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Hands on visual remains: Palestinian images following looting and destruction

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Hands on Visual Remains

Palestinian Images Following Looting and Destruction

Azza El Hassan

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Sheffield Hallam University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Azzael Hassan

To In'am and Hani, always.

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Abstract

This PhD by practice examines Palestinian images and recording equipment that have survived Israeli looting and destruction and exist today as the remains of a plundering. It assesses how violence changes the nature of not only what has been plundered, but also what has survived, which in turn alters how Palestinians relate to their own images and objects.

To study and assess objects that have survived plundering and the interaction of these objects with subjects—that is, individuals who have been dispossessed—a new methodology, *Hands on Visual Remains*, was developed through this work, as existing methodologies were inadequate to respond to the particularities and needs of the research. It is a practice-based, creative methodology in which subjects put to use objects of research with the aim of finding a new use for them and producing a new experience out of the ruins.

The outcome of the research engagements between subjects and objects of research has led to the staging of an exhibition of visual remains of plundering, the restoration of four films that survived the looting of the Palestine Cinema Institute in 1982 and their release back into public domain, and the making of a short video essay using images that have survived looting and destruction.

The exploration and its findings are presented in this thesis through chapter cases studies that examine what it means to work with fragments of visual remains of plundering instead of an actual image or a film; the ethical dilemmas that arise from such interactions; and the value for the dispossessed, today, to connect with media objects, photos and films that have survived plundering. This is the first time that this subject has been addressed in the literature.

Introduction

I once imagined that inside a film there was another film where victims win and their image is transformed. They would not resemble their oppressors and they would not do to others what had been done to them. Instead, they would tour the world and change it into a better place without victims.

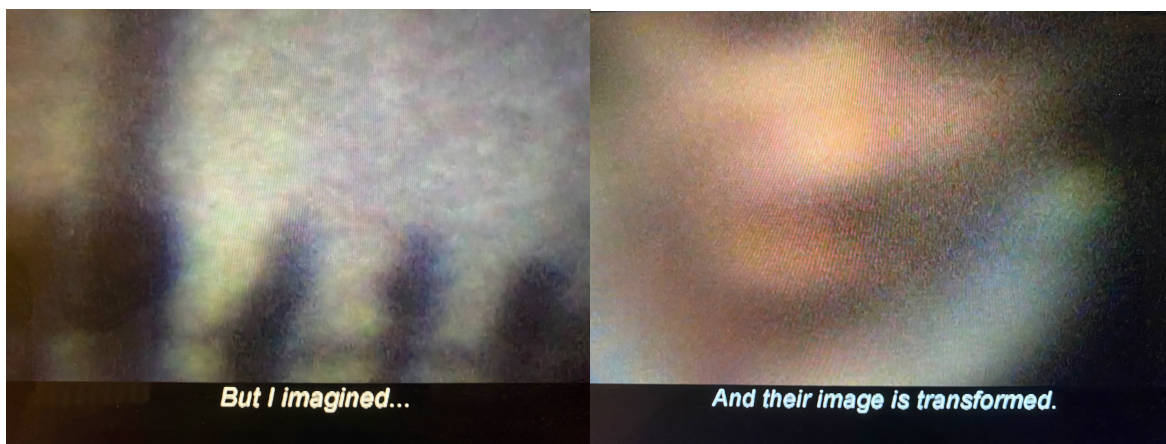


Figure 1. Azza El Hassan, dream sequence, *Kings and Extras*, 2004.

I could imagine and construct my own narrative because the film that was being projected in front of me had no actual images. There were only shadows, sounds and fading colours that filled the screen. It was a film reel that had survived the Israeli plundering of the Palestine Cinema Institute in 1982, salvaged by Mosa Mosa, a cameraman who worked at the institute, along with his 16 mm camera. Although Mosa Mosa did his best to maintain the reel, as he moved from one refugee camp to another, humidity and heat ate away at it until eventually its images degenerated and decayed. Twenty years later, after the violent event—that is, when the film reel was separated from the institute that preserved it and from the archive it once belonged to—I was able to watch it. It offered me little connection to the past. Yet, the traces of the images in it opened a space, in the present time, for me to imagine and to create a fictionalized narrative about a possible future, which I used to construct my ending sequence in *Kings and Extras*.¹

¹ Azza El Hassan, dir., *Kings and Extras* (Germany, France, United Kingdom and Palestine, 2004), documentary film.

My encounter with a visual remain of the plundering, and what emerged out of it has never left me; the possibility of something new emerging from ruins. As a filmmaker, through the years, I would encounter more photos and films that had survived the violence and find that not all of them that crossed paths with the plunderers had decayed. Some images stay intact, but even those were altered by the violence, becoming constant reminders of what had been lost and a fragment of what was.

In this work, visual remains of photos, films and recording equipment that continue to dwell in Palestinian spaces after looting and destruction are put into use. The actual engagement with these remnants is intended to illuminate the present nature of Palestinian visual remains and show how a culture relates to its own images and objects that survive looting and destruction. I will show that the violence of plundering does alter and change the surviving images and media equipment and in turn affects society's ability to connect with its own images—as I search for new uses for these remains.

In 1965, in *A Dying Colonialism*,² Frantz Fanon argues that the collision between the colonizer and the colonized produces a hybrid entity due to a coalescence of cultures and practices. For Fanon hybridization means that returning to a precolonial state is impossible. Although I am not in the process of analyzing if a hybrid entity emerges due to plundering—a point of collision between the Israeli state and Palestinian society—I do want to assess what does this collision do to Palestinian objects and to Palestinian society and its individuals.

In postcolonial theories and as part of a decolonization process, remain, that is home remains, as proposed by Homi Bhabha first in *The World and the Home*³ and later in *The Location of Culture*,⁴ have become a central concept in understanding the colonized postcolonial state. Bhabha bases his argument on Fanon's concept of collision, where "home remains" is a space of ambivalence to and with the home that emerges as a postcolonial condition after collision with the colonizer has occurred and ended; it is where what was once familiar becomes unfamiliar, estranged, unhomey and uncanny.

² Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, 1965).

³ Homi Bhabha, "The World and the Home," *Social Text* 31/32 (1992): 141–153, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466222>.

⁴ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004).

In this work, I approach photos and films that survive plundering in the same manner in which Bhabha approached the home as a space. That is because just like we inhabit our homes, our images inhabit our photos and films; and just like we accumulate memories and connect our past with the homes we grew up in, we accumulate memories within the space of a film reel or a video that we make and on photographic paper or in a digital photo space. Still and moving images are objects that can help us connect our past with our present.

Bhabha uses “home remains” to describe a postcolonial condition, while Palestine and the Palestinians are not facing a linear narrative of colonization in which colonization ends and a postcolonial condition emerges. In settler colonialism, “invasion is a structure and not an event.”⁵ This structure is designed to achieve what Stakosh and Macoun call “the vanishing endpoint,”⁶ when the settler society will have fully replaced the indigenous society on their land and naturalized this replacement.⁷ The vanishing end point, according to Stakosh and Macoun, is continuously pursued until the moment of colonial completion.

In relation to Palestinian archives, including audiovisual archives, this vanishing endpoint is pursued through a repetitive and systematic looting and destruction of these archives. Every time a Palestinian institution with an archive is attacked and plundered, a new institution is founded by Palestinians to house and preserve what, if anything, remains of the previous archive. Yet often the newly established archive center becomes the subject of another plundering. For example, the Palestine Cinema Institute, founded in the 1970s, housed Palestinian photos and films that were created by Palestinian photographers and filmmakers after the loss of Palestinian visual archives in 1948, was itself plundered in 1982. That same year, the archive of Voice of the Palestinian Revolution radio station was ransacked. And in 1998, the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank founded the Voice of Palestine Radio station, which was later pillaged in 2003.

To plunder Palestinian archives, Israel has crossed borders and invaded countries: in 1982 it invaded Lebanon and looted the Palestine Research Center archive, the Palestine Studies Center archive, the Cultural Art Archive and, of course, the Palestine Cinema Institute

⁵ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388.

⁶ Elizabeth Strakosch and Alissa Macoun, “The Vanishing Endpoint of Settler Colonialism,” *Arena Journal* 37/38 (2012): 40–62.

⁷ Ibid.

archive. In 2001, following the Oslo agreement, which provided for later negotiations on the status of East Jerusalem—which is still at the time of writing considered occupied territory by the United Nations—Israel attacked the Orient House in Jerusalem⁸ and plundered its archive, consisting of documents about the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem. In 2003, Palestinian controlled areas of the West Bank were invaded and the archives of Palestine TV, the Voice of Palestine and the Ministry of Culture were all ravaged. Most recently in 2017, Al Aqsa Mosque, which is in Jerusalem and is under Jordanian control, had its library plundered. The library held rare manuscripts and books dating back 900 years.

While the plundering of Palestinian institutions is usually recorded and documented, the looting and destruction of the private archives of individuals during invasions and bombings is not. For example, in 2003, my own library of film footage and audio recordings was destroyed during an Israeli invasion of Ramallah. I documented the destruction in *3cm Less*,⁹ and I am documenting it now by writing about it, but this is rare and is entirely due to me being a filmmaker and a researcher. The destruction and abduction of Palestinian individual archives typically remains undocumented and unaccounted for.

Postcolonialism, then, is not a Palestinian condition, Yet, despite the systematic, recurring and continuous destruction of Palestinian archives, for which Ilan Pappé coined the term “memoricide,” a genocide of memory, in his book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*,¹⁰ there is nevertheless usually an interval between one invasion and the next—that is, after looting and destruction has occurred and before it commences again. It is in this interval that the experience described by Bhabha, where the colonized and her spaces and objects emerge changed and estranged, can have its resonance within the Palestinian experience. That is when what survives looting and destruction emerges as the remains of plundering before it can become the subject of another plundering.

To understand the nature of Palestinian visual and media equipment that remains after plundering and survives the violence, and to comprehend our relationship with these objects

⁸ To read more about the looting of the Orient House archive, see: Editorial staff, “The Looted Archives of the Orient House,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 13 (Summer 2001), <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/78054>.

⁹ Azza El Hassan, dir., *3 cm Less* (Palestine, 2003), documentary film.

¹⁰ Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2007).

in our present time, it is important to return to the moment when the violence occurs, when these objects are transformed into the remains of plundering.

Remains Creation

The ongoing looting of Palestinian archives is a performance of national sovereignty that is staged by the Israeli army and intended for the Israeli audience, who are turned into an accomplice in the crime by being made to acknowledge it as nonviolence.¹¹ As part of this performance, Palestinians, who are its subjects, are cast as “infiltrators” whom the state should fight and the Israeli public should fear when they resist their expulsion and the destruction and looting of their belongings, argues Azoulay. To her, the performance is a project of partitioning populations into distinct, differentiated groups, whereby violence is both the pretext and the effect. The archive in this respect is a medium used by the army in this public performance.

As much as I agree with Azoulay, Palestinians who are both the subject of the performance and actors in it, are also another kind of audience for whom the performance of violence is intended. They are the audience who experiences the performance first-hand, as they stand watching while their belongings and those of their neighbors are looted and destroyed. Not all Palestinians resist and become “infiltrators” in the performance. As an audience and subject to the violence, they are the subordinates, the incapacitated figures who cannot defend their own belongings. The performance is designed to make them acknowledge themselves as weak, incapable and, as a result, unworthy of the land or the archives that prove their memory, right and belonging to the space. As powerless figures, the act portrays them as unable to speak or construct historical narratives that are embodied in their archive. Their inability to defend their own archive implies that they can be forced into oblivion. The aim of the performance, in this case, is to transform the Palestinian audience into passive spectators who are occupied by fear.

As an audience to the violent performance, Palestinians are not homogeneous spectators. While some resist and others watch, there is a segment of the audience that interferes with the performance script, attempting to rewrite it and change the ending. These active spectators

¹¹ Ariella Azoulay, “Photographic Conditions: Looting, Archives, and the Figure of the ‘Infiltrator,’” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 61 (2015): 6.

assume their role sometimes just before the performance commences, during it and even after it has ended. They are the salvagers who enter the scene of the violence to rescue a photo or a film from being looted or destroyed. They are the likes of Mosa Mosa, who in 1982 rescued his 16 mm camera and film reel prior to the plundering of the Palestine Cinema Institute, and Nabiha Lutfi, a filmmaker, who salvaged her film *Because Roots Don't Die*,¹² and many others.

Throughout the years, it has become a common sight to see Palestinians returning to the ruins of their homes after an invasion or a bombing to search for a family portrait, a photo album, or a phone with their video recordings, to salvage it from the rubble. It is at this moment, when a photo or a film is salvaged, that it becomes a visual remain of plundering. It is the moment of the creation of visual remains and the beginning of an afterlife of a photo or a film that is different and separate from its previous life.

While the looted audiovisual archive is usually transferred to an Israeli archival institution—for example, the Palestine Cinema Institute archive is today in the Israeli military archive—visual remains that are salvaged by someone, in their afterlife, lead a life similar to that of their salvager. The film reel I encountered in Syria, which moved from one refugee camp to another with Mosa Mosa, its salvager, experienced the same conditions that Mosa Mosa lived, its cellulose absorbing the same humidity and heat.

Photos and films that once belonged to and were maintained by an institution and which then became the property and responsibility of one individual are usually kept by salvagers in their homes. This physical dislocation from an archival institution to private spaces is an unnatural reversal in time, where time is not supposed to move backwards. Prior to the creation of archival centers, in Ancient Greece, archives were kept in the homes of the affluent. In *Archive Fever*,¹³ Jacques Derrida explained that citizens who held significant power and who were seen to represent the law maintained archives in their homes, which demonstrated their status in the society and connected archives, according to Derrida, to power and law. This past model, of maintaining archives in private, privileged spaces, cannot be compared to the present situation in which Palestinian salvagers keep the rescued remains of Palestinian

¹² Nabiha Lutfi, dir., *Because Roots Don't Die* (Lebanon and Palestine, 1977), documentary film.

¹³ Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, 1995. "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 9–63, <https://doi.org/10.2307/465144>.

archives in their homes, but it does demonstrate how plundering triggers a process of chronological reversal in the afterlife and the existence of an archival image remaining after an attack.

Hal Foster describes the creation of archives as follows: “Perhaps like the library of Alexandria, any archive is founded on disaster (or the threat), pledged against a ruin that it cannot forestall.”¹⁴ The existentialist fear Foster describes is an abstract fear of loss that inheres in an archive that has survived a disaster; when a valuable archive is being preserved, the fear of loss becomes an integral part of the preservation process. This is very different from the fear of individuals who hold a fragment of a Palestinian archive. Palestinian fear is not abstract nor is it existentialist. It comes from the knowledge and the experience of a cycle of violence that they are unable to stop, which repeatedly targets their belongings and archives. Mosa Mosa, who rescued his camera from the violent attack in 1982, is even today fearful of losing it in another invasion or war.

This vicious cycle of violence which Palestinians are constantly seeking to escape is responsible for the fear that inhabits the salvagers’ lives the moment they come into possession of a remnant from a plundering. It has led many salvagers to hide what they have retained and in doing so withholding these remains from Palestinian public spheres. Hind Jawherieh, the wife of Palestinian cinematographer and photographer Hani Jawherieh, described her fear after she salvaged her husband’s 16mm camera and film reels from a plundering attack: “I display his camera in a box in our sitting room. Everyone could see it and people know I have it. But the films I keep them hidden. I sometimes have nightmares that Israeli soldiers will come and take them.”¹⁵

Searchers into Remains of Plundering

Throughout the years and to the present day, the systematic, recurring attacks on Palestinian archives and individual acts of salvage means that the remains of plundering are continuously being made and emerging. For many Palestinian researchers, filmmakers, artists and academics, these remains have become objects of pursuit. This urgency to find and locate the remnants of Palestinian archives confronts what Nour Masalha describes as “a continuous

¹⁴ Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse,” *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 3–22, <https://doi.org/10.1162/0162287042379847>.

¹⁵ Hind Jawherieh, personal communication with author, 2017, Amman.

process of the de-Arabization of Palestine, the erasure of Palestinian history and the elimination of the Palestinian's collective memory," which she characterized as no less violent than the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians in 1948 and the destruction of historic Palestine.¹⁶ Beshara Doumani argues:

The urgency to archive Palestine and the Palestinians is driven by a deep and widespread pessimism about the future. The more remote that freedom, justice, repatriation, and self-determination seem to be, the greater the desire to preserve and record for posterity not only what was then, but what is now.¹⁷

The motives driving researchers and artists to seek out Palestinian archives and remains of plundering, according to Masalha and Doumani, range from responding to erasure and violence to a lack of possible exits from a painful, problematic situation. The intensity of the engagement between the looters and the searchers for remains who are fighting to guard fragments of archives has meant that there is little space to reflect and assess what this violence is doing to the archives themselves and to the society's relationship with its own archive that survives plundering. As Doumani argues, "The current archival fever, therefore, puts too much emphasis on discoveries of sources as external objects and not enough on the relationship between persons and texts that can make archives speak."¹⁸

It is, of course, not easy to stand in the middle of a storm and, instead of seeking shelter and salvaging what you can, pausing to assess what the storm is doing to you and to your surroundings. It is even irrational. Yet, it is necessary because the destruction and abduction carried out by a settler colonial state will not stop; what survives a plundering attack today, and becomes remains of plundering, can become tomorrow a subject of looting and destruction in yet another round of plunder. It is important that while violence is in motion, Palestinians understand what the looting and destruction is doing to them and to their objects that remain after the violence. There is a need to comprehend how the Palestinian material world is being unnaturally changed and altered by the violence. The study seeks to do just

¹⁶ Nour Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonizing History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

¹⁷ Beshara Doumani, "Archiving Palestine and the Palestinians: The Patrimony of Ihsan Nimr," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 36 (2009): 4, <http://www.palestine-studies.org/jq/fulltext/165402>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

that, by focusing on what the violence is doing to audiovisual material that survives the violence.

Understanding Audiovisual Remains of Plundering

To analyze and comprehend the current state of visual and media remains of plundering—that is, photos, films and media equipment that survive the violence—and to assess the relationship between the plundered culture and its own remains, it is important to first understand how the plundering of visual archives is affecting the Palestinian visual narrative today. In chapter one, I examine how looting and destruction constructs a cultural reality in which Palestinians have no archives while Israelis do, and I explore how this translates cinematically in Israeli and Palestinian productions. I also assess the ways in which Palestinians search for their visual archives and how finding Palestinian photos and films that once belonged to a personal or institutional archive can alter the historical visual narrative of Palestine and the Palestinians by adding another layer to it.

In the second chapter, I present a new methodology which I use to explore visual remains of plundering and the relationship of the dispossessed with these objects. I will show how existing methodologies used to examine media objects, such as media archology and its methodology *Hands on Media*, with which this research intersects, is not suitable or sufficient to enable a study that focuses on colonial plundering. I will demonstrate that there is a need for a methodology that understands violence as the pretext for the present state of an object and its subject after violence has ended. *Hands on Visual Remains* methodology functions by recognizing an affinity and a connection between the subject and object of the research that has arisen from a traumatic event. I will argue that without establishing this connection, the objects will become simply found material, and the past narrative thread between the subjects and their objects will be lost. As a practice-based methodology, *Hands on Visual Remains* demands not only the proximity of research subjects to the objects, but the actual use of these visual materials and media equipment by the subject, with the aim of producing a new experience and possibly a visual product out of the interaction. Through this research, an exhibition of visual remains has been curated, films that survived violence have been restored, and a short film that uses images that are remains of plundering has been produced.

I systematically analyze and reflect on the experience of engaging with visual remains by applying an autoethnographic approach in which I, the researcher, am also the subject of the

research and I am constantly examining my own exploration of the objects of research. As a filmmaker and a member of a dispossessed culture, I use what has made me what I am today, on a personal and professional level, to engage with and use photos and films that survived looting and destruction. Through editing, assembling and creating new narratives out of surviving images, I examine the hurdles and dilemmas which a dispossessed person faces when confronted with the remains of plundering. As I search for possible new uses of the material, I respond to the question of what relevance the handling of images and objects that survived plundering has for our lives, today.

Autoethnography as an approach has been described as “recognizing the impossibility of and lack of desire for master universal narratives.”¹⁹ “It resists colonialist, sterile research impulses of authoritatively entering a culture,”²⁰ which speaks to this research’s aims and objectives as it attempts to present an insider narrative of a settler colonial subject.

Many of the issues and dilemmas which I attempt to address through this work have haunted my film narratives. I examine my filmic experience, in chapter three, to reflect on how the abduction and looting of visual archives has affected my modes of visual storytelling and how I worked through my films to overcome the absence of visual archives. The violence has affected my films’ narrative construction and its echoes can be heard in how my film protagonists related to their own personal stories. I also look at my cinematic attempts to find lost Palestinian visual archives. This chapter lays the foundation for my engagement with this research.

Chapter four is my case studies chapter, in which I detail the process of working with each of the objects of research, which are now remains of plundering, and discuss the outcome of this process. As I assemble fragments of photos that once existed, I address the present nature of what remains unlooted and the purpose of bringing fragments of images to the public domain today. I assess what these images communicate to the spectator and to their user, today. As objects emerging from a violent event, their traumatic past inhabits the engagement

¹⁹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans S. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

²⁰ Dwight Conquergood, “Rethinking ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics,” *Communication Monographs* 58, no. 2 (1991): 179–194.

with the material, an issue that is constantly explored throughout this chapter as I seek a new use for these images.

In the last chapter, the findings of this research are discussed. Plundering reverses time, manifested in the physical state of the remains of plundering, affecting the ability of the dispossessed to interact with visual remains in the present. Sanitized encounters with visual remains of plundering by the dispossessed revealed a trauma that inhabits both the subject and the object. Yet, the interaction seemed to also trigger a healing process, which is presented as a valuable modern use of these visual remains and objects.

In the End

The pursuit of understanding the present relationship of a society with its own images following colonial plundering opens a space to speak about what has happened and is still happening: “To ‘un’-speak is both to release from erasure and repression, and to reconstruct, reinscribe the elements of the known.”²¹ It is a dialogue of the oppressed and dispossessed that is spoken for the colonizer can hear. As Chawla and Atay argue, “It addresses the colonizer, who must strive to achieve a degree of self-reflection, which illuminates the negative impact of colonization and how she has gained from it.”²²

This is the first time that the effect of Israeli plundering on Palestinian images and media objects is academically assessed and analyzed. This thesis also proposes approaches to handling visual remains of plundering in order to use them. The outcome of this research is intended to assist filmmakers from cultures and societies whose visual archives have been plundered and who, as a result, struggle with the absence of archival photos and films and with a problematic relationship with what remains of these images. The work is intended to help these filmmakers rationalize the loss and its effect on images, and it proposes approaches to handling images that are the remains of plundering.

Some of the findings of this study are painful realizations which are difficult for the dispossessed to accept. It is not easy to accept that the violence has altered and changed not only the dispossessed but also their objects and images. Yet, although difficult, it is a

²¹ Bhabha, “The World and the Home.”

²² Devika Chawla and Ahmet Atay, “Introduction: Decolonizing Autoethnography,” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 18, no. 1 (2018): 3–8. <https://openworks.wooster.edu/facpub/320>.

necessary finding. It is designed to enable the dispossessed to comprehend and reconcile with what has happened and is happening to them. It is a process that enables the dispossessed to move forward and begin to formulate and connect to images and media remains as objects of the present. While the violence and its effect are assimilated, the dispossessed need not be held hostage to it.

Cultural Reality and Searchers into Visual Remains

There is a cultural reality that is constructed as a result of the systematic and continuous abduction and destruction of Palestinian visual archives. In this constructed cultural reality, Palestinians possess no visual archives while Israelis do. In this chapter, I will assess how this reality functions when applied to cinema. I will also look at cinematic and academic attempts to counter this constructed reality by either accessing looted Palestinian archives or by searching and finding fragments and remains of Palestinian visual archives. The chapter reviews films and texts that deal with the presence and absence of Palestinian visual archives.

In the documentary *I Once Entered a Garden*,²³ Israeli filmmaker Avi Mograbi makes an interesting pact with his Palestinian protagonist. The two men shake hands after Mograbi promises to tell Ali's story as accurately as possible and offers to let him make his own scenes in the film. Ali is also granted the right to stop the filming at any time and is given, by the filmmaker, editorial control over the film. At first Ali seems a bit concerned, as he is not a filmmaker and is not sure if he can use this given power, but Mograbi reassures him that he will be there to give him all needed technical support. Eventually, Ali decides to trust his friend and agrees to be in the film, and as Ali does that, we, the spectators, trust Mograbi as well.

The film tells two narratives, one of Ali and the other of Avi, as Mograbi is a protagonist in his own film. The Palestinian and Israeli narratives run parallel to each other, reflecting a balanced representation of both, while a distinctive different style of storytelling is employed to deliver each of the narratives. The Israeli narrative—that is, Mograbi's—is told using diverse forms of visual archival materials, some of which are authentic while others have

²³ Avi Mograbi, dir., *Once I Entered a Garden* (Israel and France, 2013).

been manufactured by the filmmaker to enhance the visual storytelling. Avi tells his story using photos, film footage, actors narrating emotional letters and music. On the other hand, the Palestinian narrative, that of Ali, contains no archival material. Instead, it is told exclusively through interviews and memory performances by Ali, in which he uses his own body to tell his story.

In many ways, the presence of archives in one narrative in the film and their absence in the other speaks of the power of audiovisual archives in cinema. Ali is an excellent performer, and although he does not possess any archives, he finds ways to tell his story. For example, while Avi shares with the viewer an abundance of family photos, enabling the spectator to see their faces and have the opportunity to connect and sympathize with their stories, Ali, who shows no photos in the film, recalls his father by putting on his clothes and parading in front of the camera. Yet, with all of Ali's charm, his performances are unable to counter a narrative so vivid and rich with audiovisual archival material. In other words, the narrative that possess archives is easier to sympathize with, understand and even remember, while the other feels distant and, many times, difficult to comprehend. Examples of this run throughout the film, such as the scene in which Ali relates the history of the Palestinian liberation movement. In this scene, Ali changes headwear to depict the different periods in the Palestinian movement's history, while running from one room to another, talking through the act and describing what he is doing. The scene is visually pleasing, but it is difficult to comprehend, especially as it is juxtaposed with a narrative—the Israeli narrative—that is highly accessible to the viewer. Another example of the effect of the presence and absence of archives in the two narratives is when both protagonists have a dream. Avi's dream is portrayed through constructed film footage while Ali's dream is told by Ali to Avi during one of their "casual encounters." Having watched this film several times, I always remember Avi's dream before seeing it, but I am always surprised to rediscover that Ali had a dream as well. The lack of a visual connection to Ali's dream sequence makes it an insignificant event in the film and, as a result, easily forgotten.

The film was positively received, mainly because it acknowledged a Palestinian narrative alongside the Israeli one. It was seen to demonstrate "the possibility of an equal collaboration

between a Jew and a Palestinian”²⁴ and provide “an acknowledgment of each other’s traumas.”²⁵ However, the presence of archival materials in one narrative and their absence in the other ends up prioritizing trauma and pain, making one narrative more worthy of the spectator’s sympathy than the other. Moreover, the presence of vivid visual archival material in one narrative suggests that this narrative is more current and as a result, a connection to the viewer’s present is established; the other, which is only spoken in words, resides in the distant past. We can learn of and about the Palestinian narrative, but we need not sympathize with it.

