Trees Before Walls:

Alternative Cinematic Perspectives of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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ABSTRACT

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Amidst the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is a need to concentrate on efforts between local citizens to find a hopeful common ground through dialogue, peace-building, and nonviolent activism. The five non-fiction films examined in this thesis attempt to add nuance to our understanding of the contested region through resisting a polarized political rhetoric that has defined much mainstream coverage of the violence and ethnic struggle. Cultural scholars, through examining Israeli and Palestinian cinema as separate and oppositional entities, further fail to dissolve barriers that contribute to intensified misconceptions of the Other. Therefore, this investigation will align with the aims of "post-Zionism," an ideology that attempts to move beyond the original tenets of Zionism, embrace the multicultural makeup of Israel-Palestine, and address under-seen, marginalized perspectives of the country's history. The five post-Zionist documentaries analyzed, made during a period of intensified conflict and stalled peace talks in the early twenty-first century, examine a formidable array of viewpoints while questioning and deconstructing Israeli myths.

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Introduction

In 2009, novelist China Miéville released the dystopian, science-fiction noir *The City and the City*. The book, which won the Arthur C. Clarke Award and Hugo Award for Best Novel, takes place in two fictional cities: Beszél and Ul Qoma. In Miéville's work, the two cities are considered twins, co-existing within the same space; however, the citizens of Beszél have learned to "unsee" the inhabitants of Ul Qoma, and vice versa. Although a schism exists between the two populations, there are also "unificationists" who hope to bridge the two cities, through a third urbanity, called Orciny.

Praised as a work of speculative science fiction, *The City and the City*'s themes of emotional separation and cultural hostility among inhabitants of a shared territory provoked critics to compare Beszél and Ul Qoma to West and East Jerusalem. The lack of cohesion between the city cultures in the novel has been widely allegorized to evoke the ways that neighbouring populations purposefully ignore the social and historical claims of the other group. Jewish studies professor Michael Bernard-Donals has described this ignorance as "anamnesis," or forgetful memory. As he explains, this forgetfulness occurs when one group chooses to exclude elements that "[lurk] at the edges of cultural memory and that intrude upon or break that continuum" (119). The concept of "unseeing" in Miéville's novel relates to this "anamnesis," whereby Israelis and Palestinians choose to displace their memories of the Other in favour of their own interpretations of history.

In an interview with Geoff Manaugh of the website *BLDGBLOG*, Miéville responded to the analogies between his novel's Kafkaesque setting and the situation in Israel-Palestine. As Miéville said:

> I think there can be a danger of a kind of a sympathetic magic: you see two things that are about divided cities and so you think that they must therefore be similar in some way. Whereas, in fact, in a lot of these situations, it seems to me that — and certainly in the question of Palestine — the problem is not one population being unseen, it's one population being very, very aggressively seen by the armed wing of another population.

The partitioned setting of *The City and the City*, reminiscent of the boundaries and barriers that separate Israelis and Palestinians, is unique for its exploration of a peace process. The third city that the unificationists hope can bridge the cities together, Orciny, consists of spaces that have not yet been claimed by either Besźel or Ul Qoma. In Orciny, civilians can cross the borders without the fear of detection — a sharp digression from the heavily monitored obstacles and checkpoints that disrupt daily Palestinian life. Despite the comparisons that scholars and critics have made between Miéville's award-winning novel and Middle East geopolitics, the former's optimism toward a solution of togetherness and pluralism has petered out in the region of Israel-Palestine. The possibility for unification within the small strip of land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River is, today, the stuff of fiction.

During the twenty-first century, the atmosphere in Israel-Palestine has become increasingly polarized. The hopefulness among citizens for a two-state solution, where an independent Palestinian state exists alongside Israel, has eroded in recent years. (A bi-national, one-state solution, meanwhile, has also received widespread criticism from Israeli Jews.) The rise of Israeli right-wing nationalism, with its focus on building settlements in the Occupied Territories and the increasing securitization of the State as a response to acts of Palestinian aggression and resistance, has effectively undermined the efforts of those persisting to keep peace talks alive. This more contemporary shift in Israeli discourse diverges from much of the national political zeitgeist in the 1990s, when Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin worked valiantly to open peaceful discussions with Palestinian leadership. Rabin's assassination in November 1995 by a right-wing radical Israeli became an early sign of the shift to a new age of ethno-nationalist fervour.

As violence intensified during the late twentieth and early twenty-first century in Israel-Palestine, cultural bodies within Israel only made rare incursions into capturing this conflict on the big screen. Nevertheless, even amidst a period of instability, documentary filmmakers from around the world wanted to probe more deeply into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and observe the efforts between neighbours to understand the Other and find common ground. For a brief time during one of the most tumultuous eras of aggression within the region, filmmakers descended on the Holy Land with the hope to find stories of palpable humanism and connection, aiming to resist the politicized rhetoric that was present within much of the mainstream news coverage of the conflict.

This thesis will examine five documentaries, released in the early twenty-first century and made between the mid-1990s and late-2000s, which attempt to broaden our comprehension of a regional peace process. One common thread among some of these films is the focus on capturing elusive moments of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. Some of the non-fiction texts, such as *Encounter Point*, *Budrus*, and *Zero Degrees of Separation*, focus on the ties between the populations as they engage in nonviolent activism and anti-occupation demonstrations, while resisting obvious tropes to represent Israeli and Palestinian life. Meanwhile, *Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel* uses the teaming of an Israeli and Palestinian filmmaker to subvert state-commissioned systems of travel and separation that are supposed to divide the citizenry. Furthermore, both *Encounter Point* and *Promises* — probably the most popular title within this thesis, due to its Academy Award nomination in 2002 — manage to chronicle meetings between Israelis and Palestinians, as they shed their preconceptions of the Other to more deeply understand the circumstances of these new allies.

The creative and humanist efforts of these filmmakers (and their curious, conscientious subjects) are significant showcases of ground-level peace-building work among the two populations, corresponding with scholarly and mainstream literature that focused on paths toward peace among Israelis and Palestinians. Nevertheless, these documentaries were also a product of a time when the viability of a two-state solution was widely debated among political scientists, and when cross-border conversations between citizens could manageably occur. Even though titles from Israel and Palestine have become common entities on the international film festival circuit, with the most successful finding play at art-house and repertory cinemas across North America and Europe, contemporary fiction narratives focused on the interplay between Israelis and Palestinians are quite rare.

On a personal level, this investigation into more nuanced representations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict comes from my interest in understanding more about the ways that artists have attempted to grapple with the complexity of the Middle Eastern discord while managing to find spaces for optimism and dialogue. As a Jewish Canadian who has long been fascinated with Israel, it was absorbing to read about the different national paradigms of Israeli and Palestinian cinema, while observing the ways that documentarians have eschewed some of the local cinematic conventions to make space for marginalized perspectives of the conflict. It is thrilling to know that, even

though cultural roads to enable a more dimensional geopolitical understanding only lasted for a short period, we can use these heralded non-fiction examples as indicative of a spirit to relegate official narratives and expand our ideas of what exists in the region. The noble, pluralistic aims of many of these filmmakers were beacons of light amidst the dark, contentious political climate in the Middle East.

A few weeks after the directors and two of the subjects of *Promises* appeared at the Academy Awards, I went to see the documentary with my father, when it screened as part of the Sprockets Toronto International Film Festival for Children in Toronto, which specialized in showing films aimed at families. I vividly remember a brewing excitement in the auditorium during the film's final third, when some of the young children from West Jerusalem and the Dheisheh refugee camp in the West Bank agree to meet. (One of the film's more playful moments, as Palestinian boy Faraj goes through an extensive, near-ritualistic application of cologne and hair gel to prepare for this day, got big, warm laughs from the packed screening.)

The film's climactic sequences of unification between the children were probably my first exposure to this type of cross-cultural dialogue. As someone who attended a Jewish religious school that promoted and propagated the idea that Israel was a place of the most benevolent morality, a thriving culture, and a long history bound up in Biblical texts, the documentary was also deeply illuminating. At this educational institution, a prayer on behalf of the State of Israel, which praised God and the Israeli army for continuing to shield and protect the land's Jewish inhabitants, was spoken on the morning announcements every day. (I can still recite it from memory.) Meanwhile, whereas Jewish holidays and Israel's independence day were celebrated with gusto, there was virtually no classroom discussion of Palestinian life or history in the Middle East. None of the maps that adorned the classroom walls contained diagrams of partition borders or names of Palestinian towns, effectively erasing their presence from this territory. The only times that educators acknowledged a Palestinian co-existence with Jews in Israel was during speeches about the violence of the Second Intifada — sermons delivered by teachers about the enduring victimization of the Jewish people at the hands of terrorists. Unsurprisingly, this disproportionately one-sided perspective of the conflict became the de facto view among an impressionable class of young, outspoken Jews.

Yet, my introduction to a different side of the conflict with *Promises*, a film that ends with a hopeful message of continued reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians, kept me

curious and interested to learn more about Palestinian injustice. It bothered me when my peers, even at a middle-school age, would deem a Toronto newspaper that I enjoyed reading to be anti-Semitic because it published articles that examined Israeli military aggression or had a human-interest story about Palestinians. From time to time, when my family would discuss the continual (and seemingly unceasing) violence between the two sides, my father would bring up *Promises* as an example of potential understanding that all people interested in the conflict needed to see. The film's enduring message and compassionate approach to a serious subject resonated with me, as well; however, it was hard to find other films that examined the conflict with genuine optimism, humanism, or humour.

My experience seeing *Promises* as a child was one of the impetuses to write about other cinematic efforts to capture the lives of Israelis and Palestinians in original, nuanced ways. As the second chapter of this thesis will examine, the Western media representation of the conflict relies on stereotypes and a lack of contextual analysis, which ignores and diminishes some of the more pertinent stories coming from the region. This interest in finding films that deal explicitly with confronting citizens of Israel-Palestine and engaging them in a cross-cultural exchange led me to four more documentaries: *Budrus*, *Encounter Point*, *Route 181*, and *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

This thesis will carve out a new space to understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through cinematic means, with an emphasis on narratives that focus on nonviolent activism, peace-building, and dialogue, while also resisting some of the more prominent thematic and stylistic forms associated with films about the contemporary struggles of the local populations. Although feature narratives from Israel and Palestine remain popular on the film festival circuit, and continue to tell a breadth of stories about various ethnic and religious groups, careful and nuanced examinations of the conflict feel more naturally suited to the documentary form. The non-fiction films analyzed in this thesis, which elaborate on ways to create pathways to a fuller Palestinian autonomy as well as promote historically ignored narratives from marginalized groups, emphasize an alternative way of looking at Israel while reframing and deconstructing the ideals of the Zionist project. It is important to explore these texts as ones that realize both the bitter circumstances facing both populations (especially the Palestinians) but also try to expose viewers to outcomes that hue more positively and progressively to the enrichment of life in the Middle East.

Before detailed analyses of the film texts and their relationship to social activism, media representation, Palestinian mobility, and approaches to cross-cultural dialogue, the first chapter of this thesis will introduce the national paradigms of Israeli and Palestinian cinema. These cultural industries, although often overlapping economically, are thematically divergent. Historically, Israeli cinema has hued closely to Zionist ideologies, perpetuating mythic narratives to construct a "national imaginary" on the big screen. Meanwhile, Palestinian cinema more adeptly finds its form in the documentary, as local filmmakers use their cameras to capture the essence of brutality in the Occupied Territories. As none of the films examined in this thesis fall strictly within the Israeli or Palestinian cultural sphere, due to numerous transnational and co-production agreements, the diasporic positions of many of these films' directors give them the opportunity to question some of the dominant attributes of these national cinemas.

Chapter 1: Landscapes of Cinema in Israel-Palestine

The regional conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is complex, multi-faceted, and swirling with contradictory narratives. One's understanding of the more than century-long rift between Israeli Jews and Palestinians depends largely on the historical sources and references one chooses to examine. This thesis will analyze non-fiction films that attempt to question and critically explore the barriers between the two sides of the conflict, and (in some instances) attempt to build a path toward reconciliation, transparency, and dialogue. The film texts within the chapters ahead will investigate the efforts of people on both sides of the conflict to comprehend and come to terms with decades of violence and victimization, as well as suggest pathways toward peace and pluralism between neighbouring communities.

Cultural scholars that have focused on Israel and Palestine often clarify how both national cinemas are different. As examined by scholars such as Ella Shohat, Israeli films hue closely to national ideology, emphasizing the struggles and victories of a predominantly Ashkenazi Jewish community while ignoring or minimalizing the plight of marginalized groups. Meanwhile, scholars of Palestinian culture — Edward Said, Hamid Dabashi, Nurith Gertz and some local filmmakers — draw on the ways that Palestinian stories respond to this relegation of their national culture and history, while evoking images and themes of political resistance that argue against Israeli master narratives. Frequently, these academics and writers rely on dichotomies such as East/West, or between the colonizer (Israel) and the colonized (Palestinians), to define the power relations evoked within the region's popular culture. Just as a large number of Israeli films shy away from integrating the Palestinian experience into their stories, Palestinian films aim to revitalize those narratives while depicting Israeli powers with broad strokes.

Narratives emanating from the region often advance one side of a social or political argument without participating in an exchange of ideas with the other side. This thesis will attempt to configure a new space wherein binaries of East/West can dissolve. These films frequently shift between Israeli and Palestinian perspectives, as well as spaces; some of the selected titles even center on or culminate in moments of debate and discussion among Israelis and Palestinians. These documentaries showcase the complexities that people face on both sides of the Green Line, with their makers yearning for a more nuanced and pluralistic understanding of what needs to be done in Israel-Palestine to create sustainable political change.

Before plunging into these humanist documentaries, it is imperative to have a basic knowledge of Israeli and Palestinian film history. Although the films in this thesis attempt to find a space for harmony and co-existence between the two peoples, both cinema cultures rely on a lack of pluralistic representation onscreen, and their main scholarship depends on analyses through binary oppositions. As a result, these two early sections of the chapter will focus more specifically on the divisions between Israelis and Palestinians. Later, once we examine post-Zionism, a postcolonial discourse that centers on investigating grand Israeli narratives and myths, as well as reviving Palestinian stories, we can explore how the effects of the post-Zionist movement have affected more recent films emerging from the region, creating more unified narratives. The analyses of various post-Zionist scholars, who reacted to the changing multicultural makeup and developing globalized ethos within the state of Israel during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, resonate with the selected documentaries.

Unfortunately, the work of post-Zionist thinkers to reframe the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has not led to consistent attempts among artists and academics to explore the struggles of both peoples together. The scholarship yearns to examine co-existence and cultural collision, although there is still a tendency among these cultural writers to explore Israeli and Palestinian cinema as separate entities. Ironically, in Ilan Pappé's extensive analysis of post-Zionism, he recalls a number of academic efforts that attempted to include marginalized sectors of Israeli society, yet these researchers used methods that prioritized Zionist claims (96). Meanwhile, when (Israeli) film producers brought forward stories about relationships between Israelis and Palestinians, the story was often a fiction of forbidden love that could use an eroticized treatment of the Other to market more broadly to Middle Eastern and international audiences (Pappé 225). These are just a couple of examples that show the lack of follow-through among Israeli academic and cultural bodies to respond comprehensively to this wave of pluralist thinking.

Due to the sensitivity and political complexities often needed for discussing clashes between Israelis and Palestinians, this thesis will follow strict rules of nomenclature in regard to the citizens and spaces in the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. This thesis will exclusively refer to the Palestinian [Arab] subjects as "Palestinians," rather than "Arabs." The former term emphasizes the Palestinians' claims to their geographical roots in Palestine, while the latter diminishes their history, identity, and autonomy (Pappé 136). Since Palestinians are among the prominent storytellers and subjects represented within this thesis, it is

important to recognize and acknowledge their continued quest for statehood and political legitimization.

Furthermore, as this Middle Eastern conflict is often framed through an East/West dichotomy that situates Jews and Palestinians as oppositional entities, the narratives of other populations residing in the territory, such as Mizrahi Jews (who typically follow Sephardic Jewish traditions), the Arabic-speaking Israeli Druze, and Bedouin peoples are often ignored. Various cultural scholars present within this thesis, such as Shohat, have done extensive work exploring the representations of these communities. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this thesis, the non-fiction narratives explored will focus predominantly on Israeli Jews and Palestinians.

The National Imaginary of Israeli Cinema

As Ella Shohat thoroughly examines in *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation*, her seminal 1989 text, the prominence of the Zionist movement to create a national Jewish state in Palestine shaped "the national imaginary," and its themes were pervasive among many of the films from Israel's first four decades of statehood (250). She opines (and as the title of her tome suggests) that Israel was a nation caught in a bind between East and West. Shohat explains that as Israel emerged as a nation during the mid-twentieth century, the cultural precedents to which its makers aspired were of Western countries with a large filmic imprint (like France and the United States), although the state could only sustain a production infrastructure akin to developing cultural institutions from younger and less industrialized nations (4). One prominent example of this Western preoccupation came in the mythical figure of the "Sabra," a popular character type in Israeli feature films such as *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer* (1955) and *They Were Ten* (1961). The "Sabra" was, frequently, a healthy, physically fit male with defined Western European features, who "came to evoke the notion of the strong, robust Hebrew/Israeli who fights back and resists victimization" (Shohat 37). In stories told not long after the Holocaust, this beacon of masculinity and physical strength was an attractive source of heroism for Israeli (and even international) audiences. This trope's popularity in Israeli cinema throughout the 1950s and 1960s reflected an aura of strength and resilience.

Meanwhile, early Israeli documentaries and features shied away from Palestinian culture. Beyond their depiction of Israelis as physically and spiritually superior to their neighbours, titles from this "heroic nationalist" genre also diminished the autonomy of Palestinian characters, who

were rarely seen in the foreground and seldom offered a perspective on events within the story (Shohat 56). As Ilan Pappé adds in *The Idea of Israel*, in Israeli titles that directly address the 1948 War, the Palestinian characters were often vague and hard to define (57). This lack of alternative viewpoints was one of the ways that Israeli filmmakers tried to engage more explicitly with the state's Zionist ideology, which ties with an idea from Israeli cinema and television professor Ilan Avisar. He wrote that the cinema of a developing country "is naturally the source of mythic narratives, whose key elements reflect the drama of ideology and reality" (153). Avisar's reflections of this earlier period came in the twenty-first century, when he was more comprehensively exploring the changes of Israeli cinema in the 1990s. In that decade, there was a greater frequency of stories that involved "the withdrawal from political issues in favor of specific personal concerns," such as consumerism, social life and sexuality (Avisar 162). In an increasingly globalized era — a decade that corresponded with the signing of the Oslo Accords and a blooming (if short-lived) atmosphere of peaceful reconciliation with Palestinians — films with more explicit messages of nationalist fervour were outdated.

Similar to Avisar's reflections, Middle Eastern cultural scholars Miri Talmon and Yaron Peleg recognized a noticeable shift from grand nationalist narratives to depictions of Israeli culture "emphasizing hybridity and ambiguity," especially in the manner of portraying Palestinian life (xv). Meanwhile, when Shohat's book on Israeli cinema was re-printed in 2010, it contained a postscript about more current productions, highlighting some of the ways that Israeli cinema culture had changed since the 1989 printing. Not only were Israeli films more popular on the global film festival circuit and increasingly present during North American awards season — between 2008 and 2012, four Israeli features received Academy Award nominations for foreign language film — but there was also a move away from narratives about Ashkenazi Jews. In recent years, filmmakers were more eager to interrogate nationalist ideologies. Shohat concluded that the arrival of post-Zionist thought within certain milieus had "resulted in cultural practices that challenge monolithic boundaries of belonging" and which promoted more nuanced looks at the Palestinians (271). The arrival of post-Zionist works — including those that this thesis will investigate and analyze — also destabilized the categorization of these products as Israeli, Palestinian, or both. Often, these demarcations between national cinemas can become complicated depending on the production and funding contexts that bring these stories to the cultural sphere, which will be explored later in this chapter.

