary works, the Sansour's films continue this line of questioning about the future of the Palestinian people and the environmental scarcity that accompanies the occupation. Sansour's imagining of a black liquid flowing through the streets of Bethlehem is not that much of a mental leap from the realities of industrial pollution on Palestinian towns, for instance. In her films, through the mise-en-scene, she imagines a possible

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[203] Clemens Messerschmid, "Till the Last Drop: The Palestinian Water Crisis in the West Bank, Hydrogeology and Hydropolitics of a Regional Conflict" (Lecture series by the Alternative Information Center (AIC), Dalia Center, West Jerusalem, June 12, 2007), https://archive.org/details/ClemensMesserschmidTilltheLastDropThePalest.

[204] Barrier Monitoring Unit (BMU) and Applied Research Institute Jerusalem (ARIJ), "Barrier Impacts on the Environment and Rural Livelihoods" (UNRWA, 2012).

future in which ecological scarcity has reached a critical point, and Palestinians have had to conserve nature in contrived ways. In *Nation Estate* (2012), Sansour conceives Palestine as being transposed into a high-rise building, with the natural environment being confined to indoor spaces: the Mediterranean sea occupies one floor, and an olive grove another. Several scholars have written on Sansour's works in the 'sci-fi trilogy,' which includes *Nation Estate*, focusing their discussions on her re-imaginings of Palestinian spatial configurations and archaeology[205] and her use of sci-fi and futurist aesthetics.[206] As a newer film, the scholarship on *In Vitro* is less developed: authors have written on the film in regards to its themes of intergenerational trauma[207] but most coverage of the film is more generalized in arts and culture publications, gallery websites, and interview-style reporting. In any case, like in *Nation Estate*, *In Vitro*'s characters are in a state of major landscape deprivation – one of the environmental issues outlined in the Al-Haq report – and the constructed world in the film shows how Palestinian society has adapted to this landscape deprivation. In the film, the world has moved underground post-eco-disaster into a Brutalist world of concrete. What seems like natural light from overhead

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[205] Gil Z. Hochberg, "Suspended between Past and Future: Larissa Sansour's Sci-Fi Archaeological Archive in the Past-Future Tense," in *Becoming Palestine* 72–86; Robert Duggan, "Larissa Sansour and the Palestinian Ruins of the Future," *Journal for Cultural Research* 24, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 69–83; Carol Que, "Mechanisms of a Settler Colonial Architecture in Larissa Sansour's Nation Estate (2012)," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 73 (Spring 2018): 124–39.

[206] Gil Hochberg, "'Jerusalem, We Have a Problem': Larissa Sansour's Sci-Fi Triology and the Impetus of Dystopic Imagination," *The Arab Studies Journal* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 34–57; Jussi Parikka, "Middle East and Other Futurisms: Imaginary Temporalities in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture," *Culture, Theory and Critique* 59, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 40–58; Jareh Das, "Science or Fiction: Imaginary Narratives in the Works of Laylah Ali, Hamad Butt, Basim Magdy and Larissa Sansour," *Contemporary Practices: Visual Arts from the Middle East* 13 (2013): 44–49; Anastasia Murney and Larissa Sansour, "Humour, Collective Identities and Speculative Futures: An Interview with Larissa Sansour," in *Comedy in Crises*, ed. Chrisoula Lionis, Palgrave Studies in Comedy (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 57–64.

[207] Layla AlAmmar, "Palestinian Postmemory: Melancholia and the Absent Subject in Larissa Sansour's In Vitro, Saleem Haddad's 'Song of the Birds,' and Adania Shibli's Touch," *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies* 8, no. 1 (2019): 1–23.

shafts is the main source of illumination, making for a mostly shadowy ambiance. However, when the younger character looks out one of these windows, she looks not at the outside world but at an indoor atrium, making us wonder whether any of this light is natural at all. The bare surroundings give the characters' home a clinical coldness, and the vast, dark hallways suggest a scale that does not seem matched to the number of people we see: this environment is not full of life, in the literal sense. From what we see of their world, though, the two characters have access to medical care—the older character Dunia is on a hospital bed with an IV and a heart monitor—and both wear well-kept clothing and seem settled in this underground environment. The younger character, Alia, has grown up in this world, so has evidently had access to everything required to survive relatively comfortably. The main thing missing from both their lives, then, is access to the natural environment. This has been made impossible by whatever forces caused the eco-disaster to happen.