The narrative construction of *Once I Entered a Garden*²⁶ correlates with post-Zionist approaches to Palestinian narratives. It is a position that emerged in the 1990s after Israeli new historians, like Ilan Pappé and Benny Morris, reviewed Israeli and plundered Palestinian archives and confirmed the systematic dispossession and forced expulsion of the Palestinian population. These findings led post-Zionists to acknowledge the Palestinian narrative while consigning it to the past, which relieved them of any ethical obligation to address present-day injustice. To illustrate how post-Zionists approach the Palestinian narrative, Ilan Pappé recalls the encounter of Edward Said with post-Zionist academics in 1999 at a conference in Israel, where Said was invited as a keynote speaker. Pappé points out that while Said’s deconstructive approach to Orientalism was gladly and enthusiastically employed by post-Zionist scholars, who employed his prism to examine cultural issues in Israel, they were not ready to adopt it in any meaningful way. As Pappé argues, “In other words, they shared his narrative of Nakbah and dispossession, but not his vision for a bi-national state to which all refugees would be allowed to return.”²⁷

In *Once I Entered a Garden*,²⁸ Mograbi acknowledges the Palestinian narrative, but sets it in the past, ridding himself of any moral obligation toward it. This comes to the forefront in the way he approaches his own family history as a current narrative, while Ali’s history is as an object of the past. In the film, Avi tells the story of his Italian family who escaped fascist

²⁴ Dror Dayan, 2018. “The Manifestations of Political Power Structures in Documentary Film” (PhD thesis Bournemouth University, 2018), 105, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/162654595.pdf>.

²⁵ Rocco Giansante, “Erasing Borders: The Ottoman Dream of Avi Mograbi,” presentation at the AIS Conference, Brandeis University, 2017.

²⁶ Mograbi, *Once I Entered a Garden*.

²⁷ Ilan Pappé, “Diaspora as Catastrophe, Diaspora as a Mission and the Post-Colonial Philosophy of Edward Said,” *Policy Futures in Education* 8, nos. 3/4 (2010).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Italy and took refuge in Syria, but when Syria came under French rule, bringing fear of persecution by the French, Avi's grandfather decided to immigrate with his family to Palestine. This narrative in the film, which takes place during the 1920s and 1930s, is told through visual archives, which are again partly authentic, partly constructed. The constructed black and white film footage that is made to tell the story transforms from black and white into color; it renders what is being seen as contemporary and happening now, demanding sympathy. In contrast, Ali is taken by Mograbi to visit the remains of his Palestinian village, in Saffuriyya, which was wiped out in 1948 and whose residents are still, at the time of writing, denied the right to return to it. The two protagonists, Ali and Avi, accompanied by Ali's older brother, who can remember better what the village originally looked like in 1948, arrive at a public park that has been built over the remains of Saffuriyya village. Although the geography of the place has been completely altered, eventually Ali finds scattered stones, the contemporary remnants of the destroyed Saffuriyya village. The black scattered stones look like Roman ruins, objects from the past which can no longer be brought to life. There is nothing that can be done, except for the two protagonists to engage in friendly, casual conversation.

Giansante, who writes enthusiastically about *I Once Entered a Garden*,²⁹ describes these two events in the film and the emotional impact of each: "Avi can mourn the disappearance of his grandparents' Jewish communities in Syria and Lebanon while the Palestinian Ali can revisit the story of his family's expulsion from their native village."³⁰

In Giansante's description, only Avi's narrative calls for mourning. We mourn the present, which is immediate and painful, while we revisit the past like a tourist attraction, although chronologically the erasure of Saffuriyya village is more recent, taking place more than a decade after Mograbi's grandfather left Syria. Giansante's description presents an accurate reading of how the film sets the two narratives.

The film serves, in a disturbing manner, as a perfect example of using the constructed "cultural reality" imposed by the Israeli state through looting and destruction. It uses this constructed cultural reality as a premise on which to build the film's narrative. It adopts and

²⁹ Mograbi, *Once I Entered a Garden*.

³⁰ Giansante, "Erasing Borders."

presents a story of two men, one with archives and one without. Although Mograbi manufactured archives to tell his own story, he chooses not to do so for the Palestinian narrative, which kept this narrative at bay.

In the Israeli Archive

The Israeli state-constructed cultural reality takes different forms, from Palestinians who have no archives to Palestinians who do but are forbidden from accessing them. Looted Palestinian archives that are kept in Israeli archive centres can be accessed by Israeli academics, researchers and filmmakers, who choose what is relevant and what can be dismissed. They are thus able to construct narratives from Palestinian archives about Palestinians and then deliver them to the world and to Palestinians to consume.

Rona Sela has researched Palestinian visual archives that have been looted by the Israeli army and reside today in Israeli archives. As Sela states in her 2017 film *Looted and Hidden*,³¹ “I am cloistered in the Zionist archive, looking for Palestinian photographs.”³² Sela was able to identify and bring to the public eye Palestinian images that were presumed destroyed or missing, such as the plundered collection of Palestinian photographer Ibrahim and his son Khalil Rissas³³ and the archive of the Jaffa municipality pre-1948.

In 2017, Sela announced that she had located in the Israeli Army Archive the Palestine Cinema Institute archive, which had been missing since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Sela later released her film *Looted and Hidden*,³⁴ which used this looted archive. Several years later, another Israeli filmmaker, Karnit Mandel, released *A Reel War*,³⁵ again using film footage from the Palestine Cinema Institute.

Many Palestinian spectators never got to experience the films of the Palestinian Cinema Institute prior to their looting. Adania Shibli, for example, described her knowledge of Palestinian cinema as incomplete without seeing these films.³⁶ *Looted and Hidden*³⁷ and *Reel*

³¹ Rona Sela, dir., *Looted and Hidden* (Israel, 2017).

³² Ibid.

³³ Rona Sela, “‘Imprisoned Photographs’: The Looted Archive of Photo Rissas—Ibrahim and Chalil (Khalil) Rissas,” *Intermédialités* 32 (Autumn 2018).

³⁴ Sela, *Looted and Hidden*.

³⁵ Karnit Mandel, dir., *A Reel War* (Israel, 2021).

³⁶ Adania Shibli, “Not Forgotten: The Palestinian Film Archive,” *Sight and Sound*, November 15, 2013.

<https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/comment/not-forgotten-palestinian-film-archive>.

³⁷ Sela, *Looted and Hidden*.

War,³⁸ both made by Israeli filmmakers, offer Palestinians glimpses of their own visual history. This second-hand experience, of course, depends on the Palestinian images selected by the Israeli filmmaker to construct their own version of a Palestinian story.

Sela has written extensively about her research and work with Palestinian visual archives. In “The Genealogy of Colonial Plunder and Erasure,”³⁹ she described the apparatus within which the colonial archive functions to erase and alter the meaning of Palestinian indigenous archives. In *Looted and Hidden*, Sela attempted to distance herself from the crime of plunder committed by the Israeli state, condemning it in her film commentary. Kanit Mandel, the filmmaker of *Reel War*,⁴⁰ also engages to some degree in distancing herself from the actions of her state and rejects the concealment of Palestinian archives. The issue here is not that these Israeli filmmakers are making films using looted Palestinian film footage and in doing so revealing the violence of plundering; it is that the documentary is as much about the unseen as the seen.⁴¹ That is, the footage that has been excluded from a film is as relevant to the film experience as what is included.

Film archives can yield different historical versions of an event, and a brilliant illustration of this—one that is miles away from Palestine and the Palestinians—demonstrates clearly why archival film footage needs to be accessible, to avoid the presentation of only one version of history and, as a result, an inaccurate account of the past. In *An Archive of the Catastrophe*,⁴² Jennifer Cazenave wrote about accessing the unused and unseen film footage of Claude Lanzmann in his film *Shoah*,⁴³ which had been purchased by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, where it resides today. Lanzmann had filmed 350 hours of footage and edited it into a ten-hour film. Reviewing the remaining 220 hours of footage, Cazenave discovered that Lanzmann had chosen only to focus on male holocaust survivors. Cazenave argued that Lanzmann positioned himself with male survivors, the “masculine subject within a shared generational space that is defined by resistance.” Cazenave found that although

³⁸ Mandel, *A Reel War*.

³⁹ Rona Sela, “The Genealogy of Colonial Plunder and Erasure – Israel’s Control over Palestinian Archives,” *Social Semiotics* 28, no. 2 (2018): 201–229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2017.1291140>.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ James Fenwick “An Archive of the Catastrophe: The Unused Footage of Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 40, no. 3 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2020.1729553>.

⁴² Jennifer Cazenave, *An Archive of the Catastrophe: The Unused Footage of Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2019).

⁴³ Claude Lanzmann, dir., *Shoah* (France, 1985).

Lanzmann recorded interviews with women survivors, he did not use them. By accessing the original rushes of the film, a new film script emerged, one that has yet to be made into a film. Her work demonstrated how “the unseen can shape and transform the meaning of that which we can see.”⁴⁴

Palestinians who are forbidden from accessing their own archives are unable to refute or accept the version of their own history that emerges from cultural reality constructed when Israeli filmmakers build narratives of Palestinian history. The narratives of Israeli filmmakers become the only available narrative of the Palestinian past, but they are created out of Palestinians’ own archives. Regardless of the sincerity of Israeli filmmakers, their narratives of Palestinian history nevertheless remain their narrative; it is very possible that if a Palestinian were to construct her own narrative from this material, she would engage with the audiovisual archives through a different process of selection and narrative construction. Yet, these visual archives continue to be concealed, hidden and inaccessible to Palestinians.

It is important to note that access to Palestinian archives does not seem to be easily granted, even to Israelis. Researchers are given access “to valuable documents about the history of this place in return for recognition of the archive as the legal owner of the documents it places at their disposal.”⁴⁵ Azoulay describes a system of control that governs how narratives can be made. The film *The Great Book Robbery*,⁴⁶ which traces the story of 70,000 books which were stolen from Palestinian homes in 1948, devotes a large section of the film showing how the Israeli institution in question is constantly doubting his intentions and eventually denies him access to film the looted books. The film is about state control over narrative as much as the looted personal libraries of Palestinians.

In *Seized in Beirut: The Plundered Archives of the Palestinian Cinema Institution and Cultural Arts Section*,⁴⁷ Sela wrote about a legal battle she waged to gain access to Palestinian films. Although the film footage and photos in the Israeli military archives were stolen and thus are not the property of the Israeli archives, still to be able to use them, Sela had to acknowledge the Israeli military’s copyright claim to them and pay a fee to the army to

⁴⁴ James Fenwick, “An Archive of the Catastrophe.”

⁴⁵ Azoulay, “Photographic Conditions.”

⁴⁶ Benny Brunner, dir., *The Great Book Robbery* (Qatar: 2911 Foundation and Xela Films, 2012).

⁴⁷ Rona Sela, “Seized in Beirut: The Plundered Archives of the Palestinian Cinema Institution and Cultural Arts Section,” *Anthropology of the Middle East* 12, no. 1 (2017): <https://doi.org/10.3167/ame.2017.120107>.

use them. A year after releasing her film, Sela posted on her Vimeo account the original cut of one of the looted Palestinian films, *The Urgent Call of Palestine*,⁴⁸ by leading modernist Palestinian painter Ismael Shammout. The published copy was indeed labelled as Sela described in her writings. The Israeli military archive logo ran throughout the film copy, dominating and controlling the meaning in every shot created by Shammout.

The text that appeared before the film reads (fig. 1):

IDF and Defense Establishment Archive
War Trophies – Piece of Galilee –
Films, *The Urgent Call* a propaganda film

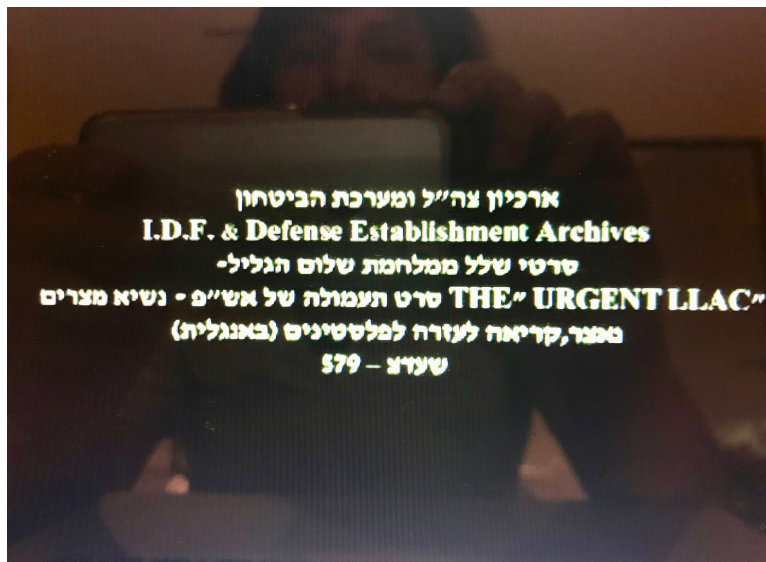


Figure 2. Azza El Hassan, self-portrait with the Israeli Army title, 2017.

Finding Palestine

Palestinian artists and academics throughout the years have mainly focused on locating Palestinian audiovisual archives. The lack of Palestinian intact archival centers has led these researchers to pursue unconventional methods in their search. Searching by association is one of the methods used, in which the researcher follows the historical narrative of a piece of recording or film to find a point of collaboration with another country that might have co-produced the piece, or even simply screened or played it at one point in time, and thus may have retained a copy of it in their archives. This kind of search transforms the researcher into

⁴⁸ Ismael Shammout, *The Urgent Call of Palestine* (Lebanon and Palestine, 1973), documentary film.

a detective conducting an investigation. Bashar Shammout, who surveyed the whereabouts of Palestinian audiovisual archives and created the most extensive, up-to-date study of today's Palestinian plundered or scattered audiovisual archives, finds Palestinian recordings using this method. Shammout discovered that in the 1920s and 1930s Arab singers used to travel to Germany to record their songs, as the region lacked the necessary recording technology. The Arab phonograph company, Bidaphone, would contract with a German company, which would send a technician to do the recordings in Egypt and then take them back to Berlin to finalize them. Based on this information, Shammout searched in Berlin phonograph archives for Palestinian recordings, which he found. Interestingly enough, among the recordings found by Shammout is one by his great uncle, Rajab Al Akhal, which was recorded in the 1920s. That a family member of the musician found the recording speaks of how the search for the lost Palestinian archives can be a very personal endeavor for Palestinian researchers.

Another searcher into remains of plundering who uses the search by association method is Iraqi filmmaker Qais Al Zubaidi. Al Zubaidi joined the Palestine Cinema Institute in the 1970s, when, "The PLO itself was a refuge for a number of independent Arab filmmakers who could not work in their home countries for political reasons."⁴⁹ After the loss of the Palestine Cinema Institute archives in 1982, which held some of Al Zubaidi's own films, he began in the 1990s to search for copies held by film festivals or Palestinian embassies around the world. He also searched for films that were co-productions, such as films that were produced by the Palestine Cinema Institute and the German Democratic Republic or the Soviet Union. He further tracked down his colleagues at the institute to see if any of them salvaged their films prior to the looting. In 2006, Al Zubaidi wrote *Palestine in Cinema*,⁵⁰ where he recalled films he could not find along with ones he had. His analysis of films that were produced by the Palestine Cinema Institute, which relied in many parts on his memory and recollection of these missing films, offered vivid access to younger generations, allowing them to vicariously experience these films by being told about them.

Another method which Palestinian researchers have used to identify a Palestinian recording is to search and experience these archives in a second-hand manner. In his book, *The*

⁴⁹ Nadia Yaqub, *Palestinian Cinema in the Days of Revolution* (Austin, TX.: University of Texas Press, 2018).

⁵⁰ Qais Al Zubaidi, *Palestine in Cinema* (n.p.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2006).

Audiovisual Palestinian Heritage, Origin, Dispersion, and Digital Preservation,⁵¹ Bashar Shammout wrote that because he was unable to access Palestinian archives in Israeli institutions, where most of the Palestinian audiovisual archives are kept, he collaborated with Israeli researchers who informed him of audiovisual archives they found in the Israeli archives. He wrote specifically about his collaboration with Rona Sela, who informed him that films and images that had been presumed missing and had been identified as present in the Israeli archive. Shammout also examined Israeli productions to identify Palestinian audiovisual archives that had been used by Israelis and which he could thus mark as existing. He also researched Arab, European and American archives in search of Palestinian audiovisuals.

To demonstrate how absurd the search for Palestinian audiovisual archives is, in *Kings and Extras*,⁵² Qais Al Zubaidi and I search a Palestinian cemetery in Lebanon, in the hope of finding films which were supposed to have been buried there to safeguard them from Israeli looting (fig. 3). The scene in the film was, of course, not designed to identify the location of films but to illustrate how the search for Palestinian visual remains can turn into an impossible mission, where the searchers sometimes need to become gravediggers in order to find what has been salvaged and hidden away.



Figure 3. Azza El Hassan Qais Al Zubaidi. *Kings and Extras*, 2004.

⁵¹ Bashar Shammout, *The Audiovisual Palestinian Heritage, Origin, Dispersion, and Digital Preservation* (n.p.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2020).

⁵² El Hassan, *Kings and Extras*.

Searchers into remains of plundering, like Al Zubaidi and Shammout, resemble in their pursuits media archaeologists, but they should not be confused with them. To begin with, the term archaeology sets the objects of search in the past, which does not necessarily apply to objects sought after by searchers into remains of plundering. A photo or a film or even a song might be in the process of being made when it becomes a subject of plundering and, in turn, an object that is pursued by searchers into remains of plundering. While searchers into such remains share with media archaeologists “a concern for what could have been, what might have been, and what fleetingly was,”⁵³ their concern does not lead them to connect the present with what was. The past sought by searchers into remains of plundering has been obliterated, and they look for traces to prove that it was once there and to affirm that the colonizer has erased the Palestinian past. The research which Bashar Shammout conducts into audiovisual Palestinian heritage leads him to construct a narrative about a Palestinian society that existed prior to uprooting, mass expulsion and the plundering of 1948. He recalls the music halls and theater that once existed, whose past presence affirms the existence of a Palestinian urban life in Haifa and Jerusalem prior to the creation of Israel. He documents filmmaker Ibrahim Sarhan’s working process in the early 1930s and 1940s to cast actors and raise funds for a fictional feature that Sarhan was planning to film and which was aborted when Sarhan himself became a refugee during the mass expulsion of 1948.

The past that is reconstructed by Shammout does not connect or relate to the Palestinian present, today. The urban life he describes should not have led to the present-day nomadic existence of Palestinian refugees. Experience and knowledge that was accumulated in Palestinian society of the past, which is described by Shammout, was not transmitted to later generations to use and build upon, and the reason is because all the objects, and with them the knowledge of the past, have been looted or destroyed.

After the expulsion and erasure of 1948, the first Palestinian fiction film⁵⁴ would not be made until 1987, produced in Belgium by Palestinian filmmaker Michel Khleifi. The making of this fiction film is not connected in any manner to any foundation that Ibrahim Sarhan laid in Palestine pre-1948. Instead, the genesis of the film is likely attributable to the cosmopolitan nature of present-day Belgium rather than a natural evolution of a Palestinian society.

⁵³ Nick Hall and John Ellis, eds., *Hands on Media History: A New Methodology in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2020). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351247412>.

⁵⁴ Michel Khleifi, *Wedding in Galilee* (Belgium, 1987).

Searching to affirm a Palestinian past led Ahmad Mrouat, in 2006, to make a startling discovery that would change the course of Palestinian and Arab photographic history. In an Israeli antique shop, Mrouat found and bought a collection of photos that were taken between 1913 and 1948 by a professional woman photographer, Karimeh Abbud (fig. 4). Although professional photography at that time was already established in Palestine, a professional Palestinian woman photographer working during that period had never been noted in Palestine or anywhere else in the Arab world. Karimeh Abbud was not only the first Palestinian woman photographer, but the first Arab woman photographer. Prior to the discovery of Abbud's collection, it was thought that Palestinian women were not professionally engaged in photography until the 1960s. The sudden appearance of Abbud's photos altered this assumption and changed the historical narrative about women in Palestine and the Arab world.



Figure 4. Karima Aboud (1896–1940), portrait.

What happened next, after Abbud's photographic collection was discovered, demonstrates what the actual presence of an archive can do for Palestinian productions, whether visually or academically. Part of Abbud's photographic collection was first released in a book co-written

by Mitri Al Rahab, Issam Nasser and Ahmed Mrouat.⁵⁵ Nasser would later compare Abbud's work with that of her male peers,⁵⁶ offering a reading of photography as an art prior to 1948, when the Palestinian photography project was put on hold until Palestinians were able to reinvent themselves. Filmmaker Mahasen Nasser-Eldin made a film about Abbud and her work. In *Karimeh Abbud: The First Palestinian Female Photographer*,⁵⁷ Nasser shows each of Abbud's photos for an extended period, as if she, the filmmaker, is afraid to let go of the images lest they would slip from her fingers like Palestine did. Abbud's collection would later be featured in a series of solos exhibitions around the world.

The trajectory of events that led to the discovery of Abbud's photo collection and all that followed—debates, writings, analysis and visual productions—including how this discovery informed the understanding of Arab women's photography, not just Palestinian photography, demonstrates how the separation of Palestinians from their homes and their archives not only erased Palestinian narratives, but also narratives of the region as a whole. One cannot but wonder, what if the forced interruption of Palestinian lives and the systematic erasure of Palestine and Palestinians had never happened? What if Palestinian society after the end of British colonialism had followed a similar path to that of its neighbors? Likely, Karimeh Abbud would have long ago occupied her space in history, and the narrative of Arab photography would have been enriched by her presence. But also, what if the coincidence that led Mrouat to that specific antique shop had not occurred? What would have happened then? Maybe the Israeli antique shop owner would have sold this substantial part of Palestinian history to a tourist and Karimeh Abbud would have never been discovered. One also wonders what other parts of the Palestinian past remain hidden and unidentified today.

The erasure of Palestinian visual material and its consequences on the narrative of the region highlights how erasure is being practiced not only on the Palestinian narrative, but on the narrative of the region's inhabitants as a whole. "Jews were dispossessed of the cultural infrastructure of a mixed society of which they had been a part, as well as their own past in Palestine," as Azoulay argued.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Mitri Rahab, Issam Nasser, and Ahmed Mrouat, *Karimeh Abbud: Pioneer of Palestinian Women's Photography in Palestine*, 2013.

⁵⁶ Issam Nassar, "Early Local Photography in Palestine: The Legacy of Karimeh Abbud," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 46 (2016): 23–31.

⁵⁷ Mahasen Nasser-Eldin, dir., *Karimeh Abbud: The First Palestinian Photographer* (2016).

⁵⁸ Azoulay, "Photographic Conditions."

Conclusion

The body of work reviewed here highlights how the power structure that is wielded through the violence of plundering has dominated the way that narratives unfold and the way research is conducted on Palestinian audiovisual material. What is needed now is to understand what this power structure of violence is doing to what remains of Palestinian images and recordings—those that have not been plundered—and the way this impacts Palestinians' ability to interact with their own images.

Hands on Visual Remains

Hands on Visual Remains is the title of the methodology that has been developed in this study to enable an assessment of the nature of visual and media objects that survive plundering and, in turn, become remains of plundering. The aim is to make it possible to understand our present relationship with these remains. In this chapter, I will discuss why a new methodology is needed and why past methodologies were not sufficient for this research. I will also look at the various methods and approaches that are used in this study to analyze and engage with the remains of plundering, including an autoethnography approach, in which the researcher, that is the self, is employed as a subject of research. I will also examine the use of exhibition space as a laboratory for interacting with visual and media remains of plundering.

Hands on Visual Remains methodology seeks not only proximity to photos, films and other objects that have crossed paths with plunderers and survived the violence, but an actual physical engagement with these survivors. The subjects of the research are asked to attempt to creatively use these remains through assembling, editing, restoring and appropriating the explored objects. Hands on Visual Remains is a creative methodology that uses art and media to explore visual and media remains of plundering and in the process produces a new product, such as a film or an exhibition installation out of the engagement.

This practice-based approach to research, and specifically with photos, films and media equipment, has been commonly used in experimental media archaeology and its Hands on Media methodology. In Hands on Media, through actual engagement with and use of old media technologies, an understanding emerges of how objects have changed and, in the process, how the society has been altered from within. In “Why Hands on History Matters,”⁵⁹

⁵⁹ John Ellis, “Why Hands on History Matters,” in *Hands on Media History: A New Methodology in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, eds. Nick Hall and John Ellis (London: Routledge, 2020), 11.

media historian John Ellis argued that this hands on method involves thinking with and through the material world, a process that renders visible aspects of human experience that cannot be attained by theory alone.⁶⁰ *Hands on Visual Remains* crosses paths and shares many aspects with *Hands on Media*, such as the exploration of both the object of research and the interaction of the subjects of research with the object. The two methodologies learn through sensitizing the experience and formulating an understanding of the present relationship between the object and the subject. Yet, *Hands on Visual Remains* needs to be understood and perceived as a separate methodology, not an extension of experimental media archaeology, for several reasons:

First, “Media archaeology is interested in technologies that were abandoned often for no good reason.”⁶¹ These are objects which Hall and Ellis explained were familiar to their users at one point but have fallen out of use. Objects of remains of plundering, on the other hand, were never abandoned and did not fall out of use. Instead, they were violently separated from their original space or owner. It is violence which ejected them from use, and their owners, the dispossessed, usually long to be reunited with them. The sense of unfamiliarity or estrangement which the dispossessed might experience when interacting with objects that are remains of plundering is the result of the violence and the forced separation and not a distance imposed by their owners.

Second, the term “media archaeology” sets objects of research in the past. The researchers are archaeologists who are unearthing old media objects or film footage. Remains of plundering, on the other hand, are not necessarily objects that belong to the past. A film casting session that is recorded digitally might still be in the process of being made when it is violently plundered. If the recording or parts of it survive looting and destruction, it then becomes remains of plundering which is actively sought out by searchers for such remains. For example, most of the material looted and destroyed in the newly founded Palestine Television and Radio in 2003 was footage and recordings that had recently been made or were in the process of being made. The remains of this plundering event is present-day material, for which Palestinian academic Lena Jayyusi searches.⁶² Hence, suggesting that there is an archaeological act in approaching remains of plundering is wrong and misinforms the reader

⁶⁰ Hall and Ellis, *Hands on Media History*, 21.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶² Panel discussion at the *Archiving Palestine* exhibit, P21 Gallery, London, 2019.

about the subject. Moreover, Hands on Media was developed to deal with the relationship of a settled, unthreatened society with its own past media objects, while Hands on Visual Remains is here to assess how a culture that is threatened with erasure deals with its objects. The difference between the two affects the mood of engagement, the nature of the explored objects and the outcome of the research. To not distinguish Hands on Visual Remains from Hands on Media and media archaeology is to misrepresent the research.

Hands on Visual Remains methodology is defined by the following elements:

1-Violence is the pretext for Hands on Visual Remains engagements

Hands on Visual Remains explores the state of an object like a photo or a camera, to understand if the violence has changed these objects and, in the process, changed society's relationship with its own images and media objects. Absent an instance of looting and destruction, visual and media remains do not emerge. It is violence that transforms an object into remains of plundering and a fragment of what has been now lost or destroyed. Searchers into remains of plundering only commence their search after violence has been set in motion; they come after an apocalyptic event. One example is Palestinians' present search for objects that remain with us today following the forced disappearance of Palestine in 1948.