The films emphasized in this thesis are all documentaries; features have been excluded since it was uncommon for fiction films during the early twenty-first century to engage in themes related to Israeli-Palestinian dialogue and the peace process. Nevertheless, one renowned Israeli narrative feature on the international film festival circuit was Eran Riklis's *Lemon Tree* (2008). Based on true events, the film focuses on Salmah, a Palestinian woman struggling to keep her lemon orchard after the Israeli defense minister moves in next door and sets up barriers on Salmah's land. Although the defense minister's wife sympathizes with Salmah's concerns, according to scholar Yael Ben-Zvi-Morad, the woman "neglects to hold a dialogue with her [neighbour]," representing the few possibilities created to make connections even among those within a close geographical proximity (285). Despite a lack of conversation between the characters, Shohat explains that *Lemon Tree* reflects an interest in exploring "fruitful dialogue and the dissolution of barriers," especially when one considers the screenplay was a joint venture between an Israeli filmmaker (Riklis) and a Palestinian director (Suha Arraf) (290). Here, despite the continuation of minimal narrative co-existence between the peoples, efforts to engage in inclusive creative collaborations and focus on the increasing pluralism of the region had started to shift into mainstream cinema culture, albeit marginally.

Palestinian Documentary as a Ledger of History

The idea of a Palestinian national cinema isn't as stable as a national Israeli cinema, partially due to difficulties in obtaining funding and an absence of cultural centres around Palestine, such as theatres where these films can be shown. In the words of scholar Hamid Dabashi, it can also be a difficult national category to define since Palestinians are members of a state that is, in the eyes of institutions like the United Nations, not unanimously recognized. As Dabashi writes, "The world of cinema does not know quite how to deal with Palestinian cinema precisely because it is emerging as a stateless cinema of the most serious national consequences" (7). Regardless, the number of Palestinian filmmakers whose work receives attention from film festivals and repertory theatres worldwide, atop the common themes and aesthetics from a wealth of Palestinian directors, has helped to create and preserve a national cinema in contemporary times.

Since many titles directed by Palestinians evoke and investigate elements of the people's history, such as the "Nakba" — a term meaning "catastrophe" in Arabic that refers to the 1948 exodus of Palestinian refugees from Israel — the documentary has become a key form of

storytelling. As Dabashi adds, “The absence of a Palestinian state does not imply a historical amnesia. In fact, documentary film becomes itself that ledger, the document of these crimes” (12). A key feature of the films within this thesis is the presence of modern cameras and the availability of archival footage to reclaim narratives of Palestinian existence and belonging.

Palestinian documentary filmmaking extends back to the late 1960s. Then, the Palestine Film Unit, founded by Fatah, a secular group running from within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), became one of various cultural bodies formed to document aspects of Palestinian social life and what was deemed “the Palestinian revolution” (Massad 35). Made from the late 1960s through the early 1980s, the documentaries validated Palestinian existence, standing in opposition to Israeli films that continually marginalized their presence and history (Massad 37). The PLO and other factions funded these films — almost all of which were documentaries — and these stories were shown to help spur and promote political change. As scholars Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi examined, in their 2008 book *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma, and Memory*, while these non-fiction films were closely tied to the national movement of the era, “cinema did not rank very high on the resistance movement’s scale of priorities,” and few were financially successful (22). Obstacles that negated the longevity of this period of revolutionary cinema included a lack of trained filmmakers and technicians who could ably organize productions, a dearth of professional equipment and few laboratories available to develop celluloid.

In the 1980s and 1990s, however, several Palestinian documentaries were made with assistance from European and U.S. funding groups. The transnational context of these films’ productions was tied to the countries where formative Palestinian filmmakers, such as Elia Suleiman, had studied and lived. Although these directors relied on film crews from Europe and Israel to make their films, the subject matter of their creative ventures still predominantly dealt with the struggle for Palestinian independence (Alexander 154). One of the most renowned filmmakers, Michel Khleifi, conjured an aesthetic and thematic focus that resonated with future storytellers. Khleifi’s films, such as *Fertile Memory*, drew heavily on interactions with West Bank citizens to illuminate the continued memories of trauma that were omnipresent in Palestinian life. By focusing on spaces such as houses that were reminiscent of the pre-1948 period, his films “[replaced] the existing present with the absent past” (Gertz & Khleifi 74). These stories and settings felt as if they were perpetually frozen in time, speaking to the lack of

socioeconomic progression of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories during the latter half of the twentieth century.

A recurring motif within Palestinian documentary cinema, especially in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, was the roadblock, a symbol of subjugation that drew upon the daily struggles of Palestinians to move around their territory. The increasingly fragmented spaces that result from these barriers have been especially effective metaphors for the lack of autonomy among Palestinians, both in Israel and within a close proximity to their homes. This restricted space is one part of what film scholar Shohini Chaudhuri terms an "architecture of enmity," relating to colonial notions of identity and space that divides Israelis and Palestinians (149). While the former insists on these barriers as a need to ensure security from terror attacks, Palestinian filmmakers continue to foreground these obstacles to portray immobility and reveal their negative effects on Palestinian economics, trade, and psychology.

In the late twentieth century, meanwhile, various Palestinian cultural projects acted as counter-narratives to deconstruct master Israeli narratives. Much of the attention went to reviving the memories of the Nakba, exploring the self-titled "catastrophe" from the perspectives of witnesses of the events. As Middle Eastern scholar Esther Webman examined, as an event that epitomized Palestinian suffering, "the Nakba was reconstructed as a founding myth of Palestinian national identity" (28). The controversy surrounding the airing of *Tekumah* on Israeli television in 1998, which will be explored later in this chapter, indicated how many of these narratives appeared in correlation with the fiftieth anniversary of the 1948 War. As Webman indicates through the words of Palestinian activist Ata Qaymari, Palestinians used the Nakba as a way "to gather a kind of collective memory that preserves their own social, cultural and historical fabric," similar to how Jewish Israelis have used the tragedy of the Holocaust to form a redemptive commemorative narrative (34).

Similarly, in her examination of national attributes of a Palestinian cinema, Livia Alexander notes dominant trends from the 1990s onward included the motif of land in defining the struggle of Palestinians, with narratives that deliver "a more intellectually complex notion of Palestinianness that supersedes defined geographic boundaries and focuses on individuals and their liberation" (151). This results in films that emphasize the claustrophobia of Palestinian existence through tight framing and enclosed spaces, as well as using archival images as emblems to represent the struggle and continuing self-determination of the people (Alexander 158). As she

examines, “in spite of increased militancy in Palestinian society, the films set in the first Intifada period display little violence and do not foreground the armed struggle,” a move that shies away from reinforcing Western stereotypes (161). As this thesis will explore, films set near or during the Second Intifada period will eschew the same conventions in their depiction of individual Palestinians.

The documentaries that will be examined later in this thesis are the product of cultural shifts in Israel and Palestine at the turn of the twenty-first century. Palestinian directors, spurred by a lack of progress toward independence and self-determination despite the arrival of supposed peace talks in the 1990s, elaborated on the themes and aesthetics already developed within the local cinema culture. This thesis will explore films, like *Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel*, which look at the semiotics of geography and the dialectics of visibility and invisibility that have come to define much of the cultural currency of this conflict. As Israel and Palestine remained fundamentally opposed entities during the Second Intifada, which began in September 2000, storytellers from both sides of the Green Line were looking at ways to portray the vivid emotions of the conflict while transcending stereotypes. In the preface for the essay collection *Dreams of a Nation*, Edward Said wrote about the efforts of Palestinian filmmakers in “trying to articulate a counter-narrative and counter-identity” (3). In a similar vein, Israeli artists were looking to deconstruct nationalist concepts and historical ideas, while beginning to open up to Palestinian voices and views.

The Quick Rise and Fall of the Post-Zionism Movement

The intellectual and cultural movement known as post-Zionism slowly began developing in Israeli academic circles during the late 1960s, although it reached an apex during the 1990s. The term originated with an article by Uri Avinery, a member of the Israeli left, who used it in a reference to Israel’s victory during the Six-Day War. To Avinery, as Middle East studies scholar Eran Kaplan describes in his book, that military achievement proved “that the country was strong and stable enough to shed its Zionist, collectivist ethos and embrace a normal course of action, one that is motivated by progress and harmony rather than by existential fears” (4). The term gained popularity during the late 1980s as historians such as Pappé and Benny Morris began to question the dominant narratives and myths that had permeated through Israeli culture. Among these “New Historians,” lines of inquiry went into the reasons behind Israel’s military victory in

the 1948 War and the factors that led to consequent Palestinian expulsion from their homes in the state. As Pappé elucidates in *The Idea of Israel*, the images and narratives perpetuated by believers in a Zionist project had failed to transform Israel into a "driving global force of human progress and enlightenment" (4). There was much curiosity among scholars to revisit the tenets of the Zionist movement, which culminated with Israel's establishment, and question whether these principles still applied to the late twentieth century.

Zionism, the belief in the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine that derives its name from the Hebrew word for Jerusalem, was a reaction to the oppression of Jewish populations in Eastern Europe, where anti-Semitic policies and pogroms had persisted through the late nineteenth century. According to Israeli political scientist Shlomo Avineri, beyond its response to anti-Semitism, Zionism drew "on a historical bond with the ancestral Land of Israel" that drew back to both religious tradition and a historical Jewish presence in Palestine (13). In the late nineteenth century, many prominent liberal Jewish thinkers wrote about the fracturing identity of exiled Jews in Europe. Then, the idea of an autonomous Jewish state was considered to be significant as a symbol of liberation and cultural identity (Avineri 13). As the century turned, the Zionist project became more publicized and popular, aided by the leadership of Theodor Herzl, who considered the movement a necessary remedy to the woes frustrating the Jews of Europe.

Herzl's writings explored the benefits of social services and technological progress that would be available in this homeland — as well as the opportunity for Arabs in Palestine "to join the New Society as equal members" (Avineri 98). Beyond the concept of Palestine as a place for exiled Jews, spiritual thinker Ahad Ha'am (a pseudonym that means "one of the people") felt that this new state should also be a place with a Jewish ethos, reflecting its culture and spirituality (Avineri 117). Nearly one hundred years after the First Zionist Congress, led by Herzl, formulated the ideas of this movement, a wave of post-Zionist ideology swept through Israeli university campuses. This critical writing became especially prominent in the years following the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993; by that point, academics that took on the name the "New Historians" had already published much literature related to these ideas. Many of these scholars and writers argued that Israel had already accomplished the core goal of the Zionist movement, and the continuation of this discourse within the Israeli establishment would be harmful to the subordinated citizens of Israel, such as Palestinians and Arab Israelis.

With the emergence of this criticism, authors, journalists, and academics began to analyze and deconstruct Israeli narratives and state discourse. As Pappé explains, to discuss subjects such as Zionism's relationship to colonialism and the discrimination against Arab Jews in universities was considered unprofessional before that decade (127). Scholars were attracted to this deconstruction, hoping to discover and salvage silenced stories. There was also a widespread interest among journalists and professors to represent more Palestinian, Mizrahi, and female voices in their publications, hoping these incursions into national and cultural narratives would "not only [expose] their mistreatment in the past and present but also [offer] redemption for these evils in the future" (Pappé 147). Although intellectual Edward Said considered post-Zionism a worthwhile step toward state criticism, he also expressed disappointment that there was an alarming lack of interest among various Israelis to hear Palestinian voices (Pappé 131). Writing in 1984, before the rise of this movement, Said elaborated that since Israelis had routinely ignored Palestinian history, Palestinians would need to form and sustain a narrative that could resonate with their regional neighbours (254). He encouraged Palestinians to participate in dismantling the master narratives and creating new ones: "They ought to record, write down their experience… as a starting point to furnish the world some narrative evidence, over and above atomized and reified TV clips" (Said 258). These urgings of the famed literary scholar would soon connect with the politicized aesthetic of Palestinian filmmakers, like Khleifi, who examined themes of widespread trauma and turmoil in both fiction and documentary forms.

The works of scholars like Said, Pappé and Morris found traction at Israeli universities, but this critical thinking about the national government and judicial policy, atop an interest in excavating Palestinian sources, would soon face a backlash. For some, the term "post-Zionism" because a shorthand "for describing any academic critique on Zionism from within Israel" (Pappé 127). While there is often a confluence between this intellectual mode and "anti-Zionism," which is entirely dismissive of Jewish claims to Palestine, post-Zionism is considered more of a critique of the Zionist narratives that were widely disseminated through Israeli culture, from the movies to military ideology (Pappé 128). Regardless, Pappé asserts that some post-Zionist thinkers would later become more aligned with the views of anti-Zionists, but adopted the former term initially to fit in with "the 'post-' era" of academic discourse" (130). Much postmodern thought disassembles master narratives to account for a plurality of voices, and a significant portion of the post-Zionist discourse revolved around a lack of justification for harsh military rule over the

Palestinians, as well as the treatment of marginalized (i.e., non Israeli Jewish) groups throughout the state's short history.

While many post-Zionist scholars looked toward mutual dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, with the hope of an Israel that could be more multicultural, the movement soon dimmed in its popularity and reach. A prime reason was due to how many fervent supporters of Israel equated the movement with anti-Zionism, even though scholars would "view their criticism of the Zionist underpinnings of the state as a necessary step" to achieve a more diverse, dialogue-filled Israel (Silberstein 5). As theorist Uri Ram wrote, the ambitions of academics to move toward a "postnational concept of Israeli citizenship" that enabled identification with Palestinians was too jarring a shift for some Jewish Israelis (64). One example of a backlash toward these ideas came in the use of the Arabic word "Nakba." That word has become more commonplace, according to Israeli studies and cinema professor Eran Kaplan, to the point where some Israeli politicians have tried to forbid the word's use (7). In 2009, right-wing politicians tried to pass a law stating that anyone commemorating the day of Israel's independence as one of mourning would be arrested. This was later revised to a halt in public funding, even though the Nakba is still widely commemorated by Palestinians throughout Israel and the Occupied Territories.

When the Second Intifada began in the autumn of 2000, the volume of inflamed Zionist rhetoric nearly drowned out much of this prior multicultural conversation. As Pappé explains, "From the viewpoint of Jewish society and its political élite, Israel had done all it could do to achieve peace but was met with extremism and intransigence" (256). The rise of what he deems "neo-Zionism," a return to right-wing unification that prioritized Israeli Jewish values above other inhabitants of the state, began to find traction during the following decade (Pappé 265). Kaplan's book about this contemporary period, *Beyond Post-Zionism*, examines whether post-Zionism's tenure as an ideology was a product of its time, and the rise of neo-Zionism will have a lasting ethos through the twenty-first century in how one can perceive the Jewish State (8). He concludes that while the ideals behind post-Zionism, especially in regard to equality and social justice, are admirable, its time may be definite (190). Moreover, despite its prominence in academic circles during the 1990s and early 2000s, post-Zionism was not popular among large swaths of Israelis beyond a certain cultural or intellectual élite (Pappé 252). As stalled peace talks continue within Israel-Palestine, it seems unlikely that this self-critical discourse will find a footing among the broader Israeli consciousness in the twenty-first century.

Despite its diminishing effect on the cultural discourse, post-Zionism found a home within various political documentaries from left-wing Israeli filmmakers. Both Pappé and Laurence J. Silberstein, in their writings on post-Zionism, refer to the controversy surrounding the televised airing of *Tekumah* (Revival) as emblematic of the insertion of post-Zionist ideas within state frameworks. *Tekumah* was a 1998 documentary series that was prepared for Israeli television to correspond with the fiftieth anniversary of the country's establishment. Although the majority of the stories within the film hued closely to Zionist ideology, some segments presented perspectives on the 1948 War and its aftermath from Palestinians and Mizrahim (Pappé 89). Even in the midst of a dominant narrative, room for alternative voices came through — and its airing ultimately provoked an apology from Limor Livnat, Israel's minister of communications, who demanded the series be taken off the air.

Films such as the ones that will be explored in this thesis challenge Zionist master narratives and deal explicitly with more relevant political discussions occurring among Israelis and Palestinians during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. More significantly, the variety and depth of stories present within these non-fiction films signal an embrace of a post-Zionist ethos beyond the decade where this movement shined most vividly among cultural scholars and academics. Avisar even defines more contemporary Israeli films as consisting of a national ideology "more conscious of its past mistakes and inherent deficiencies, and its presentation of national identity… more open to alternative types" (125). Nevertheless, while the goals for deconstructing Israeli mythology are admirable, only a marginal number of scholars consistently examine Palestinian viewpoints.

One of the central goals of this thesis is to investigate films that examine history, myth making, and the complexities of the peace process. To remain consistent and maintain balance through this investigation, there is merit to expound from a large number of Israeli and Palestinian sources. This is easier said than done, especially when various thinkers from both sides argue for greater transparency and mutual understanding yet do not do a consistent job of examining alternative views. Although one could expect a study of pluralistic film texts to employ political theories from Palestinian academics alongside the post-Zionist discourse, cultural scholars such as Livia Alexander, Nurith Gertz and George Khelifi have elucidated how Palestinian cinema is still primarily engaged with visualizing the struggle related to national independence. As later chapters will explore, issues of normalization, which attempt to promote a

relative balance between the struggles faced by Israelis and Palestinians, neglect major asymmetries of economic power and social status in the region. As a result, although the films featured in this thesis explore themes related to citizens working together with the goal of peace-building, the filmmakers also concentrate on local socio-political imbalances to create an authentic picture of contemporary life in Israel-Palestine.

The Complexities of Filming Counter-Narratives in an Israeli Space

Although post-Zionist thought wasn't as pervasive around broader Israeli and Palestinian society as it was within academic circles, the move away from master narratives did have an impact on both cultures. Just as the earliest Israeli films reflected myths from a collective national identity (Zionism), the idea of what composed Israeli identity began to shift in the late 1980s and early 1990s. To Miri Talmon and Yaron Peleg, this was a shift from a more masculine paradigm or perspective, which they wrote "had sustained the Zionist-national discourse" to "feminine aspects of mundane experiences within the private sphere and the legitimization of a personal pursuit of happiness and self-realization" (xvii). Although this would later be somewhat fractured due to the arrival of the Second Intifada, Israeli audiences could more deeply negotiate with themes of identity and community, as a result of a more diverse body of storytelling. In her book, Talmon indicates the box office success of Israeli films like *Sh'Chur* (1994) and *Turn Left at the End of the World* (2004), dramas about the Mizrahi experience that symbolized a public interest for more inclusive filmic narratives.

This demolishing of hegemony resonates with authors Rebecca L. Stein and Ted Swedenburg. In their look at contemporary Israeli and Palestinian popular culture, they rely on Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci's work around hegemony. As Gramsci explored, culture is a space where hegemonic forces work to produce and enable power, with those in dominant positions able to construct broad social and cultural norms that reflect their ideology (Stein and Swedenburg 8). Unfortunately, there are barriers to resisting ideas from the (Israeli) hegemony among various Palestinian filmmakers and authors. As filmmaker and festival programmer Annemarie Jacir chronicles, Israel's April 2002 invasion of Ramallah demolished significant Palestinian cultural centres, among the only spots in Palestine for film screenings and art exhibits (26). Beyond these limited opportunities, Israelis and Palestinians experience great difficulty

crossing borders due to extensive state security mechanisms and the challenge (among Palestinians) to secure work and travel permits, limiting exposure to opposing narratives.

This is also reflected in the regional absence of investment for training and film education in Palestine, as well as the lack of craftspeople available in the Occupied Territories to make films. Writing about the recurring difficulties of this national filmmaking, British-Palestinian filmmaker (and producer of *Route 181*) Omar Al-Qattan hypothesizes how "there will never be a truly vibrant and confident film industry [in Palestine] as long as we depend almost entirely on the erratic funding of foreign broadcasters and as long as our technical skill base is weak" (129). Nevertheless, Palestinian citizens of Israel often access national funding for their films, which can include bilateral production agreements with other countries. As film scholar Yael Friedman explains of transnational production in the Middle East, Palestinian storytellers with Israeli citizenship can raise funds for Israeli-produced films via these film treaties — an opportunity not always shared by filmmakers from Palestine or other Middle Eastern countries, where there are fewer co-production treaties (19). For instance, the four-and-a-half hour *Route 181*, made with an Israeli and Palestinian citizen of Israel collaborating behind the camera, relied on funding from Belgium, France, Germany and the United Kingdom.

