The bride (Anna Condo) in *Wedding in Galilee*, a figure of transition between the allure of traditional femininity and the enactment of phallic authority. Courtesy of Kino Film

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Between a Postcolonial Nation and Fantasies of the Feminine: The Contested Visions of Palestinian Cinema

Anna Ball

In the relatively youthful field of Palestinian filmmaking, *Wedding in Galilee* (*Urs al-jalil*, dir. Michel Khleifi, Palestine/France/Belgium, 1987) and *Divine Intervention* (*Yadun ilaheyya*, dir. Elia Suleiman, France/Morocco/Germany/Palestine, 2002) represent significant contributions to their national cinema at crucial points in its development and in the nation's history. Khleifi's work opposed the militant propagandist tone of films produced by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) following the Six-Day War of 1967, which saw significant territorial gains by Israel and became known as al-Naksa, the setback or disaster, to Palestinians.[1] *Wedding in Galilee*'s unusually lyrical, meditative style drew attention for the way it seemed to capture a profound sense of uncertainty in Palestinian nationhood. Its thoughtful ambivalence, or what might now be read in terms of its status as "accented cinema,"[2] made it the first Palestinian feature film to achieve international recognition, gaining the International Critics' prize at Cannes in

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1987. In contrast to the work of the PLO, the power of Khleifi's vision of nationhood lay in its recognition of the multiple conflicts that exist *within* Palestinian society—most prominently, between generational and gendered concerns. *Wedding in Galilee* therefore established the interplay of male and female, masculine and feminine, modern and traditional identities at the heart of his national vision, and in doing so established a powerful propensity for introspection and gendered self-critique in Palestinian cinema.

Though produced fifteen years later and adopting a very different tone, Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* bears the legacy of Khleifi's daring aesthetics and of his interrogative attitude toward gender. In a period of apparent stasis after the failed Oslo Accords, *Divine Intervention* drew international attention for its fresh and challenging representation of the contemporary Palestinian psyche. If Suleiman's work attempts to represent the fraught status of Palestinian identity, premised on conflict and on the absence of a nation-state, then *Divine Intervention* also demonstrated this quite unintentionally when the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences declared the film ineligible for an Oscar nomination on the grounds that "the Academy does not accept films from countries that are not recognized by the United Nations."[3] In this film, Palestine is unrecognizable in more than one sense, however. Gone are the authentic ideals of traditional nationalism. In their place, a series of vignettes portray the alternately absurd, blackly comic, and tragic elements of life in the West Bank, conjuring Palestine's traumatized identity in its very structure. Central to this innovative vision of nationhood is an active contestation of patriarchal power and a playful recasting of gender roles.

Khleifi's and Suleiman's works distinguish themselves by an acute gender-consciousness within their visions of the nation. This lends their *cinéma d'auteur* a somewhat unexpected affinity with the feminist assertions of Palestinian authors such as Sahar Khalifeh (who features as one of the subjects of Khleifi's *Fertile Memory* [*al-Dhakira al-Khasba*, Belgium/Netherlands/West Germany, 1980]) and Liana Badr (now also a film director herself), who both urge attention to the structures of gender oppression embedded in the nationalist project. It also aligns Khleifi's and Suleiman's promi-

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nent international projects with the highly experimental interrogations of identity that take place in the work of the video artist Mona Hatoum and, indeed, with other emerging female video artists of the Arab world.[4] This affinity offers an interesting prospect for feminist theorists of nationalism, who have frequently urged attention to the patriarchal structures of nationhood and have campaigned for gender reform as a central concern in the project of building a truly emancipated nation.[5] This feminist sentiment appears to be reflected in Khleifi's comment that only by recognizing the complex ways in which Palestinians might be both "victims and tormentors . . . towards women and children" can Palestine and the broader "Arab world achieve a new culture."[6]

Yet Khleifi's and Suleiman's disruption of gendered paradigms does not only point toward a feminist potential. It also evokes a model of nationhood that breaks away from traditional ideas of unity and embraces a fragmented, destabilized, and hybrid vision of Palestine. Suleiman's earlier works, such as *Homage by Assassination* (*Takrim bi al-Qatl*, US, 1992) and *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (*Sijil "Ikhtifa,"* Palestine, 1996), focus on the fragmentation of national identity in relation to diasporic experience—an important element of Palestinian identity and of its cinema (also reflected in Suleiman's own lengthy periods of exile in New York). Indeed, as Irit Neidhardt has noted, Palestine's lack of autonomy and of resources has meant a frequent reliance on international funding, particularly for the more idiosyncratic visions of its auteurs. While this situation has created a traumatic alienation from the concept of an autonomous national cinema, it also lends Palestinian filmmaking an intrinsically hybrid character.[7] This hybridity is not only reflected in many filmmakers' explorations of diasporic identity; it also emerges in the ways in which Khleifi and Suleiman explore gendered and national identities as shifting and contingent tropes. Collectively, this emphasis on the shifting paradigms of Palestinian identity, a disjunctive relationship to space, and a recognition of difference within the nation seems to evoke visions of the nation that are closer to Homi Bhabha's concept of the postcolonial "Third Space" than to any traditional models of the nation-state.[8] Possibilities of a simultaneously postcolonial and feminist poten-

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tial therefore seem to circulate in Khleifi's and Suleiman's work. To what extent are these notoriously fraught potentials realized in their films, and to what extent are the two projects reconcilable? By examining the ways in which gender and nation are deconstructed and remade in *Wedding in Galilee* and *Divine Intervention*, it is possible to assess the conflicts and possibilities that arise from these consciously contested visions of nationhood.

The Restorative Visions of *Wedding in Galilee*

Wedding in Galilee provoked both international acclaim and outcry among various countries in the Arab world on two grounds: its focus on Israeli military occupation and its unflinching portrayal of the fallible and physical gendered body. Distributors in Israel requested its title be cut to *The Wedding* in an attempt to dilute the traumatic political backdrop that Khleifi brings center stage, while critics in Egypt and Morocco protested its use of female nudity, the display of male impotence, and its contestation of traditional gender roles.[9] The collision of contemporary political and gender concerns is certainly a heady combination in the film. Yet Khleifi utilizes his sharply political viewpoint in the service of a poetic realism, conjured in the gently folkloric style of a Palestine visualized in the hazy tones of dappled sunlight filtered through olive trees. The film's romantic exterior offers a lulling distraction from the film's radical content, but turning to the interplay of gender and nation in the film brings the latter to the fore.