2- Objects of exploration in Hands on Visual Remains

Hands on Visual Remains was developed to explore the remains of plundering using visual media, but remains of plundering are not necessarily media objects. In 2003, when I took my digital camera and went searching for my father's home in Haifa—the home where generations of my family were born and from which my father had been expelled and denied the right to return—I had not yet given my act a name and was not yet analyzing my engagement with remains of plundering. The home appeared to me then unfamiliar and unhomely. It was the home remains of Homi Bhabha, the home, which was once familiar and had now become, because of colonialism, estranged and uncanny. My father's home belongs to what Doumani calls as “the greatest archive of all.”⁶³ This is the physical landscape that has been plundered and the bonds of daily life that constitute an organic social formation. My use of the camera to approach and engage with the remains that are my father's home in Haifa rendered my engagement a Hands on Visual Remains engagement. Hence, it was the

⁶³ Doumani, “Archiving Palestine and the Palestinians,” 6.

use of the camera rather than the object itself. Using the camera produced a visual image of remains of plundering.

3- Subjects of research in Hands on Visual Remains

Hands on Visual Remains engagements can only function in a certain cultural context, namely, a culture that has experienced colonial plundering. That is because the subject of research not only needs to be familiar with the violent history from which this object has emerged but should have an affinity with the object. These are usually individuals who themselves have experienced dispossession due to looting and destruction. Their personal experience gives them knowledge and understanding of the violence from which remains of plundering have emerged and allows a study of the effect of plundering on both the object and the subject.

A person who has not experienced dispossession cannot have an affinity with an object that has remained following plundering, and this connection is necessary for Hands on Visual Remains explorations to function. For example, film footage which belonged once to a Palestinian visual archive that has been plundered can be perceived by a person who is unfamiliar with its backstory like any other found film footage, to be freely treated, rearranged and used. The film footage in this case loses its property as a remnant of plundering, and the interaction between the subject and the object—that is, the remains of plundering—cannot be studied as a Hands on Remains of Plundering exploration.

4- Memory in Hands on Visual Remains

In scientific experiments in which a subject attempt to recall a past use of an object, failure to remember how the object was used is expected. In Hands on Media History,⁶⁴ researchers describe failure as a learning process, an expected part of any encounter with an object of the past. The “art of failure”⁶⁵ is, according to Andreas Fickers and Annie van den Oever “probably one of the most important learning experiences in this heuristic practice.”⁶⁶ On the other hand, failure to remember or the inability to engage with an object in Hands on Visual Remains of plundering is a traumatic experience for the subject, who is engaging with

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Susan Aasman, “Report ‘Staging the Amateur Film Dispositif,’” Home Movies Project (website), 2014, <https://homemoviesproject.wordpress.com/report-staging-the-amateur-dispositif/>.

⁶⁶ Andreas Fickers and Annie van den Oever, 2019. “(De)Habituating Histories: How to Re-Sensitize Media Historians,” in *Hands on Media History*, eds. Nick Hall and John Ellis (London: Routledge, 2020).

remains of plundering. It is an affirmation that although the plundering was incomplete and the object did evade the plunderers, erasure has still occurred. So although failure is an integral part of any scientific research, in *Hands on Visual Remains* failure to remember is resisted.

It is not unusual for cultures that have been subjected to the plunder of their archives to recall what they have lost by remembering it. In her book *The Archive and The Repertoire*,⁶⁷ Diana Taylor describes how cultures in the Americas use their memory to experience what has been taken from them. Memory is an integral part of how an object in *Hands on Visual Remains* is approached. The memory of the object and its use is not necessarily a personal memory of the subject who is performing the act of remembering. It is very possible that it is a collective memory that the subject possesses. “I write to remember, and to remind, so as memories are not erased. Memory is my last lifeline.”⁶⁸ The character in Ibtisam Azem’s novel *The Book of Disappearance*⁶⁹ is a third-generation Palestinian from Jaffa who describes his relationship with his city, as he traces the remains of Palestine in Jaffa’s houses once inhabited by Palestinians prior to their expulsion and replacement with new inhabitants. Alaa is a searcher into remains of plundering, and his description of memory as a lifeline indicates that not being able to remember means that what remains after plundering can perish and he along with it. This fictional character is not using his own memory to recollect, but that of his grandmother. “We inherit memory the way we inherit the colour of our eyes and skin. We inherit the sound of laughter just as we inherit the sound of tears. Your memory pains me.”⁷⁰

Just like the fictional character in *The Book of Disappearance*,⁷¹ I found myself flooded with emotions when I went to my father’s home in Haifa, although I had never lived in this home, nor even seen it before bringing my camera to it. My camera was shaking and I could not capture a stable shot of the home. My father’s memory of the place pained me. It was my collective memory and not my own memory that was responsible for my capacity to sympathize and identify with the house.

⁶⁷ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁶⁸ Ibtisam Azem, *The Book of Disappearance: A Novel*, trans. Sinan Antoon (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2019), 97.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

The Self as a Research Subject

While *Hands on Visual Remains* is the research methodology of this body of work, the approach used to describe and systematically analyze the engagement with remains of plundering is an autoethnographic approach. This means that I, the researcher, use myself as a subject of research, where I analyze and study my own interaction with visual remains of plundering.

As a Palestinian filmmaker, I have rarely used archival material in my films because my protagonists almost always have lost their photos and personal videos in one war or another. My film narratives have been dominated by the narratives of dispossession, which my film characters always struggled with. Through this work I am presented with the opportunity to work with visual archives, which I have not done before. Yet, to me, these are not found images which I can arrange and rearrange freely. I satisfy the condition that is set by *Hands on Visual Remains* as I myself have sustained the loss of personal and professional audiovisual archives, and I come from a family that has suffered dispossession. Thus, I do perceive these images as remains of plundering and identify and sympathize with them. The process of engaging with visual remains of plundering, through film editing, film restoration, and creating new visual narratives using photos and films that survived looting, becomes a process that is studied and examined. The decisions I make as to how to approach the images and the ethical dilemmas which I face all become working material for the research. Most importantly, I look at what hinders or facilitates the ability of the dispossessed to handle remains of plundering, and what type of interaction is possible between the dispossessed and visual remains of plundering.

Autoethnography is grounded in personal experience and, I would argue, personal needs. I need to engage with images of the Palestinian past and to deal with hurdles that I faced throughout my work as a Palestinian filmmaker. It is an attempt to understand the effect of violence on the self and on surrounding objects. A need to process losses. In many ways, the choice to use an autoethnographic approach in this study is a means to “purge our burdens.”⁷² That is, my burden.

⁷² Robert Atkinson, “The Life Story Interview as a Bridge in Narrative Inquiry,” in *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry*, ed. D. Jean Clandinin (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 224–245.

Although I am focusing on an individual experience, many issues which I have faced in the past and which arise when I engage with visual remains of plundering have also been experienced by other Palestinian filmmakers. In this sense, my own individual experience is used to speak of the collective Palestinian experience. That is because “although traumatization is experienced by individuals, the impact of the interaction of historical and collective trauma occurs at communal and political levels.”⁷³ “Autoethnography is a method that is self-consciously value-centered rather than pretending to be value free,”⁷⁴ which I would argue is a more sincere approach to research, as researchers are never really value free. As they make decisions to ask why and where, they position themselves in relation to the research but without explicitly claiming this position. Using the self as a research subject is designed to produce a “thick description” of a culture,⁷⁵ which can be, as explained by Jorgenson, “accessible to insiders and outsiders through discerning patterns of cultural experiences as evidenced by field notes, interviews, and/or artifacts.”⁷⁶

Of course, like any method of research there are critics of the autoethnographic approach, who describe it as a method of “navel-gazers”⁷⁷ and say that it produces “biased data.”⁷⁸ As part ethnography, autoethnography is said to not meet social scientific standards, ostensibly because it is insufficiently rigorous, theoretical, and analytical, and too aesthetic, emotional, and therapeutic.⁷⁹

These criticisms seem to dismiss the value of personal narratives and their contribution to an understanding of a collective narrative and experience. They fail to see that by capturing personal individual narratives, the collective narrative and experience in a culture is captured. For example, Eyerman⁸⁰ highlights how individual narratives of slavery have had a major

⁷³ Arlene Audgeron, “Collective Trauma: The Nightmare of History,” *Psychotherapy and Politics International* 2, no. 1 (2004): 16–31.

⁷⁴ Arthur P. Bochner, “Perspectives on Inquiry II: Theories and Stories,” in *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*, eds. Mark L. Knapp and Gerald R. Miller (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 21–41.

⁷⁵ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

⁷⁶ Jane Jorgenson, “Engineering Selves: Negotiating Gender and Identity in Technical Work,” *Management Communication Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (2002): 350–380.

⁷⁷ D. Soyini Madison, “The Dialogic Performative in Critical Ethnography,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2006): 320–324.

⁷⁸ Leon Anderson, “Analytic Autoethnography,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35, no. 4 (2006): 373–395.

⁷⁹ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, “Autoethnography: An Overview,” *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12, no. 1 (2010). <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-12.1.1589>.

⁸⁰ Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

impact on African American identity, forming collective narratives and memories and leading to shifts in communal identity.

Being the subject of colonization is a personal matter as much as a collective state of exploitation and injustice. Withholding a personal narrative robs the reader of the ability to relate to the subjects' experience and sympathize with the experience of another human being. Moreover, maybe it is not a bad thing for a subject of settler colonialism to be a navel-gazer, as the act of erasure that is embodied in the presence of a settler colonial state alters the subject and the world which she inhabits; it is thus necessary to attempt to process the changes that are happening to this person and their world. As Devika Chawla and Ahmet Atay argue, autoethnography opens a space where the colonized can speak and in the process, decolonization can begin.⁸¹

The Void Project

To find photos, films and media objects that have survived events of looting and destruction, and that can become material for research, salvagers who rescued these objects needed to be located. The problem was that these salvagers came into contact with these objects during invasions or bombings. As the objects were displaced as a result of the violent events, so were the populations that held these objects, including the salvagers. This has meant that to search for visual remains of plundering and media objects that had survived a plundering and been salvaged by individuals, I needed to approach the dispersed, disenfranchised Palestinian population in different parts of the world.

I turned to the place where what is not possible offline—that is, a territorial Palestinian space—can be virtually visualized.⁸² I established in cyberspace The Void Project⁸³ as a multimedia space for finding and working with visual remains of photos and films that have survived plundering. I called it The Void Project to capture the emptiness that plundering inflicts on the Palestinian visual narrative, and I asked website visitors to fill in the void by leaving information about the whereabouts of photos and films that have survived plundering and have been salvaged by someone, somewhere.

⁸¹ Chawla and Atay, "Introduction: Decolonizing Autoethnography."

⁸² Miriyam Aouragh, *Palestine Online, Transnationalism, the Internet and the Construction of Identity* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 75, 86.

⁸³ Located at www.thevoidproject.org.



Figure 5. Screenshot from the website, The Void Project.

The Void Project's presence on the Internet became a tool with which I could approach different social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram, and connect to people who might have visual remains or know someone who does. Using information which I received from individuals about salvaged photos and/or films, I filled in an interactive map on the Internet to mark countries where salvagers and their salvaged items reside (fig. 6)

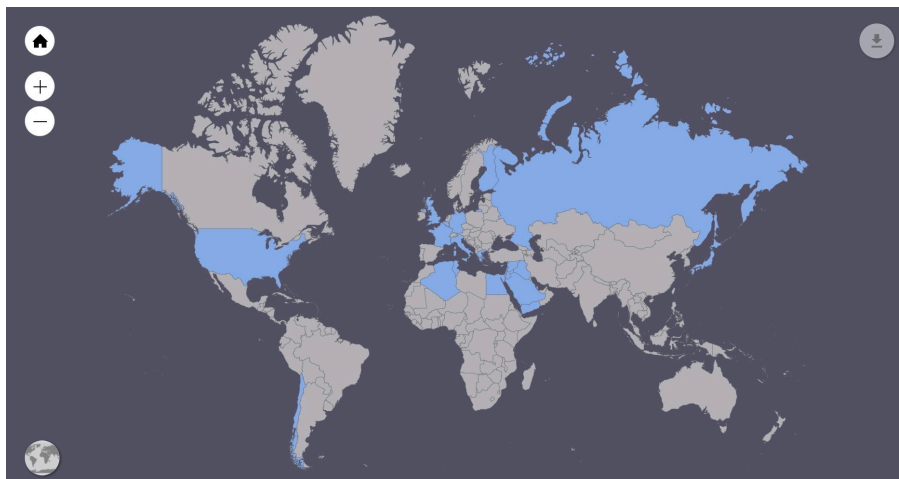


Figure 6. Azza El Hassan, map of Palestinian visual remains, The Void Project.

These marks on the map that stretch from the Arab world to the Americas, Asia, Africa and Europe are the geographies to which Palestinian populations have moved. It is important to note that these findings are not scientific. This was not a systematic search into the whereabouts of Palestinian images and their salvagers; I did not travel to each place to verify

the presence of an image or a film and to confirm the narrative of a person. Yet, the multitude of responses to a question on the whereabouts of Palestinian images speaks to how scattered the Palestinian population and its images are.

Through The Void Project and this virtual search, I eventually connected with two women filmmakers, Layali Bader and Arab Lutfi, who both worked at the Palestine Cinema Institute prior to its plundering and had copies of films they had made for the institute during and after its pillage. *The Road to Palestine*⁸⁴ and *The Upper Gate*⁸⁵ were perfect samples of remains of plundering which could be explored through this research, and their filmmakers agreed to the restoration of the films through The Void Project to serve the purpose of this research.

Yet, the bulk of the photos and films that are explored in this work did not come from the virtual world; instead, they came from my next-door neighbor in Amman, Jordan.

The Jawherieh family, prior to fleeing Lebanon, had salvaged a few images and film reels that belonged to Hani Jawherieh, one of Palestine's most acclaimed photographers and cinematographers. Jawherieh's work had been mostly plundered apart from the few images which remained in his family's possession. What remains today of Jawherieh's personal archive is explored as research objects in this work.

Exhibition Space as a Lab and a Homeland

The interaction between the subjects of research and the objects of exploration in this study takes place mostly in an exhibition space. Although some engagements originate first in the editing room, they were all eventually completed within the space of the exhibition. It is in the exhibition space that images are assembled, assessed, questioned, arranged and rearranged.

The notion of using the exhibition space as a lab for art and culture experiments is not new: artists and academics have long been using exhibition spaces as experiment labs. "The exhibition becomes experimental when it engages with its own contingency and potential to

⁸⁴ Layali Bader, dir., *The Road to Palestine* (German Democratic Republic and Palestine, 1983), animated film.

⁸⁵ Arab Lutfi, dir., *The Upper Gate* (Lebanon and Palestine, 1991), documentary film.

generate forms of knowledge.”⁸⁶ The act of deconstruction and reconstruction with which curators engage as material is assembled and rearranged is thought to bring a critical understanding to the objects at hand; it also allows an insight into the way in which an artist challenges assumptions about the exhibited object.

The spectators and visitors to the exhibition space are not the subjects of research in this study, although occasionally their interactions with the displayed objects and their comments have been noted and mobilized by the research. The actual examination of the objects and subjects of research takes place before the opening of the exhibition to the public, when the exhibition is being curated and installations are being made. The choice to interact with visual remains of plundering, such as photos in an exhibition space and not in the comfort of a home living room, is to offer an artificial space, where the subjects of the engagements are consistently being reminded that what is being explored are remains of plundering, not regular images and objects. There is nothing normal in interacting with remains that emerge after violence, and the subjects of research need always to be reminded of that in order to perform an interaction with the objects that is faithful to Hands on Visual Remains study.

Within the Palestinian context, the exhibition as a space becomes an area which plunderers cannot reach, making it a haven. In London, the confined, public space of Gallery P21, in Euston, is where material can be safely accumulated, shared and gazed at in the actual world, without fear or a threat that the experience will soon be terminated by an invasion or a checkpoint. The exhibition space becomes a claimed Palestinian space, without checkpoints or barbed wire and offering the possibility to move freely. It is the much-desired homeland, where you can experience proximity to memory objects that are denied to you in the actual world. Still, as much as one wish to imagine a temporarily proclaimed space, London, in this context, is just like Beirut, Amman, Santiago and so on. They are all what Homi Bhabha called the third space, which is “an epistemological space that is inhabited by the colonized subject.”⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Caterina Albano, “The Exhibition as an Experiment: An Analogy and Its Implications,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 17, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412918763446>.

⁸⁷ Bhabha, “The World and the Home.”

Conclusion

The process of using photos, films and media equipment with the intention of producing a new experience has led to the creation of several items, events and productions, many of which will continue to exist after the research has been completed. Among these productions are four Palestinian films that were produced by the Palestine Cinema Institute from the late 1960s to the early 1990s which have been restored through this research. Following their restoration, these films premiered at the Institute of Contemporary Arts⁸⁸ in London in 2018 and were again screened in 2019. They have since been screened at various art venues and festivals in Europe, the Americas, the Arab world and Japan. The films are now accessible online for audiences around the world. Recently one of them was acquired by the Austrian Film Museum to be displayed there permanently.

An exhibition of remains of plundering, entitled *The Found Archives of Hani Jawherieh: The Art of Accessing Forbidden Archives*,⁸⁹ was staged. The exhibition, at P21 Gallery in London, opened its doors to the public in November 2019, and for a month, the visitors to the exhibition could see the featured research and interact with remains of plundering.

Film footage that survived plundering was used to make a short video essay, *A Remake of a Revolutionary Film*,⁹⁰ which first screened at the exhibition of *The Found Archives of Hani Jawherieh*, has since been shown at various film festivals and art venues.

As an art and media production the research has been reviewed by various art magazines, such as *Art Monthly*⁹¹ and *Frieze*,⁹² and has been covered by various television stations and networks. This made the research accessible to a wide audience, but it also speaks to the currency and urgency of the subject being explored. The Void Project, as a media platform for Palestinian photos and films that are remains of plundering, remains active today in the virtual world following the completion of this research.

⁸⁸ "Cinema of the Palestinian Revolution," Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2018, <https://www.ica.art/films/cinema-palestinian-revolution>.

⁸⁹ *The Found Archive of Hani Jawherieh*, P21 Gallery, 2019, <https://p21.gallery/exhibitions/the-void-project-the-found-archive-of-hani-jawherieh>.

⁹⁰ Azza El Hassan, dir., *A Remake of a Revolutionary Film* (United Kingdom and Palestine, 2019).

⁹¹ Amna Malik, "The Found Archive of Hani Jawherieh," *Art Monthly* 432 (December/January 2019/2020), <https://www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/article/the-found-archive-of-hani-jawherieh-by-amna-malik-dec-jan-19-20>.

⁹² Nathan Geyer, "'Find a Story in a Grain of Dust': The Search for Palestine's Lost Cinema," *Frieze*, November 28, 2018, <https://www.frieze.com/article/find-story-grain-dust-search-palestines-lost-cinema>.

Chapter Three: Foundation of Work

Beginnings

The theme of loss and dispossession has dominated many of my films narratives. In this chapter, I review how I dealt with the theme of archives as a constant narrative of loss, and I discuss my artistic attempts to compensate for their absence. I look at my personal problematic relationship and that of my films' protagonists with a disturbed past and an unresolved present and the constant search for healing and resolution.

The body of work that is reviewed here has laid the foundation for the exploration that is being undertaken in this research, where photos, films and media equipment and the dispossessed relationship with matters that remain after the loss are systematically analyzed and assessed in the hope that I can once and for all find a way to deal with this grand narrative of losses.

In the winter of 2003, the Israeli army invaded the city of Ramallah, in the West Bank, and engaged in random house searches. I was out of the country at that time, but my flat mate Stephanie, a lawyer and a human rights activist, was in our flat when the army came barging in. Stephanie stood watching as the soldiers searched our flat and went through our drawers. By the time the army had finished and left, much of our belongings had been destroyed. As a filmmaker, I had a library of material which I had collected throughout my working years; video and audiotapes of scenes I shot and had not yet put together, shots and photographs of places and people, and the original masters of my films were now all gone. My work in progress, my visual memory records, were erased in a matter of minutes.

Luckily, production companies had copies of films which they had produced or co-produced with me. However, my rushes were now gone forever. I was unable to return to tapes of the four children I had filmed documenting their childhood friendship and was planning to film them again when they reached adulthood. I could no longer edit that powerful scene of the

man I met in Lebanon at the Sabra and Shatila massacre cemetery, who every day brings a table and a chair and sits combing his hair and looking at his own reflection in the mirror. He was the guard of the cemetery and he knew that no one could compete with him for the job, because in that cemetery forty members of his immediate and extended family were laid. It was both absurd and surreal. Now all I have left of this man who touched me with his calmness and madness are still photos which were taken by a friend who accompanied my film crew, photos which I am now sharing with you.



Photo by, Najib Nasrallah, 2002, Cemetery guard.

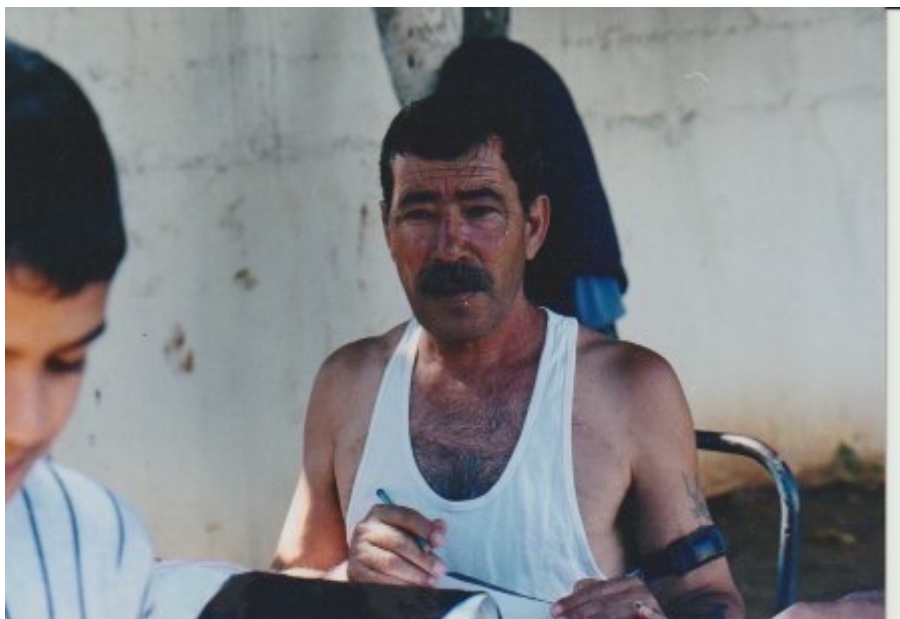


Photo by: Najib Nasrallah, 2002, Remembering the names of the Dead

The destruction and abduction of individual archives and objects is rarely reported or documented, but what I have experienced on a personal level has been an ongoing process since the 1920s and 1930s, perpetrated first by Zionist groups and then by the state of Israel. Today, every Israeli bombing and invasion of a Palestinian neighborhood leads to the destruction of Palestinian images, along with the buildings and homes that are invaded or destroyed.

However, not all Palestinian photos and films are destroyed; many are looted and kept at Israeli archival centers and institutions. The choice of what to destroy and what to take is decided by the military according to their needs and interests. As Ariella Azoulay argues, “A soldier has the authority to assess the material and their value and effect the way history could be told.”⁹³ Based on what Azoulay tells us, I can conclude that my material did not strike a chord with any soldier, which led to the immediate erasure of all my past audiovisual records.

I filmed the destruction that the soldiers inflicted on our belongings. I then used the footage to construct the ending of the film that I was working on at that time as it fitted perfectly with the film’s theme which discussed how the private lives of individuals are overtaken by what

⁹³ Azoulay, “Photographic Conditions,” 6.

happens on a national scale. In *3cm Less*,⁹⁴ Raeda is angry with her father, not because in 1975 he hijacked a plane but because he died in the process, leaving her mother to raise five little girls on her own. In the film, Raeda is the one who decides that she wants a film to be made about her. She uses me and my camera to go through a reconciliation process with her dead father; whom she loves but feels abandoned by.



3 Cm Less (2003)

Using film space for the protagonist to perform cathartic acts operates on two levels, a conscious and subconscious one. Hager's daughters want to pay tribute to their mum as she is turning eighty. The daughters appreciate that their mother had given her life struggling as a single mum and fighting occupation. For years, Hagar fought to bring back her husband's dead body from Colombia to the West Bank, which the occupation authority was denying her the right to do. In the process, the girls reveal that many times they felt that their needs as children were neglected so the mother could put up a fight against occupation. Should Hagar have given up on bringing back her husband's dead body and focused instead on the wellbeing of her children? Her girls do not think so, but they also recognize that they paid a price.

My camera in the film is assigned the role of a therapist, to whom the film protagonist confides and by doing so heals, yet I, who reside behind the camera soon find myself facing my own demons. That is when I visited Raeda, in Haifa, the city from which my father was dispossessed and turned into a refugee in 1948.

⁹⁴ El Hassan, *3 cm Less*.



Haifa, *3cm Less* (2003).

Unable to help myself or my protagonists to make peace with the past, I return to my home in Ramallah, to find Stephanie standing in our flat with all our belongings trashed on the ground and destroyed. The present itself is problematic, so how can one reconcile with a problematic past if the present is also unsettled!

That year, after my own films and tapes were destroyed, I decided to go on a filmic journey from Palestine, to Jordan, to Syria, to Lebanon, in search of the Palestine Cinema Institute archive that went missing following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, in 1982. By then, and following my own loss, I had realized that loss of images is always a personal matter for the creator of the image and for the people whose image is captured. Even when a national audiovisual archive is plundered, like the film institute archives, which is not a personal archive, still its loss remains personal for the image creators and the people captured in these images.

*In Kings and Extras*⁹⁵ I begin my search for the loss of the Palestine Cinema Institute archives by asking random individuals in the streets of Ramallah, Amman, Damascus and Beirut about personal things they lost.

⁹⁵ El Hassan, *Kings and Extras*.



Kings & Extras (2004)

Yet, as I ask strangers about their own personal losses, I am reminded by some, especially in Palestine, that instead of focusing on past losses I should go and film at the checkpoints where loss is now in motion, as soldiers stop people and strip them of their belongings and dignity.

To emphasize how the loss of the Palestine Cinema Institute and its archive have robbed Palestinians of the camera that was there to tell their story, my search for the lost images led me to meet, in Beirut, Monaf. Monaf is a young Palestinian refugee, who was born and lives in a refugee camp and who, according to Lebanese law, is not allowed to take employment except in certain occupations that are mainly considered unskilled. To earn a living Monaf works as a wedding photographer. In the film he is seen to be invisible, by many people who do not see him, even when he is mingling among them at their parties. He is like a ghost and is only transformed into an actual person when a camera with a spotlight captures his presence.



Kings and Extras (2004)

The ghostly presence of Monaf and his need for a camera to capture his image, speaks of the void that has now become apparent after the loss of the Palestine Cinema Institute, which came to offer Palestinians visibility and without which Monaf and others become unseen and unheard. There is a need for the camera of the Palestine Institute to re-emerge.

As I move from one city to another searching for a lost archive, I find myself creating my own new archive of Palestine and the Palestinians. The search in *Kings and Extras* becomes an exploration into how individuals and a culture deal with the loss of audiovisual archives. My protagonists come up with four different narratives to explain what happened to the lost archives ranging between the archive being burnt, thrown into the wind, to buried in a graveyard. Yet, none of the narratives suggests that maybe the Israeli army had defeated them and looted and destroyed their archives. Something which I always thought was a mechanism to continue living after loss of a great multitude is encountered.