The increasing transnationalism of film production in the twenty-first century is not always a tool to create common ground between Israeli and Palestinian storytellers. Friedman explains in an article about the acclaimed, Oscar-nominated 2011 documentary *Five Broken Cameras*, which is considered an Israeli-Palestinian co-production, that to be "transnational" describes "cultural and economic formations that are rarely contained by national boundaries" (18). Friedman argues through *Five Broken Cameras* that transnational co-production still favours Israel over Palestine, as the former holds treaties with 17 states while the latter has more difficulty finding co-production partners (19). She also writes that the documentary, a collaboration between an Israeli and Palestinian director, fails to properly blend the binary between the occupiers and occupied; despite the film's political message to stop the Israeli occupation, the text "locks the Palestinian into the position of the subaltern native, and aligns Israel with a European/Western position of cultural superiority" (29). This discourse reveals the implicit biases within certain co-production treaties, and creates complexities and contradictions in titles made with both Israeli and Palestinian producers.

The Chapters Ahead

This thesis will examine selected films both as extensions of post-Zionist discourse and as examples of narratives that transcend the East/West binary that has enveloped much of the scholarship on Israeli and Palestinian cinema in the late twentieth century. As examined by cultural writers like Shohat, the regional culture is often viewed through a lens of division, where Israeli films align with Western interests, while Palestinian films tread closer to the aims of Third Cinema, in themes of struggle and displacement, as well as its politicized aesthetic. Too frequently, filmmakers and cultural scholars are content to explore the two neighbouring societies as entirely separate and oppositional. This dichotomy fails to generate exchanges of dialogue and leads to deeper rifts and misunderstandings. This thesis, focusing on humanist works that contain dialogue and sometimes co-direction between Israelis and Palestinians, will explore efforts among filmmakers to look toward reconciliation between the populations.

The next chapter, entitled "Space for Protest," will analyze two films that explore approaches to activism on the part of Israelis and Palestinians, with a concentration on solidarity movements that emphasize nonviolence. Julia Bacha's 2009 documentary *Budrus*, a co-production between Palestine, Israel and the United States, and *Encounter Point* (2006), from Bacha and director Ronit Avni, are featured within this chapter. Both films are productions from Just Vision, a non-profit organization aimed at shining a light on grassroots efforts in the region that strive to end the occupation. *Budrus* explores the non-violent demonstrations from Palestinians and Israelis in the titular West Bank town where Israeli authorities threatened to build a barrier on part of the land. The film explores the widespread protests, which succeeded with hardly any use of violence on the Palestinian side, as well as the assistance of local Israeli and international demonstrators. *Encounter Point*, meanwhile, chronicles the reconciliatory efforts among relatives of terror victims in the region to talk about the conflict and create awareness of the value of nonviolence within those communities. The chapter will investigate the ways that the Just Vision filmmakers avert the stereotyped images of the conflict that permeate through Western media outlets. Furthermore, both films adopt post-Zionist traits through their depiction of peace-building efforts and defiance of harmful master narratives.

The third chapter, "Space for Travel," will elaborate on one of the main themes of contemporary Palestinian documentary: mobility. Land and territorial ownership remain a key part of the power struggle between Israelis and Palestinians, with the latter encountering

numerous barriers in their daily travel and existence. Several documentaries examined here contain scenes where Israeli drivers use their easy access around the state to help others while protesting against the restrictions imposed on Palestinians. These non-fiction titles include *Promises* (2001), *Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel* (2003), and *Zero Degrees of Separation* (2005). Within these films are pointed critiques of the "architecture of occupation," a phrase popularized by Israeli intellectual Eyal Weizman to describe the overwhelming State power over the Palestinian people. Whereas various Palestinian films emphasize the immobility of citizens living within this controversial architecture, these titles examine efforts of activists, sometimes accompanying Israelis, who are granted more freedom to travel.

The final chapter, "Space for Dialogue," will focus primarily on sequences of encounter and confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians, most notably in the Oscar-nominated documentary *Promises*. With little academic or film studies work looking at moments of discussion between the citizens of Israel and Palestine, there is an opportunity to examine the thematic, structural and aesthetic values of these pivotal moments. First-person interviews with the filmmakers and/or producers behind these ventures will be a pivotal resource during this section, wherein we will explore how these significant moments of dialogue and debate came to fruition. Through these moments, filmmakers make the audience a witness to local efforts toward mutual understanding, while giving screen time to marginalized voices and promoting the potential durability for a redemptive future.

Chapter 2: Space for Protest

On the big screen, representations of Israel and the Palestinian Territories — the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem — are often mapped out in different spatial and aesthetic dimensions. The depictions of these geopolitically intertwined citizens, often framed inhabiting separate realms despite co-existing within close proximities, reflect an Israeli dominance over the territory that situates the Palestinian as the "Other." As examined by cultural scholar Lina Khatib, the cinematic representation of space in areas around the Middle East connects to power imbalances within the region (15). Israel's close allegiance with the United States means that, for various Israeli features and documentaries, the relationship between Israelis and the Other, often vis-à-vis the Palestinian, functions closely to the way that Hollywood orients Middle Eastern space. Khatib explains of this American perspective: "The different camera shots in turn construct the Other space in various forms: as an object, as a target, as wilderness, as an urban jungle, and as a barrier/border to be crossed" (19). This onscreen relationship rarely allows the Palestinian to be a subject with a voice or point-of-view, while Israeli filmmakers routinely adapt the Western gaze, one that objectifies the Other and penetrates the space. As a result, the lopsided power asymmetry of twenty-first century Israeli-Palestinian relations moves beyond the sites of conflict and catapults onto the screen.

In its investigation of post-Zionist texts that transcend the typical attributes of mainstream Israeli-Palestinian cinema, this thesis is divided into three main chapters — all linked by the interest in creating new spaces onscreen. This chapter will focus primarily on two films that acknowledge the significance for nonviolent activism among Palestinians and Israelis. *Budrus* (2009) and *Encounter Point* (2006), documentaries developed and distributed by the non-profit organization Just Vision and directed by Brazilian filmmaker Julia Bacha and Israeli-Canadian Ronit Avni, advocate for a model of dialogue and peaceful demonstration in the region. As both films examine, this nonviolent approach can work effectively to bridge communities on the many sides of the Green Line, the de facto border that demarcates the space between Israel and Palestine. These titles investigate the vitality of land and agriculture among the Palestinian population and testify to the example of beleaguered people on both sides — Palestinians fighting to save their land from separation barriers erected by Israeli forces, and relatives of suicide bombing victims in Israel coming together to better comprehend the Palestinians.

Both documentaries attempt to harmonize the way that space is depicted within films about Israel and Palestine, eschewing Western cinematic conventions for a more accurate spatial representation. These titles from the Just Vision repertoire honour the efforts of peace movements that sprung into popularity before and during the Second Intifada period. As visual signifiers of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict emanating from American and European mainstream media coverage have proven to be slanted and lack context, *Budrus* and *Encounter Point* resist these sensationalized images and reveal the peaceful efforts that fail to build awareness among Western publics. The documentaries present Israeli news broadcasts to provide a glimpse of the official state discourse while illuminating the separation between these media enterprises and the events on the ground explored in the films. The filmmakers' close proximity to various interview subjects, such as activists from Palestine and Israel, work to enable a multiplicity of voices and further destabilize the official narratives. By focusing on this alternative space, the documentaries foreground efforts toward co-existence while bringing these actions of peace-building into a more public arena.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first will focus on the Western media misrepresentation of the conflict, moving from the ways that press outlets have failed to document the region's social, spatial, and political complexities to how *Budrus* and *Encounter Point* avert those conventions into a richer, more even-handed representation of Israeli and Palestinian power dynamics. In the second half, this thesis will look at actual peace-building approaches that have broken down barriers and united Palestinians and Israelis, while using the selected films as emblematic of how this nonviolent activism can initialize dialogue and foster change. Between the two sections, a common thread remains: the geography of space featured and foregrounded in these films, frequently positioned at ground level, broadens our understanding of the ways that grassroots efforts can spread, efficiently, among Palestinian and Israeli actors.

Media Misrepresentation of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The Just Vision productions examined in this chapter work as counterpoints to coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict within the American and British mainstream media. As defined by journalist and former *Jerusalem Post* reporter Marda Dunsky, who wrote extensively on the representation of the conflict in American news during the first five years of the twenty-first

century, the term "mainstream media" refers to "outlets that are in harmony with the prevailing direction of influence in the culture at large" (9). This distinction applies to news programs and print publications with a broad audience, such as *60 Minutes* and the *New York Times*. As Dunsky concluded in her investigation, while American news stories about the conflict are frequently displayed within these broadcasts and newspapers, historical knowledge of the Palestinian refugee crisis and the reminder of the linkages between Israel and U.S. funding is often absent. In her book, *Pens and Swords: How the American Mainstream Media Report the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, Dunsky further outlines how a dense history of conflict since Israel's establishment in 1948, and competing ideologies and perspectives among voices from both sides, ensures that many Western media outlets do not have the space or time to elaborate on broader social and historical contexts. As she writes, "the idea that U.S. aid to Israel has actually helped underwrite the cost of its occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem… is not likely to get much if any consideration" (11). Therefore, it is difficult for audiences to properly evaluate the political manoeuvring by the Israeli army and Palestinian fighters, since notable material is often absent or misrepresented from these broadcast and print stories.

According to Dunsky's research, as well as the findings of the Glasgow Media Unit, organized by communications professor Greg Philo, American and British coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is much more skewed toward highlighting the injustices done to Israel than news coverage on the same subject from networks in the Middle East, such as Al-Jazeera, which often elaborates on the treatment of Palestinians. Dunsky credits this to American foreign correspondence reporting on the U.S. Middle East policy, which she regards as "tilted in [favour] of Israel," as well as the lack of prominent pro-Palestinian sources and advocacy groups within the United States (115). When there were stories about the expansion of Israeli settlements — a common news item during the years of the Sharon administration — Dunsky reveals that very few of them outlined how continued U.S. economic aid toward Israel affected these policies. Meanwhile, much of the journalism emphasized the viewpoints of Israelis, with "Palestinian sources… rarely quoted directly, and when they are, they usually are not individuals in positions of authority" (Dunsky 148). While examining the media reportage on the legality of Israeli settlement expansion, Dunsky looked at eleven news stories from seven major newspapers. From the various reports, she found that none of the pieces connected these settlements to American foreign investment, while the majority of the sources in these stories were Israeli (151). With

minimal access to Palestinian perspectives, the resulting coverage inferred that Palestinian violence was the main obstacle to peace. This news coverage inadequately frames the challenges faced by Israelis and Palestinians interested in mitigating the building of settlements and ending the occupation.

The limits to Palestinian narratives within American news coverage also reflects the systemic stereotyping within U.S. films set in foreign regions where the landscape of the Other comes through in condescending ways. This objectification of the Other in American films, "essentialized to serve the American political agenda," connects with the marginalization of stories that do not align with U.S. interests in the Middle East (Khatib 32). Palestinian intellectual Edward Said also criticized the lack of news coverage on Israeli war crimes during and after the 1982 war in Lebanon. In his article "Permission to Narrate," Said wrote that Zionist narratives, uncritical of Israel's policies, continue dto flow through the American press, akin to the premises of U.S. foreign aid packages given to Israel (248). Meanwhile, in the documentary *Peace, Propaganda & the Promised Land*, which examines the framing of the Israel-Palestine conflict in the American news media, journalist Alisa Solomon voices her problems with the structural inequalities that distort the media representation of the conflict. She says in the film that, "the dearth of reporting, the absence of images, the lack of analysis, the void of voices, of describing the experience of Palestinians… is so vast that people have no idea that an occupation is going on." Paired with a dwindling number of stories about Israeli protests against the occupation, like the ones featured in *Budrus*, Western journalistic coverage has failed to adequately acknowledge Palestinian narratives.

These gaps in awareness and knowledge explain the results of a research study from Philo's Glasgow Media Unit, which explored the impressions that television audiences get from broadcast news coverage on the BBC and other mainstream outlets on the reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The group concluded that "many people had little understanding of the reasons for the conflict and its origins," and this was connected to the lack of relevant context provided in these news stories (Philo et al 134). For instance, from a research sample of 300 viewers, the Media Unit found that 79 per cent did not know that the Israelis occupied the Palestinian Territories. A conclusion for these gaps in historical knowledge may have been connected with a lack of prominent Palestinian voices on television and a lack of proximity to those narratives. Alongside news coverage that used harsher language to describe Palestinian

violence against Israelis than the latter's military expansion, many institutions broadcasted pieces suggesting that Israelis were more consistently under the threat of violence and terror than Palestinians. This framing of the conflict extended to language, as the Media Unit's research found that the word 'terrorist' was used to describe Palestinian militants but not Israeli soldiers, revealing an allegiance to the latter side (Philo et al 142). As the Media Unit also discovered, "Words such as 'murder,' 'atrocity,' 'lynching' and 'savage cold-blooded killing' were only used to describe Israeli deaths but not those of Palestinians" (Philo et al 144). Therefore, the coverage more coherently reflected the Israeli need to respond to Palestinian aggression.

The research efforts from the aforementioned media scholars and journalists have helped to spread an understanding of the miscues that enable public misunderstanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As a counterpoint, *Budrus* and *Encounter Point* make an enhanced effort to broadcast Palestinian voices and humanize the dimension of their struggle against Israeli occupation. Whereas various Western foreign correspondents lack the journalistic will to go into refugee camps and local villages, the Just Vision films navigate these Palestinian spaces without retrieving stereotypical, Orientalized conventions.

One of the key ways the Just Vision documentarians evade cruder conventions of Palestinian life is through questioning and criticizing the media representation of the conflict. In *Budrus*, the filmmakers observe the scenery of the mountainside where the titular village rests as well as the thriving conversations between Palestinian families within domestic spaces. *Budrus* avoids sensationalistic images of stone-throwing Palestinians until Israeli authorities become aggressive toward the end of the film; instead, the presence of calm demonstrators, including an instance of one representative holding a rainbow-coloured sign misspelling the word "peace," reveals the passion among the townspeople to renounce violent approaches to the conflict. Furthermore, the documentary often refers to the olive trees that the Israeli military threatens to uproot, an apt metaphor for the tree as a source of life and nourishment within the community. When one resident hears of the decision to uproot the trees, he responds that since "one raises [a tree] as one raises a child," without this sacred agricultural zone, a feeling of hopelessness and death could permeate through the area.

At the end of the documentary, when the village descends into violence between a few rowdy Palestinian citizens and Israeli forces, we see some of the former throwing rocks to contest

the siege. Those rocks recall a pivotal weapon of resistance from the First Intifada period, cueing viewers to comprehend the similarities between that uprising and the continued consequences of the Israeli occupation. Notably, the study from the Glasgow Media Unit found that news reports (from the early months of the Second Intifada) would often note of the Palestinian "onslaught" without signifying the rationales for their hatred and aggression (Philo et al 141). This rock throwing, albeit a minuscule part of the demonstrations in Budrus, could have been a harmful synecdoche for Palestinian violence if these images had accompanied reportage of the comparably brief clashes between the two sides.

Frequently in these two documentaries, the depiction of Israeli armed forces is a scathing criticism of national military policy, while the films also broadcast members of an Israeli populace ambivalent to the occupation. In *Budrus*, we hear IDF spokesperson Doron Spielman reiterating the reason for the establishment of a barrier in Budrus: security. As Spielman elaborates, "A nonviolent protest is not going to stop the ultimate way of the fence… because Israeli men, women and children need to go to sleep at night." Meanwhile, the Israeli border police are often shown as ineffective at quelling the demonstrators while eager to lash back at the Palestinian (and sometimes Israeli) protestors. In one of the film's more chilling scenes, Israeli border policewoman Yasmine Levy explains that when the army failed to get the demonstrators to move away from the bulldozed area, the soldiers had to resort to "traditional crowd dispersal methods." This escalation of violence and brutality, which includes firing tear gas into crowds and whipping defenseless Palestinian women, arrives moments after an international contingent (speaking English) arrives on the scene, announcing that due to the march being peaceful, "There is no need to use violence against us!" The presence of Israeli spokespeople to defend the actions of the soldiers in *Budrus* also speaks to a larger trend within the country: of an efficient public relations apparatus that has experience talking to the press (Philo et al 136). Meanwhile, the calm and discipline that Spielman and Levy express while recounting the actions of Israeli soldiers reflects their respect for the national duty of compulsory military service.

In both documentaries, Israeli television news broadcasts are used to show the disparity between the mainstream media's contextualization of current events with the documentary footage compiled by Just Vision's creative teams. The documentaries portray an Israeli media that is content to broadcast the opinions of non-violent activists who speak of alternative paths

toward ending violence and the occupation; however, the head anchor or guests on the program often subdue or ignore the activists' viewpoints.

For instance, in *Encounter Point*, Robi Damelin, the mother of a fallen Israeli soldier and a representative for the Bereaved Families Forum, is first shown speaking on the phone with the host of a local English-language radio program. (The Bereaved Families Forum is a reconciliation group for Palestinians and Israelis whose family members were victims of terror attacks.) In this scene, the host gives Damelin the time to espouse her views about engaging in dialogue to help prevent further death, sadness, and trauma. As she explains in this interview, "I don't think anybody could ever understand what it is to lose a child, and these [Palestinian] people who I meet share the same pain." In comparison, her appearance on an Israeli news program later in the documentary yields less fulfilling results. Referring to the sniper that killed David, Damelin's son, the male news anchor seems incredulous that the mother has no anger toward the murderer. Despite Damelin's retort that she is more interested in asking why her son had to serve in the Occupied Territories, the anchor seems satisfied to end the interview segment with the conclusion that David's murderer was never caught. By finishing the story in this way, the news anchor diminishes Damelin's message and suggests that only true justice can happen if Palestinians are held accountable for their violent actions.

This moment echoes another one from *Encounter Point*, when Yitzhak Frankenthal, the founder of the Bereaved Families Forum, is asked by an Israeli news anchor about Palestinians celebrating the martyrdom of their children. Instead of listening to the answer — Frankenthal probes, "Perhaps we should ask ourselves, How did we push an entire population to laud and praise suicide bombers?" — the anchor responds by minimizing how Palestinian terror could be due to Israeli state policy and military bombardment, but is instead due to a "movement within the Arab or Muslim population." That brief news clip ends with Frankenthal shaking his head, as he realizes his efforts to speak on behalf of reconciliation will have a marginal impact on the program's audience. The appalling gap between the solutions provided by the Israeli activists and the news judgments from trusted anchors is a striking example of why it is difficult for stories of nonviolence and peace-building to break through to a wider audience in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, in *Budrus*, although television news coverage is used less frequently, it does reveal the biases and perspectives of the official Israeli discourse. The documentary shows, on more than one occasion, Israel's deputy defense minister, Ze'ev Boim, expressing his reaction to

the demonstrations against the construction of separation barriers between Israel and the West Bank. In Boim's first televised appearance from the film, he communicates to the audience that the "strength of the demonstrations is increasing." Later, upon the arrival of foreign and Israeli activists to the townspeople's side — shown shortly after Israeli protestors sit in front of a bulldozer, with various news cameras hovering around this act of defiance — Boim criticizes these Israeli activists, saying they should be put on trial for their allegedly treasonous actions. Toward the end of *Budrus*, the filmmakers return to the slick newscast theme from these prior segments in a sharp cut from a sequence of Israeli soldiers taking out their batons to hit and assault protestors. The jaunty sound cue of the news program's main theme is a disturbing way to emphasize the distance between those who sit behind a desk to report the news and those sacrificing their lives to demonstrate for an end to occupation. In this scene, the head anchor's opening sentence places the responsibility for the commotion on "clashing" Palestinians, leaving little room to explore the reasons for violence between Israeli forces and local activists.

The Israeli mainstream media coverage in *Budrus* emphasizes that the Palestinians have started a sequence of events and the Israeli forces are merely reacting in self-defence. This reflects the influence of Israeli public relations, which, as the Glasgow Media Unit found, "prefers to stress the attacks and bombings made upon it… rather than to have the legality of its own actions subject to public debate" (Philo et al 136). The harshness of the news anchors and their simplistic conclusions about the Palestinians reflects how media portraits of the Muslim world, in the words of Karim H. Karim, "are drowned out by the constant din of the [dominant] discourses that capitalizes on the store of negative images to present 'Islam' as a primary obstacle to global peace" (Dunsky 10). This closely relates to an overwhelming absence of Palestinian narratives shown from Western media outlets, which consequently try (and often fail) to comprehensively cover the conflict.