Khleifi (like Suleiman) hails from Nazareth, a city not in the Occupied Territories, but in Israel itself. He sets his film in the similar location of a Palestinian village in the officially Israeli territory of Galilee, a context that draws attention to the direct presence of Israeli control in Palestine. The film exposes the friction between Palestinian national identity and Israeli governance over the course of one day on which the wedding of the village patriarch's son is to take place. The film explores the tensions that arise not only between occupier and occupied but also among village members themselves, and particularly between father and son, in the attempt to carry out this traditional ceremony. The film

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explores the compromises that have to be made by the Palestinian villagers, most notably in the concession that the Israeli governor and his soldiers should be present as wedding guests and as guards. *Wedding in Galilee* appears to offer the carnivalesque as a mode of resistance. The film's conclusion posits the most transgressive element of the wedding as its eruption from traditional celebration into ecstatic rioting, which sees the Israeli occupier forced from the village — a scene that can be read as a premonition of the First Intifada (1987–93) that would erupt only a short period later. Khleifi therefore envisions national resistance through a radical contestation of the social order. Yet the final scene of the film introduces an ambivalence. It shows the village patriarch's youngest son fleeing from the village up into the twilit olive groves, where he casts his expansive gaze over the sweeping hills, before lying down to sleep peacefully, far from the social chaos of the village below. This final image seems to place him as figuring a peaceful future Palestine, affirming the male lineage of Palestinian patriarchal tradition and connecting him to that most potent of Palestinian symbols, the rural landscape (a trope of national heritage and legitimacy that surfaces in Khleifi's earlier documentary, *Fertile Memory*).[10] Traditional and reformed visions of nationhood form a dual presence throughout the film; Edward Said discusses *Wedding in Galilee* as both a "quasimystical celebration of sacrifice and elegiac immobilization" and as a film characterized by a "postmodern unexpectedness."[11] Yet gender surfaces as a consistent concern among these vacillating visions. How do constructs of the male and the masculine, the female and the feminine play into these competing elements of the film?

Wedding in Galilee places the patriarchal order under direct scrutiny. Describing the concept of the "imagined community," Benedict Anderson notes that the powerful organizational structure that binds the nation is that of a "fraternity," a brotherhood.[12] The fraternal structures of the nation offer close bonds of ideological and emotional security, and their privileging of the homosocial realm makes them compatible with a hierarchical patriarchal order. As many feminist critics of nationalism have noted, national "unity" is therefore predicated on a profound inequality

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of power and identity in which the nation's citizens are differentiated according to clearly distinguished gender roles.[13] In the case of Palestinian nationalism, this gendered order is enforced by a desire to return to an "authentic" Palestinian society before occupation, expressed in a desire to recover elements of Arab identity. This includes the traditional concept of Arab masculinity (*rujulah*), which rests on social attributes of male honor (*sharaf*), face (*wajh*), kin, and community.[14] Such codes enforce a strict division of labor and a hierarchical relationship between the sexes, which imbue the male subject with a particular power through the enforcement of a male line of inheritance as the "bloodline of the nation." This concept emerges to the extreme in the Palestinian Nationalist Charter, which defines Palestinian identity as "a genuine, inherent and eternal trait and is transmitted from fathers to sons."[15] As an "imagined community," Palestine is dependent on men's performances of traditionally masculine roles and behaviors (courage, bravery, strength, protection of the nation and of women) to affirm the bonds of the national community.

Khleifi's film engages with the fraternal bonds of community in ways that both affirm and complicate notions of patriarchy. On the one hand, the narrative's mediation through the figure of a Palestinian *mukhtar* (head of the village), Selim Saleh Doud (also referred to as Abu Adel, "father of Adel," played by Mohamed Ali El Akili), seems to put a firmly patriarchal structure in place. Indeed, the film's focus on his son's wedding suggests that national identity can be asserted through the affirmation of traditional structures of kinship. It also points toward the sense in which *sharaf* is bound up with responsibility for the protection of one's wife and, at a broader symbolic level, of the nation, which is often figured in feminized terms in nationalist discourse.[16] Yet Khleifi demonstrates a critical awareness of masculinity and of nationalism as discursive constructs. This emerges most clearly in the night scenes that take place between Abu Adel and his youngest son, in which Abu Adel sits by his bedside as he sleeps and murmurs meditative desires for the traditional narratives of Palestinian identity to be passed on. "What are you dreaming of, my child?" wonders Abu Adel. "Are your dreams like mine? It's strange. Why do I want you

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to learn my story by heart?" In these scenes, Abu Adel's figure is barely distinguishable on the darkened screen, and his mythologized narratives take on a consciously dreamlike, fantastical tone. Here, Khleifi gently alerts the viewer to the "imagined" nature of national identity through the language of dream and storytelling. Such vocabulary arguably reveals the nationalist imagination as a discursive construct, undermining its authority and that of the patriarch's dreams. Visions of authentic nationhood become no more than bedtime stories passed on from father to son in this subtly subversive scene.

A more direct affront to patriarchal authority occurs in the opening scene of the film. Here, we see Abu Adel waiting in the oppressive urban environment of the Israeli governor's headquarters to ask permission to hold his son's wedding, an event that would extend beyond the curfew the village has been placed under. The racial and national power dynamics of this scene depict the clash of two patriarchal authorities, yet this is not a confrontation of equals. The dynamics of occupier and occupied are established through the Israeli governor's use of officious modern standard Arabic in contrast to Abu Adel's use of colloquial Arabic.[17] Indeed, the Palestinian's need to ask permission to enact an important element of his village's cultural identity suggests an emasculating effect on his authority. As Julie Peteet explains, "Manliness . . . is closely intertwined with . . . paternity, and with paternity's attendant sacrifices. Denying one's own needs while providing for others is such a signifier. Resistance to occupation and the consequences of such resistance constitute a category of sacrifice with long-term implications for the autonomy and security of the community and larger national collective."[18] The scene therefore renders the concept of "manliness" ambivalent. On the one hand, Abu Adel can be seen to affirm his "manliness" by foregoing his traditional patriarchal rights for the benefit of his community. On the other, his sacrifice can also be read as a compromise of cultural tradition and a failure to resist the Israeli governor's own manly authority. Khleifi's use of the wedding motif also indicates a subversive attitude toward traditional nationalist discourse here. If it usually testifies to an affirmation of kinship structures, Khleifi's particular employment

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turns it into what Viola Shafik describes as a "dramatic pretext to negotiate change in correlation with oppression on both the personal and political level."[19] The "wedding in Galilee" becomes more than a celebration of Palestinian identity within the film; it is also the premise for contesting traditional visions of nationhood. Khleifi indicates the dilemma this causes in the young men of the village. Adel (Nazih Akleh), the groom, is immediately thrown into an identity crisis by the conditions imposed on his wedding. His sister teases him, "You'll have to choose—your bride or your patriotism," but his own response is more severe: "Even a traitor would refuse to be married under such conditions." However, the wedding does go ahead, but its enactment does not offer the restoration of national identity desired by Abu Adel. Rather, it induces a sense of metaphorical and literal impotence in national and male psyches alike.

The impotence of Palestinian patriarchy under Israeli occupation is allegorized in the scene in which Adel is required to consummate his marriage. Though the scene bears all the markers of ceremonial authenticity—both spouses wear traditional robes out of modesty, and the new wife washes her husband's feet—the episode in fact shows a profound destabilization of gender roles. Adel finds himself unable to perform sexually and hence to consummate his marriage. Interestingly, he articulates his anger as a desire to kill his father: "His fatherly love has destroyed me," he announces; "I don't want to be the victim of his dreams." Adel recognizes that his father's complicity with the structures of occupation serves to emasculate him within the paradigms of Palestinian maleness; his marriage no longer signifies an affirmation of tradition, but rather the defeat of Palestinian autonomy. Yet a more fundamental alteration in gendered power structures also takes place in this scene. When Adel finds himself unable to perform his marital duties, his bride (played by Anna Condo) takes it on herself to fulfill the expectations of the community by producing the sheet that will testify to her lost virginity. She finally takes her own virginity in an act that both affirms respect for tradition and transfers phallic authority to the female subject, throwing the gendered paradigms of patriarchy into flux. It is important to note, however, that this

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destabilization of gender roles does not overthrow the structures of Palestinian nationhood more broadly. Rather, it foregrounds both husband's and wife's needs to respect tradition within the stifling pressures of both Israeli occupation and patriarchal expectations, against all odds. As the bride puts it, "If a woman's honor is her virginity, then where do you find the honor of a man?" Here, the wife identifies her actions as a product of the severe crisis within Palestinian codes of honor and national duty. Her experience of this as a source of trauma, however, ultimately serves to normalize the patriarchal structures of Palestinian nationhood.