Memory and Presence of “the Other”

The absence of archival photos and films in the spheres of my protagonists and subjects has meant that, many times, I needed to search for alternative ways to narrate a past story. In *Title*

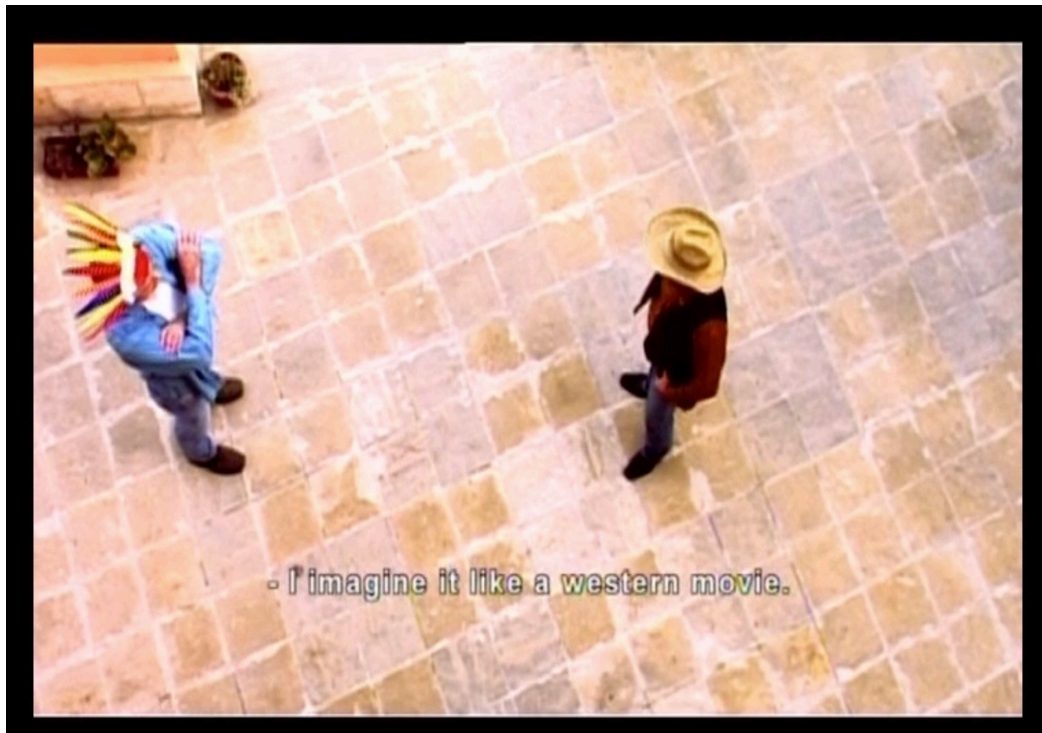
*Deed from Moses*⁹⁶ I filmed in Ain Kareem, a Palestinian village at the outskirts of Jerusalem where affluent Palestinians used to live. In 1948, its occupants were forced out. Ain Kareem was preserved as it was, with its Palestinian homes and church remaining intact; only its occupants were changed and its new inhabitants are, today, affluent Israelis. As I filmed the village, I searched for photos and films that depict the village life prior to 1948, but I could find no visual archives and learnt that Ain Kareem archive had been looted during the dispossession of 1948.

I had to search for a creative way to compensate for the absence of archival photos and films and still be able to recall the presence of Palestinians in Ain Kareem prior to their expulsion. With the absence of past images, I decided to rely on sounds; the music which the Palestinian inhabitants of Ain Kareem would listen to if they were still in their homes, today. Because the houses in Ain Kareem are still as they were, the introduction of the music brought a ghostly presence of the inhabitants who still reside in the space even after they have been expelled from it. Being able to compensate for the absence of archives, and finding a way to still tell the story, has always given me comfort; it was the repeatedly disturbed present which I and my protagonists struggled with.

I was beginning to realize that to find a resolution in my narratives I needed to point my camera not only at Palestinians but at “the other.” I wanted to make a film about Israelis but was unable to find them as the segregation wall separated us from them, and the only Israelis whom I could see in Ramallah were soldiers. In *Always Look them in the Eyes*⁹⁷ I approach an Israeli soldier and attempt to engage in a discussion with him, but he remains hidden behind his army uniform and automatic rifle, precluding any possibility of a human interaction between us. Israeli citizens—that is, the average, unarmed person—could then only be imagined and not seen, so I decided to portray our imagination of them. I went to the streets of Ramallah and asked people how they imagined Israelis to be. “She would probably be very arrogant! Not very nice!” said one woman, while a young man began impersonating Israelis but ends up only impersonating a soldier who shouts and gives orders.

⁹⁶ Azza El Hassan, dir., *Title Deed from Moses* (Palestine, 1998), documentary film.

⁹⁷ Azza El Hassan, dir., *Always Look Them in the Eyes* (United States, Jordan and Palestine, 2007), documentary film.



Always Look Them in the Eyes (2007)

RESISTING THE FRAME

Escaping a problematic past only to be confronted by a problematic present can likely define all my other filmic attempts. In 2001, during the second Palestinian Intifada when curfews were a daily occurrence and life was as far from normal as possible, I decided amid all of this to shoot a love story that was unfolding between my landlord and his wife, Abu Khalil and Im Khalil. In *News Time*,⁹⁸ I contact Abdul Salam Shahadi, a friend and a cameraman with whom I usually work, to ask him to film the story. But I find him busy filming news so I decide to take matters into my own hands and film the old couple myself. Yet, my attempts to do so are repeatedly interrupted by Israeli bombings and shelling, which leads my neighbors to leave the neighborhood, abandoning me and the film. Left alone, I begin to film four kids who have been playing in front of my flat while I have been filming, Im Khalil and Abu Khalil.

⁹⁸ Azza El Hassan, dir., *News Time*. (United Kingdom and Palestine, 2001), documentary film, <https://vimeo.com/409256092>.



News Time (2001)



*News Time (2001), They like to film us*⁹⁹

Eventually the harsh reality of living under occupation, where every aspect of personal life is overtaken by the grand narrative of war and occupation, dominates the film. My neighborhood, just like other neighborhoods in Ramallah finds itself struggling with the

⁹⁹ "They Like to Film Us," sequence from *News Time*.

presence of news reporters from all over the world, who have come to spectate Palestine and the Palestinians and make news out of the deterioration of life's little details.

Geographies

The unsettling relationship with the past and its present have set me, in most of my films, in a constant state of searching. It was as if I had lost something and I had been searching for it ever since as I engaged in repetitive journeys between Palestine, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Borders between these different countries seemed to disappear in my films. These spaces were the geographies to which populations of Palestinian refugees had been dispersed and with them a grand and personal narrative resides. It was the Palestinian grand narrative of loss that I was searching to comprehend and the private personal narrative of attempting to survive without a homeland. Years later I read Homi Bhabha's "The World and the Home," where he wrote: "In that displacement the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that divided as it is disorienting."¹⁰⁰

In my short video essay, *In Search of a Death Foretold*,¹⁰¹ I attempt to present to myself and to my viewer an explanation of why, somehow, it always seemed necessary to leave Palestine and go searching as if in pursuit for what has been lost.

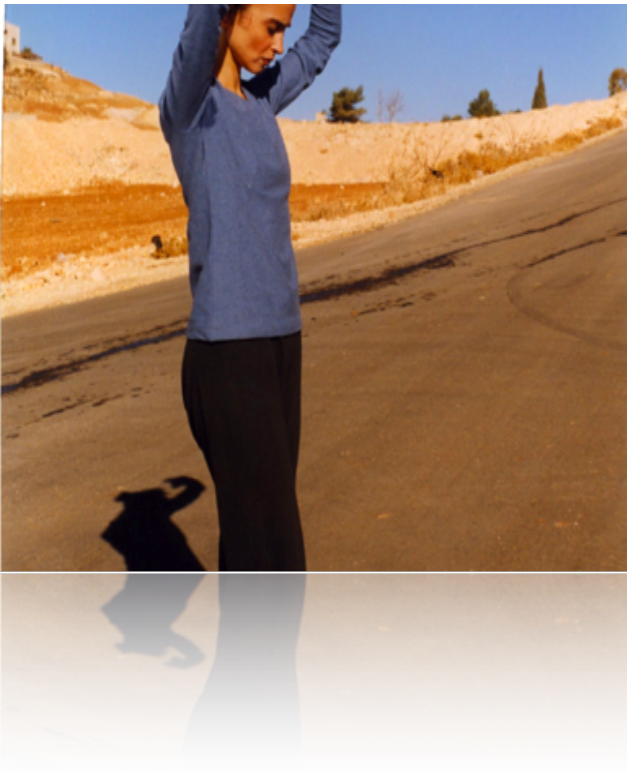


In my journeys, I would sometimes omit a stop and sometimes add another new stop. Being on the road in my filmic journeys meant that most of the time I was making road movies where the narrative, almost always, evolved and unfolded while the camera was on

¹⁰⁰ Bhabha, "The World and the Home," 141.

¹⁰¹ Azza El Hassan, *In Search of a Death Foretold* (Palestine and Germany, 2004), video art.

the move. In *3cm Less*, I travelled between Palestine and Jordan; in *We Are All Fine*,¹⁰² I travelled from Palestine to Lebanon; and in *Always Look them in the Eyes*,¹⁰³ it was Palestine and Jordan. In all of films it was the narrative which originated in Palestine that motivated the travel to find a narrative resolution. Only in *Before you were Born*,¹⁰⁴ the journey is reversed, where I take my newborn child on a journey from Jordan to Palestine so he can have a Palestinian identity card. In front of a shattered landscape, I sit with my son on a balcony looking over a rundown landscape as I tell him, “This is Palestine, we are home!”



The Place (2000)

My problematic relationship with the space that I inhabit first came to the surface in *The Place*,¹⁰⁵ where a woman lives at a crossroad, in the middle of nowhere. She has an imagination of a place that is heavenly and perfect and from which her parents were dispossessed. As she visualizes the past, she finds herself still able to hear the laughter of the dispossessed as if they had never left and listen to their music playing.

¹⁰² Azza El Hassan, dir., *We Are All Fine*, (Palestine, 2005), documentary film.

¹⁰³ El Hassan, *Always Look them in the Eyes*.

¹⁰⁴ Azza El Hassan, dir., *Before You Were Born* (Jordan and Palestine, 2012), documentary film.

¹⁰⁵ Azza El Hassan, dir., *The Place* (Palestine, 2000), video art.

In *The Place*,¹⁰⁶ the space from which the woman has been dispossessed and the unfamiliar unhomely space at the crossroad makes her a subject that inhabits the rim of an “in-between” reality.”¹⁰⁷ It is an in-between-ness which I am incapable of escaping as I move into my empty flat in Ramallah, that is an impersonal space. In this empty flat, that holds no present memories, I hang on my wall the image of the woman who is at the crossroad.

I Hate It All

Eventually I got tired of my attempts to reconcile with an image and with a disturbed space. I decided I was going to rid myself of this problematic subject and to work with something that had nothing to do with this unbearable narrative of loss. In 2014, I released *The Unbearable Presence of Asmahan*.¹⁰⁸ Asmahan was a Druze Syrian princess who became a famous singer and later on a double agent for the British and the Germans during the Second World War, eventually dying in a mysterious car accident. My protagonist, who has been described to be not a singer but a state of mind, offered me a world of *Lust and Vengeance*,¹⁰⁹ which was the title of a film in which she starred in 1944. The espionage episode in her life, with all the action that followed, seemed like an escape route away from any problematic presents and unsettling realities. Asmahan's lust for life, which made her presence unbearable to her aristocratic class and many husbands, was supposed to help me in *The Unbearable Presence of Asmahan* to move forward and begin to formulate new kinds of narratives and themes. Yet, I quickly realized that instead of escaping my previous image constructs and narratives I was now molding Asmahan and her narrative to tell a story that has been haunting me throughout my work. I made Asmahan the queen of refugees, since she was born on a ship, while her mother was fleeing a martial dispute from Syria to Egypt. Asmahan grew up in Cairo, while spending her time between Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Palestine, which gave me a reason to indulge yet again in a road movie between these countries.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

¹⁰⁸ Azza El Hassan, dir., *The Unbearable Presence of Asmahan* (Austria and Switzerland, 2014), documentary film.

¹⁰⁹ Philimon Wahba, *Lust and Vengeance* (Egypt, 1944).



The Unbearable Presence of Asmahan (2014)

The film was made in the midst of the Arab spring, that is when the Arab world was searching for icons and heroes to lead the uprisings that were spreading in the Arab countries in a domino effect. Made from various stories told by Asmahan's lovers and seekers in modern times, the film tells the story of a continuous search for icons and leaders. In many ways, *The Unbearable Presence of Asmahan*,¹¹⁰ is an anti-hero film. In Vienna, a group of Arab refugees, who came to Austria following the dream that Asmahan set out in one of her songs, "Euphoric Nights in Vienna,"¹¹¹ have become Asmahan haters. "She lied! There is nothing euphoric about Vienna,"¹¹² says one of the film's protagonists.

Asmahan's story is told from the present, as film protagonists attempt to deal with their unsettling realities. Shireen, who walks in the streets of Cairo looking intimidated by the public space, asks herself, why do we look to the past to resolve our problematic present? She later answers her own question: "You are nostalgic for the past, when you do not like your present."¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Asmahan, performer, "Euphoric Nights in Vienna," 1944.

¹¹² "Refuge interview," *The Unbearable Presence of Asmahan*.

¹¹³ "Interview with Shireen," *The Unbearable Presence of Asmahan*.



The Unbearable Presence of Asmahan (2014)

I soon realized that by changing my subject I resolved none of the issues that were haunting me. All I did was reshape the same themes and subjects by giving them a more universal theme that is not solely Palestinian.

CONCLUSION

I have always invited the spectator to come and see and experience the world of my films through my own perspective, as I have been almost always a protagonist in my own films. So to use now an autoethnographic approach in *Hands on Visual Remains*, in which I use myself as a subject for research, is a continuation of the position which I have always claimed in my visual narratives: the position of the insider who is attempting to make sense of being the subject of a problematic past and an unresolved present.

My past documentary works have centered on the loss of visual archives and the aftermath of this loss. In some films I dealt directly with the subject while in others I attempted to compensate for the loss by searching for resolutions. The loss of a visual archive is part of a series of losses which I and my protagonists sustain, such as the loss of a homeland and a set of relationships.

Instead of encountering absence, in *Hands on Visual Remains*, I am dealing with the presence of visual archives of photos and films. Yet, this replacement of absence with presence comes

in the aftermath of loss when the available images have emerged after events of plundering. The encounter with this material is designed to open a space to confront loss and attempt to formulate a new relationship with these images. It is a search into what these present visual remains can offer now to my visual narrative and a possible connection with the past.

The Present Nature of Palestinian Visual Remains

Curating modern exhibition installations out of what remains of photos and films following the violence, restoring films that have survived the violence and producing a video essay of a visual narrative that has been plundered, are all encounters and engagements that are explored in this chapter. The aim is to reveal what has become of these images and of our relationship with what remains unplundered, today.

To understand what has become of Palestinian photos, films and even recording objects that have survived looting and destruction and how we relate to these objects in our present time, five Hands on Visual Remains creative encounters are preformed to explore:

- 1- The physical state of visual remains and media equipment: The effect of the plundering on what remains unplundered, and the life which the object has lived after the violence as it became the property of its salvager, is explored to offer an understanding of any changes or alteration which these objects have encountered within the course of events and their separation from their original archive.
- 2- The interaction between the subjects of research and remains of plundering is studied: This part of the exploration assesses the subject who interacts with objects that emerged out of the violence. How do these individuals perceive these objects and how does their knowledge of the violence that has been exercised on these objects affect the interaction between the subject and the object? More importantly, what type of issues arise when the subject handles these remains? Is there a possible use for these objects in the present?

Working Material

Most of the objects that are explored as remains of plundering in this work belonged to Palestinian photographer and cinematographer Hani Jawherieh (1939–1975). Jawherieh is considered to have been responsible for the formation of the image of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and its Palestinian fighters during the 1960s and 70s. He was one of the founders of the Palestine Film Unit (PFU), along with cinematographer Sulafa Jadalah and filmmaker Mustafa Abu Ali. The PFU later evolved into the Palestine Cinema Institute when the PLO moved from Jordan to Lebanon in the early 1970s. During his career as a photographer of the Palestinian revolution and the leading cinematographer of the Palestine Cinema Institute, Jawherieh produced thousands of images, which formed a large part of the film institute archive. In 1982, the archive of the Palestine Cinema Institute was looted and destroyed by the Israeli army during its invasion of Lebanon, resulting in the disappearance of almost all of Jawherieh's work and the ejection of his images from the world. The few remains of Jawherieh's work which are explored in this work are the handful of items that Jawherieh's wife, Hind, salvaged during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

It is worth mentioning that although the fate of the bulk of Jawherieh's work, whether it was looted or destroyed, remains unknown even today. Nevertheless, some photos and film footage of Jawherieh's missing work did appear in *Looted and Hidden*¹¹⁴ and *A Reel War*,¹¹⁵ two Israeli films that used looted Palestinian film archives now held by the Israeli military archive. This suggests that at least parts of Jawherieh's stolen film and photographic archives have not been destroyed, although they remain inaccessible and concealed from Palestinians.

What Hind Jawherieh salvaged in 1982, prior to fleeing Beirut, Lebanon to Amman, Jordan are photos and films which were already in her home in Beirut and not in the Institute when it was plundered. For thirty-five years Hind has kept what she salvaged in her home in Amman. In 2017, she granted me access to the material and the right to explore and use it, plus the right to release the images back to the public for the purpose of the research. This material is:

¹¹⁴ Sela, *Looted and Hidden*.

¹¹⁵ Mandel, *A Reel War*.

- 1- Six contact sheets.
- 2- A catalogue of portraits that were plundered but the catalogue, itself, survived.
- 3- A personal photo album.
- 4- Three film reels.
- 5- A 16 mm camera.

The scarce material that remains from the legacy of a great photographer and cinematographer emphasizes the effect of Israeli looting and destruction on Palestinian visual narratives. The material offers a realistic sample of visual remains of plundering, the fragments that remain after a violent plundering event.

Most of the material explored dates to the 1960s and 70s, a period that was known as the Palestinian revolutionary era in cinema. Additional working material that does not belong to Jawherieh and belongs to the end of this era—that is, the early 1980s and 90s—is used in one of the productions in this research to explore the narrative of the Palestine Cinema Institute and the aftermath of its looting on film productions. These additional materials are *The Road to Palestine*¹¹⁶ by Layali Bader and *The Upper Gate*¹¹⁷ by Arab Lutfi.

Significance of Focusing on Remains from the Revolutionary Era

The revolutionary era in Palestinian cultural production is characterized by what Nadia Yaqub describes as a time in which Palestinian filmmakers wanted to portray Palestinians “in control of their own destiny and liberators of themselves.”¹¹⁸ It is the Palestinian revolutionary Cinema era which stretches between the 1960s through to the early 1980s, where Palestinian filmmakers and artists produced their work within institutions that were founded by the PLO, with the aim of depicting and informing the world of the Palestinian struggle.

The choice to work in this research with artists and their images that belong to the Palestinian revolutionary era is not coincidental. This era was chosen as it comes after the first and major plundering of Palestinian objects and images that occurred during the horrific events of 1948,

¹¹⁶ Bader, *The Road to Palestine*.

¹¹⁷ Lutfi, *The Upper Gate*.

¹¹⁸ Yaqub, *Palestinian Cinema in the Days of Revolution*.

“when Palestinians seem too many to have disappeared from the political map as an independent actor, and indeed as people.”¹¹⁹

The Palestinian revolutionary era was the era in which Palestinians began creating new visual archives to replace what had been lost, and to fill the void in Palestinian imagery that resulted from the 1948 plundering. They were responding to the loss by insisting on the continuity of their visual narrative. “We saw our main role as filmmakers is to document the life of our people following displacement and to portray their struggle for liberation.”¹²⁰ They recorded interviews with the dispossessed remembering the objects and the world they lost, and through that they created out of these memories a new archive. The narrative of the past became an activator for their present state of being, in which these image makers constructed an image of the ‘New Palestinian’; that is the Palestinian who has emerged after displacement and dispossession to fight and change her reality. Jawherieh himself was said to have had an obsession with creating a new visual archive: every time he finished a photo session or filming, he would perform a small dance and say: “Now we have a new piece of archive!”¹²¹

The abduction and destruction of the archive of the Palestinian revolution era, that is the archive of the Palestine Cinema Institute, illustrates the cycle of violence which settler colonialism engages in. It demonstrates how what remains in Palestinian spaces is continuously under the threat of becoming the subject of another attack and this makes the choice to work with these remains significant, as it explains the continuous trauma of loss that inhabits these remains of plundering.

¹¹⁹ Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

¹²⁰ El Hassan, *Kings and Extras*.

¹²¹ Dunia Al Watan, 2017, a testimony about the formation of the PLO Media Unit, Twice Abu []



Portraits, Hani Jawherieh (1939-1976), 1970 (pic.1)

The Exhibition of *The Found Archives of Hani Jawherieh*

The Exhibition of *The Found Archives of Hani Jawherieh: The Art of Accessing Forbidden Art*¹²² was curated to showcase engagements and productions that have developed out of using artistically the visual remains of photos, films and media equipment.

Although most of the material explored in the exhibition was originally made by Hani Jawherieh, it was Hind Jawherieh who salvaged his work, and she is recognized in the exhibition as an artist, just like her husband. In the artists' corner, a photo of Hind was placed side by side with that of Jawherieh, with the biography of each artist displayed next to their image summing up the work which each of them had done to generate the displayed images (pic.3).



The Found Archive of Hani Jawherieh - The artists corner, Hind & Hani (pic.2)

Hind Jawherieh is framed not only as a salvager but also as an artist due to the effect she has had on the displayed work; when she salvaged her husband's work, she engaged in a process of selection. She was unable to carry to her new exile all of her husband's belongings, so she had to choose. She carried some things and left others behind. Her selection process depended on what she deemed to be important, like Jawherieh's personal photo album and his 16 mm camera. As Hind prioritized objects and images that Jawherieh produced she

¹²² *The Found Archives of Hani Jawherieh.*

excluded the private and maybe even more interesting photos. For example, although Hani Jawherieh focused his work during the late 1960s onwards on the Palestinian movement and stopped publicly making the other kind of photography that he had previously made, like landscape photos, he still, at home, experimented in photographing his family. Among the images he made, was a collection of nude images of his wife, Hind. Yet, Hind was always shy when anyone saw these images and did not really like them. In 1982, as Hind was prioritizing Jawherieh's work and deciding what to salvage and what to keep behind, Hind neglected this collection although, as a souvenir, she did choose out of this collection one photo. The one she chose was the most conservative and it hardly revealed any parts of her body (pic.2).



Hind, 1975, by Hani Jawherieh. (Pic.3)

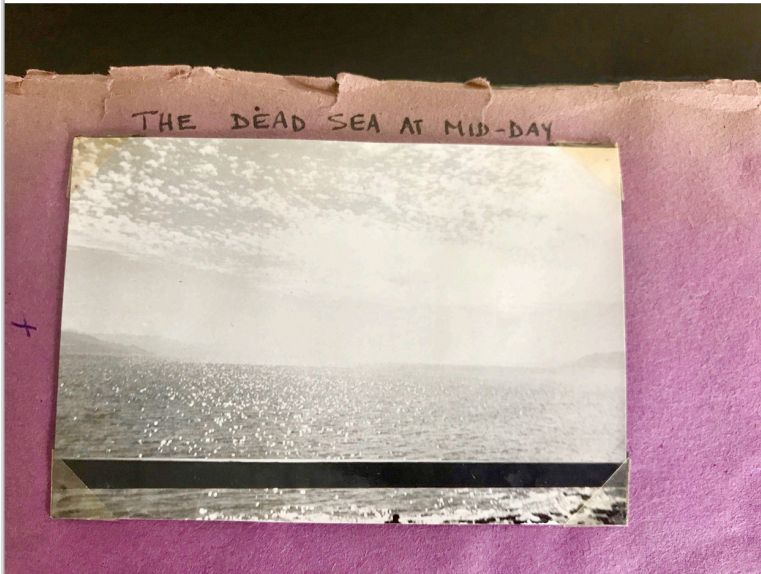
This image (pic.3) today is the only surviving image of this nude collection. It acts as a reminder of what was and informs us that Jawherieh did still, even in his revolutionary years, sometimes, produce images that had nothing to do with the liberation movement which he was involved in. The selection process which Hind exercised in her home determined what of the few remains of Jawherieh's work traces would survive.

Throughout the years, as Hind maintained what she salvaged in her home, she improvised methods of keeping and maintain these objects. Her decisions effected the condition of the images, film reels and camera today. Hind Jawherieh might be seen by some as more of an archivist than a salvager. ‘That is when the archivist is seen to be continually reshaping, reinterpreting, and reinventing the archive. This represents enormous power over memory and identity¹²³. But salvagers are not archivists and should not be defined as such. As a salvager Hind challenged siege, crossed borders and then maintained the archive on her own without the presence of an archive institution to help her or lift this enormous responsibility from her shoulders. The role of the salvager in this respect needs to be studied and assessed separately, which unfortunately this study is not designed to do.

In the coming sections the exhibits, which are the artistic exploration of the found visual remains of photos, films and media equipment, are discussed. The gallery floor maps (map 2) are designed to guide you through the exhibits and to help you visualize the process.

¹²³ Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook, “Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435628>.