The Strength of Nonviolent Movements and Peace-Building in *Budrus* and *Encounter Point*

Over the past decade, researchers and scholars have analyzed the progressive tactics of activist groups working in Israel and Palestine. Among two of the more heralded books to outline the methods used in these movements are by humanitarian and educator Donna J. Perry and political science and international affairs professor Maia Carter Hallward. For her analysis of the organization Combatants for Peace (CFP), Perry spoke with Israelis and Palestinians about their

urge to join in a nonviolent struggle against occupation and the approaches used to initialize dialogue between the group members. (Her research was compiled into a book, *The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Movement: Combatants for Peace*.) Similarly, Hallward spent more than a year living among and interviewing members of seven activist groups in the region, from the checkpoint-stationed women of Machsom Watch to Al Mubadara, a local initiative that harshly criticizes the role of the Palestinian Authority in doing little to improve economic and social life in the West Bank. (*Struggling for a Just Peace: Israeli and Palestinian Activism in the Second Intifada* is Hallward's book on the subject.)

Perry and Hallward begin the recaps of their investigations by outlining theoretical frameworks that can comprehend the success of these small yet burgeoning movements. Perry explores "transcendent pluralism" to understand the decision-making among Israeli and Palestinian members of CFP. The term refers to addressing "problems of human devaluation through the identification and implementation of strategies by which people can respond to one another more fully as human beings" (Perry 11). In other words, she was interested in examining the ways humans understand each other to the extent that they treat those from the other side with dignity. Meanwhile, Hallward's approach also relates to the need for Israelis and Palestinians to recognize the goodness within a supposed rival to ensure that actions of nonviolence succeed in word and action. Her intention for peace-building goes beyond the idea that peace equates the mere absence of war; instead, it relates to a more advanced "sociopolitical transformation… that looks at postagreement efforts to reduce violence" (52). While nonviolence does not always initiate the need to create viable paths to peace, the lack of combat reflects a societal impetus to leverage change beyond mere demonstration. As Hallward writes, "Palestinians affirm their desire for peace but clarify that their immediate focus is on justice and freedom" (57). The author explains that to talk of peace is unnecessary since that concept is difficult for Palestinians to embrace until there are seismic changes within the current Israeli occupation.

Hallward continues by exploring how the seven groups she investigated championed three common models for peace-building purposes. The first, institution building, relates to how formal changes can be more effective with an institutional body to regulate and organize these movements. The second, awareness raising, focuses on disseminating information to propel people into taking action while appealing to a sense of moral goodwill. The third, constructive confrontation, enforces the use of nonviolent action to reduce and prevent violence. As Hallward

notes, despite the aim of the latter model to reduce murder and oppression, "it is no guarantee… that those in power will respond accordingly" (74). As the end of *Budrus* reveals, violence and provocation by a small number of rebellious Palestinians, in response to Israel's military escalation near the Green Line, resulted in a retaliation that also undermined the strategies of nonviolence that had been the key to the resilience of local demonstrations.

Within the two films examined in this chapter, one major development in the success of this nonviolent activism among Israelis and Palestinians concerns this constructive confrontation, as locals break down barriers to ensure that there is a diversity of views between the two populations. This confrontation, Hallward elaborates, seeks to rearrange power relations and undercut the control of Israel's military regime through entirely nonviolent means (98). This approach is best epitomized in *Budrus*. In the documentary, Palestinians from the titular town band together to resist the arrival of Israeli bulldozers, which aim to uproot olive trees — a provider of major agricultural and economic importance to the townspeople — so that authorities can put up a separation barrier. The film's main Palestinian proponents for nonviolence, such as Ayed Morrar, are driven by a duty to live in a place with a viable economy and an atmosphere where children can be raised in relative calm. In an article about *Budrus*, Hallward explains how the Palestinian tactic demonstrated in the film, "to actively struggle for their rights rather than sit back and passively accept Israeli control," is a vital effort to determine the destiny and autonomy of the people (65).

The usefulness of a common meeting ground, as emphasized in *Budrus* and *Encounter Point*, is connected to the aim of trying to flatten power dynamics between Israelis and Palestinians. For instance, Palestinians can be suspicious of speaking with Israelis who have served in the military, a compulsory component for many within Israel and an institution that has done much to dehumanize the Palestinian population. A major obstacle to ensure discussion between both parties is the Israeli military's role in facilitating a system of surveillance and authority. Nevertheless, a section from the middle of *Budrus* highlights the co-operation between Israeli and Palestinian activists. The filmmakers witness a large contingent of Israelis crossing the border into the West Bank to campaign against the uprooting of Budrus' olives trees. In one scene, Israeli citizens step to the front of the protest to try to reason with the soldiers. As one of the Israeli soldiers explains in an interview with the filmmakers, "Because they were Jews, [the army] couldn't use force against them." As Hallward explores in her book, members of the

activist group Ta'ayush found that one way to empower the members of its group was through in-tandem efforts, such as demonstrations, among Palestinians and Israelis. For instance, one Israeli member of the organization was drawn to how Ta'ayush would position Israeli Jews alongside Palestinian villagers against the soldiers, highlighting the strength of their nonviolent resolve (100). In these films, the presence of Palestinians in an area occupied by Israelis, and vice-versa, helps to destabilize the concept of boundaries that have been installed and maintained by Israel. Still, it is difficult for joint demonstrations to occur in places that are too far from the Green Line. As Hallward explains from her findings, "boundary or frontier regions continued to be the place where most joint work occurred," with the separation barriers between Israel and the West Bank among one of the most common sites for protest (147-8). Nevertheless, the filmmakers acknowledge how a space for communication between the two sides can begin to bridge the gap between the Israeli occupier and the Palestinian subject.

There are clear connections between the conversations held by Hallward and Perry and the positive effects of joint nonviolent activism present within *Budrus*. In the documentary, Israeli activist Kobi Snitz remarks that the titular village was one of the first sites of cooperative demonstrations against the Israeli army. Moreover, two of the film's protagonists, Morrar and his daughter, 15-year-old Iltazem, are stunned by the integration of Israelis within the packs of communal demonstrators. As the young woman says in the documentary, of the Israelis, "Some of them think we should live together in peace… Not all of them are soldiers, they don't really hate us." The goodwill and enthusiasm of the locals, emphasized by the absence of scenes involving tensions between Palestinian and Israeli activists, is offset by the chilliness of the Israeli army as their members confront former soldiers (who are now activists) on Palestinian ground.

Meanwhile, one of the figures interviewed in the documentary is Ahmed Awwad, a member of Hamas, a group whose military wing is often associated with coordinating rocket fire attacks and suicide bombings against Israelis. Awwad speaks of the strangeness of standing next to Israelis during these protests, and the filmmakers show him greeting these demonstrators with pride. In an article about *Budrus*' depiction of nonviolence, Hallward explains that moments of Palestinian villagers watching left-wing Israeli activists support their resistance effort ensures "the dynamics of the conflict shift from a competition based on ethno-national background to one based on different conceptions of rights" (64). One stereotype the film quashes is how Hamas'

ideologies are closely connected to armed resistance, as Awwad's presence in the film shows a resolve among some members of that group to participate in non-violent activism and communicate with Israelis (Hallward 65). As the film showcases Awwad's approval of this assistance, it provides a message that there can be harmony even between aggressive Palestinian and pacifist Israeli regimes.

Meanwhile, the foregrounding of Israeli activists arriving to Budrus to assist with the demonstrations — aiding the Palestinians with their knowledge of Hebrew and the legal limits of Israeli Defense Force actions — ensures that Israeli forces must contend with internal criticism and confrontation. The disparity between mainstream Israel and the left-wing demonstrators eager to dismantle new forms of state oppression in this village reflects the schism along the political spectrum during the 1990s, when post-Zionist thought was at its most electric in cultural and academic spheres. Despite the documentary's release after the wave of post-Zionist scholarship, which enabled Israelis to promote a more pluralist relationship with Palestinians and other marginalized groups, the film shows the endurance of these values in the twenty-first century.

Perry's interviews with members of CFP revealed that many Palestinians, from a young age, associated Israel with military might. Yet, many questioned violence as a worthwhile strategy against the Israeli army. One participant she interviewed felt that a Palestinian working toward peace "was actually perceived as more dangerous to Israel than a Palestinian using violence, because he believed that violence gave the Israeli authorities an excuse to perpetuate military actions against the Palestinians" (35). Furthermore, when exploring the ways that CFP members found commonality, Perry found that storytelling was an element to encourage personal reflection. As she outlines, storytelling "involves not only relating the external experiences with regard to the conflict but also involves the interior response… for the individual person" (87). At these group meetings, various Israelis found a space to communicate self-doubts about their society's mistreatment of Palestinians. Having a window to speak with the Other helped to undermine negative stereotypes and remove cultural differences existing between these groups.

In *Encounter Point*, grieving Israelis and Palestinians try to overcome their fears of their neighbours to respond to vicious cycles of violence permeating through the societies. These circles of support are sites for families from both sides to recognize the pain of the Other, a

process that reflects the value of storytelling that Perry outlines in her research. These meetings and dialogues of the aforementioned Bereaved Families Forum take place inside a Jerusalem hotel, one initially introduced after a scene with Damelin asking, in voice-over, what she should do with the pain of her loss. (During this prelude to the Forum meeting, the camera lingers on her car's rear-view mirror, a symbol for the mother's decision to leave her own trauma and confusion in the past as she approaches a space for clarity and understanding in Jerusalem.) At these meetings, the camera captures interactions from within these circles of dialogue from a height that aligns with the seated participants, a stylistic choice that prioritizes the confessional aspect of storytelling, mirroring the approach of a standard talking-head interview. During these brief moments of discussion captured on film, the eyes of the narrating Forum member keeps finding the camera, further enveloping their appeal beyond the circle, to the audience of the documentary.

One of the film's most powerful instances of shared discussion occurs after two sequences where we hear a first-person story of tragedy. The first concerns Israeli war veteran Tzvika Shahak, whose daughter, Bat-Chen, was murdered in an attack at Tel Aviv's Dizengoff Centre in 1996. This recounting of grief and trauma leads into a Palestinian story, where George Sa'adeh discusses the death of his 12-year-old daughter, Christine, by Israeli militants who opened fire at the family car. These two stories, narrated primarily from the perspective of the grieving fathers, have some aesthetic differences; although both begin with wailing sirens, the attack in Tel Aviv is shot from a bird's-eye view, from the perspective of a television news camera setting the scene via helicopter, while the carnage in Bethlehem is shown from ground level and receives a more verité, handheld treatment. The funeral processions that accompany these stories are also starkly different. At Bat-Chen's funeral, a large crowd stands silent and hunched as they listen to a Hebrew prayer of mourning. Prior to Christine's service, though, there is a widespread march among Palestinians, as men and women chant, "The voice of Christine is calling us," and civilians carry the slain woman's tomb. Whereas Bat-Chen is an innocent victim mourned by many, Christine is a martyr who invigorates her local community to march and shout for an end to occupation. Yet, despite the formal and processional variances, the moment of dialogue between the two fathers at the Forum is a calming step forward, with both men proclaiming their discussions useful. As Shahak explains, "If we who lost what is most precious can talk to each other and look forward to a better future, then everyone else must do so, too."

In another collaboration featured in *Encounter Point*, we meet Rutie Atsmon and Aziz Tanji, an Israeli woman and Palestinian man at the helm of Windows. Windows is a joint organization that publishes a children's magazine in Arabic and Hebrew for the good of Israeli and Palestinian youths. Atsmon and Tanji are hoping to meet to assemble the magazine in the West Bank town of Irtah, a short walk from the Israeli border. (Tanji is unable to go into Israel, as their government denied his permit for entry.) However, *Encounter Point* spends little time with this meeting of creative minds; instead, the focus of this section of the documentary is a darkly comic detour, as Atsmon and her Israeli cohort of writers struggle to find a suitable entry point into the West Bank. Using a telephone as a connector between the parties, the documentary cuts between Tanji's impatient room of Palestinians and a disbelieving Atsmon and her Israeli crew as they try repeatedly to arrange a route to the meeting. The majority of this sequence looks at the difficulty of Israeli mobility into the West Bank: what makes this ironic sequence so fascinating is how it inverts a common trope of the local cinema, of the navigational difficulties of Palestinians in the West Bank, onto the Israelis.

The numerous checkpoints that Israeli authorities set up before and during the Second Intifada have, more prominently, physically barred or significantly impeded the movement of Palestinians in the West Bank. Beyond the ramifications of these borders on the Palestinian psyche, these roadblocks have also made it more difficult for Palestinians and Israelis to find a common place to meet. Scholars such as Shohini Chaudhuri, Kay Dickinson, and Anat Zanger have explored numerous documentaries about these obstacles made in the early twenty-first century that criticize extenuating Israeli control and occupation. Yet, it is rare to find films that show the limits of Israeli autonomy within the Palestinian territories, even though various Israeli laws prohibit its citizenry from entering certain Palestinian areas (Hallward 63). While checkpoints and roadblocks have limited Palestinian travel, affecting the social, economic, and psychical lives of local inhabitants, this architecture also has an impact on peace activism. Regardless, as Hallward adds, "it can sometimes (ironically) be easier for Israeli activists to access Palestinians towns throughout the West Bank (via settler roads) than it is for Palestinians from other towns" (64). Nevertheless, despite an ultimate encounter between the Palestinian and Israeli members of the Windows crew, the transportation difficulties depicted in the film prove just how tenuous these occasions of conversation and dialogue can be. It is telling that, when the

Israelis finally arrive in Irtah, some of the Palestinians present in scenes filmed earlier in the day have abandoned the meeting space.

As Perry states in her book, "even Israelis and Palestinians who desire to meet and build peace need to surmount systemic barriers in order to do so" (94). With each precarious journey into the opposing territory, there is a chance for the efforts toward dialogue and reconciliation to disband. Both Hallward and Perry note the asymmetric power dynamics between Palestinians and Israelis, especially when the former feel much less autonomous than the latter. As Michel Warschawski, the Israeli founder of activist group The Alternative Information Center, addresses, "Palestinians are part of the oppressed society, of the society which is dominated by my own society. They are much more at risk, and we should never ignore this reality… If you're not aware that we're in an uneven situation, then we will have pure Israeli domination" (Hallward 110). Moreover, finding a common place to meet can be difficult for organizations that are disparately organized within Israel and the Occupied Territories. The central location and proximity to a large Palestinian population ultimately ensures that Jerusalem becomes an important meeting place to accommodate a large number of people from both areas, such as the Bereaved Families Forum. However, due to the barriers for citizens living in the West Bank and Gaza that prohibit their passage to Jerusalem, the Palestinians that attend these meetings are, in all likelihood, a small sample of those who may want to listen and talk with Israelis.

One prominent activist group Hallward examines in her book is Machsom Watch, organized by women who monitor the military checkpoints with cameras to document potential abuses in the spaces. ("Machsom" is the Hebrew word for barrier, although it is also used by Palestinians to refer to the checkpoints.) The witness-bearing organization began with Neta Efrony, a retired documentary filmmaker for Israeli broadcast television. As Michael Riordon notes in his book on Israeli and Palestinian peace activists, *Our Way to Fight*, Machsom Watch limits membership to women, "on the assumption that Israeli men were more likely to provoke the soldiers" (56). In Riordon's interview with Efrony, the activist explains that Palestinians want her to film the arguments and clashes between soldiers and civilians, as proof of the circumstances that Palestinians encounter daily (62). The recordings of these checkpoints are published on the organization's website, which ensures that local and international media channels can have access to this footage.

The presence of these activists at military checkpoints integrates women within a typically male-dominated environment. Anat Zanger has examined the significance of gender and power dynamics when women directors set their documentaries in army settings that are dominated by masculine mores. Zanger considers those films as an interference with "the sacred Israeli discourse," which suggests the masculine realm (58). As the film scholar notes, just as borders exist to separate people from different territories, the presence of a feminine gaze functions as a kind of border, with the directors intruding on the gender-based values of the space (70). This awareness of the power of female voices also resonates with post-Zionist thinkers, who wanted the narratives of more marginalized groups to be salvaged, redeemed, and placed "into the national narrative… [and] in the cultural canon" (Pappé 147). In his chapter on the emergence of post-Zionism in Israeli academia, Pappé insists that the presence of more feminist scholars pushed forward an interest of anti-militarism into the national discourse (151). These themes of objecting to violence would register with the titles developed by Just Vision, which focus on the role of female Palestinian and Israeli activists, and feature women directors and producers behind-the-scenes.

Even if neither Bacha nor Avni documents a direct dialogue between members of the Israeli army and Palestinian demonstrators, both are drawn to the sight of Palestinian women confronting and attempting to overcome a mostly male regiment of Israeli soldiers in *Budrus*. In the documentary, the filmmakers show the efforts of Palestinian women as they help to combat the presence of Israeli bulldozers on their land. If female solidarity and strength come through in Bacha's film, it is with Iltazem and the collective of young Palestinian women who demonstrate with passion. The 15-year-old realizes that "there wasn't a single woman" marching with the men who initiated these protests. Soon after this statement, local girls are using their gender defiantly to push back against an army that would be less likely to use violent force against women than men. At one of the film's most galvanizing moments, Iltazem jumps in a hole in front of an Israeli bulldozer — an action that recalls the iconic photograph of the man standing in front of Chinese military tanks at Tiananmen Square — and is soon joined by her Palestinian comrades. This moment of triumph comes after a sequence of Palestinians and Israelis — and the film crew, trying to duck away from noxious gases the soldiers fire to quell the gathering of protesters — rushing toward the bulldozers in an attempt to halt the work of the Israeli authorities. Iltazem's action, filmed from a distance due to this aggression blocking the documentary crew from

approaching the demolition, is foregrounded through slowing this moment, pausing, and zooming in to a stationary still of the teenager inside of the hole.

To emphasize Iltazem's individual pursuit for constructive confrontation, the filmmakers abandon the sharpness of the image but prolong the moment to express the clarity of the young woman's nonviolent feat. In an article about the film, Hallward states that Iltazem's action was "in contrast with Western assumptions of covered Muslim women" as submissive and passive (64). Iltazem was the first woman, Bacha revealed in an interview with *NPR*, to break through with the Israeli border police. As the filmmaker reports, the teenager "couldn't understand why, since the First Intifada, the role of women had gone into the background in Palestinian resistance… she wanted to take responsibility." This reflects Iltazem's enthusiasm in the documentary, where she expresses her happiness at continuing with the examples of Palestinian resistance set by several generations from her family. The focus on the presence of women at the front lines of these demonstrations in *Budrus* deconstructs the idea that Palestinian resistance is an overwhelmingly male contribution.

Conclusion: The Virtues of Just Vision

Just Vision's efforts to enlighten audiences about the positive effects of dialogue and nonviolent demonstration to end the Israeli occupation were momentarily effective, although largely forgotten amidst a continually re-activated and reformatted Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The examples of resistance and resilience within *Budrus* and *Encounter Point* are emotionally resonant, yet these nuanced films remain a small part of cinematic discourse among films about the Middle East. Nevertheless, these two films find an important space that rejects the binaries of East and West that defines much of the discourse about cinematic representation within Israel-Palestine. The filmmakers routinely engage with the conceptions of scholars such as Hallward and Perry to realize with authenticity the ways that Palestinians and Israelis have worked together, while combatting misconceptions that both sides are doing too little to work for an end to the occupation.

Budrus and *Encounter Point* portray potent examples of teamwork among Israelis and Palestinians, examine the virtues of co-existence, and try to promote an impetus for deeper social and cultural collision. With a more inclusive collection of voices commenting on the recent geopolitical situation — including Palestinian women, often misrepresented as passive entities,

and level-headed activists from both populations — the films bring to light a more nuanced and critical take on the conflict. Meanwhile, the documentaries' releases in the early twenty-first century resist the perception that the post-Zionist movement entirely disbanded during the years of the Second Intifada. The titles explored in this chapter express an enthusiasm to return to these significant conversations about social progress and the treatment of marginalized Palestinians.

Regardless, inextricably linked to these films of peace-building and protest is the inequity of space between Israeli citizens and settlers, and the Palestinians whom they occupy. Israel's installation of separation barriers to obstruct Palestinian life while encroaching on local habitants, for instance, have thwarted resistance efforts while creating an environment of increased hostility between the two sides of the conflict. These obstacles, literally and figuratively, destroy roads that could lead to peaceful cooperation, as Palestinian populations in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem still remain largely dependent on international aid (mostly, from American and European governments) for water, food and shelter.