This shift in national duty and phallic authority from male to female subject is an interesting feature of Khleifi's work, but it is one that can be related to traditional nationalist configurations of female identity more broadly. Though Palestine is referred to as the "fatherland," Palestinian land itself is feminized. Its gendering points to a fierce patriarchal protectionism toward women, embodied in the phrase *ardi— 'irdi*: literally, "my land is my womenfolk," through which it is understood that both male and national honor rest on the defense of *ard* and *'ird*—land and women's sexual integrity.[20] The traditional binaries of the male as an active defender and the head of the family and of the woman as a passive subject to be defended and provided for lie at the heart of such sayings and equate the female figure with the land—symbolic of homestead, traditional social order, maternal propagation, and the embodiment of nature. Traditional patriarchal tropes of the feminine woman therefore idealize her reproductive capacity and its allegorical significance for the continuance of a nation—hence woman becomes a figure of the nation through her feminine qualities of domesticity, heterosexuality, and reproduction (note *nation*'s derivation from *nascere*—to be born).[21] The bride's adoption of phallic authority can be read as an affront to these structures. Yet it can also be interpreted in relation to the extensive feminization of the land that occurs in colonial discourse, where territory, like woman, is penetrated, raped, and subjugated at the hands of the colonizer.[22] In this sense, the bride's taking of her own virginity can be read as an internalization of colonial violation within the female (and implicitly national) body.

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However, the propensity for women to adopt traditionally masculine forms of agency is also recognized by national discourse. In fact, domesticity and maternity may be appropriated as militant characteristics. The motif of the woman in traditional embroidered Palestinian dress, holding a child in one arm and a rifle in the other, is common on posters and paintings and represents a complex matrix of national and gendered ideals.[23] On the one hand, such an image equates the act of childbearing with resistance, locating the territorial struggle as a domestic affair for women. On the other, it represents the desperate state of affairs for a Palestine so apparently emasculated by colonial occupation that its women must bear arms, inciting a sense of shame among nationalist males. Ultimately, it points to the shifting gendered roles of the contemporary nationalist struggle, in which women have become increasingly active. Women have been accepted into the PLO and have elsewhere adopted increasingly militant roles, as the controversial figure of the female suicide bomber reveals (a figure considered a martyr in Palestinian nationalist discourse).[24] Yet this is not a sign that the social expectations of women have shifted significantly within the nationalist movement. Indeed, to be respected as a good fighter and to be considered a "sister of men," a female fighter must display the qualities of "married women and mothers—morally correct behavior and stoicism in the face of adversity,"[25] or *sumud*.

The ambivalent status of female agency is presented through competing gazes at the female body within the film, which allegorize the difficulties of "reading" woman as a construct. The bride appears as a desirable figure when offered up for scrutiny within the traditionally feminine realms of the house during her wedding preparations. While this gendering of private, interior space as female and public space as male is a common feature of a patriarchal society,[26] Khleifi violates these boundaries by shifting the cinematic gaze into this feminocentric realm. This gaze remains coded male, however, as the bride is staged as the object of heteronormative desire. As she is washed by the other women in her family, she stands statuesque in center frame as water cascades over her naked body. Though she appears a strong and iconic figure of a powerfully sensuous Palestinian femininity, she is also presented as

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the object of an eroticized gaze, affirming her status as the object of desire for her husband. In contrast, the groom's younger sister, Sumaya (Sonia Amar), is seen posing in front of a mirror, naked from the waist up but playfully twining a traditionally male garment, a *keffiya*, about her. Here, the gaze is that of Sumaya's appreciation of her own body. Indeed, Nurith Gertz sees this episode as displaying an "irreverence toward the male realm" in general,[27] and Sumaya certainly presents a challenge to traditional notions of feminine passivity: we learn elsewhere in the film that she wishes to leave the village. Forced to attend the wedding against her wishes, Sumaya longs to be part of the male realm, or at least the center of attention within it. She taunts or flirts with the men she otherwise holds in disdain. "You won't be able to do anything without me. You'll see," she retorts to the young men plotting an assault on the Israeli governor who show no interest in her help. And indeed, they are unable to act, but it is because they are discouraged by another patriarchal figure who warns them not to ruin the party like unruly sons. In fact, Sumaya's waywardness is not seen as a serious threat. "Marry her off soon," her mother tells Abu Adel, as her suggestion of how to contain their daughter's untamed sexuality. While Sumaya suggests the tensions between modernity and tradition for the female subject, her rebellion is presented as something of a teenage phase—an indication, perhaps, of how Khleifi considers the destabilization of gender roles to be a similar stage in Palestine's own development toward maturity.

Elsewhere, Palestinian femininity is portrayed to more subversive effect; indeed, women bear the potential to destabilize the binaries of colonial power through their connective potential. This appears in the scene where a young Israeli soldier named Tali (Tali Dorat), the only female member of her party, faints during the heat of the afternoon. She seems to pass out from the heady atmosphere created by an excess of dancing, food, noise, heat, and bodily proximity, and insofar as this is the case, the wedding's assertion of tradition can be read as an overpowering of the Israeli soldier. Yet her female identity serves to destabilize a simple reading of this scene as an overthrow of the colonial oppressor. When the soldier faints, the Palestinian women transport her from the

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public realm of her male Israeli colleagues into the restorative coolness of the house. This action in itself dissolves the power structures of the Israeli occupier and the submissive Palestinian, as the communal, caring, and maternal values of the Palestinian women are shown to transcend national boundaries. With the soldier's entrance into the feminized realms of the house, a more profound transformation in Israeli dominance takes place. The Israeli soldier finds herself awoken to the tactile remedies of the village women, who break down the distance and distinction between Palestinian and Israeli bodies by massaging oils into her skin and slowly peeling her uniform from her. Khleifi portrays the house as a realm of everything feminine and desirable. A certain Orientalist allure emerges in the glimpses we gain of these intimate interior realms, as the camera flits among fragmented images of flower petals, jewelry, and twinkling perfume bottles to the sound of gentle laughter, as if we are watching the scene through the flitting veils of the Orientalist harem.[28] Yet Khleifi's use of this trope also appears playfully self-referential. Outside, we see a male Israeli soldier who appears perturbed by this sudden reversal of power structures and asks to be taken to his colleague. Sumaya, attentive to his view of the Palestinian woman as a source of both exotic allure and threat, mocks his Orientalist stereotypes: "After the ritual, they're going to eat her alive," she declares with a sultry gnash of her teeth. She also reverses the Orientalist gaze by flirtatiously asking him to take his uniform off, a comment that at once asserts her as an active desirer rather than a desired and hints at a political subtext in which she would like to do away with his military identity. When he is finally taken to see his colleague, the house no longer appears as a zone of exotic allure but as one of powerfully restorative energies. When he finds Tali, he seems to wake her from a trancelike state as she stands in full Palestinian dress with a candle in each hand and her hair loosened. The feminist and nationalist dynamics of Khleifi's vision overlap in interesting ways here. On the one hand, his vision of Palestinian femininity appears to offer a realm of connectivity and of transcultural gendered alliance that effectively dissolves