The Found Archive of Hani Jawherieh
The Art of Accessing Forbidden Archive



Exhibition Dates: **7th - 30th November 2019**

Curator: **Azza El Hassan**

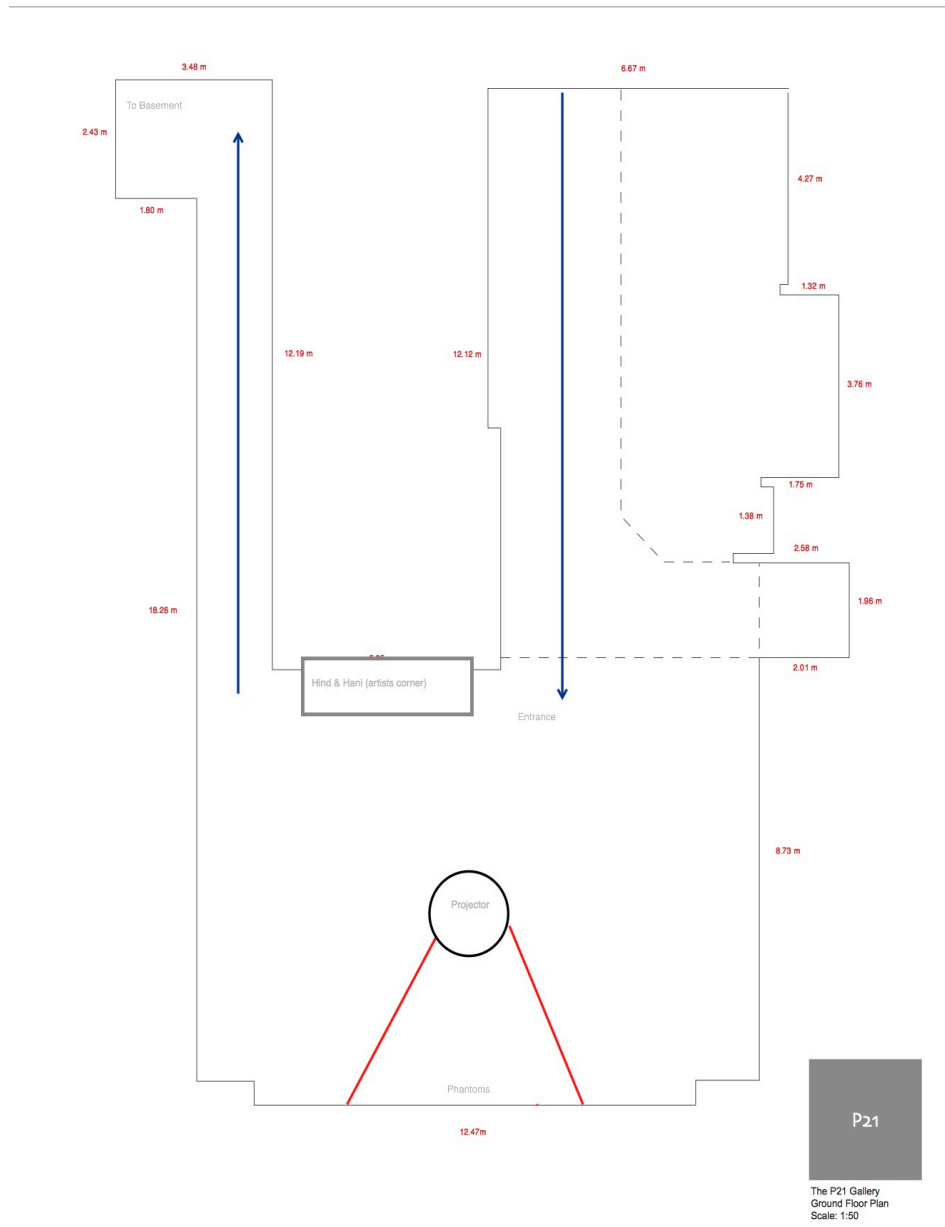
P21 Gallery Opening Hours: Tuesday, Thursday & Friday: 12:00 - 18:00, Wednesday: 12:00 - 20:00, Saturday: 12:00 - 16:00

 THE VOID PROJECT

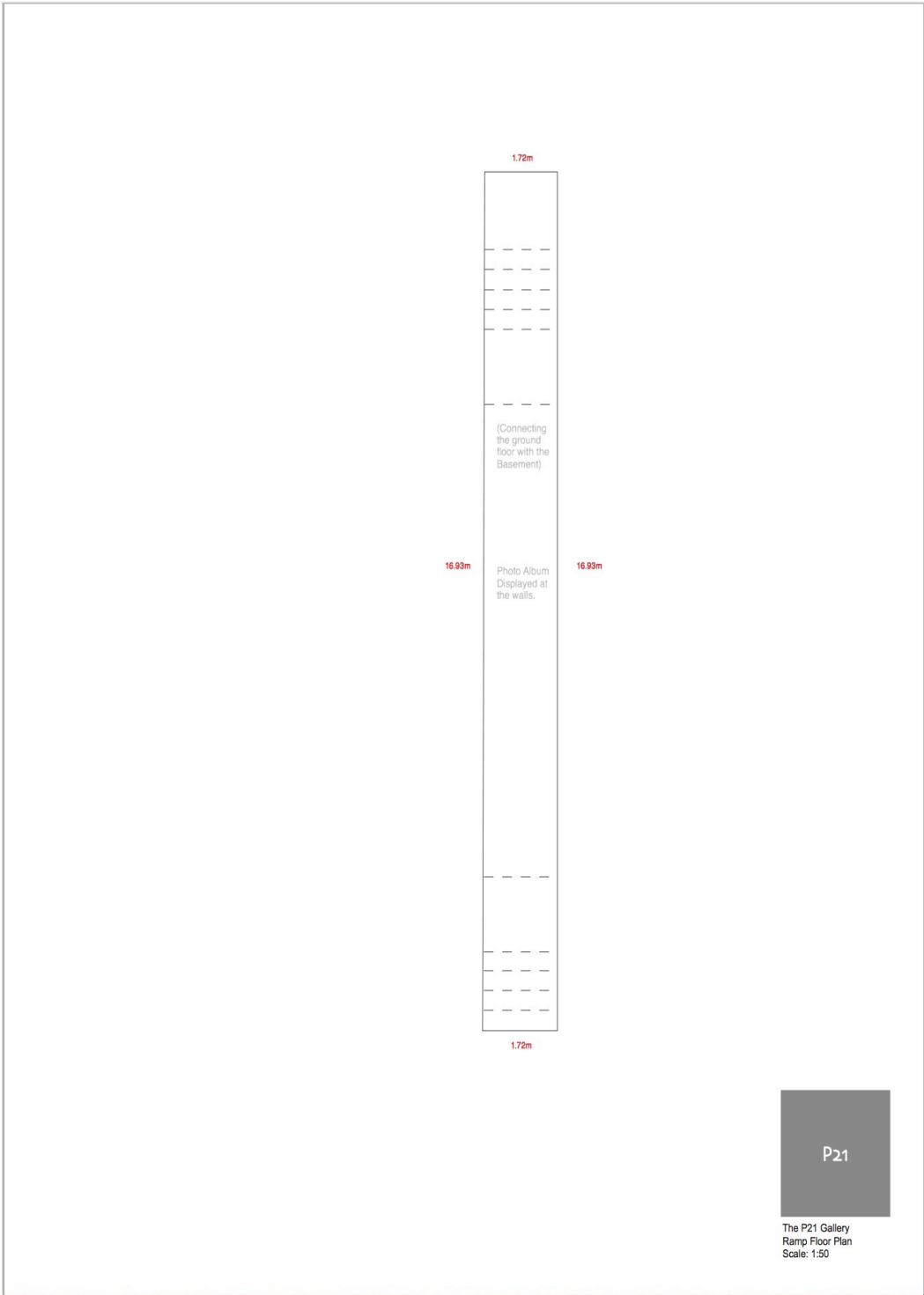
The Found Archive of Hani Jawherieh, Exhibition Poster, 2019

The Found Archive of Hani Jawherieh: The Art of Accessing Forbidden Archives

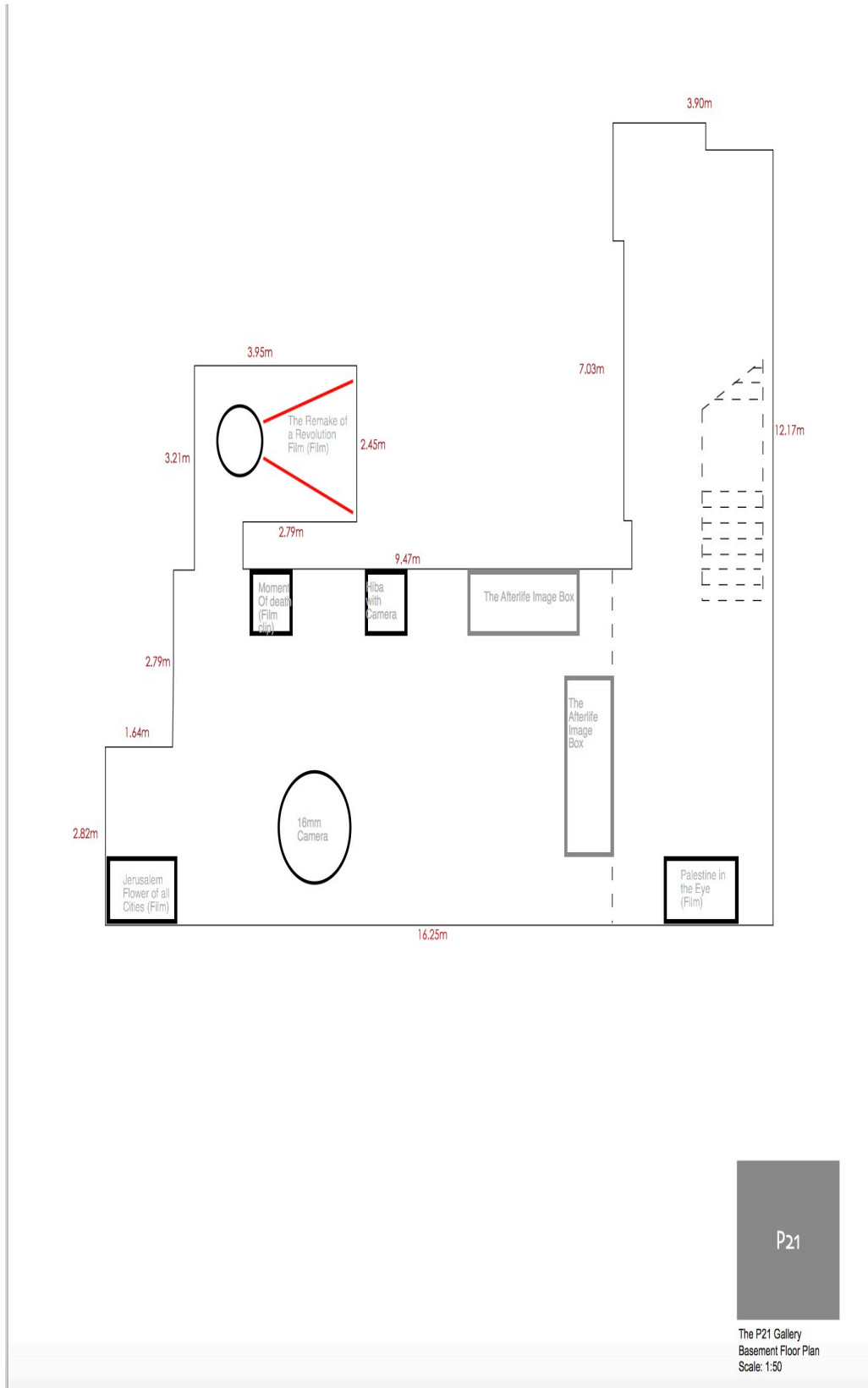
Exhibition Floor Plan



Ground Floor



Ramp



Basement

The Afterlife Image Box

Six contact sheets, that contain 154 images. Each image on the sheet measures 5.5 X 5.5 cm or 3.5 X 2.5 cm. These small positives of negatives were made by Jawherieh to enable him to look at shots and select the images which he would want to develop. Out of the 154 positives, Jawherieh only selected thirty images which he developed into actual photos, while he dismissed the rest. The developed photos became the property of the Palestine Cinema Institute. In 1982, these photos were plundered during the Israeli attack on the institute. Today, these sheets are the only trace and evidence that in the summer of 1969 Jawherieh conducted a photo shoot session of Palestinian refugees in the Jordan Valley. The images are of a celebration that was staged by the PLO in the refugee camp.



Contact Sheet, 1969, Hani Jawherieh (pic.1)

The surviving contact sheets are the raw material for an artist's work in progress. While the sheets do include reflections of images which Jawherieh worked on and made into photos, the bulk of these sheets are images which Jawherieh dismissed, did not select, and did not credit himself for taking them.

In this work, these contact sheets are used, first, to address the present nature of visual remains of plundering and, second, to assess the ethical implication of using and exhibiting an artist's visual remains. While exhibiting to the public remains of looting and destruction exposes the violence that has been exercised on Palestinian visual archives, and embodies in it a resistance to erasure by reclaiming what remains, does this justify showing images which the artist himself did not want to make public? Is it ethically correct to exhibit a work that has been reverted to its pre-completion state not by the artist but by the plunderers?

Working Process

A 90 cm box was set up. On top of it three frames were placed. Each frame contained two contact sheets, making the total of displayed sheets six. These are all the contact sheets that were salvaged by Hind Jawherieh. A photographic magnifying glass was placed on top of each frame to allow exhibition visitors to engage with the tiny images and to see their details, which it would not have been possible to see with the naked eye. The installation, The Afterlife Image Box, was placed at the basement of the exhibition space (map.2). The walls surrounding the installation were left bare, leaving nothing for the visitor of the space to see except if she decides to become an active spectator and engage with the magnifying glass. (pic.3, 4).



The Afterlife Image Box (pic.2)



The Afterlife Image Box (pic.3)

In using the magnifying glass, the active spectator begins a process of selecting images to view, and in that way emulates what Jawherieh himself did fifty years ago. She can dismiss a shot, prolong her gaze at one image, organize the order in which the images are viewed and decide which shot should be the starting point of a visual narrative.

Re-enactment is both affirmation and renewal. It entails addressing the old, but it also engenders something new, something we have never seen before. Herein lies the excitement of performance, as well as its surprises and its distortions.¹²⁴

As visual remains of plundering, these contact sheets have two distinctively different past lives: one before they became the subject of plundering and one after they were salvaged and became the property of their salvager. This means that when addressing “the old” one needs to ask which part of the old is being addressed. Is it the past life of the image before it was plundered or is it the time when these images became remains of plundering, after violence has been perpetrated on them? The existence of two past lives affects the type of spectating experience and the form of engagement of the user of the magnifying glass. The user of the

¹²⁴ Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree, and Jay Winter, *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

magnifying glass approaches the installation with the knowledge that what is on display are visual remains of plundering; after all the whole exhibition is a display of visual remains of plundering. This to a large extent marginalizes the first life narrative of these images—the original narrative for which these images were created by the artist.



Contact Sheet, 1969, Hani Jawherieh (pic.4)

If the user of the magnifying glass wants to follow the life of these images before they were plundered, she can follow the red and blue marks which were made by Jawherieh to mark the shots which he selected and later developed into actual photos. By doing so, the user gets glimpses of how Jawherieh wanted Palestinians and their movement to be portrayed to the world. “The act of photography by itself was, for us, an act of revolutionary resistance.”¹²⁵ Jawherieh and his colleagues at the Palestine Cinema Institute perceived themselves as revolutionaries who were creating images, rather than as image creators who were filming or

¹²⁵ Yaqub. *Palestinian Cinema in the Days of Revolution*, 75.

photographing a revolution. The marked collection of images was taken a year after Jawherieh joined the PLO, so it represents his early work as the photographer of the revolution and it embodies his attempts to depict the Palestinian resistance following the Nakba in 1948.

“Using still and moving images we can display the ideas and concepts of our revolution to the world.”¹²⁶ Jawherieh made selections that serve the way in which the PLO wanted to be portrayed in the media. Although his collection included portraits of men, women and children, the images he marked and selected were mostly of women fighters. Jawherieh’s choice to focus on women served the movement line at that time, in which Palestinian leaders wanted their movement to be seen as secular and inclusive of the whole Palestinian society. Presenting women as central figures served both the nonreligious aspect and the society’s involvement in the revolution. In Jawherieh’s images women are portrayed not only as active participants in the revolution but leaders of the struggle, standing in the front rows commanding the rest of the group. (Pic.5, 6, 7)

¹²⁶ Shlanzi et al., *Palestine in the Eye* (Lebanon and Palestine, 1975), collaboratively produced documentary film.



Liberation, 1969, photo by Hani Jawherieh (pic.5)



Prayer, 1969, Photo by: Hani Jawherieh (pic.6)



The Fighter, 1969, Photo by: Hani Jawherieh (pic.7)



The Scarf, 1969, Photo by: Hani Jawherieh (pic.8)



The March, 1969, Photo by: Hani Jawherieh (pic.9)

The contact sheets offer another option: that is when the user of the magnifying glass decides not to follow the red and blue marks of the artist. There are 124 unmarked small images on the contact sheets. These are the shots which Jawherieh did not select. They are ideas for possible photos that never materialized and some are probably images which the artist considered to be a “mistake” and never credited to himself. Since these 124 images never existed as photos they were never plundered by the Israeli army.

Spectating the raw material of Jawherieh’s images, the user moves the magnifying glass, freely creating her own narrative of these images. She exercises image and narrative

appropriation, not because the artist has relinquished some of his control over his own narrative or to enable an active spectator to participate in narrative construction; nor is it an appropriation that arises out of the spectator's deep knowledge of the material, or what Thomas Elsaesser calls "an intimate gesture of love."¹²⁷ Instead, it is narrative appropriation that emerges as a consequence of viewing fragments of what was. The ejection of Jawherieh's work from public domains has meant that no one from the public, including myself, the curator of the exhibition, has had a previous intimate relationship with the artist work and consequently with the given images.

Artist Intentions and Contemporary Experiences

As the first user of the magnifying glass, I have explored both options. I followed the red and blue marks tracing the images which Jawherieh selected and which were plundered in 1982 by the Israeli army, and I have also dismissed Jawherieh's marks and used the sheets as raw material from which I constructed my own visual narrative. Because the images I selected were never selected by Jawherieh, my visual narrative construction was a completely new present creation that had nothing to do with the past. The images I chose were never plundered because they never existed as photos and have always remained reflections on a contact sheet.

Fickers and Van den Oever consider any kind of engagement with old media, and of sounds and images, to be an authentic contemporary experience which does not recreate an "authentic" historical experience.¹²⁸ They relay in their argument on sensory historian Mark Smith who made a distinction between sensory production and consumption, arguing that although a certain sound or image can be reproduced in the present time exactly as it was in the past, it is interpreted in a radically different manner from how it was experienced in the past due to present context.

As remains of plundering of a photographic work that has been reverted by the violence to its pre-completion phase, the work already does not call upon the experience of the past. The marked images do give an insight into Jawherieh's selection process, but do not present the images which Jawherieh later developed. That is because of what a photographer does after

¹²⁷ Thomas Elsaesser, "The Ethics of Appropriation: Found Footage between Archive and Internet," lecture presented at the Recycled Cinema Symposium, Doku Arts, 2014.

¹²⁸ Fickers and van den Oever, "(De)Habitation Histories."

selecting his images and through the process of developing them: he usually manipulates the light exposure, adds filters, and sometimes omits a part of one image or another and stresses a part, until the image is what he wants it to be. This means that what is on display and is being looked at through the magnifying glass are traces of what later became photos and not the photos that were plundered in 1982. Moreover, when Jawherieh created these contact sheets he was not making visual remains of plundering. It is only now when these sheets are identified and exhibited as visual remains of plundering that they acquire this new identity. It is an identity that comes about after violence has been exercised over Palestinian images. This modern, out of the violence identity emphasizes the contemporary state and experience of these contact sheets.

Jawherieh made photos and films during the revolutionary Palestinian era to give Palestinians and their cause visibility. Yet, looking through the narrow viewfinder of the magnifying glass, these images appear incomplete, distant, and fragmented. They stand far from the original intension of their creator. Palestinian visibility seems difficult to attain. One visitor described her experience of viewing the images through the viewfinder as follows:

I was taking a peek into a very secret and hidden bunker of testaments. For an outsider, the war portraits and portraits of murder and child soldiers and emaciated fighters will haunt me a long time. The whole thing is a treasure trove of memories and outrages.¹²⁹

The experience described by the visitor falls in contrast with Jawherieh's depictions of Palestinians as visible, present, and capable. The ghostly property described in the testimony is probably evident because the visitor knows that violence has been exercised over these images through continuous destruction and looting; it is information which she acquired as she entered an exhibition of remains of plundering. The visitor describes the figures as ones that haunt her. Her sense of being haunted is "the ethical implication of attending to the ghost."¹³⁰ The figures in the images, that is the refugees, remain today, 54 years after these images were taken in the same problematic reality, without a resolution. They have become specters that hover between an unresolved past and a problematic present. Her perception of

¹²⁹ Exhibition visitor, comment book, *The Found Archives of Hani Jawherieh*.

¹³⁰ Derrida and Prenowitz, "Archive Fever."

the figures as “the other” is demanding from her a sense of responsibility towards the injustice she is viewing. As Davis argues, “Spectres gesture toward a still unformulated future,”¹³¹ a gesture which is presented to the user of the magnifying glass the minute she engages with looking at the figures as she becomes a hauntologist who searches for ghostly figures.



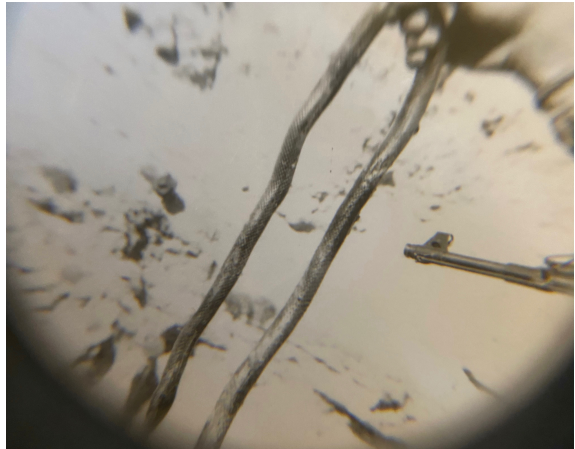
Through the Magnifying Glass, 2019 (pic.15)

A hauntologist can begin to construct through the images the hostile transitional space which the specters occupy: a barren landscape (pic.18) and a snake that has just been captured (pic.19). One odd image stands out (pic.20). It is of refugees sitting on the ground surrounding a sound recorder. It is not clear if they are transmitting their traumatic experience and recording their voices for someone to hear or whether they are listening to other specters narrating their story.

¹³¹ Colin Davis, “Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms *French Studies* 59, no. 3 (July 2005): 373–379, <https://doi.org/10.1093/fs/kni143>.



Tree, 2019 (pic.18)



Snake, 2019(pic.19)



Sounds, 2019 (pic.20)

Ethical Dilemma

Deciding to display these contact sheets in their entirety can be justified as a means to underline the violence that has been exercised over Palestinian visual narrative. This is what art historian Malik concluded when she wrote about the exhibition: “The sense of the exhibition conveying a meaning equivalent to a double negative comes about inevitably because of the diminished resources and platforms through which a Palestinian history can be seen.”¹³² Yet, does exposing the violence and the systematic attack on Palestinian archives justify infringing on the rights and desires of the artist who originally produced this material?

To decide to exhibit publicly Jawherieh’s contact sheets and present them as visual remains of his work poses an ethical dilemma. Being the artist’s work in progress they are not his final work which he defined and labelled as such. Consent to use what remained of Jawherieh's images in this installation and other productions in this work was obtained from his wife and daughter, that is from his legal heirs. The consent covers the right to exhibit the material publicly, to name, arrange, rearrange, and appropriate the material into new visual narratives. Although Jawherieh is recognized as one of the founders of the Palestine revolutionary era in cinema and photography and he remains, following his death and absence, an important figure in Palestinian visual history, the absence of Jawherieh’s work from the public domain, due to looting and destruction, has meant that his images could not be seen. Exhibiting what remains of his legacy was seen by his family as a revival of his work and an acknowledgment of his role in the Palestinian visual narrative.

Working with visual remains of plundering, rearranging, assembling, appropriating, and bringing back to the public the little that remains of Jawherieh’s work was positively reviewed by critics and Palestinian activists. Selma Dabbagh wrote, “The impact of this work is personally moving, visually striking and politically powerful. It goes a long way to filling the void in Palestinian collective memory.”¹³³ But is filling the void in Palestinian collective visual memory, even if it is exercised following obtaining consent from Jawherieh’s family a justification to display images which the artist himself did not want to make public?

¹³² Malik, “The Found Archive of Hani Jawherieh.”

¹³³ Selma Dabbagh, “Mending the Holes in Collective Memory,” *Electronic Intifada* (blog), January 20, 2020, <https://electronicintifada.net/content/mending-holes-collective-memory/2936>.

The ethics of audiovisual appropriation cannot be reduced solely to consent, argues Jamie Baron in her book *Reuse, Misuse, Abuse*.¹³⁴ Instead, complex and various variables need to be taken into account when considering if use of an image is ethical or not. She draws on Bill Nichols' analysis of how a spectator definition of whether a film is ethical or not depends on her perception of the location of the filmmaker in relation to the film's subject and by implication the construction of the viewer's relationship to the film's subject. In other words, what defines the use of an image as ethical or not is the ethics of the user of the image and how it is understood by the viewer. In this context, Baron defines one film that does not obtain consent from the creators of the material or their subjects to be unethical because it depicted its subjects in a racist manner. In contrast, she defines another film that also did not obtain consent for the use of its material to be an ethical film because it presented an indigenous narrative that challenged colonialism.

In this regards the artist or filmmaker is cleansed from ethical wrongdoing if she or he presents an alternative narrative to the colonial narrative, attempts to reclaim the narrative and resists erasure. In this respect, *The Found Archive of Hani Jawherieh: The Art of Accessing Forbidden Art*, can probably pass ethical judgments. It does speak out against violence and erasure but it also and in order to do that ignores the intensions of the artist whose work is used. Jawherieh was an artist who was very much in control of the type of imagery which he wanted to project of Palestinians and their movement. To reduce his work now into a collection of contact sheets and present them in their entirety, including images which he himself dismissed and did not develop, and to label this as his work can be seen as a violation of the artist's rights.

Years ago, I wrote about how, when a culture is resisting colonialism, the public narrative takes over the artist's private narrative and space.¹³⁵ Today, I am writing about this again. The public issue that is embodied in reclaiming remains of plundering and speaking about the violence overrides considerations towards the individual's needs and wishes, in this case the needs and wishes of the artist. The question here is who is violating the artist's rights. Not exhibiting even traces of the artist's work is to force him into oblivion. It is as if he never

¹³⁴ Jamie Baron, *Reuse, Misuse, Abuse: The Ethics of Audiovisual Appropriation in the Digital Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020).

¹³⁵ Azza El-Hassan, "When the Exiled Films Home," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 43, no. 2 (2002): 64–70, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41552333>.

existed and never produced images. The altered and changed nature of the images that emerge in the exhibition are the results of looting and destruction. If violence never occurred, then an exhibition that would feature Jawherieh's work would take on a completely different form than the one that I displayed. What is necessary is to recognize that the violence has changed the images and altered how we can relate to them and that it violated the artist's rights.

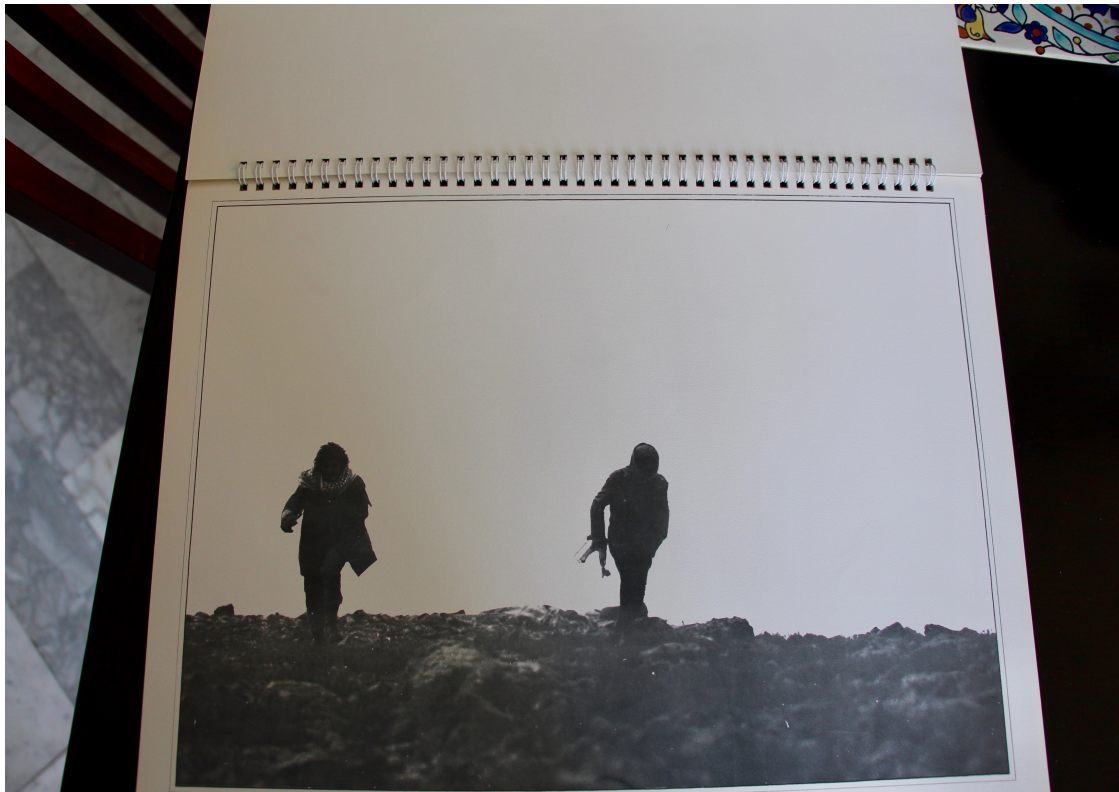
In the Presence of a Fighter

During the 1960s, Jawherieh began photographing Palestinian fighters, fedayeen, creating a collection that only stopped growing with his death. The collection that was made between the 1960s and 1970s was mainly individual portraits of these fighters, to whom Jawherieh wanted to give a face. The early parts of this collection were first exhibited at Al-Karameh (Dignity) exhibition in the spring of 1969, in Jordan. Jawherieh photographed the fedayeen from a low angle making them look gigantic; large photographic prints were made, probably to emphasize the importance of the depicted figures.