Although the Just Vision films contain a few sequences that examine the circumstances of mobility, other documentaries explore these border impediments more explicitly and operate with a more polemical purpose. The following chapter will examine three films — *Promises* (2001), *Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel* (2003), and *Zero Degrees of Separation* (2005) — that explore past and current restrictions within travel in Israel and Palestine. Instead of looking solely at the immobility through a Palestinian lens, these titles investigate the ways that filmmakers and activists are working to re-route an ordinarily divided space. These adventures along and through the borders between Israel and the Occupied Territories investigate attributes of the history of both sides and from both sides of the conflict.

Chapter 3: Space for Travel

A significant motif in many films focused on Israeli and Palestinian life, from the ultra-nationalist genre entries of the pre-1967 era to the activist documentaries of the post-Second Intifada period, is the national landscape. Millions of people hold possession of the earth, road, and sand from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea to the banks of the Jordan River, although the domination of the space by Israeli authorities has resulted in an unequal access to many parts of these territories. The films in this thesis focus on the post-Oslo Accords period where, in opposition to the spirit of peace and reconciliation those meetings intended to spread across the region, there was a growing incursion of territorial expansion within Palestinian space from Israeli lawmakers, regulators, and settlers. A large number of non-fiction narratives from the early twenty-first century engaged with Palestinians, striving to hear their stories and stake claims to a space of shrinking freedom and frequently mishandled social justice.

This asymmetrical power dynamic between Israelis and Palestinians is often displayed on film in the continued struggle over land. Documentarians have showcased the disparity in territorial power and ownership among the local populations through examining mobility and transportation. Daily, the mangled collective of roads in the West Bank, as well as the situating of Israeli checkpoints and obstacles at borders in various settings — including in the air — deplete and overwhelm the local Palestinian population. These delays and difficulties of travel do not just collapse the region's social and economic structures, but also upend any attempt at a viable peace process.

Meanwhile, the installation of an "architecture of occupation" infringes on the pluralistic goals of the post-Zionist movement, where an acknowledgement of Israeli mistakes and human rights abuses was supposed "to open up the… landscape to a variety of voices and stories, to create the type of democratic cultural space in which no hierarchy or regulatory border can privilege one narrative or voice over another" (Kaplan 41). Nevertheless, post-Zionist cultural documents from the early twenty-first century have attempted to comment on these limitations of freedom and include the voices of maligned groups, while also transcending the ways that checkpoints, roadblocks, and other spaces of asymmetric power struggles have been depicted onscreen.

In this chapter, there will be a focus on the numerous ways that Israeli, Palestinian and diasporic filmmakers disavow these apparatuses of Israeli power. Three documentaries — the Oscar-nominated *Promises* (2001); the three-part, four-and-a-half hour *Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel* (2003); *Zero Degrees of Separation* (2005), produced by the National Film Board of Canada — examine and re-write these ordinarily divided and contested spaces. The filmmakers, beyond engaging in conversations with Israelis and Palestinians from various positions on the political spectrum, use their professional access to roads on both sides of the Green Line to ultimately destabilize the presence and power of borders. In the process, these filmmakers dismantle and deconstruct the vertical ideological geography that has defined much of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while ushering in a new, more horizontally inclined, ground-level approach of creating debate and dialogue.

The Architecture of Occupation

Before focusing on the film texts and the ways their directors map out new terrains of space, it is worthwhile to examine aspects of these mechanisms of Israeli power and the more common architectural and anti-colonial criticisms made by scholars such as John Collins, Menachem Klein and Eyal Weizman. It is the latter whose phrase "architecture of occupation," the subtitle of his critically-acclaimed book *Hollow Land*, has become an iconic short-hand for the domineering ideological, militaristic, and imperialistic reach (and simultaneous misuse) of Israeli law and control in spaces such as East Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank. As Weizman elaborates in his book, this spatial control is systematic and multi-faceted, and includes the continuing expansion of Israeli settlements. Those urbanities are situated in places where there is an advantageous height over the Palestinians, as well as access to better roads, electricity, and water sources than their neighbours — and these segregations persist despite being in Palestinian territory.

Meanwhile, other features of this architecture include military-governed checkpoints and the construction of separation barriers that stand along the Green Line and cut into Palestinian territory in the West Bank. These systems of "security" manage to undermine Palestinian livelihoods while continuing to immobilize the population entrapped behind these obstacles. Israeli incursion and re-organization on this land creates an atmosphere of chaos, one which "supports one of Israel's foremost strategies of obfuscation: the promotion of complexity —

geographical, legal, or linguistic" (Weizman 8). As the architectural scholar writes, these arrangements to separate Israeli and Palestinian life, beyond dispossessing the two peoples from common contact with the other, magnifies the scope of Israel's surveillance and intelligence over their neighbours — those who lack the physical and economic means to counter-balance that security system (11).

This kind of colonization has its roots in the Likud government's configuration of a project that mapped out prime Israeli real estate — land that was either not owned or that Palestinians could not prove was privately owned — and have the State seize this territory (Weizman 116). According to the Ottoman Land Law of 1858, a plot of land is privately owned if it had been cultivated continuously for a period of at least ten years. Using that legal basis and after scanning the West Bank for tracts of land, Israeli agencies registered spaces in this occupied territory for the means of settlement. This process, done without official requisition orders, ultimately led to a system where, under the guise of legal legitimacy, Israel could cultivate spaces it deemed were open for possession (Weizman 118). As scholar Menachem Klein connects, Israel's propulsion to gather territory and arouse settlement is meant to respond to its "security needs," using a basis of victimization from Palestinian aggression to ensure development (53). Unfortunately, this has resulted in an aggressive expansion of Jewish settlement, and one without much legal basis or validity according to the Fourth Geneva Convention, which reports on the obligations of an occupying power over the citizens it occupies.

Beyond their spread across the territory, Israeli settler placement on higher tracts of land in the occupied West Bank has allowed these citizens to survey and report the movements of Palestinians. This positioning has turned that space into "an optical matrix radiating out from a proliferation of lookout points/settlements across the landscape" (Weizman 132). Meanwhile, the Israeli government's financial allocation toward settlement towns is also significantly higher than the proportion of the Israeli population that lives in these areas (Klein 52). Furthermore, the inequity is exacerbated by an overwhelming lack of approval (by Israel) for Palestinian building permits within the West Bank, which Klein notes align with a mere five per cent of the total number of accepted permits (58). Certain Palestinian structures deemed to contravene the Israeli rule of law could lead to the demolition of these properties, often given without much warning to the owner. As a result, the intimidation of a heightened Israeli presence, literally and figuratively, alongside the construction of checkpoints and roadblocks, has contributed to a power and security

imbalance in predominantly Palestinian areas. This continuum of settlement expansion negates the peaceful rhetoric of the Oslo Accords period and guarantees a disproportionate balance of power between Palestinians and Israelis.

Another facet of Israel's colonial reach has to do with the State's ties to religious virtues. Many of the Israeli citizens who have settled in the occupied West Bank belong to sects of Judaism that promote ethno-religious claims to the land, such as the ultra-Orthodox and national religious Jews. The former group awaits the arrival of the Messiah, while the latter sect has "absorbed the Zionist ethos of self-reliance and activism" while dismissing any self-determining Palestinian claims for independence (Klein 75-76). Beyond military incursion and settlement construction, Israel's control rests in its "ethnocratic" institutionalization, according to political geography scholar Oren Yiftachel. As he writes, this concept of ethno-nationalism views "control over state territory and its defense as central to the survival of the group in question," meaning Israel's Jewish population, and where power is wrested is "based on selective and highly strategic historical, cultural, or religious interpretations" (124). In plainer language, there is a bid to create Jewish ties to territory based on scripture and historical events — in a land filled with competing narratives from various ethnic and religious groups. Meanwhile, legal mechanisms such as the Law of Return, which permits the settlement of Jews from outside of Israel within the state, is another way that ethno-religious claims have been enforced onto Israeli society (Collins 45). As the films analyzed in this chapter will present, many Jewish inhabitants of Israel use Biblical claims to bolster their argument for colonial expansion and oppression.

Zero Degrees of Separation and *Route 181*, for instance, point out the stark visual power of the "architecture of occupation" by focusing on spaces that evoke Israel's historical claims to the land while marginalizing the Palestinian presence within the same territory. In one scene from the former, director Elle Flanders and her main subject, Mizrahi Israeli Ezra, drive through a tunnel under the Palestinian Christian village of Beit Jala. This route, which Ezra describes as "Aryan" to evoke comparison between the occupation and the Nazi regime, exists so that Israeli motorists can avoid contact with Bethlehem, a mostly Palestinian space. In the scene, the camera remains at the dashboard windshield, capturing the void of darkness when the filmmaker enters the tunnel (aside from the blur of yellow lights dangling overhead). The appearance of white glare from the cars travelling in the opposite direction each initially seem to indicate the approaching light at the end of this tunnel — a conclusion that arrives after a minute of

submerged darkness. As the filmmaker says of this moment, "It's a psychological movement [of passage]… You think about the machinations that go on to create separation" (Flanders). A reprieve from the sunbaked and dilapidated Palestinian architecture shown in the moments before, the blackness of the tunnel signifies the void of understanding that comes due to this division of space for mobility, along with an evocation of different socioeconomic statuses within the space.

Flanders' filmic observation of the Beit Jala tunnel is an example of what scholar Gil Z. Hochberg refers to as "visible invisibility." This concept relates to Israeli efforts to "erase the history of past inhabitants' relationship to the land" (Hochberg 38). The architectural separation of travel within the West Bank is one potent example of how two geopolitical realities can exist within one geographical territorial space; even within a close proximity, Palestinian and Israeli lives intersect so rarely due to these separations that the Other is rendered invisible (Hochberg 18). Kay Dickinson, in her article about Palestinian "roadblock" films, states that this type of road system that connects isolated settlements with Israel proper "has no firm foundation in Israeli law, making the implementation of this infrastructure extremely opportunistic, arbitrary and unregulated" (141). It is the Israeli side that can afford to build such a feat of seemingly unnecessary architecture.

Meanwhile, the comprehensive *Route 181* contains many scenes in and around museum properties that foreground Israel's official historical narratives. Throughout their journey along the partition line, filmmakers Michel Khleifi (a Palestinian) and Eyal Sivan (an Israeli) stop at various commemorative spots, including the museum of the Yad Mordechai kibbutz and the museum of the Nir Am reservoir, to inquire about the histories enshrined at these institutions. In these spaces, carefully crafted narratives depict the Israeli struggle to obtain power while minimizing the stories of Arab displacement. In the sequence at the Nir Am museum, the guide emphasizes his interest in creating a more elaborate museum space. Here, he shows the filmmakers a binder of his ideas, including an ambitious fountain display and a hot water swimming pool. Beyond the enormous costs of these ventures, which he estimates could be around $1 million — "If I find the money to do it, it'll be magnificent," he tells the directors — they would also be wasteful spending, in a desert space not far from Gaza, where residents have limited access to water. This 10-minute museum sequence even opens with a shot of the entrance

to the museum, where water flows underneath the transparent floor, which one could consider an egregious use of natural resources.

Other moments from the documentary involve the directors driving through deserted areas of Israel and focusing the camera on statues of Socialist workers and tank replicas, further solidifying the ideals of military and agricultural expansion that still permeates through the Zionist consciousness. Along with *Zero Degrees of Separation*, the film emphasizes the kind of "territorial ethno-nationalism" that Yiftachel described, which helped to make Jewish immigrants feel more at home in Israel while marginalizing the existence of non-Israeli populations in Palestine prior to periods of Jewish cultivation in the early twentieth century (Peled-Elhanan 103). In her analysis of these sequences in *Route 181*, Shohat mentions that the Israeli references to ruins stemming from Biblical times is a way to repress the memory of more recent ruins: the villages that once belonged to Palestinians (281). The unsettling invisibility of populations in pre-1948 Palestine within these exhibits demonstrates how powerfully the official State discourse has erased certain voices from the region's social and cultural history.

Crossing Borders of Space and Time, Literally and Stylistically

Numerous documentarians have depicted these apparatuses of Israeli architecture in ways that foreground the extensive verticality of the State's control, while also avoiding these domains to demonstrate the ways around occupied space where paths of resistance can come through. As Hany Abu-Assad, the director of the award-winning Palestinian thriller *Paradise Now*, has said: "You cannot change the reality; you can only overcome it… Cinematic means enable you to cross borders" (Gertz and Khleifi 157). The makers of the films explored in this section use a variety of stylistic and storytelling techniques to highlight the scale of Israeli occupation, while also dismantling these displays of power in clever ways.

One method of democratizing narrative access is through prioritizing the stories of Palestinian women, whose stories and existence are often neglected by the stereotype of the masculine, stone-throwing resistance fighter that predominates the conflict's sensationalized media coverage. A significant section of Khleifi and Sivan's four-and-a-half-hour film is spent in Palestinian homes with women telling tales of their survival, resilience, and continued struggle. The first Palestinian voice we hear in *Route 181* belongs to a woman from Bnei Re'em — although she refers to its space by its preceding name, Masmiye — who is trying to keep custody

of her family home as developers build a road nearby. In the second part of the documentary, a Palestinian woman (and Israeli citizen) named Myriam recounts her stoic resistance living in a district with a mixed residency of Israelis and Palestinians, despite calls, like those for the woman in part one, for her home to be demolished. “If the government wants my death or my house, I may as well die for my brothers,” she announces. “We’re refused the most basic human rights.” Finally, a storytelling circle in a Palestinian village (featured in the third section of the film) is dominated by a woman’s report, as she speaks of the traumatic experience of being shot at by Israeli soldiers decades earlier and then having to move away from her home.

Khleifi and Sivan have the vision (and lack of time constraints) to not let one tale of defiance become a synecdoche for the resistance of Palestinian women. Instead, the visibility of women, oppressed by the threat of Israeli colonization while losing little of their spirit, becomes a common part of the film’s portrait of local resistance. As Gertz and Khleifi write of the Palestinian director’s earlier films in *Palestinian Cinema*, Michel Khleifi highlights various individual narratives, instead of letting a collective define the filmic space. These various stories suggest “diverse and sometimes contradictory identities alongside the single, united national identity that is still being carved out of the lost past” (Gertz and Khleifi 75). Meanwhile, the interior world of the Palestinian home is not just invisible to Western media coverage of the conflict, but is one of the only spaces of autonomy that exists for these citizens beyond the means of Israeli surveillance (Rastegar 106). Placing these chronicles of history outside or within the space of the home further solidifies the stability of Palestinian communities that have persevered to remain in their homeland, while reminding the viewer of the constraints of social life and curfew that is inherent to many residents.

One stylistic trait anchored to the temporality of the Palestinian perspective is the way that Flanders eschews rigid filmic conventions of space and time. In *Zero Degrees of Separation*, the Canadian filmmaker structures the film through various flashbacks that use archival footage, filmed by the director’s grandparents, of the early years after Israel’s establishment. These displays of 16mm film, showing tourist bus trips around the still-developing nation-state, are stark juxtapositions to the more contemporary reality of struggle and occupation. At various points during the film, a shot of twenty-first century West Bank settlements or dusty, untamed fields appear adjacent to the archival footage, which reveals a greener and more prosperous past, one of citizens tending the soil and smiling. As Hoda El Shakry describes in a review of

Flanders' documentary, the blend between the past and present "creates an eerily fragmented temporality in which her grandparents' home footage can only be seen proleptically, the current state of the conflict already glimpsed between the reels." These clashes of spirit and aesthetics collapse the time and space — an element also suggested with the documentary's quantitative title — to show how starkly life in the region has both changed (in the disarmingly disproportionate procuration of land) and stayed the same (recurring statuses of Israeli power over the Palestinian, the latter framed as an object).

A note of comparison between the two time periods, Flanders revealed in our interview, relates to the pointing of the figures in the archival footage. The gesture in the 16mm sections signals to what the Israelis own and lay claim, compared with the pointing of activist Ezra in the digital contemporary, as he draws attention to the awful situation befalling millions of residents in Palestine. An instance of this pointing occurs in the opening minutes of the film, when the Jewish arrivals from Flanders' family rejoice as they pose near giant rocks and point out to the sea, looking out onto the water like conquerors surveying this land. Flanders explains of this motif, "It's this very interesting gesture which kind of says, Look over there, look over there, look over there! But what are they also saying? That's ours, that's ours, that's ours. We're going to build this here, that's where the university's going to be, here's the hospital" (Flanders). Whereas the repetition of this gesture aligns the Israeli as the master, it also suggests that Palestinian property seized or appropriated by Israelis during the 1948 War is an object for taking. The recurrence of pointing, which implies the Palestinian (and their past residence) as the object, helps to bind the archival film with Flanders' digitally shot documentary.

Another means of limiting these apparatuses of power on film is through abolishing the use of borders. This is a recurring motif of *Route 181*, which was filmed along the route of the 1947 Partition Line of UN Resolution 181, originally designed to separate the land into spaces for Jewish and Palestinian populations. A frequent occurrence throughout the documentary is the filmmakers' confusion about the names and places on the map, a visual aid the viewer often sees lying on the dashboard, its reflection shown in the windshield. The directors' intention to remain tethered to this "elusive" border of partition, while often being unable to locate sites that are supposed to appear close to their route of travel, emphasizes the absurdity of having any kind of partition — especially in a country where walls and barriers enclose millions of Palestinians while quashing their access to other sections of the state. Consequently, Shohat describes the

presence of these "borders" as "a kind of mirage lacking any concrete form on the land, and which yet impacts lives in the most direct and material way" (288). Staying true to the formal properties of Michel Khleifi's earlier features, *Route 181* focuses much of its journey on the features of the Israeli and Palestinian landscape, "weaving them into one harmonious whole" (Gertz and Khleifi 83). In this regard, the blending of Israeli and Palestinian spaces curtails the attempts at separation that correspond with the architecture of occupation.

The efforts of post-Zionist filmmakers, in their attempts to create new spaces for travel and habitation, must take into account the events of the 1948 War and the continued negligence among Israeli authorities to account for the expulsion of Palestinian refugees. In the notable documentaries examined here, Flanders, Khleifi, Sivan and the three directors of *Promises* (Carlos Bolado, B.Z. Goldberg, and Justine Shapiro) focus on the need to make Palestinian life visible and present where it has not yet been onscreen. One method to repair these wounds from the past is through helping Palestinians access and return to these spaces, as well as acknowledging the plight of the oppressed as they encounter disputed histories related to the Nakba.

In *Promises*, the three documentarians interview grade school-aged children in West Jerusalem, East Jerusalem and villages in the West Bank. A stylistic trait the filmmakers employ to accentuate the dynamics of power is prioritizing high-angle, birds' eye view shots of the Holy City to correspond with the stories of the Israeli children, emphasizing how their liberties are not the same as the ones afforded to Palestinian families. In one scene with Moishe Bar Am — a child from a West Bank settlement who admits with glee that Israeli soldiers training near a Palestinian village "might shoot an Arab" — the camera is placed above the child as he bikes near the border with that neighbouring village. Placed adjacent to the youth's comments that he wants the Palestinians to leave the land of Israel, this freewheeling mobility of the camera starkly emphasizes how he takes his freedom for granted while disregarding the Palestinians' struggles.

This height differential is further foregrounded in scenes where American-Israeli director B.Z. Goldberg, accompanied with a permit, swiftly motors through the checkpoints — another imbalance between the two populations. Nevertheless, in one significant sequence, the two people transported in Goldberg's car are Faraj Adnan, a pre-teen track-and-field athlete from the Dheisheh refugee camp, and Faraj's grandmother. Their destination is the village of Ras Abu-Ammar, where the grandmother lived before Israel's establishment, and a space they can access

subversively through Goldberg's permit and license plate. The poignant arrival at Ras Abu-Ammar is diminished by the absence of people and property in the space. Instead, there are stones and shrubbery, although the grandmother is able to locate the rocks by the home that her grandfather had built. As Faraj's grandmother recounts, "The Jews destroyed it, blew it up so no one could say we had a country." The freedom and mobility situates these Palestinians, long removed from their homes, in a space that empowers them to inspect the ruins, speak of the past, and anticipate a return to these spots in the future. As Hochberg expands on her aforementioned concept, "no matter how many efforts are put into covering, erasing, concealing, and hiding, the haunting visible invisibility of the ghost will continue to taunt" (46). Near the end of this sequence, Faraj finds an engraving of a Star of David on a rock in Ras Abu-Ammar and asks if he should kick it — a gesture that recognizes the constancy of conflict over these contested historical sites.