As in *Nation Estate*, natural resources have had to be relocated to locations where their survival would otherwise be futile. Without the sunlight needed to grow agriculture, *In Vitro*'s underground society has configured the orchard with available resources. Trees (Mediterranean cypress, other native species) grow on the ground along with saplings, divided in sections. Smaller platforms mount the walls of the large atrium like opera boxes. Olive trees grow out of a box in the foreground, and next to it are closed glass cases of seedlings in jars.[208] Pollination is possible through the bees salvaged from the world above, and lamps work to photosynthesize. There is vegetation coming from every angle of the atrium, and the cold, concrete architecture suddenly seems a lot more humid and inviting. The orchard brings comfort to Dunia: she is able

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[208] This brings to mind Jumana Manna's exploration of the life of a seed from the Global Seed Vault in *Wild Relatives* (2018).

to escape her "entombment," as she calls it, when the orchard lights are on and she can hear the ecosystem come alive.

A Palestinian alternative environmentalism

Despite the characters' yearning for the outside world, Sansour's imagined future of ecological conservation is successful; an orchard is able to grow underground and the Mediterranean sea is able to survive on the 28th floor of a skyscraper. Through eco-apocalypse and total spatial reconfiguration, nature is able live on in impossible circumstances. These imaginings of decolonial environmental persistence also bring to mind Ghada Sasa's conception of a Palestinian alternative environmentalism, under which she brings together the concepts of *a'wna* (collaboration), *sumud* (steadfastness), and *a'wda* (return). *A'wna* or collaboration is about all human and non-human entities living in harmony, stressing that harming one will harm all.[209] In this way, with *a'wna* the "human-nature binary… severely erodes" making all species more interconnected.[210] The rupturing of this division between humans and non-humans also challenges the status-quo that caused climate change, that of a destructive anthropocentrism. *A'wna* therefore allows us to conceptualize a future radically different than the current reality. The underground orchard in *In Vitro* is a fitting example: with the underground society's agricultural ingenuity, trees are able to grow and produce fruit without seeing the sun. The humans provide the means of survival for these trees outside of regular processes of photosynthesis, while the trees provide sustenance: *a'wna.* Although fictional scenarios,

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[209] Sasa, 11.
[210] Sasa, 12.

Sansour's imaginings of flora and agriculture persisting in impossible conditions reflects the hopeful outlook of a Palestinian alternative environmentalism.

Conclusion

Narratives of ecological scarcity and abundance play an important role in how people think about the occupation of Palestine. On the Zionist side, the idea of a barren land, either because of incompetent stewardship of this land or because it was bereft of civilized humans (*terra nullius),* is used to justify continued colonial expansion through settlement. Zionist presence "making the desert bloom" is both a slogan encapsulating these colonial tropes and the particular flavour of greenwashing that is most common in Zionist rhetoric – environmental development and conservation is a convenient façade for the rapid settlement goals that are at the core of Israel's nation building today. To clarify this intersection of environment and settlement, I analyze the ways the Jewish National Fund and another greening organization in the region, HaYovel, promote their work and mission to the public. HaYovel's promotional video *Greening Israel* shows how they employ these colonialist tropes and greenwashing to maintain relatively positive public relations: the use of rhetoric and language is particularly illuminating in this regard. To the same end, HaYovel presents an interesting case of what I call Bible-washing – language that encourages Biblical reverence to distract from the fact that they plant in the occupied West Bank. Even with their Evangelical Christian focus, this aspect of their mission aligns well with Zionist appeals to Biblical logic on questions of land ownership.

Meanwhile, Palestinian visual and audiovisual art depicts conceptions of ecological scarcity and abundance opposite in nature to the Zionist conception. An idyllic agrarian past is a common motif in Palestinian painting, with ecological abundance characterizing the time before

occupation. Through her mise-en-scène and use of ecological imagery in dialogue, Larissa Sansour's *In Vitro* depicts Palestinians living in environmental scarcity, and the anxieties that this produces. The world that Sansour has conceived of here fits the pattern of imagined futures of ecological scarcity that comes up in other Palestinian visual artists' work since 1948. A study of reports detailing environmental issues caused by occupation in the West Bank suggests that these anxieties of environmental failure are prompted by realities on the ground. However, Sansour's characters have managed to conserve their natural environment and agricultural practices even in the most inhospitable of landscapes, which echoes Ghada Sasa's notion of a Palestinian alternative environmentalism that centres collaboration and steadfastness through the difficulties of occupation.