In 1975, when Jawherieh was killed while filming Palestinian fighters in the Lebanese Mountains, his colleagues at the Palestine Cinema Institute produced a catalogue of selected images from his portraits collection to commemorate his work as the photographer of the Palestinian revolution. When the Israeli army invaded Lebanon in 1982, Jawherieh's fighter portraits collection was plundered, along with the rest of his work and the archive of the Palestine Cinema Institute. All that remains today of this collection that informs us that this collection ever existed is the catalogue that was produced by Jawherieh's colleagues, which contains seven prints.

In the instillation of *In the Presence of a Fighter*, the catalogue (pic.1) is used to explore Jawherieh's portraits of Palestinian fighters. It asks: What is the urgency, if there is an urgency, in spectating today images of Palestinian fighters from the 1960s and 1970s? Of course, there is a historical value in bringing back these images to public domains and allowing a connection to be re-established between Palestinian past and present, which has

been violently disrupted by the plunders; but apart from the historical value and the connection with the past, can these portraits tell us something about our present and maybe future?

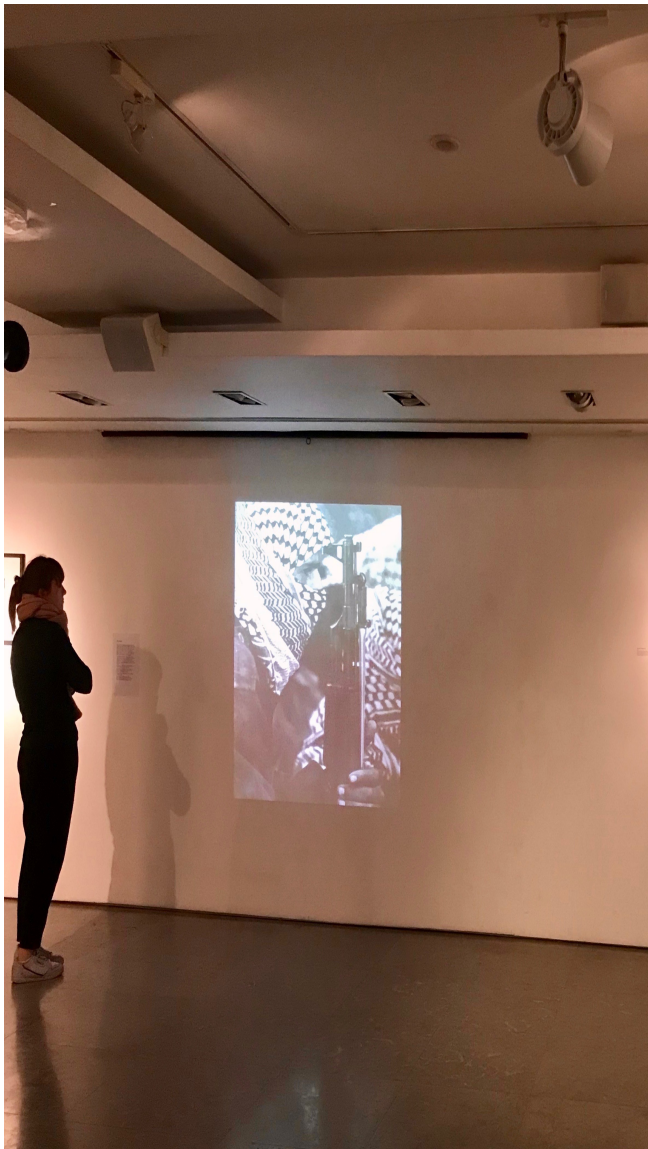


Catalogue of Jawherieh's work produced by his colleagues at the PFI in 1976 (pic.1)

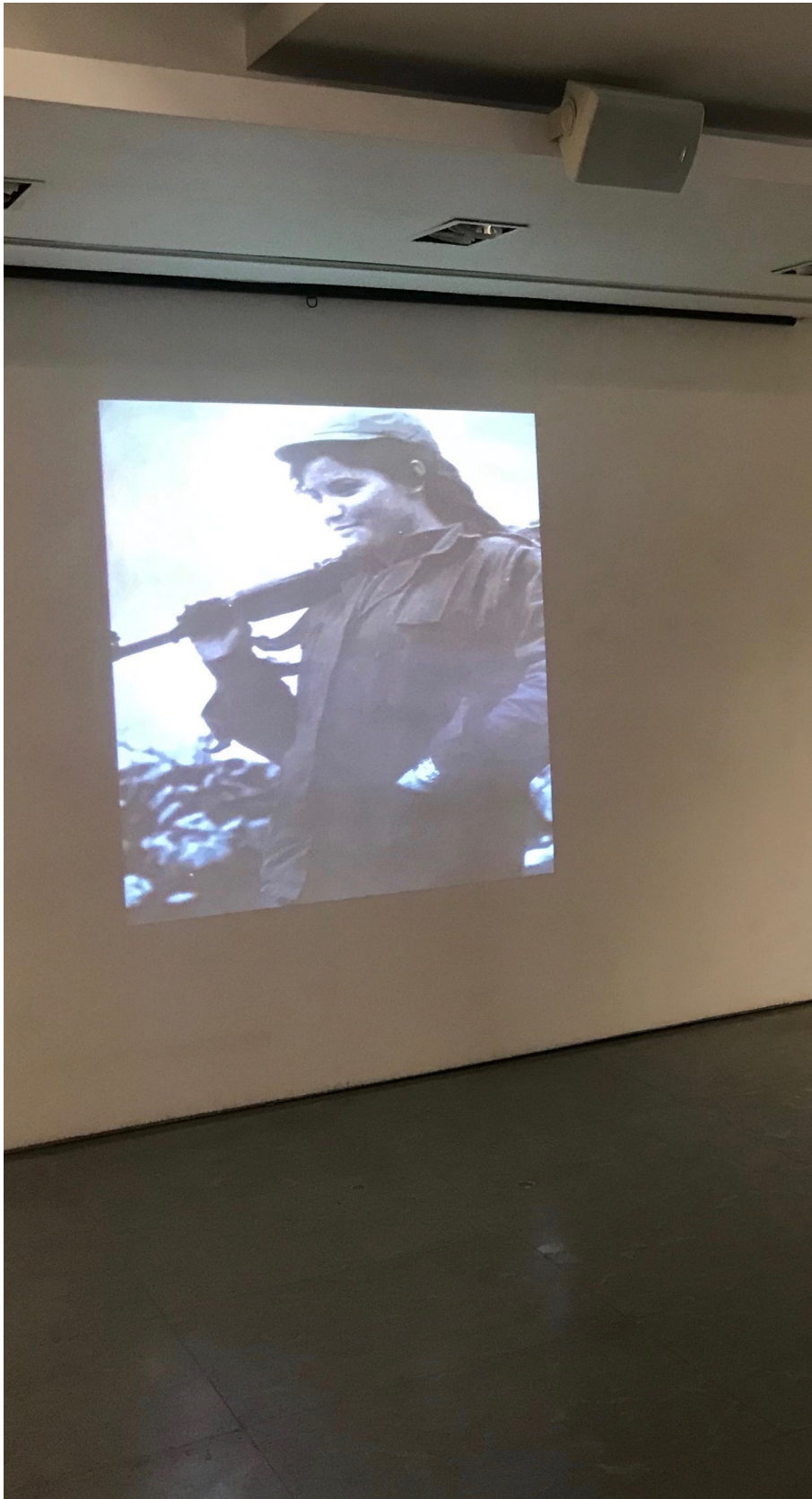
Working Process

Replicating the images and creating large scale prints of them, just like Jawherieh did when he exhibited some of them at Al-Karameh exhibition, would have been an unlawful resurrection to a past that has been plundered and ejected from the public domain. It would not be true to the backstory of these images that have been subjected to violence. So, instead of replicating the past, a digital projection was set up. On the first floor of the exhibition space (map.2) where empty white walls confront the visitor of the display of visual remains of plundering the digital image of a fighter interrupts the emptiness of one of the walls. The images appear only to disappear, so the space can regain its void for few seconds before another image of another fighter appears, only to disappear again. The portraits of the fighters appear like holograms of phantoms that are accompanied by the sound of silence. No sound effects or music is played along with the images. The lights have been dimmed in the empty

space to allow the projection of the image to appear. The spectator stands in front of the white wall waiting for images of fighters to appear (pic.2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8). Although the portraits of the fighters were not exhibited in the same way Jawherieh exhibited them, the effect which he wanted to create by producing single large-scale portraits is still re-enacted in this installation; the presence of the digital image in this empty space draws the attention only to this figure that appears for seconds.



In the Presence of a Fighter , 2019 (pic.2)



In the Presence of a Fighter , 2019 (pic.3)



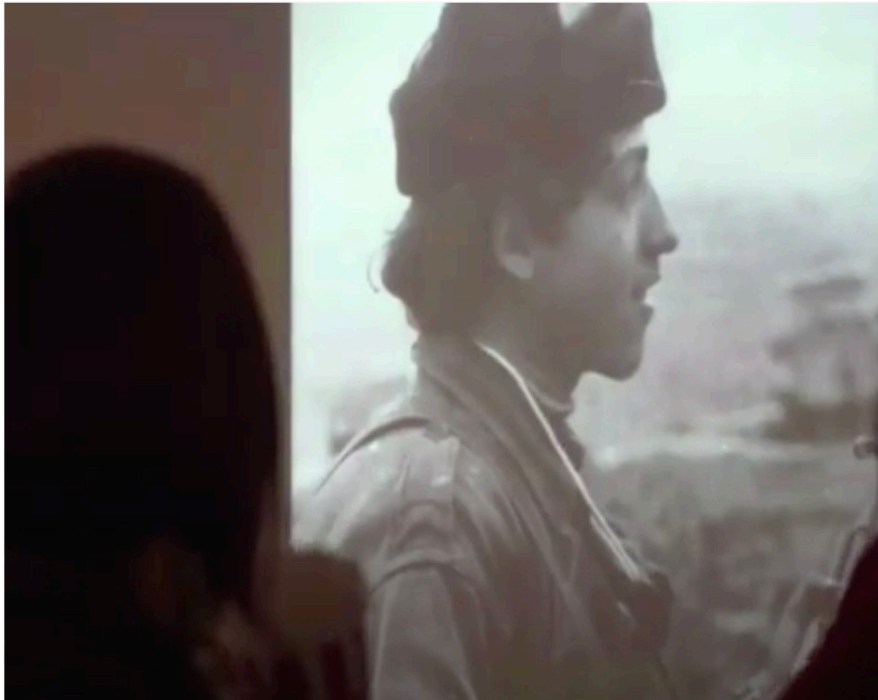
In the Presence of a Fighter, 2019 (pic.4)



In the Presence of a Fighter, 2019 (pic.5)



In the Presence of a Fighter, 2019 (pic.6)



In the Presence of a Fighter, 2019 (pic.7)

The Appearance and Disappearance of a Fighter

During the 1960s and 1970s, Palestinian fighters commanded a kind of fascination, especially among the Western left. This was after many countries gained their independence from colonialism, like Vietnam and Algeria, and Palestine and the Palestinians appeared to many to be the last struggle to defeat colonialism. Writers, filmmakers and actors visited and collaborated with PLO institutions as a form of solidarity and a contribution to the Palestinian struggle. Among these were Jean Luc Godard, Vanessa Redgrave, Jane Fonda and Jean Genet.

Jean Genet spent two years during the 1970s in Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, mainly accompanying Palestinian fighters. Ten years later, Genet wrote *Prisoner of Love*,¹³⁶ which has been described as his most political and personal piece of writing. In it, Genet speaks about how the image of Palestinian fighters has now become imprinted in his memory. The image of the fedayeen grows more and more indelible.¹³⁷ Genet describes an act of appearance and disappearance which the fighter engages in and which is somehow orchestrated by the fighter himself:

¹³⁶ Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love*. (New York: New York Review of Books, 1986).

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

Thin, disappearance seems to be not only a vanishing, but also a need to fill the gap with something different, perhaps the opposite of what is gone. As if there were a hole where the Fedayeen disappeared, a drawing, a photograph, any sort of portrait, seems to call him back in every sense of the term. It calls him back from afar again, in every sense of the word. Did he vanish deliberately in order that the portrait might appear?¹³⁸

A Palestinian fighter is not a soldier, but a person who is in a transitional state of being. Through a collection of interviews with Palestinian refugees in the 1970s, Rosemary Sayigh, in her book *From Peasants to Revolutionaries*,¹³⁹ follows the life paths of Palestinian refugees who after uprooting and displacement took up arms. Many refugees joined the PLO and became fighters. This evolution from a refugee to a fighter, which was instigated by the loss of a previous life and a disturbed present, became a route that the fighters took in order to exit the present and return to the past—that is, to reverse their status as refugees to become yet again a settled people. The refugees who became fighters treated their current position, the fighter position, as a transitional state that will be terminated when normality is regained. This probably explains why Genet speaks about what appears to be a rebirth, where something perishes for something else to appear, something different, perhaps the opposite, that is when the role of the fighter ends. Yet, Genet refers to a deliberate vanishing act that is manufactured by the fighter to enable “the portrait” to appear. It is as if the portrait itself is of value to the fighter. Is it because the fighter wants to be remembered or does the portrait value stem from its need in present times?

In an interview with *Falastine Al Thawra*, a PLO magazine, Jawherieh spoke about his motives for creating images of the movement and its people, including the fighters’ portraits:

We knew that after liberation revolutions lacked films recording the period before liberation. So we found, that filming everything that we could in the beginning would in the future, that is after liberation, be material accessible to everyone... Recording

¹³⁸ Ibid., 23.

¹³⁹ Rosemary Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries: A People's History* (London: Zed Press, 1979).

everything that happened would be documentary material whose value would not be reckoned until years later.¹⁴⁰

The connection that Jawherieh describes between the Palestinian movement and other liberation movements is evident in the fighters' portraits which he created. Apart from the portrait of the Palestinian fighter who is wearing a Palestinian kuffiah, scarf, (pic.2) which indicates the identity of the fighter, all the other portraits can be of fighters from Nicaragua, Cuba or any other country that fought colonialism. It is a visual connection of these freedom fighters to other freedom fighters in the world. It is a visual attempt to emulate the experience which Jawherieh and his colleagues were observing of postcolonial nations, who had successfully rid themselves of colonial military control.

There seems to be no doubt in Jawherieh's mind that Palestinian liberation will be achieved, and that there will be a "happy ending" to the Palestinian struggle in which Palestinians and Palestine will sit comfortably in the seat of a nation like any other nation and at that point they will want to assess their present retrospectively. In this context the experience of postcolonial nations becomes a rehearsal to Palestinian future; a learning process to avoid the mistakes that were made by other nations who fought and won their battle against colonialism. It is within this learning process that Jawherieh discusses image creation during a time of revolution, that is a task which is performed for the sake of the future. Images are made in the present, Jawherieh says, so they can be used to construct new narratives of the future. Based on this notion that sums up Jawherieh's work as a work for the future, one can conclude that when the Israeli army plundered his work, they were terminating the future which was supposed to unfold if these images were left intact.

Both Jean Genet and Hani Jawherieh died prior to the Oslo peace accord between the Israeli state and the PLO. They did not see Palestinian fighters giving up arms to pave the way for a peace deal that was intended to lead to the creation of a Palestinian State and to allow a future to begin formulating. Many of these fighters, after this, joined the Palestinian police force that was established in the West Bank and Gaza to lay the foundations for the agreed upon Palestinian state. But Israel never stopped confiscating land, and the possibility of a Palestinian state being created on what remained of historical Palestine seems every day to be

¹⁴⁰ Yaqub. *Palestinian Cinema in the Days of Revolution*, 75.

getting smaller and smaller. As for the portraits which Genet saw being created and manufactured by the fighters who vanished, for the portraits and the images which Jawherieh constructed specifically to appear in the future, they have both been looted or destroyed.

Phantoms of Fighters

In the exhibition *The Found Archive of Hani Jawherieh: The Art of Accessing Forbidden Art*, what is on display is not the reappearance of the Jawherieh's fighter portraits but their disappearance. The visitor to the exhibition comes to see visual remains of plundering. The digital projection of single portraits, which were originally made by Jawherieh to be used in the future, appear now as reflections of images that infiltrate our present reality for a few seconds as phantoms that demand to be heard even though they are now no longer present.

Although some of the individuals who were captured in these portraits might still be alive today, their transitional state of being fighters has been terminated without reaching a resolution. The colonization of Palestine land has not come to an end, land confiscation continues, and Palestinian refugees remain scattered in refugee camps around the world. The certainty of a future which these fighters came to deliver has been abruptly interrupted.

The installation embodies in it a disturbed form of re-enactment of what was; it is a kind of re-enactment which Gapps describes as having come about in order to “open up possibilities that allow history to be unfinished business.”¹⁴¹ As phantoms, Palestinian fighters from the 1960s and 1970s appear now to seek closure; one that is achieved by spectating them. The appearance of these portraits today in their phantom image communicates their trauma. In some way Genet was right: the portraits are appearing because the Fedayeen has vanished. He is also right that the absence of the fighter means that there are gaps that now need to be filled. Although the fighter has vanished, Palestinians still need a resolution and something different, perhaps the opposite of what is gone needs to emerge.

Standing in front of the individual portraits of the fighters today is akin to standing in front of the previous generation of Palestinians who began the Palestinian revolution. The phantom feel of the reflected image transforms them into dead ancestors who have come to exercise

¹⁴¹ S. Gapps, “Mobile Monuments: A View of Historical Re-enactment and Authenticity from Inside the Costume Cupboard of History,” *Rethinking History* 13, no. 3 (2009): 395–409.

transgenerational communication; but unlike the phantom of Abraham and Tork that emerges to prevent its traumatic and usually shameful secret from coming to light,¹⁴² these phantoms in *The Presence of a Fighter* have no shameful secrets but a story of betrayal of a world that continues to accept colonialism till today.



In the Presence of a Fighter, 2019, by Azza El Hassan (pic.8)

¹⁴² Davis, “*Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms.*”

Camera Remains

Is it possible to find a new use for a camera that has become remains of plundering?

In 2003, I interviewed Hiba Jawherieh, the daughter of Hani Jawherieh, in their family home in Amman, Jordan. In the interview, she sat on the floor next to a glass box displaying her father's 16 mm camera, which was with him when he was killed. The camera, which was damaged during the horrific event, still retains marks from the attack. Its body is riddled with shrapnel holes (pic.1) which killed Jawherieh and terminated the use of the camera as a filming instrument.



Kings & Extras, 2004, Hani Jawherieh's camera, splinters holes (pic.1)

Following Jawherieh's death, the camera was returned to the Palestine Cinema Institute. As damaged property, a new use of this 16 mm camera quickly emerged. The camera was placed in a glass box at the entrance of the institute and became an object for display. The decision to display it was because Jawherieh's colleagues wanted to continue to see their colleague's camera and because the damage that was done to it and the death of its cameraman sent a statement to the visitors of the Institute about the violence which Palestinian film professionals were experiencing while working.

In 1982, during the Israeli siege of Beirut, and when it became apparent that the Israeli army would soon enter the city, Hind, Jawherieh's wife, went to the institute and requested to be given her husband's camera. At that time, it was anticipated that when the Israeli army

invades the city, PLO institutions, among which is the Palestine Cinema Institute, would be attacked and Hind feared for her husband's camera. Members of the Palestine Cinema Institute shared Hind's fear, so they granted her the 16 mm camera. Hind later fled the city and smuggled the camera from Beirut to Damascus and then to Amman, where it remains until today, displayed in a glass box (pic.2) that was made especially for it in the family home, and where I interviewed Hiba for *Kings and Extras*.¹⁴³

In the interview, I asked Hiba if it did not trouble her to see the 16 mm camera which was with her father when he was killed. To my astonishment, Hiba was surprised by my question and asked me if I thought that the camera should be kept hidden and not seen. She went on to say that, on the contrary, "I love seeing it. When I look through it I feel that I can see the world exactly how he saw it."¹⁴⁴



Kings and Extras, 2004, Hiba using Jawherieh's camera (pic.2)

Hiba Jawherieh, somehow, had managed to surpass the violence that was evident on the damaged camera's body. Although riddled with splinter holes Hiba could only see it as her father's camera, which continues to function in the same manner as it used to prior to his killing; that is, as a piece of media equipment that still records images.

¹⁴³ El Hassan, *Kings and Extras*.

¹⁴⁴ "Interview with Hiba Jawherieh," *Kings and Extras*.

The Jawherieh family displayed the camera over an antique Damascene box, on top of which they constructed a glass box to put the camera inside and to make it visible to all their home visitors (pic.2). The camera served in their home as evidence of a spectacular career of a great cinematographer whose images were looted and destroyed but his camera remained to contest the erasure of his past. Yet, the presence of the camera in a private space, that is Jawherieh's family home, meant that the view of it was only available to the few who had a connection to the family and would visit them in their home.

Prior to becoming a display object and evidence of a career, and just after it was terminated as a filming instrument, the 16 mm camera acquired for a brief time an unexpected role. In this role it was given human properties and was seen to have become a martyr who died in combat. It was Mustafa Abu Ali, one of the Palestine Cinema Institute founders and filmmakers, who introduced this role for the camera when it appeared in *Palestinian in the Eye*,¹⁴⁵ shattered and damaged by the shelling that killed its cameraman. "Hani became a martyr and so did his camera. The bomb that killed him killed it as well,"¹⁴⁶ says Mustafa Abu Ali over a high angle pan of the camera lying like a dead corpse that has just been removed from the battlefield (pic.3).



Palestine in the Eye (1976), Jawherieh's dead camera. (Pic.3)

¹⁴⁵ *Palestine in the Eye* was restored in 1976 and is available to watch at: <https://vimeo.com/512499604>.

¹⁴⁶ "Mustafa Abu Ali commentary," *Palestine in the Eye*.

As a filmmaker, Mustafa Abu Ali, who often had close encounters with filming equipment, saw Jawherieh's camera as an extension of Jawherieh's body and being. The camera and the cameraman were inseparable in Mustafa Abu Ali's mind and the moment of death of Jawherieh became what defines the presence of the camera after death has occurred.

It has been fifty years since Jawherieh was killed and the camera was damaged. It has also been nineteen years since I interviewed Hiba Jawherieh in *Kings and Extras*.¹⁴⁷ In this encounter I ask: Can the camera have a different use that is relevant to our lives today? Can it serve a purpose that goes beyond it being an object for display, the evidence of a career and an extension of a cameraman's life that has been brutally cut? The camera can no longer function as an image recording equipment, so how can it be used in the present to explore the personal relationship of individuals with objects that remain after plundering? The research asks what use do objects of remains of plundering have in our present lives?

Camera as Remains of Plundering

Attempting to find a new use for old technologies has been practiced repeatedly in media archaeology experiments and Hands on Media. For example, the ADAPT Project (2013-2018) which was set up to examine the historical development of British television broadcasting production and the effect of these developments on society, executed several encounters between subjects and filming equipment. Film professionals were reunited with their cameras, studios and editing equipment that they had used in the past, with the aim of assessing the present relationship of the subjects with the past equipment, and to understand the relevance of this relationship to the present culture and society. In the process, these film professionals were not asked to re-enact what they did in the past, nor to reconstruct a specific historical moment. Instead, they were asked to do for real in the present what they once did in the past.¹⁴⁸ Watching TV professionals interacting with their past equipment in the present proved to be extremely valuable to researchers who could observe how, for example, a camera professional or an editor remembers to adjust their body movements to handle the equipment and begin to perform her past. The encounters provided material and

¹⁴⁷ El Hassan, *Kings and Extras*.

¹⁴⁸ Amanda Murphy, "A Blind Date with the Past: Transforming Television into a Research Method," in *Hands on Media History: A New Methodology in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, ed. Nick Hall and John Ellis (London: Routledge, 2020).

data that John Ellis argues could not have been obtained by conducting interviews or attempting to conceptualize the process.¹⁴⁹

To find a new use for Jawherieh's 16 mm camera, Hiba was asked to engage with the camera, but unlike the equipment in the ADAPT Project, which was still functional but had fallen out of use and abandoned due to advances in technology, Jawherieh's 16 mm camera could no longer be operated because it had been violently damaged. Moreover, Hiba is not a film professional and is unable to perform actions with the camera that her father would have been able to do, such as holding the camera in the right position, adjusting her body comfortably to it, or looking through its viewfinder and modifying its lens in preparation for shooting. Therefore Hiba, in the engagement, was not asked to perform memory as she encountered the camera but instead to simply assemble it in a glass box in preparation for being displayed in the exhibition.

In the ADAPT project, venues were chosen for film professionals to encounter their past tools aimed at assimilating their past work environment in order to allow the subjects to feel comfortable and in familiar surroundings. The venue in which Hiba engaged with the camera was the exhibition space, where what remained of her father's work following plundering was on display. Performing the engagement in an unfamiliar set-up, for Hiba, which is the exhibition space, was designed to act as a constant reminder for her that she was handling an object that has been subjected to violence, in the hope that this can reveal a present relationship between the camera and Hiba that is not connected to Hiba's father but to Hiba's own experience.

Working Process

The 16 mm camera was dismantled, packaged and shipped from Jordan to the United Kingdom. The box arrived at the P21 Gallery, in London, and was transferred to the basement of the gallery, where an empty glass box, which was made specially to host the 16 mm camera, had been placed (map.2).

The packaged camera was left unopened until Hiba arrived from Qatar, where she resides with her husband and children, to help in organizing the exhibition. When she arrived, Hiba

¹⁴⁹ Hall and Ellis, *Hands on Media History*.

was asked to open the box and begin assembling the 16 mm camera in the glass box, preparing it to be exhibited. In the past, when the camera was assembled in Jawherieh's family home, Hiba was still a child, and it was her mother who assembled it, so Hiba had never in the past assembled the broken camera's various parts to place them in a glass box. This was a fresh new experience for her.