Queering the Space

The presence of these disputed historical narratives among Israelis and Palestinians, and the power imbalances that help to rescue the former instead of the latter, resonates within *Zero Degrees of Separation*. The archival footage interspersed with the more contemporary narrative highlights the degree to which Palestinian citizens were pushed aside in the years subsequent to Israel's establishment. There is an odd sense of emptiness in these archival film clips, stressed by the flickering of light that corresponds with the tenuous state of the 16mm stock, but which also recall a ghost-like presence haunting empty spaces. These sputtering flashes are a transitory way for Flanders to make a bridge from twenty-first century Israel to mid-twentieth century footage, which focuses on spare, empty fields, and a noticeably low number of workers tending to that land. The flickering renders a population to be a spectre of what used to exist. When added digitally to the modern footage, meanwhile, these flickers can be viewed as the filmmaker's attempt to connect more than fifty years of history, as well as call attention to the absence of Palestinians.

The intention of showing empty spaces from the past, like the ones Flanders selects for *Zero Degrees of Separation*, connects to Anat Zanger's description of how films use memories to recall the essence of a place. In her book, Zanger describes how film's examination of a landscape, using the language of cultural scholar Michel de Certeau, is "always a 'landscape in

movement' that is seen but also heard" (2). The glassy score playing underneath these flickers, which destabilizes our perception of the image as we are unsure of its status as being part of the archival past or the digital present, emulate the memories with echoes that we can hardly hear — an apt evocation of Hochberg's concept of "visible invisibility." This relates to an idea of Zanger's, who refers to Israel's status in relation to thousands of years of Jewish exile as "a displaced signifier severed from its referent" (17). One can elaborate that *Zero Degrees of Separation*'s tenuous links between the early 1950s and the mid-2000s evokes Palestine's status in a similar way, with its inhabitants severed from this signifier.

It is appropriate that a queer film, focused on two gay couples comprised of one Israeli and one Palestinian, does such a thorough job of deconstructing the issues with practices committed in the name of Zionism. *Zero Degrees of Separation*'s fluidity between film and digital, past and present, represents a "queered" response to examinations of regional history. As queer cinema scholar Nir Cohen explains in his book on gay representation within Israeli cinema, *Soldiers, Rebels, and Drifters*, Flanders' position and history as a queer activist who has engaged with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict enables her to "link gay activism in Israel with the leftist struggle to end the occupation" (170). The motif of her grandparents' archival footage, held in comparison to the present day, is meant to explore the initial Zionist dream and how those ideals would betray the existence and permanence of so many (Cohen 171). However, although the films' subjects are gay, the concerns of couples Ezra and Selim, and Edit and Samira, align with internal ethnic strife more than homophobia.

In an interview with the filmmaker, she explains that the film was originally "about queers and their opposition to the occupation," which is how she attained access to her lesbian subjects, both activists with the group Black Laundry (Flanders). Unusual for a film focused on LGBTQ characters, and which played at a variety of queer film festivals, Flanders evades discussions of gay intolerance, instead shining a light on more pressing matters of oppression (Cohen 176). As a result, *Zero Degrees of Separation* avoids the status of being a "pinkwashed" text, referring to social efforts to re-brand Israel as a tolerant, liberalized society that promotes gay liberty and independence while minimizing the severity of the State's human rights abuses. As author Sarah Schulman explains of this "pinkwashing" phenomenon, Israeli authorities have used the progressive inclusivity of LGBTQ populations in the state (such as their presence in the army) to nullify the violation of Palestinian human rights (39). Similarly, Flanders focuses on

subjects concerned with the occupation, moving away from the recent history of local fiction and non-fiction titles about Israel's LGBTQ community — ones that focus more on personal queer narratives and collectives within Israeli society.

Regardless, *Zero Degrees of Separation* does show the difference in access afforded to Ezra (a Mizrahi Jew) and Selim (a Palestinian living under house arrest and the threat of deportation). Ezra's vulgar comments to Israeli soldiers who are manning checkpoints — in an early scene, he tells the soldiers that he is travelling "to an orgy in Mount Yatir" — receives no reaction, yet the scrutiny given toward Palestinians who pose no apparent threat at these roadblocks is much more visible. One can read Ezra's defiant takedowns of Israeli soldiers, such as in a scene where he harshly criticizes Israelis in military garb approaching a Bedouin tent, as a way to emasculate and minimize the power of the hawkish regime. In these moments, the shamed objects on camera are the soldiers, who cannot give much of an intelligent reply to Ezra's questions and fail to obstruct Flanders' crew from filming.

In Hochberg's *Visual Occupations*, the author analyzes a seven-minute short film called "Chic Point," which compares a fashion show (with young men strutting down the catwalk, eager to be watched and photographed) with the events at an Israeli checkpoint, as Palestinian men receive humiliating strip searches. That short film gives power to the image of an Israeli soldier, who is "enabled by the structure of the occupation and the colonial violence it imposes on Palestinian bodies… [and also] empowered by the position of the gaze" (Hochberg 92). In an inverse of the power dynamics of "Chic Point," the subjects receiving the ire of the gaze in *Zero Degrees* are the Israeli soldiers; although they are not exposing flesh, Ezra's verbal dressing down of their military might serves an equally emasculating service.

The Presence of an Imagined Space

Another one of the defining elements of these post-Zionist documentaries is how their filmmakers attempt to construct an imaginary ideal, one that points toward fewer divisions among the citizens of Israel and Palestine. This form of resistance deconstructs the idea that there are thick walls and barriers that constantly seize independent populations to follow their spatial logic. Instead, filmmakers find spaces and locations that can act, even temporarily, as a liminal or transitory space to create interaction and a less rigid binary for both travel and habitation.

These interstitial spaces between the two societies come through when the camera is turned toward villages and enclaves that house Palestinian citizens who live in Israel. A common feature of these unique areas is related to the nomenclature. As Haim Bresheeth examines, "the names of [these] villages or towns are not seen on road signs, just as their language, although it is an official language of Israel, is noticeable by its absence" (507). It is a post-Zionist method to delegate space as more imagined than real, as it suggests a plurality of land possession and history that cannot be reconciled with the official State narratives. The concept of granting Palestinian voices and bodies an autonomy that doesn't rely on a comparison with Israeli figures allows them to thrive as heroes of their own story, not victims of oppression and apartheid.

The presence of "imagined space" is a key aspect for Palestinian stories, as Gertz and Khleifi claim while examining the films of Michel Khleifi. In his oeuvre, the Palestinian filmmaker draws a new environment to harken back to a pre-Nakba era that is "meant to function in the future as a relic… doomed to be lost in the Israeli reality, in an ever-changing world" (Gertz and Khleifi 74). As the film historians examine, one of Khleifi's techniques that separates his stories from a contemporary Israeli existence is the absence of borders or checkpoints, a thematic tool that weaves all of the features of the landscape from both societies to create one whole (83). That unobstructed freedom can be attained through images that portray a vast, seemingly unending space, which can do much to liberate the Palestinian onscreen.

One instance of this autonomy comes in the closing sequence of the second part of *Route 181*. Here, the filmmakers follow a group of Bethlehem and Beit Jala citizens walking to a wedding, a mobility where the people refrain from abiding by State structures — even if those going to the celebration have to climb up steep hills and strategize to avoid Israeli roadblocks. "We do it right under the Army's nose," one of the guests tells the directors. "We continue celebrating despite the occupation." There is much joy as the Palestinians walk to the wedding — from the region that, as Flanders' film explores, would soon be severed from Israeli roads — and then partaking in prayer and celebration. As Bashir Abu-Manneb writes in his review of the documentary, this elating sight "[goes] against the grain of the logic of displacement and dispossession… the necessary elements for a future in common." Similarly, the documentary's first third also concludes at a wedding, albeit a Jewish one, where there is feasting, drinking, and toasting. (That celebration, at the Herzl House, is presided over by a portrait of the Zionist leader.) That a Palestinian party can function with the same energy and spirit as the Israeli

celebration is one way the documentarians erase the presence of borders and checkpoints, while creating, although fleetingly, a level playing field between the two sides.

Khleifi and Sivan's *Route 181*, a collaboration between Israeli and Palestinian filmmakers, also collapses the fixed categories of what corresponds to an "Israeli" or "Palestinian" film, providing room for its makers to subvert aspects of both overarching national struggles (Shohat 273). Although set in Israel and Palestine, and helmed by filmmakers with citizenship in the country, the documentary is a co-production among France, Germany, and Belgium. However, this transnational production doesn't feature the same power dynamics implicit to the structuring of *Five Broken Cameras* — the example used in Friedman's analysis of external co-production agreements with film production in the Middle East. Unlike that documentary, the journey through Israel-Palestine does not assert one filmmaker's dominance over the other: both Khleifi and Sivan remain behind the camera, as they speak with and question the various citizens of Israel and Palestine. In this essence, the collaborative nature of *Route 181* comes from a seemingly shared approach to the material. While Sivan and Khleifi use their primary language to lead conversations with Israelis and Palestinians, respectively, it is difficult to discern whether either director emerges as the film's true auteur. As Shohat explains of the filmmakers' twisty journey through the country, "Tracing the 181 line is revealed to be a doomed quest, disoriented by the contradictions of proliferating maps and facts on the ground" (280). Nevertheless, *Route 181* becomes an essential post-Zionist text, examining a wealth of local viewpoints, aimed at revealing the then-contemporary zeitgeist of the conflict while also challenging Israeli subjects as they attempt to elaborate on historical myths and master narratives.

One motif of the four-and-a-half hour documentary is land development. As Shohat describes, Zionist cinema focuses on the barren desert as a way to speak to both the past absence of the Jews on this land and their continued presence due to constant development, revitalization, and construction (289). Similarly, as Zanger analyzes in her book about place in Israeli cinema, the desert often suggests a social transformation on the nation's part in terms of construction, thus becoming a reflection of a Zionist fantasy for settlement (112). One connection to this subject occurs in the opening segment from the first part of *Route 181*. Set in the port city of Ashdod, these moments focus on various construction workers, such as Israeli foremen reiterating the difficulties of hiring Palestinians as a result of the Second Intifada and the subsequent increase in security. The filmmakers ask the male labourers, who are standing on an empty beach in front of

mounds of sand, inferring a development projected to be completed, if they knew of a Palestinian town, Nabi Yunis, that used to exist in this vicinity. The apathy of the workers — "I don't care, why should I?" one of the men asks the directors — is apt when one considers their role of developing this bare space, which will continue to alter the Israeli landscape. An introduction with a group of construction workers is significant, further evolving the themes of agricultural imperialism, which here submerges the history of a potentially Palestinian space to make way for new, expansionist Zionist principles.

Watching the Watchers and Bearing the Barriers

A central and defining space among a large number of contemporary films about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the roadblock and checkpoint. Often, filmmakers use this space as a synecdoche to represent the totality of a static, immobile, and ideologically scrutinized Palestinian population (Shohat 294). Since these rigid barriers have the ability to halt the autonomy of a local livelihood, documentaries about the conflict explore how these border-like structures have the power to dehumanize the population. The checkpoint, meant as a security apparatus to block the entry of potential terrorist activity into Israel, is applied to virtually all of Palestinian life. Nevertheless, their presence within Palestinian territory creates another layer of State security, and one that only a select few — those with permits approved by Israel — can use to their benefit.

As a result, these domineering centres of surveillance and security have done much to destroy the rights and liberties of the Palestinian population, many of whom — including an estimated eighty-five per cent of West Bank villagers, during the first three years of the Second Intifada — are unable to travel beyond their villages (Dickinson 142). Yet, the efforts of documentarians to broadcast the roadblock in a unique way provide a form of visual resistance to these demarcated, discriminatory spaces. Despite their focus on methods of State control, the documentarians' entry into a Palestinian atmosphere, as well as attempts by their subjects to openly criticize the soldier gatekeepers at checkpoints, helps to dismantle the official, distorted geography and move away from the "politics of verticality." A key aspect of this harmonization of the Israeli and Palestinian experience to the same spatial plane is reflected in the filmmakers' efforts to collapse time and space, as well as move seamlessly around the borders and barriers meant to separate populations.

Before providing examples of the way that Khleifi, Sivan, and Flanders eschew the thematic and stylistic conventions of filming at checkpoints, we must understand some of the methods documentarians have used to represent this space. An apt visual representation is frequently shown through tight framing and close-ups, a stylistic mirror of the cramped intimacy that Palestinians feel when subjected to an enhanced inspection by the Israeli army. Shohini Chaudhuri notes that the process of checking, which can create a wearying level of anxiety among Palestinians, turns the checkpoint space into "a topos for the banality of evil" (159). Beyond this dehumanizing experience, the monotony of waiting and the systematic protocols involved in these security checks create a clear comparison with daily Palestinian life.

Another frequent convention of these moments is the perspective from inside the vehicle hoping to cross the border. Placing the camera within the confines of a car's front or back seat registers the containment of the Palestinian bodies, while the shakiness of the cinematography, which replicates elements of carsickness, is a distinctly Palestinian feeling (Dickinson 146). Here, there is little room for filmmakers to evoke 'imagined space,' as the impatience and anxiety becomes all too real for the passengers yearning for entry across the border. As Gertz and Khleifi conclude, journeys through Palestinian space, which "appear at first to denote mobility, control of space, the mapping out of the landscapes… ends in a single destination" (154). This fundamental disruption and repetition within the daily Palestinian life corresponds with the motif of monotony within films from directors like Khleifi and Elia Suleiman. Scholar Kamran Rastegar notes that various fiction films from the region use long takes and recurring actions to signify a "suspended state" that traps the Palestinian characters — and this includes the routines and rituals at the checkpoint (108). Border crossings and checkpoints have contributed to an environment of constant psychological anxiety among ordinary Palestinians, one that several film texts try to replicate with a visceral grip.

Various documentaries that visit these unique security zones, set between the enclaves of Palestinian and Israeli life, are limited by what they can show, due to a frequent mistrust in the camera among military forces. As Zanger adds, "The presence of an increasing number of film-makers and media reporters who have turned their cameras towards these checkpoints testifies to an urgent need to intervene in the course of events" (131). Interestingly, while Khleifi and Sivan receive a noticeable amount of resistance among the Israeli soldiers they meet in *Route 181*, Flanders and her crew often film without visible soldier apprehension of the camera's presence.

This difference in reception resonates with the success of Machsom Watch, which, as the previous chapter examined, consists mainly of women for the purpose of minimizing tension between soldiers, activists, and civilians.

Since the protocols and communicative exchanges at these checkpoints are often terse and tense, there can be little room for a spontaneous exchange of ideas and discussion. When Gil Z. Hochberg examined Rula Halawani's series of photographic close-ups of Israeli and Palestinian hands, and the gestures they provide in the checkpoint space, she noted how the pictures shifted attention "away from the gaze and from the potential for a restorative exchange or a process of recognition or communication" (104). Meanwhile, according to Zanger, checkpoints exist in a contested space that is neither Israeli nor Palestinian, but one that is indeterminate, "where 'protocol' seems to have replaced human dialogue" (133). The scholar adds that the camera's presence at these thresholds helps to offer an opportunity for an exchange of dialogue, moving away from the maxims of the State to a set of questions and behaviours that may engage more emotional investment from either side (Zanger 137). The concept of the checkpoint as existing in another territory from both Israel and Palestine also suggests that the space does not adequately define the humanity of the populations on either side of the border.

The instances these documentaries recount at the checkpoint is often one where Palestinian voices are either rendered mute or difficult for the Israeli soldiers to understand. In one sequence from *Promises*, where young Palestinian girl Sanabel and her family are taking a bus to visit her incarcerated father, there is a lack of meaningful exchange between the army and civilians at a checkpoint because the Israeli soldier is unable to comprehend Arabic. However, instead of *Promises*' documentary crew jumping in to rectify the language gap, we are left observing the bus passengers' sustained paranoia and fear.

On the other hand, an intervention between Israeli control and Palestinian subjugation occurs during a scene in *Zero Degrees of Separation*, when Ezra witnesses soldiers taking away a Palestinian driver's car keys and detaining him. The Israeli activist mentions to the camera that, due to the film crew's presence, "they won't harass the driver as much." In the subsequent confrontation between Ezra and a few soldiers, the camera (which the soldiers have demanded be turned off, but remains on) hangs at a lower level, capturing the dangling rifles. This focus on the weapons, placed strategically at the crotch level of the soldiers, connects the impulses of

militaristic order with masculinity, while accentuating the gun as a mechanized extension of the Israeli — the device they grip to reinforce their power in this asymmetrical system of control.

In one confrontation with border soldiers during the second part of *Route 181*, Khleifi and Sivan walk to a checkpoint, with their camera aiming below the face of an approaching soldier who asks the filmmakers for IDs. There is a request from another soldier to stop filming; minutes later, when a different soldier arrives on the scene and asks if he is being filmed, there is a gesture (that we don't see) from one of the filmmakers that suggests someone behind the camera signified that the camera was off (although it still films, to the audience's knowledge). Upon receiving questions from the documentarians about his role at the checkpoint, the soldier responds that, in this space, he does what the army tells him so that he can serve his country. "That's what soldiers who commit atrocities say," one of the directors responds, in a foreshadowing of a later scene involving a well-read Israeli. In that later segment, a philosophy student-turned-soldier, who identifies as a Zionist, mentions to the filmmakers that he has never heard of Hannah Arendt and her concept of "the banality of evil" to which the directors make a reference. (That absent-mindedness is less glaring when one realizes that *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* was not published in Hebrew until 2007.) This concept of Arendt's, which derives from the trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, fostered the idea that cruel and murderous actions could be done by people without dangerous or sociopathic tendencies. It registers here with the recurring sight of Israeli soldiers enforcing a strict order and curfew on Palestinians for purposes of security and retaining national pride.

By referring to State authorities to justify their actions with a calm impersonality, the soldiers carry the ghost of the Second World War throughout *Route 181*. In one telling sequence, set in a military tribunal, Palestinians wait to hear their sentencing from a judge. Amidst the prisoners, a young Palestinian man tries (and sometimes succeeds, against Israeli orders) to touch the hands of his mother and kid brother, who are also present. There remains a discomfort among the soldiers when challenged with the camera, echoed by the requests from uniformed men for the filmmakers to turn off the device. Nevertheless, the recurring focus on these gestures of touch between the imprisoned Palestinian and his family members arrest our attention, and the soldiers hanging around the space fail to restrict contact between the charged civilian and his relatives. Here, the soldiers are ultimately ineffective in quelling this humane exchange, despite their authority and strength in numbers.

The Road Ahead

These documentaries, while exposing the sharp inequalities and pervasive divisions between Israeli and Palestinian inhabitants through their access (or lack thereof) to the land, also explore the ways that artists and filmmakers can create resistance to obstacles of oppression and occupation. While settlement expansion and rigid checkpoint security has continued, mostly unabated, since these films' release, the directors used their road access to destabilize the binaries of space. From subversively offering Palestinians access to their ancestral land in *Promises* to engaging in thought-provoking dialogue with Israeli border police, these filmmakers aimed for their projects to coincide with a post-Zionist spirit of pluralistic narratives and original aesthetics. Here, artists and directors engaging with activists on the ground used their privileged position to showcase the inequity of mobility and spatial architecture while finding ways, like various Palestinians in these film texts, to move through and around these rigid, vertical barriers.

The national backgrounds of the filmmakers from this chapter — Israeli, Palestinian, American, Canadian, Mexican — is unique, especially when one considers their efforts to engage in conversation with a wide range of regional voices. The presence of multiple creative forces, which can transcend the trappings of Israeli law and transport bodies through demarcated spaces, is a tool to ensure the possibility of debate and dialogue. One major quality of *Encounter Point* and *Promises* is the presence of dialogue between divided peoples. In these documentaries, the creation of spaces for conversation relies on the careful planning and coordination from various bodies to ensure these meetings can take place. The next chapter will train its focus on these cinematic encounters between Israelis and Palestinians, exploring the lengths traveled (literally and figuratively) to ensure these powerful and illuminating exchanges occur. Here, a viable space for meeting is created due to the flexibility of the production companies and the resilience of peace-promoting organizations, with the goal of enabling both a safe space and a rare, resonant personal exchange.