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the power structures between oppressor and oppressed. In this, Khleifi appears to reclaim the feminocentric realms of the house, much as the Tunisian director Moufida Tlatli appropriates the harem as a realm of female solidarity in her film *The Silences of the Palace* (*Samt al-qusur*, Tunisia/France, 1994).[29] At the moment when Khleifi could be seen to privilege a powerful female perspective within his film, however, he uses female power to signify something besides itself. The female Israeli soldier's connection with the Palestinian women is portrayed as a means to subvert Israeli authority, and this connection ultimately suggests both an essential feminine essence beneath the Israeli soldier's guise of authority and a traditional essence of Palestinian female identity beneath these troubled layers of representation. Thus at a point when Khelifi seems poised to reveal the inherent instability of gendered and national identity, he instead reverts to the well-worn tropes of a domestic and sensual feminine essence. While this vision may cross ethnic lines, it also remains firmly embedded in masculinist conceptions of the feminine, which underpin Israeli and Palestinian national discourses alike.

Khleifi's destabilization of gender roles therefore serves an ambivalent purpose. On the one hand, he indicates the ways in which the traditional gendered structures of nationhood are no longer viable within the fraught and multiple tensions of Israeli occupation. He recognizes that concessions and alterations in gender roles are necessarily entailed in the process of constructing nationhood. Yet on the other hand, Khleifi suggests that this destabilization of gender roles does not operate in the service of the individual, least of all the female subject. Rather, it is a means to offer new forms of service to the nation, of finding new ways to connect with old traditions. Hence while Shafik's comment that "Khleifi's binary notion of gender certainly draws from traditional ideas, but invalidates them by changing and twisting their signs," is accurate,[30] it fails to recognize the other traditional binarism that is retained within his work: that of the nationalist cause as a primary concern, and of the feminist project as secondary.

For all the limitations of its feminism, the film neverthe-

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less retains an interesting postcolonial potential. While the film is set in a period of occupation, it is unafraid to critique the possibility of armed resistance (evident in the young men's failure to carry out their plot against the governor) and reveals the status of the nation as an "imagined community"—a discursive construct formed from ideals that are not so easily realized. Its recognition of gender as an axis of differentiation within the nation itself also imbues it with a certain hybridity not usually present in nationalist discourse. Indeed, its interrogation of Israeli identity through the figure of the female soldier Tali also suggests some recognition of nationhood as a dialogic construct, one negotiated between "self" and "other." These traits arguably point toward the model of "national, anti-nationalist histories" formulated by Bhabha in his concept of "Third Space."[31] He writes that the Third Space is a "place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other*, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very form of our recognition of the moment of politics" (25, emphasis in original). Khleifi does, in one sense, construct this radically new political object, which portrays the simultaneously traditional and contemporary concerns of nationhood in circulation alongside one another. While he recognizes the coexistence of these different perspectives on nationhood, though, his film never quite mobilizes the possibility of an autonomous female perspective. Even at her most rebellious moment, when Sumaya appropriates the dress of a Palestinian male for herself as she twines the *keffiya* about herself in the mirror, her gaze intersects with that of Khleifi, and we are reminded that Sumaya, the secondary female character to the bride, represents an *alternative* form of female identity. In this, the feminist potential of the film is ultimately held back by what is an undeniably complex and hybrid, but also enduringly symbolic, projection of Khleifi's vision onto that familiar territory of nationalist representation: the female body. Promising as the film's postcolonial and feminist potentials appear, they are never quite integrated on equal terms.

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The Liminal States of *Divine Intervention*

If Khleifi's hybrid vision of nationhood ultimately falls back onto familiar symbolic tropes, Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* presents an altogether more radical reconfiguration of national imagery. In his joint project with the photographer Jean Mohr, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*, Edward Said states that "since the main features of our present existence [in Palestine] are dispossession, dispersion, and yet also a kind of power incommensurate with our stateless exile, I believe that essentially unconventional, hybrid, and fragmentary forms of expression should represent us."[32] Suleiman arguably pushes this vision to its limits, confronting the viewer with a portrait of Palestine formed from a series of allegorical filmic vignettes that range from the lyrical to the banal to the surreal in tone. Each is concerned with presenting a different element of life in Palestine, from the most militant of political fantasies to deeply personal moments of love and loss. Collectively, the film constitutes a daringly polyphonic vision of Palestine that appears determined to represent its reality (and unreality) anew. Within the film, Suleiman engages with gender in a similar fashion to how he treats the nation: as a trope that can be parodied and regarded with a certain playfulness. In this, Suleiman's film appears to offer the possibilities not only of a hybrid national vision but also of a transgressive engagement with gender and its performative qualities. Indeed, Suleiman describes his work in terms that evoke a tenet of postcolonial discourse, the desire to subvert the relationship between the center and the margins: "I am trying to create a 'decentered' image . . . my challenge is to avoid a centralized, unified image that allows only a single narrative perspective and, on the contrary, to produce a kind of decentralization of viewpoint, perception and narration . . . I love to be 'dislocated,' 'decentered.' "[33] Do these multiple narrative perspectives facilitate a different way of looking at the relationship between gender and nation? Examining Suleiman's construction of masculinity and femininity offers something of an answer.

Subtitled *A Chronicle of Love and Pain*, the film is in one sense Suleiman's personal meditation on the illness and death of his father. As a motif, this tragedy establishes strong links between the

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political and personal, as both "ES" (the central character, played by Suleiman himself) and the nation are plunged into states of crisis. The grief-stricken state of ES's consciousness is visualized through the film's structure: we see ES piecing together his troubled thoughts by writing enigmatic statements and observations on Post-it notes and arranging them on his wall. These thoughts and observations appear to correlate with the various vignettes of the film. In a reflection of ES's own sense of familial crisis, many of these episodes also convey states of troubled masculinity and of communal incoherence. National and individual, personal and political concerns therefore collide in Suleiman's vision.