It was estimated that to open the box and assemble what was inside it, should take her between an hour to an hour-and-a-half maximum. I knew from previous experience, that recording an interview with Hiba while she handles the camera can act as a barrier between Hiba and the experience of handling the camera in an intimate manner. In other words, the presence of the camera engaged Hiba in a performance in which she positioned herself as the daughter of the owner of the camera, and I did not want to replicate that, this time. To allow Hiba to experience the camera in relation to herself and not to that of her father, a decision was made not to interview her while she engaged with the camera. Hiba was asked to interact with the camera on her own and in silence. We agreed that I would interview her after she had completed assembling the camera so we could speak about the process and how she related to the camera as she encountered it.

Hiba and I have been friends since childhood. We both lived through the Israeli war in 1982 and the uprooting of our families from Beirut to Amman, a city we later learnt to love. So, although Hiba was given clear instructions to work in silence, her urge to communicate to her friend what she was going through was one she could not control. After Hiba unpacked the camera and began examining its pieces to assemble them in the box, she began to struggle with a very strong smell of gunpowder which the camera, according to her, had retained from the attack on her father. It has been fifty years since the camera was subjected to the splinters of a bomb attack. "Can you believe it! The smell is still there, and it is very strong. I can smell it. It is gunpowder! The smell is now stuck to my fingers!"¹⁵⁰ Hiba insisted that I should join her to smell the gunpowder, which of course I could not smell. The smell seemed to inhabit only Hiba's brain and nowhere else in the gallery.

¹⁵⁰ Hiba Jawherieh, personal interview by the author, 2019.

The 16 mm camera and Hiba's Fingers that Smell of Gunpowder



It is not uncommon in engagements that looks for new uses for media technologies beyond those for which they were originally designed, to find that accessing these objects leads to a process of revisiting the specific “structure of feeling,”¹⁵¹ that inhabited their one-time use.¹⁵² In Hiba’s case, who did not in the past use the camera as a recording equipment, she only encountered it in the past as the object that survived the killing of her father. This is the one-

¹⁵¹ Siegfried Zielinski and Siliva Wagnermaier, eds., *Variantology: On Deep Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁵² Hall and Ellis, *Hands on Media History*, 4.

time use which the camera had in Hiba's life. Moreover, Hiba knows the smell of gunpowder, from her childhood in Lebanon, especially during the Israeli invasion in 1982, where the smell of gunpowder accompanied every bombing. What is interesting is that she decided to recall this specific smell to aid her in the process of unpacking the camera and assembling it in its London box. During the pauses which Hiba repeatedly took to help her cope with the smell, she recalled various incidences in her life where she experienced the smell of gunpowder. First, she remembered the gun shooting outside our school in Beirut, then the bombing of Al-Fakhani (a Palestinian area in Beirut) where we used to play and finally the whole three months' siege before the Israeli army invaded Beirut in 1982. Nothing of what Hiba recalled had to do with the camera or her father. Probably the splinter holes that marked the camera body triggered Hiba's own memory of the war and, of course, the fact that this is her father's camera who died while using it, triggered her own trauma of losing her father at a very young age. It took Hiba four hours to assemble the camera as she struggled with the smell and the various memories and recollections which she was communicating constantly.

Transgenerational Trauma

Two traumas are revealed through interaction between the subject and the object, that is between Hiba and the camera. The first trauma is the trauma of a cameraman who was killed while filming and the other is his own daughters trauma. These are transgenerational traumas of 'the wounded Soul'¹⁵³, as Heartman called them, when he describes what becomes of people when trauma is experienced by one generation after the other.

The presence of the camera is inhabited by trauma, but it is not a trauma that dwells inside the camera itself. There are no specters or phantoms that live inside this piece of equipment that are attempting to communicate with us. The trauma inhabits the interaction with the camera. Since Jawherieh was killed, the presence of his camera that is riddled with splinter holes has always acted as a reminder of a traumatic event that terminated the life and career of a father, a husband and great cinematographer. Yet, the interaction of Hiba with the camera revealed another trauma which the camera facilitated to surface and for Hiba to be

¹⁵³ Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and Lemyra DeBruyn, "The American Indian Holocaust: Healing Historical Unresolved Grief," *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 8, no. 2 (1998): 60–82.

able to speak about. The sensitized encounter of Hiba with the camera revealed that Hiba herself was inhabited by trauma and her experience with the camera allowed her to verbalize this trauma of a person who had lived wars and who grew up without a father, whom she lost due to the violence.

The encounter of Hiba with what remains after plundering did prove that a different, present use of these objects can be found. The camera, which is no longer an image recording tool, nor is it a display object in this encounter, became a memory trigger for Hiba, that facilitated her ability to reveal her own trauma and to verbalize it. It is a finding that proposes that objects which are remains of a plundering attack can open up spaces for individuals to formulate narratives about what they experienced and are experiencing in the present time. “The emergence of narratives of traumas can have the potential to facilitate healing.”¹⁵⁴



Hani Jawherieh After it was assembled by Hiba Jawherieh (2019) (pic.4)

¹⁵⁴ I. Wessel and M. Moulds, “Collective Memory,” *Memory* 16, no. 3 (2008): 288–304.

Remains Restoration

Film restoration is an act that involves looking at a film reel frame-by-frame. It is a process that is like dissecting the film in order to be able later on to reconstruct it and preserve it. The process of film restoration is used in this part of the work to assess the effect of plundering on Palestinian films that remain in Palestinian spheres after looting and destruction. The working material is five films that were produced by or became the property of the Palestine Cinema Institute. The process is intended to reveal:

- 1- The effect of the separation of these films from their original archive institution, following the plundering of the Palestine Cinema Institute.
- 2- The effect of the salvager on the rescued films.
- 3- The value of restoring these films after all these years following the plundering event.
- 4- The narratives that are embodied in these films, today, after the films have crossed path with the plunderers and been rescued.
- 5- The ethical issues that emerge when returning to the public sphere films that have survived a plundering event.

One Script, Different Films

In order to understand what had become of films that had survived plundering it is important to understand the film's past, that is, to address their multiple histories instead of just "The first chapter of a film's existence."¹⁵⁵ It is a kind of film restoration that Jones describes as able to "resist singularity"¹⁵⁶ by attending to the film's various elements and layers which have made it into what it is today: the history of its theatrical release, film trailer, "the alterations and cuttings which the film went through and how its fall into obscurity, its neglect, as well as its previous imperfect restorations."¹⁵⁷

The films of the Palestine Cinema Institute were mainly produced during the 1970s and 1980s. They were political films that documented the Palestinian Revolution as it unfolded.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Jana Jones, *The Past Is a Moving Picture: Preserving the Twentieth Century on Film* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2012), 137–166.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Yaqub, *Palestinian Cinema in the Days of Revolution*, 7.

The filmmakers, according to Yaqubi, were attempting to create a cinematic language that is consistent with the Palestinian revolution's ideals and needs. They perceived themselves as workers who were all working to deliver a narrative about the expulsion of Palestinian families from historical Palestine, the Palestinian refugees' realities and hardships, and the fight for liberation. It was a narrative that told one story and one story only. This is why in this restoration engagement, it was necessary to restore more than one film from the Palestinian cinema's revolutionary era in order to be able to reveal variations within this one narrative. It was important to show how this narrative was approached by different filmmakers, to elucidate the different styles of narrating the same story and generational differences in telling this same narrative.

By exploring the narrative of the films, the restoration project is exploring the story of the Palestine Cinema Institute. While two films in the collection were largely shot by Jawherieh and present a narrative construction of the first generation of the Palestine Cinema Institute, the other two films, one made by filmmaker Layali Bader and the other by Arab Lutfi, present the narrative of the second generation of film practitioners at the institute. These are films that were made years after Jawherieh's death by two women filmmakers who joined the Palestine Cinema Institute in the late 1970s and made films for it.

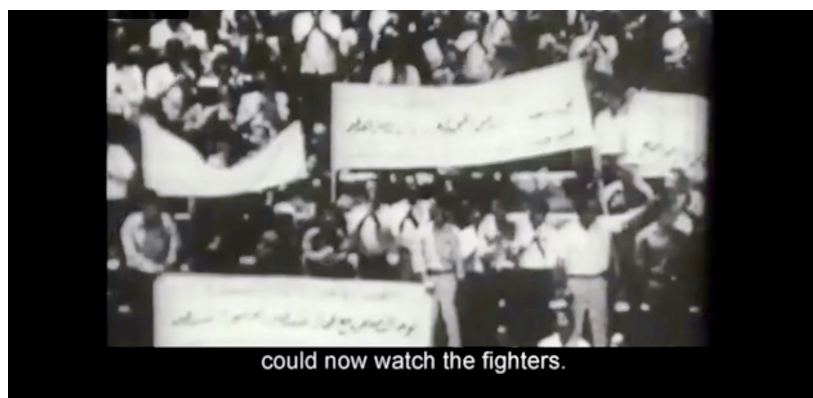
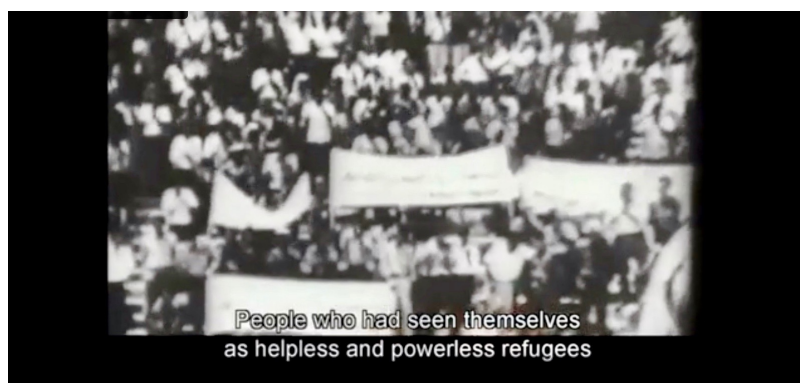
Films from the revolutionary era had no trailers and were released theatrically mostly in refugee camps in makeshift cinemas. In *Kings and Extras*,¹⁵⁹ Khadijah Habashneh, who was the chief archivist of the Palestine Cinema Institute and was also responsible for running the institute's screenings, described how Palestinian refugees watched the Institute's productions (pic 1). Habashneh spoke of a spectatorship in which a sense of identity and empowerment was felt by the spectators. "These were spectators who felt powerless in their life realities as refugees, but saw on the screen images of themselves as capable and powerful,"¹⁶⁰ says Habashneh. In *Kings and Extras*,¹⁶¹ I constructed a sequence of Kadijah Habasheh's description which probably is the closest thing to a trailer that was produced about the institute.

¹⁵⁹ El Hassan, *Kings and Extras*.

¹⁶⁰ "Interview with Kadijah Habashnah," *Kings and Extras*.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Kings and Extras (2004), An idea for a film trailer (Pic.1)



It is important to note that this restoration project, of films by the Palestine Cinema Institute, was not the first restoration to be undertaken. Nabiha Lutfi, one of the Institute's filmmakers, began restoring her own film *Because Roots Don't Die*¹⁶² with the French Film Restoration

¹⁶² Lutfi, *Because Roots Don't Die*.

Institute but died before completion of the restoration. Monica Murer and Emily Jacir restored *Tel al Zaatar*¹⁶³; Bashar Shammout restored his father's two films, *The Urgent Call of Palestine*¹⁶⁴ and *Glow of Memories*¹⁶⁵; and Kassem Hawal restored his own film *Palestinian Identity*.¹⁶⁶ Yet, this is the first time that the process of restoration of Palestine Cinema Institute films has been made in order to assess and examine the act of film restoration.

Working Process

For seventeen years, Hind Jawherieh had kept in her attic in Amman three film reels she had salvaged in 1982 during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. In 2017, she agreed to give them to me in order to restore them, study them, use them to construct a new narrative and release them back to the public.

The first step was to transform these 16 mm and 35 mm films into a digital format in order to begin the restoration process. I travelled, carrying the film as hand luggage, from Amman to London. Prior to beginning the transformation process, I decided to play the films and verify their content as the labelling on them was not very clear. The 35 mm had been labelled "Hani Jawherieh" in Arabic. There was no film title on it, but Hind was certain that it was *Palestine in the Eye*,¹⁶⁷ a film that was made by Jawherieh's colleagues after his death to commemorate his life. There was also a 16 mm film cannister that had written on it, in Arabic, "Jerusalem, Flower of All Cities,"¹⁶⁸ a film that Jawherieh shot while working for the Jordanian Ministry of Communication and which he decided to take with him, from the ministry's archive, when he resigned to join the Palestine Film Unit. The last cannister, containing a 16 mm film, had nothing written on it. It was the most intriguing one of all. Hind and I speculated that it could be one of the institute's missing films, and I hoped it would be film footage which Jawherieh had shot, but never used.

¹⁶³ Chamoun Abu Ali and Pino Adriano, dir., *Tel al-Zaatar* (Lebanon and Palestine, 1977), documentary film.

¹⁶⁵ Ismael Shammout, dir., *Glow of Memories* (Palestine, 1971), video art.

¹⁶⁶ Kassem Hawal, dir., *Palestinian Identity* (Palestine, 1984).

¹⁶⁷ Shlanzi et al., *Palestine in the Eye*.

¹⁶⁸ Issa Siam, dir., *Jerusalem, Flower of All Cities* (Jordan, 1969) musical film.



The three film cannisters, in Jawherieh's family attic (2017) (pic.2)

Following the digital transfer, I sat to watch the films. I could quickly confirm that one film was indeed *Jerusalem, Flower of All Cities*¹⁶⁹ and the other was *Palestine in the Eye*.¹⁷⁰ The surprise came when the editor and I realized that the third 16 mm film reel, which was unlabeled, was empty. It was a film reel that Hind had preserved all these years, thinking that it contained images taken by her husband. Most probably it was a reel that Jawherieh had brought home from the institute with the intention of using but was never able to do so as his life was terminated.

The presence of the empty film reel in an editing room for the restoration of Palestinian films that survived plundering, suddenly emphasized the interruption that has been inflicted on these films. Its images of a void became a space for what could have been made and seen. The glare of white light that was projected from it was haunting; what images would be on it if Jawherieh had not been killed and had continued to make his own images!



The Empty Film Reel (Pic.3)

¹⁶⁹ Shlanzi et al., *Palestine in the Eye*.

¹⁷⁰ Siam, *Jerusalem, Flower of All Cities*.

The two other films that were restored in this project, were obtained directly from their filmmakers. *The Road to Palestine*¹⁷¹ by Layali Bader was made as a joint production between the GDR (East Germany) and the Palestine Cinema Institute. In 1982, during the invasion of Beirut and the plundering of the Palestine Cinema Institute, the film was still in postproduction in Berlin. By the time Bader finished editing the film, the Palestine Cinema Institute had been looted and destroyed. She was unable to deposit the Palestinian copy of the film in the Institute archive, as it was no longer present. The film copy remained with Bader, as she moved from one exile to another, until she finally settled in Egypt, where she kept her copy of the film in her home.

*The Upper Gate*¹⁷² by Arab Lutfi was made after the destruction of the Palestine Cinema Institute, the intention being “to insist that although the institute was attacked and robbed, we are still able to produce films.”¹⁷³ Financed by the PLO, which was then based in Tunisia, the film was one of the last few films to be made before the production of the Palestine Film Institute was completely halted few years later.

In the Editing Room

After digitization of the four films, I restored Jawherieh’s films, while *The Road to Palestine*¹⁷⁴ and *The Upper Gate*¹⁷⁵ were restored by their filmmakers. We all agreed that the restoration process would adhere to the approach used by Hands on Visual Remains of plundering, which dictated that the restoration should preserve marks on the films that illustrate the life of the films following plundering. A decision was thus made not to restore the films to perfection, to remove all damage they might have sustained. Instead, any damage to the film would now become an integral part of what it is today. In other words, image restoration was only applied when details of the image were impossible to see. For example, in pic. 5, on the right of the image prior to restoration, damage to the film was clearly visible and the three figures that are ringing the bell could hardly be seen, especially when the image was in motion. In this case, restoration was done to enable visibility, which would have been impossible otherwise. The result after restoration can be seen on the right side of the image.

¹⁷¹ Bader, *The Road to Palestine*.

¹⁷² Lutfi, *The Upper Gate*.

¹⁷³ Arab Lutfi, personal communication with the author, London and Egypt, 2018.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

Another example of how restoration was applied is in pic. 6, where the lines that appear on the image's left-hand side and which appeared in other parts of the film were left as is except when their frequency was so high that the image could no longer be viewed; in these cases, the lines were eliminated, as shown in the right-hand side of the image in pic. 6.

In *Palestine in the Eye*,¹⁷⁶ there was one image that was so badly damaged by humidity that it was actually no longer visible. This meant that this part of the film needed to be edited out. It was a painful decision to make—to cut out part of the film—especially as restoration was being performed to salvage and resurrect these images, not to eliminate them. Nevertheless, the damaged part was cut out in order to prevent disruption in the experience of viewing the films. The decision to maintain damage to these films, the remains of plundering, seemed to maintain their integrity. Not doing so would have seemed like an act of erasure to the narrative that depicts the violence which these films had encountered.

Color correction was applied to all restored films because the films' colors had faded to a degree that made them look much older than their actual age. Although the films were produced in the 1960s, 70s, 80s and 90s, each of them looked as if it were twenty years older than its actual age. This was a direct effect of being separated from the original archival institution that was supposed to maintain them. Although their salvagers attempted to maintain the films in the best possible conditions, they were able to offer, still, the films were kept in attics and closets instead of an air-conditioned, dark, film archive room. The decision to apply color correction was made because the forced aging of the films, which was an effect of plundering, contributes to the erasure of Palestinian narratives, setting them in a time and space they do not belong to.

At the end of the process, the four films looked as imperfect as they could. You could still see signs of damage that had been inflicted on them. Yet, they were also brought back from the time reversal that was imposed on them, to the actual era in which they were produced, due to the restoration of their colors.

¹⁷⁶ Shlanzi et al., *Palestine in the Eye*.

Before and after shots from *Palestine in the Eye* (1976)



(Pic.5)

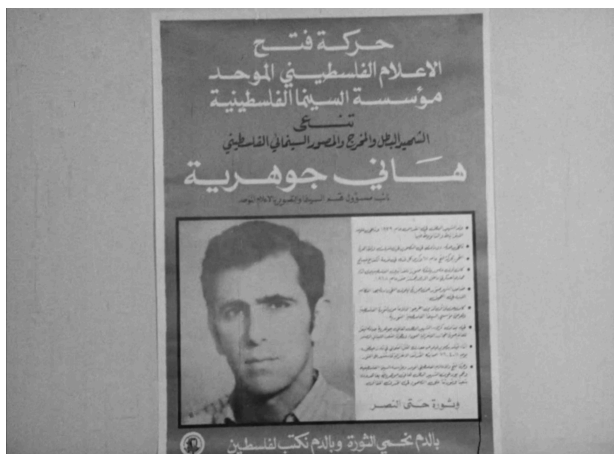


(Pic.6)

Narratives through Restoration

Assembling the four films following restoration and watching them as a single viewing experience offered a visual narrative of the Palestine Cinema Institute and its members. *Jerusalem, Flower of All Cities*,¹⁷⁷ a seven-minute musical film of the song “Jerusalem, Flower of All Cities”¹⁷⁸ sung by the famous Lebanese diva Firouz is probably the first musical film of this song. Later, and throughout the years, Arabic TV channels would produce many other versions of this musical video. The first four minutes of the film feature the city of Jerusalem prior to its occupation in 1967. This footage was filmed by Jawherieh when he was still living in Jerusalem before he was denied the right of return. The footage depicts the city’s neighborhoods, alleys, and people. The imagery of landscape is suddenly interrupted when in 1967, Jawherieh was denied the right to return to Jerusalem. His inability to capture more images of his city triggers in the film a series of shot repetitions, a loop of memories that haunts the dispossessed who can no longer return to their neighborhoods and homes.

Palestine in the Eye,¹⁷⁹ which was made following Jawherieh’s death, opens up with a poster of Jawherieh that was produced by the Institute following Jawherieh’s killing. “Hani Jawherieh, Martyr of Militant Cinema”¹⁸⁰ reads the poster, setting the mood for what follows: the story of a cinema for which people live and die.



Palestine in the Eye, Hani Jawherieh poster (pic.7)

¹⁷⁷ Siam, *Jerusalem, Flower of All Cities*.

¹⁷⁸ Firouz, performer “Flower of All Cities,” (Al Rahbinah, Lebanon, 1967), song.

¹⁷⁹ Shlanzi et al., *Palestine in in the Eye*.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

Jawherieh, as the film protagonist, is introduced by a military commander as a fighter who used his camera as a weapon. “He was always in the battlefield, always with his camera his weapon. We had our Kalashnikovs and he had his camera. He never abandoning the battlefield,”¹⁸¹ says the commander. Although the film is intended to be a portrait of Jawherieh’s life, and we are told repeatedly throughout the film by different protagonists that “Jawherieh did not die in vain,” the film is also about the role which filmmakers and cinematographers in the film institute saw themselves playing within the Palestine liberation movement.

Through the narrative of Hani Jawherieh, one of the founders of the Palestine Cinema Institute, the story of the Institute and its makers is told. It is a story of revolutionaries who were making films, and not the other way round. They are workers for the revolution and the end credit of the film affirms this collective notion of all filmmakers and cinematographers working for the same cause. There is no filmmaker accredited to the film. Instead, a title appears, “Workers on the Film,” and below it nine names are listed, projecting a collective effort that is set to challenge film hierarchy.



Palestine in the Eye film credit: Text: The Workers in this film:
Shlanzi, Jane Shamoun, Rasmi Abou Ali, Samir Nimar, Omar Al Moktar,
Qassim Saad, Mohamed Awad, Motea Ibrahim, Moustafa Abu Ali (pic.8)

*The Road to Palestine*¹⁸² was made a decade after the Institute was founded in Lebanon. The film, an animation film, was made to target children as an audience. The film shows a shift in the approach that the Institute was taking, where prior to the making of this film, children had never before been targeted as an audience by the Institute’s productions. Yet, interestingly enough and according to Layali Bader, the main reason for the creation of this animation film was not mainly to target children, but because members of the Palestine Cinema Institute

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Bader, *The Road to Palestine*.

were thinking of introducing animation into their productions. Layali Bader, who had recently joined the Institute, was sent to the GDR to learn how to make animation films.



The Road to Palestine, by Layali Bader, 1983 (pic.9)

*The Upper Gate*¹⁸³ was made eleven years after the plundering of the Palestine Cinema Institute archive and the destruction of the institution. Arab Lutfi, a Lebanese filmmaker, joined the Palestine Cinema Institute following her sister, Nabiha Lutfi, in the late 1970s. The two sisters wanted to make films that not only changed Palestinian reality but the reality of the whole Arab world, and they believed that the Palestine Cinema Institute was the right place to do so.¹⁸⁴

*The Upper Gate*¹⁸⁵ is an auteur film. The director's presence can be felt throughout the film. She is the narrator of the film, and the viewer is invited to see her bond and that of the Lebanese people with the Palestinian cause. Lutfi does not give names to many of the people whose testimonies you hear but faces you do not see. She justifies her directorial choice as one that frames the testimonies to represent a mass experience and not a portrait of a personal account.

¹⁸³ Lutfi, *The Upper Gate*.

¹⁸⁴ Nabiha Lutfi, personal communication with the author, Cairo, 2012.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

When I choose to include *The Upper Gate*¹⁸⁶ in the collection of films to be restored, I had not yet seen it, but my interest in it was awakened because it was one of the last attempts to continue producing institutional films, even after the Palestine Cinema Institute had been looted and destroyed. I did not know that I would find in the film something so personal, relating to me personally and to my own family history. Among the testimonies that Lutfi records, is one by a man whom you do not see—but I could recognize his voice. It was my uncle Bilal reciting how my grandmother and her children had fled Haifa, in 1948, following a massacre that took place in Haoussa village. My uncle, who was recalling the memory of a nine-year-old child, goes on to describe how when the family arrived to Lebanon, with other Palestinian refugees, Lebanese families came to give them food:

They had brought good food and in great quantities. But I kept asking, why are they giving us food. I was beginning to realize that our situation has changed and we have now become refugees, to whom people give food to.¹⁸⁷

The story of how my family became refugees is one *that I* always experienced, its effect on how my father and my uncles and aunts related their loss to us as their children, but I did not hear it before. Their trauma was riddled with guilt. They blamed themselves for not staying in Palestine even if it was going to cost them their lives, so they went silent.



The Upper Gate, by Arab Lutfi, 1993 (pic.10)

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ "Interview with Bilal El Hassan," *The Upper Gate*.

Finding something that relates to my own family experience emphasizes how personal Palestinian audiovisual archives are and how the looting and destruction of these films is robbing individuals of their own personal narratives. It also speaks of how our encounters with remains of plundering can be so personally necessary. It reminds me of the encounter of Bashar Shammout, which I discussed above, in the German archives with a recording of one of his great uncles and how Hiba connected with her own trauma by experiencing her father's camera; I had opened a Pandora's box for myself by watching Lutfi's film, but I also very much needed to comprehend the story of our dispossession.

Films Release and Ethical Necessities

Following the restoration of the films it was of course time to release them theatrically and return them to the public domain. The release of the films was not only motivated by the restoration where spectators can now experience the films in their new form; there was an ethical necessity to present these films in their entirety to the public. In previous chapters, I discussed how snaps of looted Palestinian photos and films have appeared in Israeli films. I argued how Palestinians who watched these films got to experience their own history divided and incomplete as they could not watch the used material in its entirety. Therefore it was ethically necessary to release the films as they are.

Control over what can be seen of an archive or not, is a control over the fundamental way in which society seeks evidence of what its core values are and have been, where it has come from, and where it is going.¹⁸⁸ This is why returning the films to the public sphere is an ethical necessity. The films reveal layers of a Palestinian film history, which Palestinian filmmakers and society as a whole had not been able to see and as a result did not know about. Not releasing the film would have made this research project an accomplice in denying Palestinian history to be seen by Palestinians and the rest of the world as it was told by its own people.

The four films, have been screened since their restoration in film festivals and art venues in Europe, the United States, the Arab world and Japan. The spectatorship experience which Habashneh had told me about before, where Palestinian spectators felt empowered watching these films, was this time dominated by the story of the plundering of the Institute's films.

¹⁸⁸ Schwartz and Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power."

The films synopses told the story of the plundering and the audience mainly came to watch a cinema that a colonial power wants to conceal and deny the world from seeing. The restored films were mainly watched as a fragment of what was and acted as a reminder of what has been lost. In this context the presence of the plunderers in cinema theatres was constantly being felt by the spectators.

A Remake of a Revolutionary Film

A major question when dealing with film footage that are remains of plundering is whether this visual material can still be integrated into present narratives, or whether the violence makes them so unfamiliar and estranged that it is no longer possible to appropriate and use these images. The concern is that plundering has succeeded in creating a disconnection between the society and its own past images. By ejecting these images from public domains, they become unfamiliar and uncanny for the society that generated them in the past, making the society unable to relate to or even comment on them.

Photos and films that have survived plundering are riddled with trauma and pain. When thinking about appropriating such problematic material I always find myself remembering *Nostalgia*¹⁸⁹, the classical film, by Hollis Frampton. In this film, Frampton appropriates his own personal past photos and brings them to his film. After telling the story of each image he engages in burning it slowly, erasing it from existence. Rachel Moore describes it as “a kind of curing trip,”¹⁹⁰ when the trauma embodied in these images is confronted and then resolved through the act of burning. Moore goes onto say:

Frampton keeps the gravedigger at bay by developing and incorporating his own history, opens wounds so that they might heal, replacing that which is lost or in peril of being so, and burns them in order to activate the present.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Hollis Frampton, dir., *Nostalgia* (United States, 1971), video art.