Chapter 4: Space for Dialogue

The concept of dialogue and communication is elusive in Israel-Palestine, even in several of the films examined within this thesis. While post-Zionist texts have worth in the way they encourage more complex mutual understandings, between Israelis and Palestinians, of the other's personal narratives and historical claims, these roads toward comprehension are, sometimes, a product of the film's release and media push than what is ultimately featured on the screen. The producers and filmmakers can aim to use their access to insightful stories from the region to ultimately provoke an audience of interested spectators to discuss and contemplate the presented stories after the film fades to black.

However, in the spirit of charged and engaged dialogue between the inhabitants of Israel-Palestine, room for this debate between the two sides can be a daunting task for filmmakers and activists to organize and enable — and potentially, a risk for the citizens willing to speak, given the social pressures and structural asymmetries inherent to the conflict. The potential for normalization, which would bring both sides of the conflict onto an equal footing, could derail any functional, ground level approach to peaceful dialogue through refusing to acknowledge these power imbalances. Since 2004, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) has galvanized citizens to disengage from dialogue that would normalize or ignore the conditions of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation.

Nevertheless, despite an overwhelming lack of films that focus on these decidedly rare moments of interaction, *Encounter Point* and *Promises* focus on fleeting yet significant intersections between the documentaries' subjects. As the title of the former documentary suggests, there is room for positive interaction between Israelis and Palestinians who have suffered through tragic losses. The latter film, which earned an Academy Award nomination as that era's violence intensified in the Middle East, culminates in an afternoon where four of the film's seven young subjects, residing within a 20-minute radius of each other, decide to meet, play, and speak about the conflict. The path to solidifying these unions is fraught with difficulties, both on the part of the interviewed subjects who hesitate to participate, and on the part of the filmmakers, who must coordinate these intersectional meetings with various parties. Meanwhile, the directors must represent these potentially tense confrontations in a way that does

not tilt from their pluralistic aims while ensuring that both sides' perspectives resonate powerfully.

This chapter will feature a comprehensive analysis of these pivotal moments of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians; most specifically, in the final 15 minutes of *Promises*. It will also include reaction from recent interviews with two of the filmmakers who helped to achieve these onscreen dialogues: filmmaker and activist Ronit Avni, and *Promises* co-director and journalist Justine Shapiro. Meanwhile, there will be an emphasis on the approaches for maintaining an effective conversation among oppositional forces, as well as the challenges in reaching these spaces for communication. Finally, this chapter will examine the viability of dialogue beyond the constraints of the frame, and into the extra-textual space of special film screenings.

The Value of Enabling Dialogue

As the films analyzed within this chapter demonstrate, junctures for dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians may arise due to the role of peace-building groups. Nevertheless, the contours to reach a space where civilians from both sides of the conflict are comfortable enough to discuss personal struggle takes enormous commitment on the part of organizations and activists. As Ronit Avni explained in an interview with *Worldpress*, the films from Just Vision decided to focus mainly "on the people who engage in the slow, steady, unglamorous task of peace-building, regardless of who is in power." The aims of organizations like Just Vision are primarily for social, if not political, change. Regardless, using art and storytelling as a method to enable mutual understanding, and create communities of kinship that dismantle the binaries that are integral to simplistic framings of the Israel-Palestine conflict, can help to enable fruitful dialogues.

To envisage a future of increased pluralism, the power of narrative art is one tool that has been used frequently, from the work of filmmakers like the ones featured in this thesis to theatre companies that dramatize the harsh stories of Palestinian refugees and Israeli soldiers to imagine a common ground between the two sides. The imperative to have a performance space to re-enact stories for a curious audience is one way that a marginalized civilian can wrest power and foreground their devotion to bring awareness of the conflict to others. For instance, the volunteers from Israel and Palestine who agreed to appear in *Encounter Point* and *Promises* understood that their involvement in these creative projects would be broadcasted for a local and international

audience. As Avni told *Worldpress*, "No Palestinian ever asked us to conceal his or her identity for [*Encounter Point*], even though they knew we aimed to show it on Arabic satellite and Israeli television." Since the legacy of these non-fiction stories rests in the minds of spectators from various positions on the political spectrum, there is an opportunity for these cinematic discussions to encourage connection and understanding, both in and beyond the film presentation.

Elizabeth Mavroudi, who writes about spaces of performance within films situated in the Middle East, explains that these stages of storytelling go against the ideas of space as examined in the previous chapter, which disempower the victim due to the actions of an oppressor. Instead, these dramatized approaches in cinema and theatre "may use and interrogate space in more radical, malleable ways, in order to try and imagine hope and peaceful alternatives, or to encourage communication and connection between rival sides" (Mavroudi 560). One example of a space that resists the politically dominant strain of thought to foster an increased engagement with other perceptions of life in Palestine is playback theatres. In these environments, after audience members share personal stories, the players from the company proceed to interpret those narratives, acting them back at the audience as incisive drama — one that aims to accommodate the opinions of all spectators. As Jo Salas writes of these performances, "Listeners, hearing the human voice of the teller and seeing her story brought to life, find a little more space within themselves to accommodate the humanity of that person and her perspective" (Rivers 157). Here, the interaction between the audience member (who tells the story) and the actors (who adapt that tale into a narrative) is a tool to express the commonality between the two sides and also recognize the depth of the Other. The work of a company of actors to stage these deeply personal accounts also enables marginalized narratives to garner attention in a public sphere.

One of the major solutions to forge an atmosphere that fosters peace-building and removes aggression is through implementing a ground for exchange that does not privilege one ethnic group or identity over the other. This ensures that the dialogue does not reflect the dynamics of power asymmetry between Israeli oppressor and Palestinian victim. As a result, the organizational structure for these meetings should include appropriately representative voices, establishing a space where all voices have volume and value. An encounter between opponents that recognizes the commonalities between the participants, as Perry explores in her research, positively influences one's opinion about the Other. In an environment with an equitable power balance, the geographical space for these conversations also depends on a swapping of home-

field territory. As participants in CFP reported, going to the Occupied Territories encouraged more open discussions and helped some Israelis comprehend the depth of the occupation (Perry 122).

These pushes toward peaceful cooperation by making the dominant side understand the imbalance of power mirrors Avni's conception of what she would do if a film similar to *Encounter Point* was in production today. Avni says that focusing on the structural dynamics in Israel-Palestine would be easier to examine in the present-day due to an increasing recognition of this asymmetry:

> Beyond occupation, there's ideology… Anybody inhabiting those lands ultimately has to make a choice between whether they value pluralism or they value a kind of ethno-nationalist tribalism. Pluralism means that you can imagine the full equality of the Other and your neighbour, and there's intrinsic value to that.

Despite a larger presence of anti-occupation activism and wider breadth of literature on the continued failures and obstructions related to the peace process, a project like *Encounter Point* would be punishingly difficult to make in today's polarized political landscape, Avni adds. One of the reasons for the unlikely contemporary success of a documentary about peace-building today comes in the words of activist Shlomo Zagman in *Encounter Point*. As the film chronicles, Zagman left his home in a West Bank settlement due to his disapproval of Israeli territorial expansion. The activist mentions that people from the Israeli left and right make their opinions known in slogans or stickers. He wonders, "If, like me, your position is a full page, how can you make it a sticker? Who will read it?" Zagman's frustration over the complexity of defining the nuances of the conflict speaks to how difficult it is for compassionate people from both sides to partake in dialogue, as there are so many layers and perspectives to the historical and contemporary situation in Israel and Palestine.

Beyond the hazards of spatial boundaries like checkpoints, the ways that citizens from both sides approach the meaning of peace affects what conversations can ultimately happen. While there are organizations trying to improve relationships among people from different ethnic and political orientations, a major challenge to these attempts at conversations revolve around the concept of normalization. Within the geopolitical context this thesis explores, to normalize this

situation would ignore the stark power imbalances between Israeli and Palestinian lives. There is value in reaching out to the other sides, but according to journalist Omar H. Rahman, these encounters "[ignore] the ongoing oppression, colonization, and denial of rights, committed by one side against the other" (Rivers 158). Similarly, in Hallward's exploration of peace-building groups, she notes the different aims for the participants within these conversations, explaining that while Israelis are insistent on participating within a peace process, even invoking the idea of a viable "peace" rubs some Palestinians the wrong way (51). Due to the contrasts in response to the signing of the Oslo Accords, which Israelis greeted with optimism and Palestinians met with cynicism, the latter group wants to avoid using the term 'peace,' since this approach does not always emphasize the architecture and social norms that occupy them and continue to hinder social progress (Hallward 56). As these authors examine, Israelis interested to reach out and seek common ground with their neighbours must recognize the incredible circumstances that Palestinians face, systemically, on a daily basis.

The challenges for these conversations go beyond the mere logistics of getting through checkpoints and finding the time to sit for an uninterrupted, meaningful dialogue. There is also a risk on the part of those willing to meet, as they may be considered pariahs among their ethnic or religious group for agreeing to interact with people considered to be an enemy. Meanwhile, as Perry found in her investigations, Palestinians were wary of encountering Israelis who had served in the military, since the icon of the soldier defines much of the brutality of the occupation, while Israelis had to overcome the feeling that their neighbour believed in the legitimacy of violence against them (97-98). The fears of these participants may not just stem from their time with a rival, but the reaction of friends and family members who may oppose their immersion with these cooperative initiatives.

One challenge to creating this dialogue among youths (like the subjects of *Promises*) stems from the lopsided, historically slanted narratives printed within school textbooks in Israel-Palestine. Nurit Peled-Elhanan's book about the representation of Palestine in these Israeli texts showcases the efforts among national publishers to frame the regional geography in a way that promotes Jewish claims to the land and marginalizes the history and identity of other religious groups. The ideologies espoused within many of the books she analyzes emphasize the idea that Jews possess the historical right to Israel, and this includes the insertion of Biblical phrases into the text to sanctify an ethno-nationalist, Zionist narrative (106). (For a more thorough analysis of

the varying approaches to teaching Israeli and Palestinian history, Tamara Erde's 2014 documentary *This is My Land* serves as an insightful glimpse into the ideological biases of these schools.)

Dialogue in Dheisheh

Fears and misconceptions of the Other, which further divide these regional neighbours, nonetheless fail to affect the aspirations of optimistic citizens in *Encounter Point* and *Promises*. In the latter documentary, there is a prolonged sequence of extensive interaction, cooperation, and dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, moderated and supervised by the filmmakers. Some critics have faulted the documentary's attempts at achieving balance through a kind of normalization, which disregard the power asymmetry in the region. Michael Atkinson's mixed review of the documentary in *The Village Voice* opines that the filmmakers may have done too little to differentiate between the children's' "declarations of racist vengeance" and "why-can't-we-just-get-along hopefulness." Nevertheless, the moments of communication between the two parties provides a unique glimpse at the process of trying to understand the other side of this loaded, multi-faceted conflict, and exposes the hope of the films' young subjects in regard to their openness to continue these conversations.

Promises uses the youths both as a conduit to initiate unfamiliar audience members with the concerns and circumstances besieging local populations, as well as a catalyst to instigate further communicative exchanges, bolstered by the subjects' fiery, engaged stances. This passion for the children to meet is best personified in a conversation among the Palestinian children, where Sanabel explains that the Israelis may empathize with their situation, asserting that "No Palestinian child ever tried to explain our situation to the Jews." The will among the documentarians to examine how the Israeli and Palestinian children consider the well-being of their new acquaintances, within the span of a day-long play date in the Dheisheh refugee camp, initializes a potential for hope and meaningful dialogue.

During the first two thirds of *Promises*, the filmmakers focus on the common activities of these youths. Through montages and sequences that highlight the spiritual practices and recreational activities of the various young Israelis and Palestinians featured, the documentarians mirror the importance of these interests, suggesting shortcuts through which these children can later be brought together. Two collections of scenes, in particular, connect the passions of these

local youths. The first is a montage of religious observances from around the holiest centres of Jerusalem, showing the moods and movements of prayer that occur at the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Western Wall — two geographically proximate spaces of gathering and worship among Palestinians and Israelis. The second is a comparative study of two athletic competitions: the volleyball match of secular Israeli twin brothers Yarko and Daniel, and Faraj's track meet, where the spry Palestinian pre-teen faces off against children from other villages and refugee camps.

In one of the film's more stirring audio-visual triumphs, which doesn't contain a single utterance of dialogue, a minute-long montage shows various forms of spiritual ceremonies happening around Jerusalem. It begins with an establishing shot of Jerusalem's holy sites, although the camera then gravitates toward these pivotal places of prayer. Subsequently, shots of Jewish men in religious garb bowing their heads and kissing the Western wall repeatedly, depicting the sustained repetition and devoted movements required for certain psalms, is mirrored by movements of a different kind: the kneeling and prostration of Muslim Palestinians. True to the ways both peoples face their holy sites, the Jews are turned toward the right of the frame, symbolizing the obligation to face the center of Jerusalem, while the Muslims are mirrored in their stance, also positioned toward the core of the city but from the other side. These reflections do not sustain this faith-oriented montage, as there are interspersed glimpses of children from three religions (including Christianity) partaking in their own forms of observances, and positioned in a variety of different stances. The sequence showcases one of the central causes for animosity between Israelis and Palestinians, the ethno-religious differences between the communities, while also showing the commonalities in the shared rituals surrounding Jerusalem's several apexes of holiness. With a peaceful horn playing underneath these images, the film imagines a utopian-like space, where various forms of religion can be practiced within a close proximity without the presence of ethnic tension and religious flares. (A subsequent sequence with Palestinian boy Mahmoud washing his feet and preparing for the serenity of walking into the Al Aqsa Mosque, followed by a brief scene of Shlomo's bar mitzvah at the Western Wall, highlights the preparation routines and gestures that are such an intricate part of these holy ceremonies.) The nuanced comparisons between Muslim and Jewish religious observance, all occurring within a close distance, is a way for the filmmakers to acclimate their spectator with the practices of the subjects while witnessing the commonalities of Jewish and Muslim spiritual devotion.

Furthermore, the focus on the two aforementioned sporting events binds the children, who will not meet for several months, into a more immediate terrain. In the first, at the citywide finals of Yarko and Daniel's volleyball team, there are tears when the twins are defeated. In a sequence a few minutes later, we see Faraj crying as well, when he narrowly loses a sprint against other Palestinian runners. This mirroring of the youths' recreational passions is illuminating for a few reasons. First, it portrays the power of sport as a vital outlet for children on both sides, foreshadowing the games and athletic competitions that will emerge as a unifying factor during the film's climactic meeting. Second, the external aspects of these sporting events punctuate the contrasts among the two societies: the volleyball match is in a clean gym, large and full of echoes, while the track competition, on a dusty, outdoor field, must have its athletes and spectators contend with blowing sand and noise from Israeli helicopters flying overhead. Finally, and most significantly, the frustration and bitter sadness that Faraj, Yarko, and Daniel show after their losses unites their emotional similarities, while showing the audience for the first time that the subjects know that the filmmakers are speaking with children from their opponent's side. Yarko and Daniel are full of questions for director B.Z. Goldberg, asking him if Faraj won his race, before one of them adds, "Sometimes we also cry after a race." The filmmakers use sport as the backdrop for the first suggestion that there is an interest among the children on knowing what is happening with the children in the West Bank — and is also *Promises*' first instance of onscreen empathy from an Israeli toward a Palestinian. This structural approach to mirror everyday activities like prayer and athletics works as a connective tissue between the young Israelis and Palestinians.

Meanwhile, shortly after we hear the twins' interest in Faraj's race, we have a few sequences of crosscutting between the documentary's seven main subjects. In a quick succession, we see snippets of the filmmakers' interviews with the young Israelis and Palestinians, as they talk about who has rightful ownership to the territory of Israel/Palestine. Sanabel explains that "the Jewish people still occupy our land" and voices her dream of visiting and praying at the Dome of the Rock. In a later collection of crosscutting, with Jerusalem as the subject, Moishe quips that the Holy City belongs to the Jews and that he would "clear out all the Arabs from the Mount of Olives." The extreme differences in these responses are startling, yet the tactic of this editing helps to transcend the disparity of these opinions. This editing reflects the quick access that the film crew has to these various stories and opinions — a spatial allowance that the

filmmakers can obtain due to their usage of Israeli permits and license plates. Nevertheless, it also infers how the main obstacle to hearing a wealth of varying opinions about the conflict is decided by space, and forecasts the way that the filmmakers will initialize contact among the youths: through the Israeli vehicle that transports Yarko and Daniel into the Dheisheh refugee camp with relative ease. Although the crosscutting highlights the social and political separations among the children, the flurry of near-overlapping voices becomes a kind of metaphorical debate, as the arguments espoused by the children both answer and deflect each other.

Director Justine Shapiro explained that a main challenge to enable a space for dialogue with this documentary was combatting the idea that it could even happen. As she says, Palestinian and Israeli educators she met during *Promises*' initial location and research gathering shoot in 1995 told the film crew "if we bring the kids together, it would be a contrivance" (Shapiro). She adds: "Kids just don't meet each other for many reasons, including the checkpoints, but… to be supervised requires a whole other level of partnership between the adults. Adults [from both sides of the Green Line] rarely meet unless there is an organization or a political or a work reason to do so" (Shapiro). In our interview, Shapiro also revealed that the decision to have the children meet in Dheisheh was Faraj's suggestion, and that once this idea was voiced, the parents and families in the refugee camp were open to the idea of gathering the Israeli and Palestinian children there. Still, the documentarian says that the film crew "spoke with those in the camp who were the most well-connected, and were assured that [neither] Hamas nor any other authority would… respond to Daniel and Yarko's visit," assuring that there was little risk for the filmmakers and the young subjects who accompanied them (Shapiro).

The meeting occurred over the course of a Saturday. As shown in *Promises*, Yarko and Daniel's mother drives them through a checkpoint into the refugee camp, where Faraj, Sanabel, and a few other Palestinian children (including supporting characters Ahmed and Motassim) wait for their arrival. The 10-minute encapsulation of this play-date contains several short sequences of youthful bonding activities between the pre-teens, including a game of Stella Ella Ola, a Middle Eastern lunch (prepared by some of the families of the Palestinians), and sports such as soccer and wrestling. *Promises*' recurring interest in sports as a common denominator between the two sides — also inferred in an earlier scene, where Daniel explains he would rather talk about sports than politics with the Palestinians — comes to symbolize an evaporation of this feeling that the Other is the opponent. During the soccer scene, Faraj and Yarko show

camaraderie by choosing to be on the same team, while the playful wrestling on Faraj's living room carpet (which concludes with Ahmed taking Yarko's hand and declaring him the champion) creates an opportunity to unite in their shared passions and find friendship. This dissolution of fear and tension between the children even finds an ironic symbol at the end of the soccer sequence, as many of the Palestinian children show their new Israeli friends a slingshot. This item, a weapon of defiance in the Biblical story of the Jewish king David and in the more contemporary geopolitical circumstances of Palestinian resistance, is reclaimed as a toy to be shared among new friends, instead of a weapon.

Aside from these dynamic childhood games, the Saturday does feature a brief tour of Dheisheh, where the Palestinian children show Yarko and Daniel a spot that was significant during the First Intifada. A Hamas slogan, which asserts that the land of Palestine's "thirst will be quenched with blood," seems to unsettle the Israeli twins, yet this tension is soon forgotten as Faraj tells his guests not to speak "Israeli," meaning Hebrew, around Dheisheh so as not to arouse suspicion among locals. (Here, as in *Encounter Point*, English is a shortcut to dialogue, as the children are often more knowledgeable of this language than the dialect of their neighbour.) This leads to Yarko's admission during the living room dialogue at the end of the film that he once believed that any Hamas supporter "was totally insane," but now understands the devotion to that militant group. "If I were [a Palestinian], I'd feel the same way," he asserts. The choice among the documentarians to show the twins' physical and verbal responses to the graffiti shows how an understanding of Palestinian struggle is immensely important to creating a path for dialogue, where Israelis can register the significance of these resistance groups.