Conclusion

Metal, concrete, and barbed wire snake through the West Bank in the form of the occupation's separation barrier, 712 kilometres long and in some parts, eight metres high.[211] The sections of the barrier that are concrete wall tower over Palestinian urban areas, and depending on what side of the wall you are looking at, the structure acts as a canvas for either graffiti or camouflaging adornments. Recalling my discussion of the barrier in chapter one, I propose that what is *on* the wall is a microcosm of the ideas running through this thesis. For the benefit of settlers, on the Israeli side of the wall there are attempts to camouflage the structure from view, or at least dull its severity on the scenery: landscaping techniques visually lessen the height of the wall, and pastoral landscapes are even painted onto the wall in some places in an attempt to erase its imposing nature.[212] In this way, the built structure and the natural landscape work together to hide Palestinian existence and struggle from view. On the other side of the wall, graffiti by Palestinians (and also on occasion, international artists or collectives) expresses resistance to the infrastructure of control and the occupation more generally. The presence of the graffiti does not diminish the existence of the barrier or the power it holds over the Palestinians it encircles, but rather adds a visualization of resistance onto its form. Interacting with this structure using language and images constitutes an act of resistance to the occupation: it both 'vandalizes' the intrusive structure and reclaims it as a canvas onto which expressions of hope, grief, humour, and anger can be viewed by other Palestinians encountering the wall.

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[211] "The Separation Barrier," *B'tselem*, November 11, 2017, https://www.btselem.org/separation_barrier#:~:text=For%20the%20most%20part%2C%20it,flanking%20it%20on%20either%20side.

[212] Matan Tzuri, "Israeli Artist Paints Gaza Border Walls: 'I Painted the Landscape beyond Them,'" *YNet News*, May 30, 2023, https://www.ynetnews.com/article/hjnasfqi2.

This type of reclamation is important, especially in the realm of images, where the agency to visualize one's own subjectivity is not generally afforded to Palestinians. In the West, images of Palestinians undergoing violence are plastered across pages and screens, documented by a range of news sources including citizen journalists. As I write the last words of this thesis, Gaza has been under a brutal siege by Israel for almost two months, and the extraordinary loss has been documented as it happens, by people in Gaza. Now, as ever, the ubiquity of this image of Palestinian suffering speaks to the ubiquity of suffering when under occupation, and under siege. Some argue that the spreading of these images may help the Palestinian cause in some material way: maybe seeing the severity and enormity of the loss in Gaza, for instance, will make world powers reconsider their support of the Zionist occupation. Others point out that it seems that no amount of Palestinian suffering, visualized or not, seems to be enough to push those in power to extend care to Palestinians in any meaningful way. This can lead us to think about whether images – their capturing, distribution, viewing – could ever have a real effect on the Palestinian resistance. Capturing a siege with a camera may sometimes seem like a futile, last-ditch effort at *some* kind of action in the face of violence and war; after all, taking a picture will not stop the bombs from falling. Having an archive of suffering over the course of 75 years of occupation has evidently not caused the occupier to cease occupying. Still, images proliferate and through them, the world watches.

In November 2023, the siege on Gaza by Israeli Occupation Forces was interrupted by a brief 'humanitarian pause,' and Gazans documented this moment, a chance to breathe. The onslaught of horrific images online began to be interspersed with documented moments of joy: of a child finding her toy amid the rubble that was her home, of a wedding taking place despite it all, with music and dancing, of a communal meal time. As with the images of suffering, the

images of resilience and joy amid pain do not make a material difference in the reality of Palestinians in Gaza. Images do not always have a purpose, or a role to fill in helping or hindering a cause; images will not free Palestine. What is the value they hold, then?

I have endeavoured to answer this question throughout this thesis, and argued that cinema has the power to transgress spatial boundaries and in a way, be a tool of a return to Palestine. To expand this to our discussion of the images coming out of Gaza under siege, we can say that Palestinian image-making contributes to a broader narrative of steadfastness in the face of occupation. It documents presence on the land and the resilience required to remain there, or to remain hopeful of eventual return. The films studied here do not account for a real reclaiming of space—in reality the occupation continues to encroach on the land further, whether or not Palestinians make films. Still, the artistic interaction with the occupation's markers of environmental control constitutes a level of reclamation that is comparable to the separation barrier graffiti: Palestinian resistance modifies the environment through artistic intervention. Infrastructure and the natural landscape are the arenas in which the Zionist occupation exerts control over Palestinians, and Palestinian artists are able to enter this arena through the filmmaking practice. Palestinian cinema provides a mode of resistance, and through this thesis I have demonstrated that the medium of cinema has unique capabilities to this end. With a lack of physical access to Palestine for diasporic Palestinians, inhabiting space digitally and imagining new spatial configurations through cinema allow for a different kind of presence on the land. Images in movement simulate movement on, and interaction with, the land.

The importance of a cinema of resistance grows as the nature of the Zionist occupation's control evolves, with ongoing natural resource theft and violent settlement expansion. A violent

occupier should not operate behind a curtain; perhaps images are some small way to render justice to Palestine.

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