The first section of the film, which prefigures the appearance of ES, sets the scene for his "chronicle of love and pain" at both a societal and a personal level. It consists of vignettes that convey a sense of societal breakdown through a series of blackly comic, disconcertingly bathetic portraits of Palestinian men. In stark contrast to Khleifi's vision of the village *mukhtar* as a figurehead of Palestinian patriarchy, the men in Suleiman's film are not romanticized. We watch as a man drives around the streets in his car, waving cheerily at his neighbors while he mutters obscene insults under his breath: hardly the vision of national solidarity and "fraternity" we might expect. Elsewhere, an elderly gentleman defending his house from demolition gleefully punctures a youth's soccer ball that lands on his roof, only to be beaten up by the boy's father. In the opening sequence, we witness a man dressed as Santa Claus being pursued and stabbed by a group of children. The bleakly explanatory subtitle to this episode is "Nazareth"—Jesus' biblical childhood home in which even that most sacred of things, childhood, has been lost.[34]

This vision of Palestine, as a society composed of grumpy old men, fierce neighbors, and children who have not only lost their innocence but delight in violence, is a disconcerting one. Suleiman throws stereotypical expectations of Palestinian identity off-kilter, while also critiquing nationalist discourse itself. Indeed, the film's focus on the relationship between father and son can be read as an allegorical reflection of the crises that have taken place in traditional nationalism. In the post-1948 and 1967 Pales-

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tinian national movements, a radical ideology termed the "overthrow of the fathers" emerged in response to military defeats that were blamed on the "backwardness" of traditional nationalism. A younger generation of male activists emphasized the concept of a renewed patriarchy, in which the "sons" of the nation would bring about national progress.[35] There appear to be echoes of this situation in ES's own. Indeed, the character's air of melancholy and his tendency toward stasis seem to signal the inertia of the Palestinian subject, emasculated by colonial rule. The final image of the film, in which ES sits alongside his mother, watching the temperature of a pressure cooker swiftly rising and surely about to blow its top, is deeply symbolic of the internalized frustration and containment imposed on Palestinian space and enacted through its gendered subjects. Action seems a distant possibility within the confines of Israeli occupation, rendering the model of the proactive nationalist revolutionary difficult if not impossible to fulfill. If this allegory extends to ES himself, though, how is he to mobilize agency as the son responsible for rejuvenating the nation?

ES mobilizes agency by turning his sights toward a very different space in the national and male psyche: that of fantasy. If disconnection, banality, and emasculation mark the "realist" elements of Suleiman's national vision, then his dreamlike visions of Palestine are marked by alternative gendered dynamics, in which Suleiman's fantasies of affront to the Israeli occupier are played out in the spectacular feats accomplished by a female figure (played by Manal Khader). Just as Suleiman finds in the disconnected, fluid nature of Palestinian space a source of creativity, he also embraces the uncertainty of identity and the boundless qualities of the imagination in these episodes. Indeed, the female figure of Suleiman's fantasies occupies landscapes predicated on liminality and uncertainty, which offer a symbolic projection of the national condition. Here we see Suleiman draw on a traditional trope of nationalist discourse, in which the Palestinian female acts as the representative of the nation. Yet as his vision of nation is imbued with deconstructive and postmodern characteristics, his female representative is also updated and complicated as an allegorical figure. This woman features as a central but anonymous and voiceless female character

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who recurs in various guises throughout the film. Her dreamlike shape-shifting between identities and her seemingly omniscient presence cast her as a contemporary guardian angel, one possessed as well of an alluring reticence and striking looks. Rather than acting as the symbolic "border-guard" of national identity by upholding ideal standards of femininity,[36] however, this female figure quite literally and actively patrols, inhabits, and lays claim to the nation's borderline, liminal spaces. This assertively marginal location could be seen to imbue her with a powerful postcolonial feminist potential.

From the outset, both spatial and subjective liminality mark the episodes in which the female figure appears. Initially, we encounter her as the lover of ES. The couple meet each other at the Al-Ram checkpoint on the border between their respective towns of Ramallah and Jerusalem. These episodes take on the quality of a recurrent dream. Given the lack of narration, only the changing light of the surroundings supplies context—the scene is repeated at dawn or dusk, then night, lending the episodes a nightmarish sense of cyclic containment. The sequence takes place in the car, where the couple, occupants of a no-man's-land and unable to cross over into each other's territories, meet. In such a situation, it seems the only thing they can do is hold hands, and the gesture takes on an electrifying sensuality, as the camera dwells on the sight of each lingering caress. In her initial guise, the woman invokes the realms of the liminal border. But she also suggests traditional qualities of the sensuous, erotic, and intimate: the realms of romantic fantasy.

The association of female identity with liminality becomes spectacularly evident in the second context in which the woman appears in the film. Here Suleiman's ultimate dreams of territorial transgression and spatial reclamation are played out through the actions of the woman, who defiantly crosses the border of the Al-Ram checkpoint without permission and in the process miraculously brings the border-control watchtower crashing to the ground. It is highly significant that this fantasy of agency should be played out at the border, a site that has acquired major significance in

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Palestinian national consciousness. This is hardly surprising, since Israeli forces have responded to the intifadas (the second of which began in 2000) with severe spatial regulation. Barbed wire, trenches, and concrete barriers have limited mobility, while the Separation Wall erected along the West Bank has eroded Palestinian territory still further, paradoxically relocating around 395,000 Palestinians, mostly from East Jerusalem, on the Israeli side of the divide.[37] The proliferation of roadblocks used for border control has had such an impact on Palestine's cultural imaginary that a whole genre of so-called roadblock movies has sprung up in response to them. As Gertz and Khleifi write, "borders have . . . become a sign of oppression characterized by an Israeli definition of Palestine as a non-existent, split or broken identity."[38] Suleiman therefore locates his resistant fantasy within the deepest scars on the Palestinian psyche: at the site of the border.

Suleiman has claimed in interviews that the memorable scene is based on the real-life incident of his friend marching across the border despite being denied access. But in the story's retelling, this transgression takes on almost mythic resonance due to the carefully constructed depiction of femininity. The episode does not immediately appear to adhere to allegorical qualities of the feminine. Indeed, in contrast to the passivity of the portrayal of the ideal woman as wife and mother, Suleiman's female figure possesses a powerfully subversive autonomy. Yet in this sequence Suleiman arguably employs the female body primarily as a vehicle for his anticolonial fantasy.

The opening shot of the sequence is of an elegant woman's foot clad in a pale pink, high-heeled shoe, stepping out of a car on the Ramallah side of the Al-Ram border checkpoint. The impression could not be more different from the traditional image of the idealized Palestinian woman in authentic embroidered dress. Instead, the woman's attire, a pale pink, tight-fitting dress to match her shoes, suggests sophistication and contemporary taste. Her image is not "authentic" but rather self-assertive. As the Israeli soldiers at the checkpoint catch sight of her, their gaze is primarily sexual: in such attire, the woman is the idealized, sexualized figure

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of the male gaze, rather than a racialized, specifically Palestinian subject. She catches their eye, and though they clearly are interested, they shrug their shoulders. There is certainly no indication that they feel threatened; rather, they appear somewhat forgiving of the dim-witted but attractive female who fails to understand their authority. As the camera moves to her dark glasses and determined jaw, the dynamics of the encounter shift. No longer dwelling on the attractive and enticing qualities of her appearance, the soldiers are confronted with her disengagement from the male gaze as she walks toward them with calm self-assurance, deliberately yet elegantly, in direct defiance of their presence and that of the roadblock. The soundtrack to the sequence, an upbeat contemporary dance track, kicks up a gear, and so does her pace. This spatial affront from the assertively sexual woman threatens the soldiers' authority, and the men begin to group. The camera's gaze reveals her transformation from sexualized female other into territorial threat: the men pick up their guns, and we see the male gaze shift into that of the Israeli occupier at the Palestinian intruder as a rifle's viewfinder is imposed on the woman's face. At this juncture, the episode shifts into fantasy. Removing her dark glasses, the Palestinian female other returns the gaze of the Israeli soldier with a stare as steely as his aim. Her gaze is literally disarming: the men find themselves uncertain of how to respond to this woman, at once an object of desire and of threat, and they lower their guns—a nicely phallic motif to render the disintegration of masculinist Israeli authority. They find themselves unable to do anything but watch as she walks straight past them. As she does so, in a dramatic and symbolic gesture, the border-control tower comes crashing to the ground—and she heads on toward Jerusalem.