It is significant that the pluralistic concept of dialogue has varying significance among Israelis and Palestinians, as there can be different power dynamics between those willing to engage in discussion. For some Israelis, to sit down with an opponent for a dialogue is an outreach effort linked with democratic ideals, which is meant to find common purpose among constituents with different views to create political change. However, for Palestinians who approve of assembling a space for discussion that includes Israelis, there is some hostility around even calling these sessions a dialogue (Perry 88). As Hallward elaborates in *Struggling for a Just Peace*, the idea of 'peace' is connected with security for Israelis, but justice and freedom for Palestinians – and there is an extraordinary imbalance between what exists for the former and latter in that situation (55). The idea of dialogue for some in the Occupied Territories is too

interlinked with "peace talks," which repeatedly failed in the late twentieth century to yield significant political or economic gains for Palestinians or a solution to the refugee issue.

Similarly, the power struggle around language is often an obstacle to collaborative activism. Even though many Israelis and Palestinians, like those profiled in *Promises*, know some English, the number of Palestinians who speak proficient Hebrew is larger than the number of Israelis who know Arabic. During exchanges of dialogue, "Palestinians are often forced to speak in Hebrew, putting them at a disadvantage when it comes to communicating their thoughts" (Hallward 65). Also, the Arabic language classes at Jewish schools in Israel focus on a more classical style than the colloquial language that Israeli activists encounter during meetings and demonstrations in the Occupied Territories (Hallward 119). Despite the English-language exchanges we see during parts of this initial meeting in *Promises*, one wonders whether dialogues and meetings between this set of Israeli and Palestinian youths could have worked as adeptly without the presence of translators that travelled with the film crew.

In her book on Combatants for Peace, Perry explores the way that storytelling has worked as a tool to spur dialogue. These narratives, told during interactions among the CFP participants, could prompt a meaningful interior response among the group members, as sharing personal stories created an atmosphere for deeper self-reflection (Perry 87). The meaningfulness of this dialogue reflects the living room conversation at the end of *Promises*. In this sequence, the filmmakers capture expressions from the individual subjects, as they come to a further understanding of their new friends' perspectives on the conflict. Moderated by the directors and translators in the room, the atmosphere of this three-minute sequence is calm and civil; there are no times when the children shout above or speak over the other to negate or contest someone else's opinion. There is a unanimous understanding that these peaceful talks deserve intensive listening. Perry concludes that the directness of CFP's dialogue sessions helped to develop a beneficial meaning among the Israelis and Palestinians, ensuring that there was space for all to communicate their experiences of suffering, without fearing the response from those who may be uncomfortable by themes related to the occupation and national violence. In *Promises*, a factor that helped the confessionality of this serious dialogue was the age group of the children. Shapiro explained that, among the Israeli and Palestinian children interviewed in the pre-production phase, those who were not yet teen-age were the most natural in speaking their mind, and not as self-conscious about revealing personal stories and opinions on camera. By following a pre-teen

age range, the filmmakers got "what the kids were saying, but also their body language, their gestures, which often expressed far more than what they were saying" (Shapiro).

During this sequence of dialogue, all of the children sit on couches, in a circle, responding to questions in their main language (with the aid of the translator for communication). The confessions from the various pre-teens touch on the difficulty of befriending a supposed enemy. "Part of me wants to connect with you and part doesn't," Faraj tells the twins. Meanwhile, young Palestinian Motassim is too tearful to coherently recount the story of his brother's tragic death by an Israeli soldier, although he does say that the tragedy made him understand that there are people on the land who don't want the Palestinians there. Throughout this dialogue, there are many close-ups on the faces of Sanabel, Faraj, and the other Palestinian children while they listen to these stories; their tears reveal the overwhelming struggle they feel at having to communicate their emotional state of being occupied subjects. This sequence concludes with Faraj's tearful realization that Goldberg, the co-director and a buoyant onscreen presence with the young subjects throughout the documentary, will be leaving them soon — and that the youths' brief but powerful experience with Yarko and Daniel is fated to whimper into little of significance. "All our effort will be in vain," he stammers, as the camera cuts to a close-up of a defeated, crying Goldberg.

Alas, the length of this climactic dialogue (just under three minutes) seems abrupt given the amount of time the filmmakers spend within the documentary pitching this meeting to the young subjects and their parents. This fragmented dissection of what was, in actuality, closer to an hour, may have been curtailed due to the foresight that this sort of reconciliation would be difficult to arrange repeatedly (Shapiro). A review of the documentary from journalist Gabriela Notaras, writing for the *World Socialist Web Site*, states that these final scenes "demonstrate that the real obstacles to forging and maintaining these friendships are external and political, factors that the children themselves cannot resolve." A coda immediately following this scene, filmed two years later, reveals a lack of continued faith for these discussions among those who met in Dheisheh for continued peace talks. Here, Daniel explains that the checkpoints had become a major complication in hindering and delaying these meetings.

Public Screenings and Probing Talkbacks

Beyond the aims for dialogue within these documentaries, the films' producers organized festival and premiere screenings with the purpose of elaborating on the debate and discussions featured in the texts. With the courageous, cooperative subjects of the films sometimes present to provide illuminating commentary after the films' presentation, encounters between the subjects and the spectators extended the ideas and themes emphasized within the moments of meeting to a physical and immersive theatre space.

As a supplemental bonus feature on *Encounter Point*'s DVD, "On the Road," examines, special screenings throughout North America and the Middle East helped to encourage moments of cross-cultural exchange, potentially among audience members with varying perspectives on the Israel-Palestine conflict. As Bacha explained in the bonus feature, "the responsibility of the filmmaker exists, but the responsibility of the audience is as important as the people creating it." The footage presents fraught and lively post-film discussions, where audience members voiced their spots of bother with the documentary's depiction of the conflict while others expressed their pleasure at engaging with thought-provoking material that shook one's perception of the occupation.

This supplemental feature shows how the presence of dialogue within the film has spurred continued conversation in the theatre space and beyond. A section entitled "Opposing Viewpoints" within the 11-minute bonus feature reveals the direct criticism the filmmakers received during post-screening question-and-answer sessions. For instance, a woman at *Encounter Point*'s Jerusalem premiere asked why the film represented the Israeli side more frequently. Meanwhile, a man in Sderot, Israel insisted that the film was "somewhat antagonistic to the Israeli army." This compilation of direct criticism toward the filmmakers highlights the misconceptions that audience members had about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as their sensitivity to the framing and narrative choices made by the filmmakers. Regardless, using the theatre space as a way to discuss contrasting opinions of the conflict ties in with the atmosphere of the onscreen meetings. *Encounter Point* co-producer Nahanni Rous says in the bonus feature that the documentary received the biggest response from screenings with a varied audience, as "when you realize that what's challenging for you is different than what's challenging for the person sitting next to you, it shows the complexity of [the conflict]." The presence of the subjects at these selective screenings worked in a similar way to alternative theatre, as those spaces

provided Palestinian citizens the opportunity to amplify their stories to an interested audience. The film producers' insistence on speaking with dissenting voices framed these talkback events as a non-judgmental space in the vein of that environment. In those cultural spaces, there is a "voluntary exchange… within a respectful environment [that] can encourage audiences members to suspend reified definitions of self and other, in favour of a more accommodating stance" (Rivers 157). Within these sessions, experienced storytellers could amplify their empathy to the public domain, potentially reaching a larger number of believers in nonviolence and peace-building movements than what they could normally encounter within local communities in Israel and Palestine.

The purpose for this kind of outreach goes beyond building public awareness of this geopolitical strife, but to enlighten and educate citizens from Israel and Palestine about their blind spots when it comes to the contemporary conflict. In an interview with *The Age*, Bacha explained that extensive planning of a public screening of *Encounter Point* at the Jerusalem Film Festival was needed to accommodate the Palestinian patrons who had partaken in the film and needed a permit to attend the festival. In an intriguing parallel to the voices of Palestinian cynicism from within the film, which doubted the necessity of meeting and talking with Israelis, some of the local Palestinians weren't entirely sold on the film's peace prospects, according to co-producer Joline Makhlouf. As Makhlouf recalls in the supplemental feature, "We found people a little cynical. 'Oh that's nice, but it's not going to go anywhere.' And then there were people who said, 'There are Israelis who believe in our rights?'" Meanwhile, the film's placement on an Arabic, multi-national satellite channel, Al Arabiyah, was met with some scrutiny from the target audience, as an article in *The Age* stated. However, the large viewing audience for that channel was considered a way that *Encounter Point* could impact Arabic political discourse outside of Palestine.

The documentarians also had other audiences in mind; notably, an American public that was politically engaged but lacked exposure to autonomous and vibrant Palestinian voices. Rous explained in an article for the *Christian Science Monitor* that it was a major goal to organize screenings in the United States, which included co-sponsored events between Muslim and Jewish groups that finished with a post-screening dialogue. Avni also shared the idea that Jewish and American audiences were mostly unaware of nonviolent activism among Palestinians at the time of *Budrus*'s presentation on the festival circuit. In an article for *JWeekly.com*, in preparation for

that documentary's premiere at the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, Avni mentioned the difficulty of getting stories about this resistance into mainstream American news outlets. As she stated, "There has been a disproportionate [news media] coverage of militancy and militarism compared to communities and individuals trying to problem-solve." The film, Bacha wrote in a column for *Forbes*, could help to build "the capacity of nonviolent activists in the field by ensuring these gain traction within their own societies and abroad." As the documentary approached its North American release, the creative forces at Just Vision realized the power of print media to write corresponding articles about *Budrus* that could make an impression on a large readership.

This exposure among North American audiences tied in with Just Vision's development to use the film and the examples of nonviolence it outlines as a document for pedagogical discussion. As Avni admitted in our interview, the film's deepest cultural impact was for the North American Jewish community. She says, "We were one of the factors that began to disentangle the notion of 'Palestinian' and 'terrorist' in the eyes of American Jewish communities and… the media. When we started, people wouldn't even use the word 'occupation' in conversation." (Avni). Thus, although the film remains relatively obscure in the contemporary era, *Encounter Point* helped to inspire new approaches, albeit temporarily, of discussing the conflict.

Nevertheless, the wish among certain spectators for a "balanced" overview of the complex, multi-faceted conflict is one reason for much of the criticism toward both *Encounter Point* and *Promises*. In Yael Friedman's investigation of Greenhouse, a development programme for non-fiction filmmakers across the Middle East, she noted the large donations from European countries, which complements a "Eurocentric patronage" that suggests a closer alliance with Israel (21). Thus, Friedman's hesitance to regard balance as a worthwhile quality of Greenhouse films connects with the Western funding of documentaries like *Promises* and *Encounter Point*, which depended highly on donors from the United States and Europe. Shapiro revealed in our interview that *Promises* could be made with the help of a 10-minute fundraising clip, which garnered donations from American Jewish celebrities like Norman Lear and Debra Winger. Both documentaries relied on American funding to some capacity, while Just Vision had a plan to exhibit *Encounter Point* in U.S. classrooms as part of a developed curriculum, as Avni revealed in her interview with *Worldpress*. The films' careful symmetry between Israeli and Palestinian

voices reflects the pluralism both films seek to reflect but also marginalizes and normalizes the systemic power imbalances in the region.

Some Final Words

The presence of cross-cultural dialogue in *Encounter Point* and *Promises*, documentaries that engage with ideas of co-existence, creates new ways of comprehending the intensified Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite some overwhelming resistance from voices on both sides of the Green Line, the filmmakers manage to reveal the compassion and genuine curiosity of citizens within the territories of knowing the Other. Nevertheless, both films spend more time chronicling the efforts of activists and the directors as they try to arrange a space for meeting and conversation than actually recording these moments of benevolence among Israelis and Palestinians who hope to learn from each other. Ultimately, that process reveals more about the ways that these two politically intertwined peoples have been socially and architecturally separated — often through dismal circumstances far beyond their control — than it does about their capacity to engage in dialogue.

There is worthwhile criticism and commentary to be written about the ways that these examined non-fiction texts focus too much on balancing Israeli and Palestinian voices. Through normalizing the regional power struggles and minimizing some of the harsher historical elements of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, these documentaries are not always successful. Despite these flaws, the virtual absence of popular literary and cinematic texts that examine pushes toward peace in Israel-Palestine makes these projects invaluable. In both films, the directors mirror the experiences of citizens from both circumstances to illuminate a shared humanity — a stylistic trademark that unifies the resolve among the populations for the violence to dissipate. Meanwhile, the decision among producers and filmmakers to invite impassioned audiences to discuss these films amplifies the small, grassroots efforts from activists on the ground, who hope to battle public misconceptions and media misrepresentation of the complexities facing these resilient communities.

Conclusion

The five documentaries explored in this thesis show the ways that filmmakers from the Middle East and around the world hoped to elaborate on the relationships between Israelis and Palestinians, while showcasing an impetus among various citizens for peace-building, nonviolent activism and constructive dialogue. These cultural projects foregrounded ideas of reconciliation and pluralism during a period when terrorism, violence, and harmful ethno-nationalist values defined the way many from around the world glimpsed this multi-faceted conflict. While few of these films were seen widely beyond the realm of cable and satellite television or special festival screenings, their concentration on measurable actions to create change in Israel-Palestine resonated with the investigations of activist and humanitarian groups in the state. Although the two-state solution became an exponentially difficult vision to uphold due to periodic violence and increasing settlement construction in the twenty-first century, these films can still prove to be valuable gestures that point to a productive way forward in the relationships between these populations.

In the first chapter, we examined the rupture that exists between the two national cinemas, while showing how the myths and narratives perpetuated by these paradigms could reconcile due to the post-Zionist cultural movement. The films from late twentieth and early twenty-first century Israeli cinema began to shy away from Zionist themes and embrace the multicultural and multi-ethnic make-up of the region. An increasing transnationalism of film production, along with a growing number of collaborative ventures between Israeli and Palestinian film crews – such as the Oscar-nominated film *Ajami* (2009) – are other ways that these local cinema cultures have resisted aligning entirely with nationalist values and ideas that betray or marginalize the Other.

The second chapter examined two documentaries from the American non-profit organization Just Vision. *Budrus* and *Encounter Point*, which highlight the ways that Israeli and Palestinian citizens have worked together to protest the occupation and reconcile over the violence that has plagued both communities, promote the humanism of locals in standing up to Israeli military and government authorities. The chapter also showcased the efforts of media critics to invalidate the ways that (predominantly) Western press outlets report on the conflict, as well as the theoretical and investigate work of peace-building advocates. *Budrus* and *Encounter*

Point attempted to broaden perception around Israel and Palestine due to the ways they avoided aligning with much of the Western media representation of the conflict while sharing values with under-represented groups aimed toward nonviolent solutions to local tensions.

"Space for Travel," the third chapter, reviewed the ways that films from Israel and Palestine orient space, with an emphasis on the constrained mobility of populations in the Occupied Territories. Although several of the documentaries featured in this thesis comply with some of these cinematic representations, their makers found new ways to approach the "architecture of occupation" and portray the increasingly divided relationships between these separated units. The three films examined here elaborated on how to portray these spaces cinematically, to emphasize the continuing brutalization of Palestinians while also finding new stylistic zones through which to quell the rule of Israeli military powers.

Meanwhile, the fourth and final chapter, which relied more heavily on textual analysis and interviews with filmmakers, focused on the fleeting, temporary moments of interaction and dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. A detailed analysis of *Promises*, which culminates in an extended sequence of play and discussion among local youths from West Jerusalem and the Dheisheh refugee camp, focuses on ways that the documentarians depicted the shared values and interests of these children alongside their socio-political differences of opinion.

However, these documentaries, released during the first decade of the twenty-first century, are beginning to look like period pieces. In 2017, with Israel's recent announcement of settlement expansion in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, the peace process is stalled even further, as leaders from both sides of the conflict seem unlikely to meet and negotiate in the near future. Meanwhile, the arrival of Donald Trump's administration — one that includes the appointment of lawyer David Friedman, who has frequently espoused pro-settler views on the Web site *Arutz Sheva*, as the U.S. Ambassador to Israel — has also threatened to move the American embassy to Jerusalem. This political decision, which would signal that Jerusalem is a legitimate capital for the Jewish people but not the Palestinians, could inflame tensions between the city's inhabitants and inspire acts of violence on both sides. (One should not forget that a major impetus for the Second Intifada was Ariel Sharon's visit to the contested Temple Mount in September 2000.)

Meanwhile, another site of flurried debate in recent months has been a United Nations Security Council Resolution, 2334. This resolution, favoured by 14 countries, criticized Israel's

continuing establishment of settlements in occupied Palestinian territory. As the resolution states, the Security Council believed that settlement construction constitutes "a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-state solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace" (United Nations, S/RES/2334 (2016), 2). Much of the reaction to this resolution examined the abstaining of the United States, which has regularly vetoed declarations against Israel, from the vote – a move that ensured the decree would pass. Nevertheless, although the United States (under the Obama administration) was faithful to their Middle Eastern ally, the country's long-standing disapproval of settlements, which eroded prospects for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, resulted in the abstention.

Unsurprisingly, Israel condemned the resolution. Danny Danon, an Israeli representative to the UN, scorned the Council for bias. Danon explained that the resolution would deter the peace process and incite Palestinian aggression, before vowing to the Council that Israel would "continue to be a Jewish state proudly reclaiming the land of our forefathers" (*The Times of Israel*). On the other side, a permanent observer for the State of Palestine, Riyad Mansour, approved the resolution and targeted Danon's criticism, explaining that the only present bias worth mentioning was one against law, reason, and the vision of a viable two-state solution. The intense lack of common ground among Israeli and Palestinian representatives mirrors the disparate responses in the State to the issue of settlements — a problem that is both difficult to resolve and continues to demote conscientious dialogue among citizens of Israel and Palestine.

Furthermore, the overwhelming schism between Zionist supporters of Israel and those sympathetic with the struggle for Palestinian human rights has grown due to an international boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaign (BDS) against Israel. The campaign aims to put economic pressure on the State until it "complies with international law and universal principles of human rights" (Barghouti 239). Since this activist campaign began in 2005, the BDS movement has grown into a point of dispute and extreme controversy between pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian factions. The latter consider the campaign to be a peaceful and civil solidarity movement, while members of the former group argue that to single out and delegitimize the Jewish state is a form of anti-Semitism (Barghouti 82). The BDS campaign, which has spread across many university campuses in Canada, the United States, and Europe, has further polarized the discussion about this geopolitical conflict on the world stage. The embattled atmosphere within academic and political circles as a result of the controversies surrounding this movement

has contributed to a more divisive dialogue pertaining to the occupation of Palestinians. In other words, although there are still pervasive discussions about the Israel-Palestine conflict on campuses, the divergent aims of the BDS movement's supporters and opponents demonstrates the increasingly hostile atmosphere of engaging in these debates today.

It is tough to evaluate how well the documentaries analyzed here resonated in the decade following their production and distribution. Released during a period of war and flaring tensions in the region, when hopes of mitigating the violence and returning to negotiations around peace were common, these documentaries spoke to the possibility for a nurturing and sustainable dialogue among Israelis and Palestinians. However, neither Avni nor Flanders, both interviewed for this thesis, consider their work to be too relevant against the contemporary political backdrop. In regard to the feasibility of engaging the other side in dialogue, Flanders cautions that this would be very difficult to find in Israel-Palestine today. "Palestinians aren't really interested any more in faux Israeli dialogue," she says (Flanders). These sharp replies to questions about these documentaries' continued influence shows the drastic changes within the region over a decade — from a period of various attempts at hopeful rapprochement to one of near complete resignation about the compatibility of Israeli-Palestinian co-existence.

Nevertheless, although gestures toward dialogue and reconciliation have not continued with much presence on the ground, these film texts still speak to a will among some brave Israelis and Palestinians to challenge their conception of the Other and participate in peace-building and nonviolent activism. As for *Route 181*, which focuses its cultural collision more on the collaborative efforts behind-the-camera, there are still films being made in Israel that benefit from this unification of Israeli and Palestinian artists. These films, produced during a particular period in Israeli and Palestinian history, exposed a will among filmmakers around the world to ask thoughtful questions about the effects of occupation and the viability of peace. These artists' commitment to investigating thoughtful, new approaches of looking at the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict adheres to the merits of post-Zionism, which desired to expose and explore new perspectives related to Israel's dense and heavily debated history. Many years into the future, these documentaries may resonate due to their position as among the first primary cultural texts to point the way forward among Israelis, Palestinians, and all those who crave pluralism and peace in the Middle East.

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