Suleiman's border-crossing fantasy figures the disintegration of Israeli authority and the unification of Palestinian territory through a female image alien to the traditional nationalist imagination. Her authority and militancy are derived neither from her reproductive capacities nor from her symbolic equation with a raped and pillaged land, but rather from her assertive territorial reclamation. This female figure seems to evoke a powerful identity envisaged in postcolonial feminist theory: that of the border

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crosser. The concept of the border crosser is drawn from Gloria Anzaldúa's project in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*,[39] which shares much with Bhabha's Third Space of cultural hybridity. Much like Bhabha, who attempts to break from binary constructs of identity, Anzaldúa identifies a postmodern space of subjectivity in which the colonial and patriarchal binarisms of us and them, self and other are displaced by multiple, coexistent subject positions. Significantly, this space emerges at the border. As Anzaldúa writes, "The Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory. . . . A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants" (3). The border crosser is not only the figure who occupies the literal border; it also signifies someone who must traverse the multiple binary power structures imposed by a patriarchal, colonial, or heteronormative system in his or her everyday life. Suleiman suggests that the Palestinian condition is characterized by similarly intersecting systems of marginalization for the gendered, raced, national, and colonized subject. Suleiman's female border crosser disrupts the racial and gendered binarisms of the masculine Israeli oppressor and the feminine Palestinian oppressed. As Emily Hicks interprets Anzaldúa's concept, "The border crosser is both 'self' and 'other.' The border crosser 'subject' emerges from double strings of signifiers of two sets of referential codes, from both sides of the border."[40] This deconstruction of self and other can be read in the figure of the border-crossing woman in Suleiman's film. With the collapse of the reference points of Palestinian and Israeli, female and male, the binary divide of the border falls to the ground.

Suleiman's fantastical vision of the borderland seems to point to a destabilized postcolonial model of nationhood in which national, gendered, and power-based identities circulate alongside one another. Yet there is a significant barrier to the realization of this fantasy. In Suleiman's vision, the female subject remains a primarily symbolic medium through which postcolonial resistance is played out. Hence female agency—the possibility of self-

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representation—remains beyond the realm of the possible, even within Suleiman's fantasy. The disempowering effect of Suleiman's liminal vision emerges most spectacularly in a later scene, which sees the female subject quite literally suspended in the realms of the symbolic.

While this episode is the film's most postmodern and consciously cinematic, using computer-generated special effects and elaborate choreography, it is also the most symbolically loaded, as it imposes a palimpsest of nationalist symbols on the mythical female resistance fighter. Suleiman's postmodern imagination surpasses itself in this scene. A group of Israeli soldiers at target practice fire on a series of cardboard archetypal Palestinian resistance fighters. Their movements are stylized; they advance on the targets with a series of rolls, dives, and dance moves in time to the soundtrack's militaristic dance beat. In this episode, Suleiman is concerned with reversing the colonial dynamics of self and other once again. The Israeli soldiers become a faceless, homogenized group, akin to a troupe of dancers simply following the moves they have been taught. Meanwhile, from behind the last remaining cardboard cutout of a Palestinian militant emerges a mysterious flesh-and-blood figure. We recognize her dark, sultry eyes, the only visible marker of her identity, as those of ES's lover and the gutsy border crosser. In her latest guise, the figure of feminine resistance turns ninja.

In the postmodern flight of fancy that ensues, the female fighter slays each individual Israeli gunman. Her actions feature the magic realist leaps and midair suspensions of an Ang Lee film, along with Hollywood-style explosions. Yet such postmodern pyrotechnics act as a contemporary facade for a highly nationalistic symbolism. While this figure might appear alien to tropes of the ideal female, her status as action heroine in this scene links her to other exceptional female militants from Palestinian history, such as Leila Khaled, the figurehead of the notorious 1969 airplane hijacking carried out by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine,[41] or indeed the figures of militant women from Arab history more broadly, such as Hint Bint Rabia, the slayer of Muhammad's followers in the Battle of Ahad.[42] The ninja's mesmeric beauty in this scene also suggests something of the willful autonomy of that

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seminal figure in Arab literature, Shahrazad, who defends herself from her husband's murderous desires through a combination of intellect and sexual allure in *A Thousand and One Nights*.[43] Unlike Shahrazad, though, Suleiman's heroine is not imbued with the power of speech—she can only act. This figure hovers midair in a martyrlike pose, with a halo of bullets magically suspended about her head as she wields a shield in the shape of a unified, pre-1948 Palestine. Even this fighter's weapons are symbolic. Using stone and slingshot in contrast to the Israelis' guns, her assault evokes the practice of stone throwing at Israeli soldiers while also setting her up as David to the Israeli Goliath. Her veiled and/or masked face is revealed when her *keffiya* unravels and supernaturally reels in her opponent's weapon, revealing her dark, sultry femininity, her hair flowing in the breeze. Her exit from the scene is simple; she steps quietly and meekly back behind the cardboard cutout from which she had emerged to vent her wrath and to parody the image of the Palestinian other.

This scene reveals the troubling paradox at the heart of

The liminal figure of the female resistance fighter (Manal Khader) hovers in midair, bearing a shield in the form of a unified Palestine. Courtesy of Artificial Eye

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Suleiman's film. On the one hand, the somewhat tongue-in-cheek, deliberately parodic configuration of the mythologized Palestinian militant offers a highly transgressive configuration of the female subject as neither passive and domestic nor secondary to Suleiman's vision of the nation; rather, she is the enactor of national agency, transforming the liminal, emasculated spaces of Palestinian society into sites of resistance in her various guises. On the other, she remains a symbolic manifestation of the troubled and emasculated male psyche, acting as the screen onto which parodic and mimetic versions of Palestinian identity are projected. While this figure represents a more fluid, plural, and postmodern nation, the liminal realms of fantasy also appear as a limiting rather than as a radically liberating realm of representation, for the female subject is constructed as the agent of Suleiman's wish-fulfilling fantasy. This vision positions the female subject once again in binary opposition to the emasculated men of the film, affirming the "topsy-turvy" status of Palestinian society in which "resistant fighters [and] martyrs" have been replaced with "helpless patriarchs, rebellious daughters and self-aggressive young men" in the cultural imagination.[44] Contrary to all expectations, then, Suleiman's postmodern, innovative vision reconstructs a familiar gendered order for Palestinian identity. For all its rebellious sentiment, Suleiman's film continues to posit the male subject as a dreamer and a visionary and the female as the object of such national fantasies. Any substantial recognition of female consciousness remains conspicuously absent from both Suleiman's and Khleifi's visions.

Contested Visions and Alternative Gazes

Wedding in Galilee and *Divine Intervention* both reveal, and indeed engage with, the profound tensions between gendered and national concerns implicit in the task of rendering Palestine visible. While the recognition of difference within the nation challenges myths of national unity, I have suggested that the films' constructions of symbolic female subjects and their crisis-ridden portrayal of maleness do not break free from the existing symbolic order; rather, female agency and waywardness serve as pro-

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jections of national crisis, while complex subjectivity and national fantasy remain the territory of the male subject. Yet if the relationship between nationalism and feminism remains a site of contestation in the films, so, too, does the correlation between nationalism and postcolonialism. While both films construct innovative, hybrid visions of Palestine predicated on its destabilization, they do so to lay claim to a new national essence, one predicated on Palestine's fraught spatial condition. The insistence on essence prevents Palestinian cinema from realizing fully the potential of the Third Space or of the borderland in its postcolonial vision of nationhood. Do Khleifi's and Suleiman's films therefore signal the inability of Palestinian cinema to look beyond primarily nationalist concerns, or might they still constitute sources of transgressive potential?

Arguably the most significant limitations of Khleifi's and Suleiman's projects lie not in their failure to attain a postcolonial feminist vision of nationhood, but rather in the limitations of terms such as *postcolonialism* and *nationhood* themselves. Much of the difficulty of drawing a clearly postcolonial potential from Palestinian cinema lies in the ambivalent status of Palestine as a colonized nation, and indeed in the ambivalence of *postcoloniality* as a term. While, as Joseph Massad notes, "*Colonial* and *postcolonial* are terms that are generally used to designate a historical trajectory of the beginning and end of the process of colonialism and the ushering in of a new era,"[45] neither the temporal nor the ideological status of Palestine is so straightforward. While Israel might view itself as postcolonial, having entered a post–British mandate era, its declaration of statehood can also be read as a form of colonization, since the ensuing territorial dispute over Israeli state boundaries has resulted in Palestine's placement under varying degrees of Israeli control.[46] The nature of a postcolonial project is therefore complex for Palestine. Indeed, it seems to exist in relation to the dual views of "the postcolonial" outlined by Robert Young, who writes that "postcolonialism as a political philosophy means first and foremost the right to autonomous self-government for those who find themselves in a situation of being controlled politically and administratively by a foreign power,"[47] the status that Israel

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would claim for itself, and for which Palestine strives. But "with sovereignty achieved, postcolonialism seeks to change the basis of the state itself, actively transforming the restrictive, centralizing hegemony of the cultural nationalism that may have been required for the struggle against colonialism" (113).

Palestinian cinema seems to address both resistant and deconstructive strains of the postcolonial project in tandem. On the one hand, Khleifi's and Suleiman's open embrace of the fragmented, hybrid, and crisis-ridden status of Palestine, and their recognition of national identity as something multiply inflected by various subject positions, point toward a desire to contest the hegemony of cultural nationalism. This model promises a radical destabilization in gender roles and the integration of feminist agency into a hybrid postcolonial perspective. On the other, though, Palestinian cinema retains the need for a coherent strategy of anticolonial resistance at this crucial stage in nation building. Forerunners in Arab national cinemas suggest that a feminist perspective is less easily integrated into such a project. Indeed, Lina Khatib notes that even when resistant female figures are allowed to surface in Arab national cinemas more broadly, they are also subject to an overarching framework of nationalist gender expectations, which affirm gender stereotypes in other ways. A particular example of this is the figure of the "modern, tough woman," who is deliberately portrayed in conflicting terms: as a symbol of modernity and as a purely "circumstantial" aberration.[48] Such ambivalent modern women feature in Egyptian films such as *Road to Eilat* (*At-tarik ila Eilat*, dir. Inaam Mohamed Ali, 1986) and *Mission in Tel Aviv* (*Mohimma fi Tal Abib*, dir. Nader Galal, 1992), for example, which all portray politically engaged women in ways that celebrate their national commitment while categorizing them as either "butch or seductress" (98). It would seem that Khleifi's and Suleiman's films retain something of this conservatism. The rebellious daughter of Khleifi's film disappears from sight and is replaced with the figure of the young son back in the Palestinian hills, while Suleiman's alluring female militant is located firmly within the realm of male nationalist fantasy. How might it be possible to resist this absorp-

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tion of gendered and postcolonial concerns into a traditionalist nationalism?

Given Khleifi's and Suleiman's visionary abilities to look to new forms of nationhood, perhaps the solution is a radical break from the concept of the postcolonial altogether. Ella Shohat suggests this possibility in her formulation of "post-Third-Worldist" cinema, which she identifies as a cinematic formation that breaks away from Third Worldist notions of resistant unity, while also embracing gender consciousness as an inextricable concern in the task of representation. Significantly, Shohat does not envisage this polyphonic vision dissolving into the liminal realms of a postmodern postcolonialism. Rather, she suggests that post–Third Worldist cinema is capable of "display[ing] a certain skepticism toward metanarratives of liberation, but [does] not necessarily abandon the notion that emancipation is worth fighting for."[49] Shohat's concept of post–Third Worldist film bears interesting parallels with other elements of postcolonial and feminist theory, notably Miriam Cooke's "multiple critique," which she describes as "a fluid discursive strategy that allows for conversations with many interlocutors on many different topics. Unlike identity politics, which depends on a notion of essential subject position, multiple critique allows for contradictions that respond to others' silencing moves,"[50] while retaining "multiple consciousness of others" (163). Cooke's concept is based on her Islamic feminist stance, through which she asserts strong ideological commitments alongside an awareness of the discursive nature of both discourses. In this light, it is interesting to note that Shohat identifies a post–Third Worldist sentiment at work in another Arab woman filmmaker's project, the Moroccan Farida Ben Lyazid's *A Door to the Sky* (*Bab ila sma maftouh,* France/Tunisia/Morocco, 1988), which narrates the story of a Westernized young woman's return to Morocco and her negotiation of Western, North African, and Islamic concepts of womanhood. The central character finds herself able to reconcile these apparently conflicting subject positions by constructing a subjective feminist stance based on both individual commitments and collective ideology.

While such films demonstrate the possibility of mobilizing

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feminist, nationalist, and ideological commitments alongside one another, post–Third Worldist film also has its limitations. In *A Door to the Sky*, the female subject finds herself able to attain personal fulfillment only within a private, introspective, and feminocentric realm. Thus a paradoxical boundary between male and female, public and private remits of participation is instantiated in what appears to be a common feature in post–Third Worldist film. In Tlatli's *Silences of the Palace*, we also see the all-female realm as the only space in which female subjectivity can come to the fore within national concerns. Post–Third Worldist film demonstrates an exclusivity when its gendered concerns are confined to feminocentric interior realms. Even the strategies of multiple critique employed by post–Third Worldist film therefore struggle to articulate feminist commitments at the broader levels of national and postcolonial concern.

Khleifi's and Suleiman's films affirm the absence of easy solutions or utopian possibilities in the task of representing Palestine's fraught individual and collective concerns. Palestinian cinema remains an inherently contested endeavor characterized by competing tensions. Yet perhaps this situation is more promising than it appears. While the films I have discussed do not fully incorporate a feminist agenda into their visions of postcolonial nationhood, they also do not confine the exploration and destabilization of gender to a feminized realm, as other exercises in post–Third Worldist film have done. Instead, their visions teeter precariously in the balance between a commitment to a radical vision of a postcolonial Palestine and the allure of a traditionally feminized nation. This precarious position may yet prove productive in postcolonial feminist terms. For as long as Khleifi and Suleiman remain creatively attuned to the liminal conditions of negation, division, and inequality of the Palestinian condition, the hope remains that they may come to recognize sites of gendered absence and division in their own representations of the nation. The possibility of a postcolonial, and feminist, vision of Palestine is not yet out of sight.

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Notes

1. Viola Shafik, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity*, rev. ed. (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 20.

2. Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). The term *accented cinema* denotes the double consciousnesses of subjects who have undergone exilic and diasporic experiences, which is reflected in the multiple spatial and national perspectives of their work. This is arguably intrinsic to Palestinian cinema as a filmic medium that not only has a large number of diasporic filmmakers but is also the product of a nation based on the absence of an officially defined geographical space.

3. Statement by the academy to reporters, quoted in Hamid Naficy, introduction to *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*, ed. Hamid Dabashi (London: Verso, 2006), 8.

4. See Sahar Khalifeh, *The Courtyard's Gate* (*Bab al-saha*) (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1990); Liana Badr, *A Compass for the Sunflower*, trans. Catherine Cobham (London: Women's Press, 1989); and *Measures of Distance* (dir. Mona Hatoum, Canada, 1988). For an introduction to the work of several other emerging Palestinian female video artists, see Laura U. Marks, "What Is That *and* between Arab Women and Video? The Case of Beirut," *Camera Obscura*, no. 54 (2003): 41–69.

5. See Nira Yuval-Davis, *Theorising Gender and Nation* (London: Sage, 1997); and Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat, eds., *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

6. Quoted in Michel Khleifi, "From Reality to Fiction—From Poverty to Expression," in Dabashi, *Dreams of a Nation*, 51.

7. Irit Neidhardt, "Palestinian Society as Reflected in Its Cinema," in *Encyclopedia of Arab Women Filmmakers*, ed. Rebecca Hillauer (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 206–8.

8. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 36.

9. Naficy, "Palestinian Exilic Cinema and Film Letters," in Dabashi, *Dreams of a Nation*, 93.

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10. Lina Khatib, *Filming the Modern Middle East: Politics in the Cinemas of Hollywood and the Arab World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 57.

11. Edward W. Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969–1994* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), 135.

12. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 7.

13. Yuval-Davis, *Theorising Gender and Nation*, 15.

14. Julie Peteet, "Male Gender and Rituals of Resistance in the Palestinian Intifada: A Cultural Politics of Violence," in *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Mai Ghoussoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb (London: Saqi, 2000), 107.

15. Palestine Liberation Organization, "Al-Mithaq al-Watani al-Filastini" ("Palestinian National Charter"), extract and translation in Joseph Massad, "Conceiving the Masculine: Gender and Palestinian Nationalism," *Middle East Journal* 49 (1995): 472.

16. The feminization of the nation circulates in the Palestinian cultural imaginary through love songs, poetry, and folklore that visualize Palestine as a wife, mother, or lover. It has also emerged in recent years through the practice of naming female children after lost or destroyed Palestinian villages. See Susan Slymovics, "The Gender of Transposed Space," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 9 (2002): 113.

17. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 125.

18. Peteet, "Male Gender," 107.

19. Shafik, *Arab Cinema*, 236.

20. Sheila Hannah Katz, "*Adam* and *Adama*, *'Ird* and *Ard*: En-gendering Political Conflict and Identity in Early Jewish and Palestinian Nationalisms," in *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), 87.

21. Ronit Lentin, " 'No Woman's Law Will Rot This State': The Israeli Racial State and Feminist Resistance," *Sociological Research Online* 9 (2004), paragraph 3.1, www.socresonline.org.uk/9/3/9/3/lentin.html, paragraph 3.1.

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22. See Ella Shohat, "Gender and the Culture of Empire: Toward a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema," in *Otherness and the Media: The Ethnography of the Imagined and the Imaged*, ed. Hamid Naficy and Teshome H. Gabriel (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood, 1993), 45–84.

23. Julie M. Peteet, *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 107.

24. See Rosemarie Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006).

25. Peteet, *Gender in Crisis*, 154.

26. Shirley Ardener, *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps* (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 21.

27. Nurith Gertz, "Space and Gender in the New Israeli and Palestinian Cinema," *Prooftexts* 22 (2002): 180.

28. See Reina Lewis, "Harem: The Limits of Emancipation," in *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel, and the Ottoman Harem* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 96–135, for a discussion of Orientalist tropes of the harem.

29. Suzanne Gauch, *Liberating Shahrazad: Feminism, Postcolonialism, and Islam* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 15.

30. Shafik, *Arab Cinema*, 200.

31. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 38.

32. Edward W. Said, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 6.

33. Elia Suleiman, "A Cinema of Nowhere," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29 (2000): 97, 101.

34. As Anton Shammas writes, "For twenty years now officially there has been no childhood in the West Bank and Gaza Strip." He is referring specifically to the reporting of the death of a ten-year-old boy as that of "a young man of ten," but his comment represents the broader sense in which Palestinian children can no longer experience a "normal" childhood. Shammas, "A Stone's Throw," *New York Review of Books*, 31 March 1988, 10.

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35. Frances S. Hasso, *Resistance, Repression, and Gender Politics in Occupied Palestine and Jordan* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 18.

36. John Armstrong employs the term *border-guard* to describe the role of women as symbolic guardians of national identity, which they maintain by policing their own behaviors and by adhering to strict standards of behavior. See his *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 6, 242.

37. Peter Lagerquist, "Fencing the Last Sky: Excavating Palestine after Israel's 'Separation Wall,'" *Journal of Palestine Studies* 33 (2004): 6.

38. Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi, "Palestinian 'Roadblock Movies,'" *Geopolitics* 10 (2005): 320.

39. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987).

40. D. Emily Hicks, *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xxvi.

41. See Leila Khaled, *My People Shall Live: The Autobiography of a Revolutionary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973); and *Leila Khaled: Hijacker* (dir. Lina Makboul, Sweden/Jordan, 2005), www.wmm.com/filmcatalog/pages/c694.shtml.

42. Nawal El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (London: Zed, 1980), 157.

43. Gauch, *Liberating Shahrazad*, 5.

44. Shafik, *Arab Cinema*, 236.

45. Joseph Massad, "The 'Post-colonial Colony': Time, Space, and Bodies in Palestine/Israel," in *The Pre-occupation of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 311.

46. See David Newman, "From National to Post-national Territorial Identities in Israel-Palestine," *Geojournal* 53 (2001): 238.

47. Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 113.

48. Khatib, *Filming the Modern Middle East*, 104.

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49. Ella Shohat, "The Cinema of Displacement: Gender, Nation, and Diaspora," in Dabashi, *Dreams of a Nation*, 89.
50. Miriam Cooke, "Women, Religion, and the Postcolonial Arab World," *Cultural Critique* 45 (2002): 163.

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The female border crosser and the miraculous collapse of the checkpoint watchtower. Courtesy of Artificial Eye

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