¹⁹⁰ Rachel Moore, *Hollis Frampton (Nostalgia)* (London: Afterall Books, 2006), 17.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

Moore argues that Frampton burns the past in order to activate the present. But to do so, to be able to terminate the past, I would argue, then a high sense of security needs to be present. It suggests that the past is safe and so is the present. It is this sense of security that allows Frampton to exercise loss. Frampton's own narrative about his past is not contested, and his images are not archival evidence of his past existence. Frampton does not fear that if he burns his images the visualized space of the United States of America will be terminated. He does not struggle with trauma and fear that if he burns his photos the evidence of the existence of a world will be erased. He does not fear that the past of the places and people he captured in his images will now be contested as his photos cease to exist; that the justification for the disturbed present, which the individuals in the images inhabit, will no longer be available and they can no longer claim their own narrative about their past and present.

In the Palestinian context, erasing the past means terminating the claim of millions of Palestinians who live in refugee camps, under occupation, and in Israel. In this context, artistic erasure mimics the crimes that are committed by plunderers who destroy and conceal archives to silence narratives. From this perspective, the act of appropriation in *Nostalgia* appears as a luxury that can only be performed by an artist who does not feel that the images at hand and the narratives that lie with them are threatened. It is the luxury and privilege of the safe, who can engage in altering, changing and even dismantling parts of their own history in order to create a vibrant present.

Addressing the question of whether I can appropriate visual remains of plundering or not—whether I could alter and change this material—is a complex matter. The four films restored through this project and returned to the public sphere—*Jerusalem, Flower of All Cities*,¹⁹² *Palestine in the Eye*,¹⁹³ *The Road to Palestine*¹⁹⁴ and *The Upper Gate*¹⁹⁵—have now become film footage which I can use to formulate a new narrative about the present. Yet, this is only possible if I am not alienated from the film material and if I can connect to the film footage and have something that I want to comment on.

¹⁹² Siam, *Jerusalem, Flower of All Cities*.

¹⁹³ Shlanzi et al., *Palestine in the Eye*.

¹⁹⁴ Bader, *The Road to Palestine*.

¹⁹⁵ Lutfi, *The Upper Gate*.

There has been, in the past, only one attempt by a Palestinian filmmaker to appropriate and use film footage from visual remains that have survived the plundering of the Palestine Film Institute. In *Until Victory Aka Off Frame*,¹⁹⁶ Mohanad Yaqub treats found film footage with much respect and offers his film space for these film sequences to be re-seen in a modern context.

I was the first spectator of the four films that were restored through this work. My intension was not only to spectate but to assess my relationship with the film footage and see if there is anything in them that I would want to alter, change, or use. Yet, being aware of the violence from which these Palestine Cinema Institute films emerged and being keenly aware that I like other Palestinians have been denied the right to watch these films due to most of them having been looted, made me want to indulge in the act of spectating. It almost felt unethical to meddle with the films. But there was a film sequence in *Palestine in The Eye*¹⁹⁷ that disturbed me. It was the sequence in which the moment of Jawherieh's death was portrayed and I had an urge to rectify this moment at least cinematically.

Moment of Death

It is possible, that he filmed the moment of his death, but the film inside the camera has been destroyed. Hani became a martyr and so did his camera. The bomb that killed him killed it as well. What we are seeing now, are the last five minutes he recorded prior to his death. We have put them as they are, unedited.¹⁹⁸

The last five minutes recorded by Jawherieh and which have been included in their entirety, without any editing, are intended in *Palestine in the Eye*¹⁹⁹ to offer a glimpse of what this prominent cinematographer saw last, before his life was terminated. Shots of a barren landscape, with fighters scattered around the frames (pic.3), are the authentic last five minutes in Jawherieh's life. The scene is painful to watch as it is so insignificant and

¹⁹⁶ Mohanad Yaqub, dir., *Off Frame Aka Revolution Until Victory* (Palestine and Holland, 2016), documentary film.

¹⁹⁷ Shlanzi et al., *Palestine in the Eye*.

¹⁹⁸ "Interview with Mustafa Abu Ali," *Palestine in the Eye*.

¹⁹⁹ Shlanzi et al., *Palestine in the Eye*.

unimpressive; yet it can be tolerated, because in the film Jawherieh is depicted as a fighter who used his camera as a weapon. As viewers we are not told anything about Jawherieh's life prior to him becoming a militant cinematographer. Instead, the narrative of the film begins in the battlefield and ends in the battlefield. This narrative construction makes the last minutes that are seen by Jawherieh, somehow, acceptable. It is as if this is what he would have wanted to see and wanted us to see.



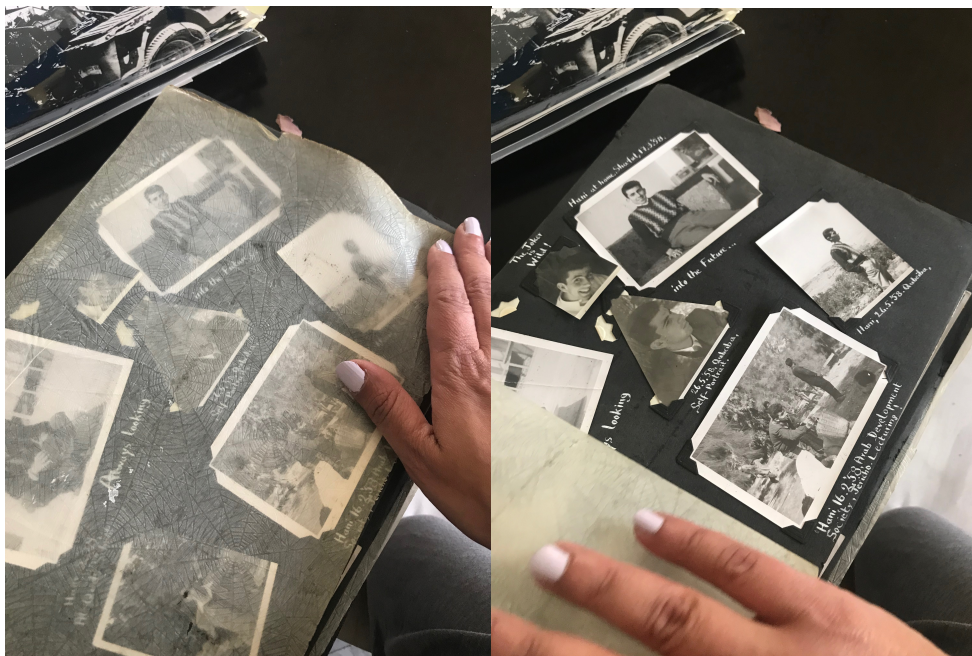
Palestine in the Eye, 1976, one of the last shoots shot by Jawherieh before his death (pic.3)

It has been forty-six years since *Palestine in the Eye*²⁰⁰ was made and since Jawherieh's life was brutally cut short. Flipping through his personal photo album, which he made during the 1950s and early 60s prior to him becoming the photographer and cinematographer of the Palestinian revolution, a different narrative about Jawherieh's life beings to formulate. It is a narrative that would demand a different ending; a different landscape of imagery in the last five minutes of life. Jawherieh had carried this photo album with him when he left Jerusalem for Jordan in the 1960s. Later, in 1975, when Jawherieh decided to become a full-time photographer and cinematographer for the PLO, he took the photo album with him to Beirut. In 1982, that is after Jawherieh had been killed, and during the Israeli invasion to Lebanon, Jawherieh's wife, Hind, took the photo album and fled with it from Beirut to Amman.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

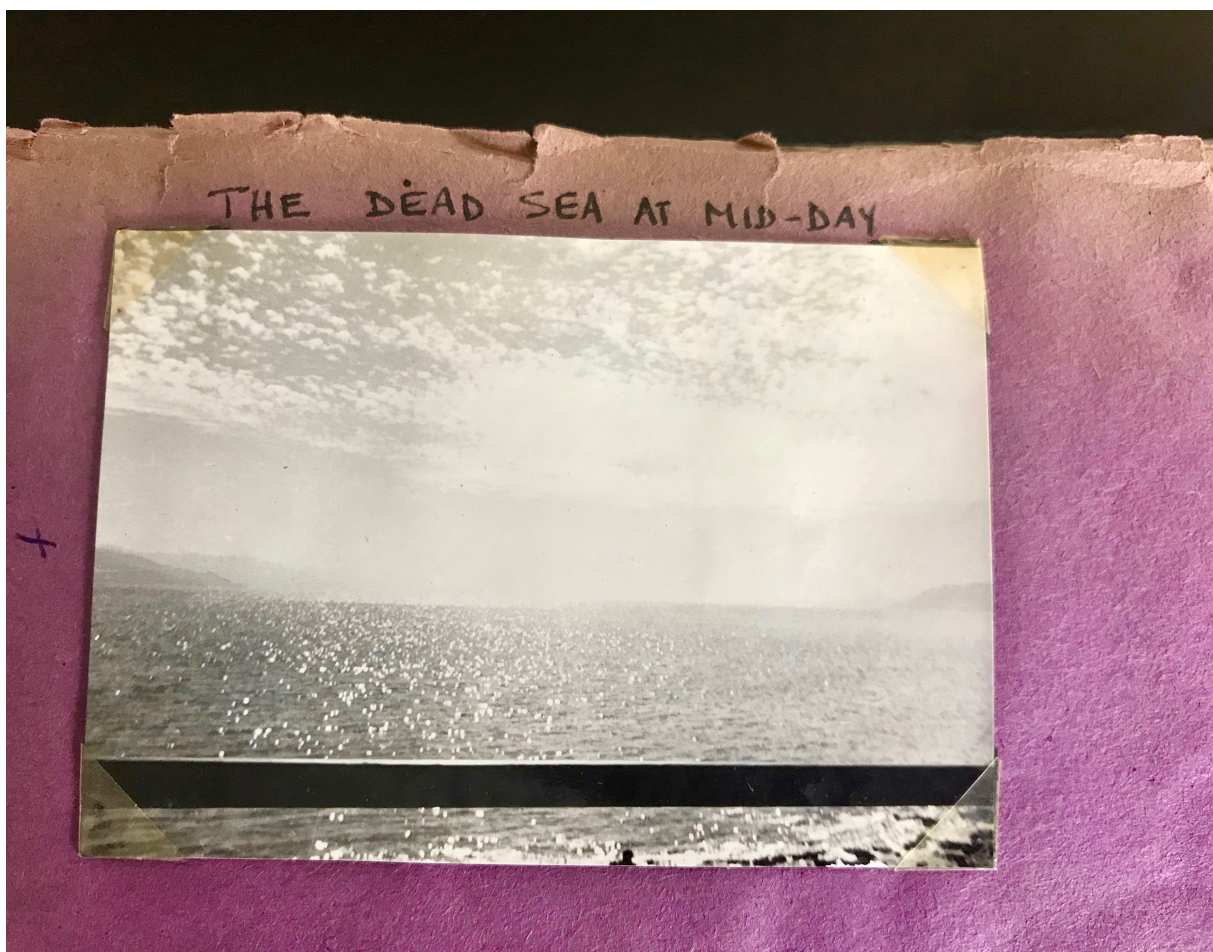


Hani Jawherieh Personal Photo Album - Amman 2017 (pic.4)

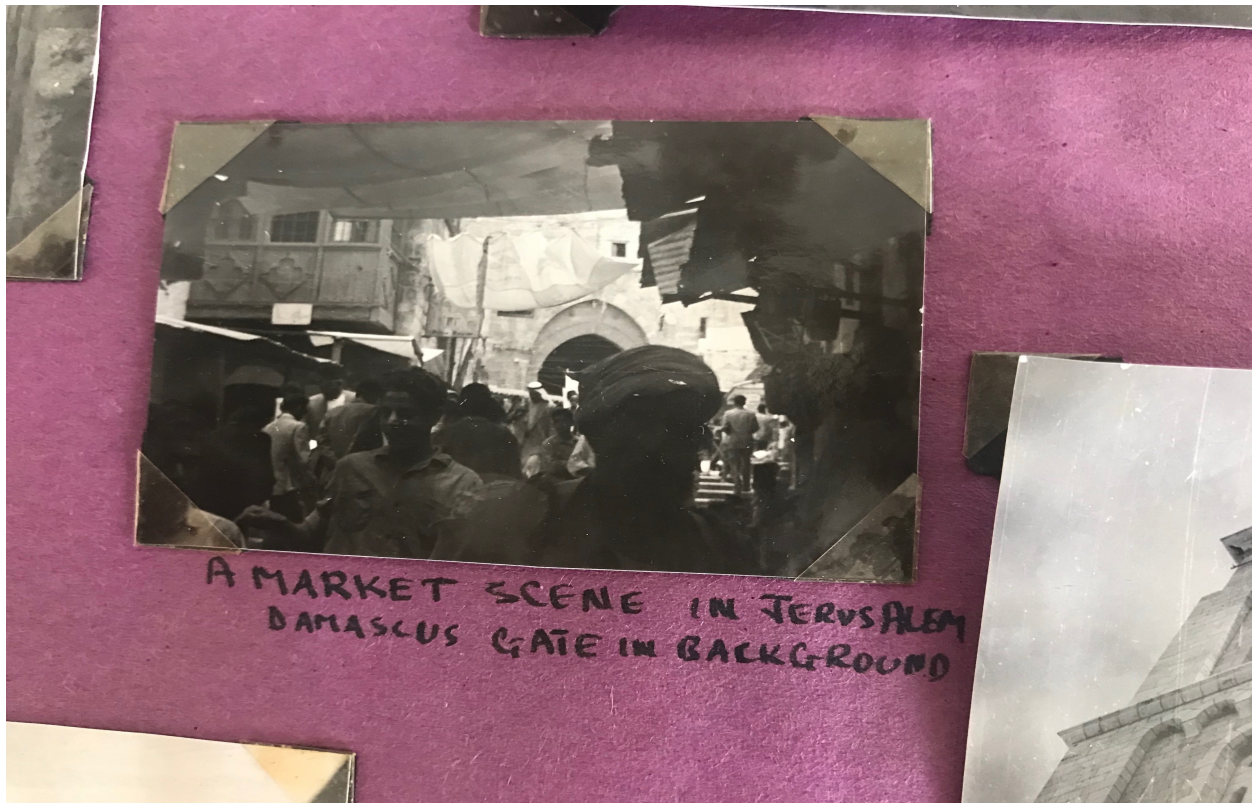


Hani Jawherieh Personal Photo, portraits of Jawherieh in the Album - Amman 2017 (pic.5)

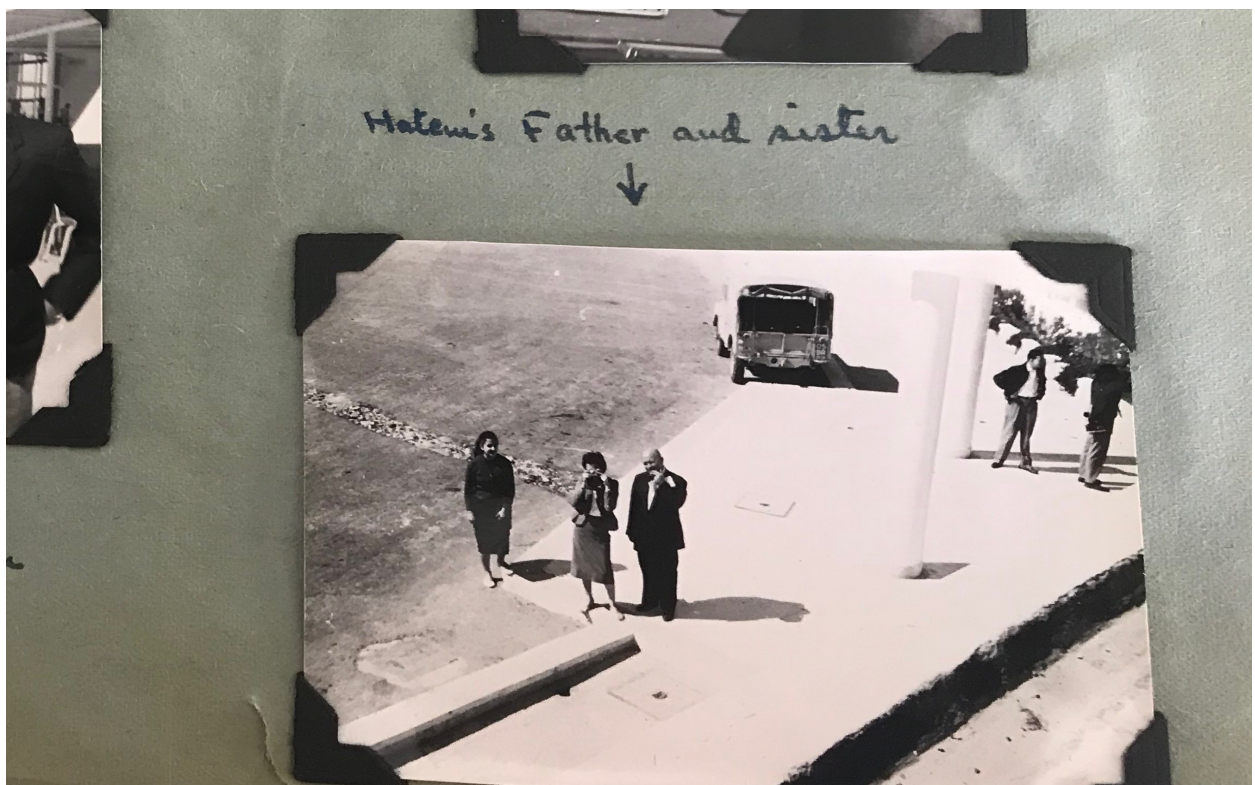
Flipping through the photo album's pages I could see that Jawherieh had a passion for capturing landscape and architecture. He created portraits of his city Jerusalem (pic.7) and he photographed his family and friends. He experimented with different lenses and styles making self-portraits and photographing his little brother, Riad, coming out of a lutes branch. Although politics did not seem to occupy Jawherieh, still there are photos taken of a television set showing images of the Egyptian leader Jamal Abdul Nasser. Later on, there are pictures of Egypt. Jawherieh had visited Egypt and seemed to be in awe of the city's architecture, the River Nile and the Pharaonic monuments.



Jawherieh's personal Album, The Dead Sea at Mid-Day (pic.6)

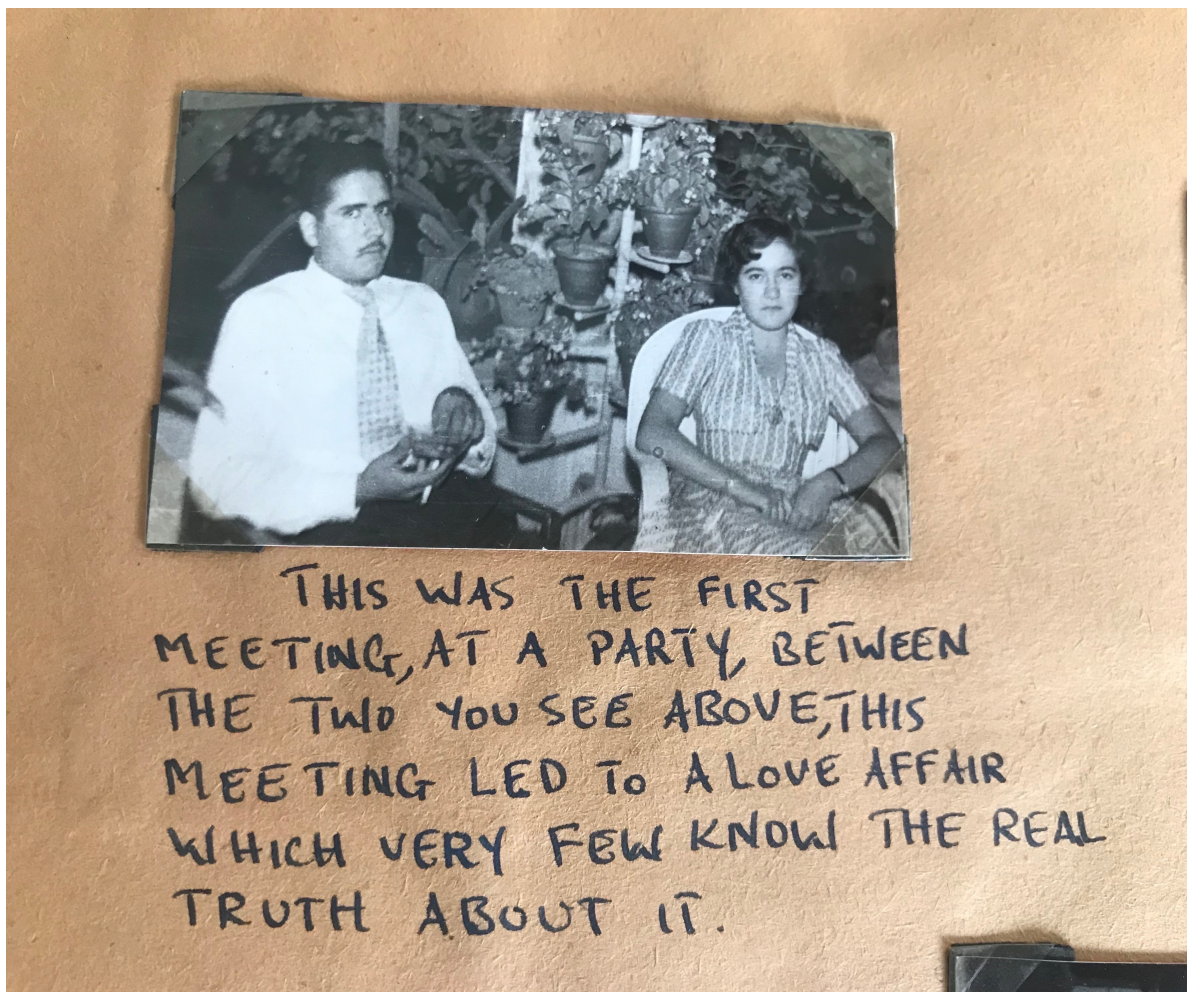


Jawherieh's personal Album, Jerusalem market, Damascus Gate (pic.7)



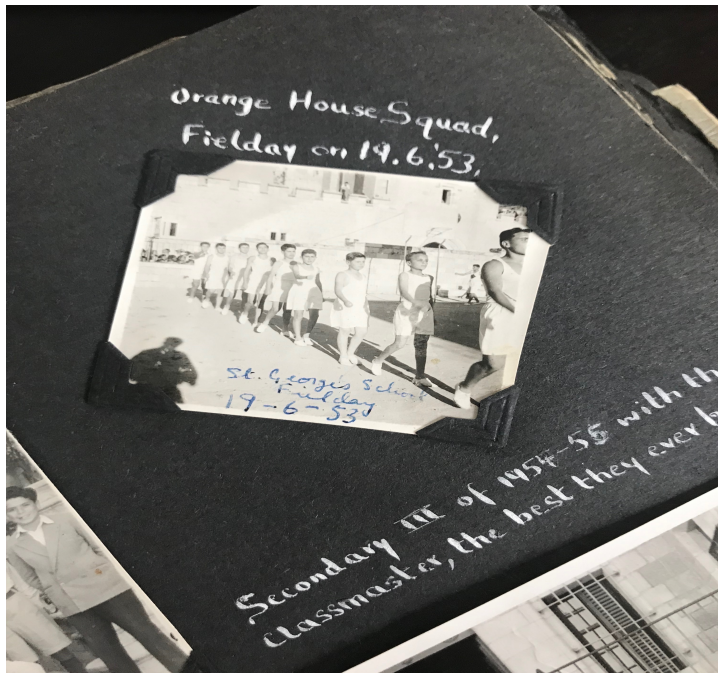
Jawherieh's personal Album, Hatem's Father and Sister (pic.8)

In his short life, Jawherieh did not write memoirs but in his photo album he wrote comments next to each photo he took. His handwriting is neat and he wrote his comments in English, probably so no one would read what he wrote. Writing in English also demonstrates that Jawherieh came from a privileged background, where he received private bilingual education. Jawherieh's father was a lawyer and the pictures in the album present a comfortable childhood and teenage life. Jawherieh's written comments, next to his photos, often described his sentiments and viewpoints about the places and the subjects of which he was taking pictures. Sometimes, he revealed secrets about the people he encountered, like in (pic. 9), where he tells us about a love story that was just starting between this young man and woman; he describes it as "a love affair which very few knew about." It is almost as if Jawherieh was attempting to capture the love that he could sense between the couple but felt that the image did not really transmit, so he needed to comment on it.



Jawherieh's personal Album, Secret, Jerusalem (pic. 9)

The early work of Jawherieh as a professional photographer can be traced through the photos of his school, St Georges, for which he acted as the school photographer. He documented the school's activities (pic. 10, 11), taking class photos, like the graduating class photo of the years 1952 and 1953 (pic. 12).



Jawherieh's personal Album St George's School - Sports Day, 1953 (pic.10)



Jawherieh's personal Album St George's School - Human Pyramid (pic.11)



Jawherieh's personal Album - St George's School - School graduates 1955 (pic.12)

The photo album presents the type of images Jawherieh was constructing in his early days as a photographer that are very different from his imagery production in his revolutionary years. You cannot but wonder if Jawherieh had not been exiled from Jerusalem, what type of artist he would have become. Moreover, the photos in the album depict a Palestinian community in East Jerusalem that seems very settled. There is no indication that this community had any idea that its world was being threatened and that the life they were living would soon cease to exist.

Working Process: Reconstruction of an Artist's Narrative

To retell Jawherieh's last minutes before his death, I needed to understand why these minutes unfolded in the battlefield. I needed to construct a narrative about Jawherieh's life prior to him becoming a militant photographer in order to understand the transformation that led him to his moment of death.

Jawherieh's photo album offered indications of the life which he led as a teenager and in his youth, but I still needed further insight to comprehend in order to retell. I soon found a text

that was written by Jawherieh's friend, Vladimir Tamari. Tamari was a multimedia visual artist. Vladimir and Jawherieh were childhood and lifelong friends. *Vladimir Tamari remembers his friend Hani Jawherieh*²⁰¹ was written decades after Jawherieh's death and when Tamari already knew that he was terminally ill with cancer. In the text, Tamari describes the kind of friendship that developed between the two friends in their hometown, Jerusalem, and the implication of the loss of this hometown on how the life narrative of each of them unfolded later. The text offers a portrait of Jawherieh that contradicts his depiction in *Palestine in the Eye*²⁰² as a fighter who lived only for the Palestinian cause.

I present unapologetically. I say that for they may seem to some to contradict the myth of the mantle of heroism and idealism that his colleagues in the revolution have bestowed on him—and deservedly so—after his martyrdom. Yes Hani did eventually become a real hero, but I knew him before all that, I knew him as a wonderful ordinary human being—extraordinarily ordinary, so to speak, and I do not want to lose that Hani, the friend and the dear brother.²⁰³

Vladimir goes on to describe the effect of waking up one morning to find out that the city that is theirs, where they were born and formed memories, had become off limits to both. He describes their sense of feeling groundless and the consequences of that on what followed in their lives. The narrative of the two men, Jawherieh and Tamari, leads each of them to a different life path. Both men joined the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the 1960s, but Jawherieh decided to dedicate his life project to the organization, while Tamari eventually immigrated to Japan and experimented with different art forms. Tamari's text and Jawherieh's photo album appeared to me to run parallel to each other: While Tamari speaks about his friend Hani, images of Vladimir emerge throughout the photo album (pic.13,14,15,16).

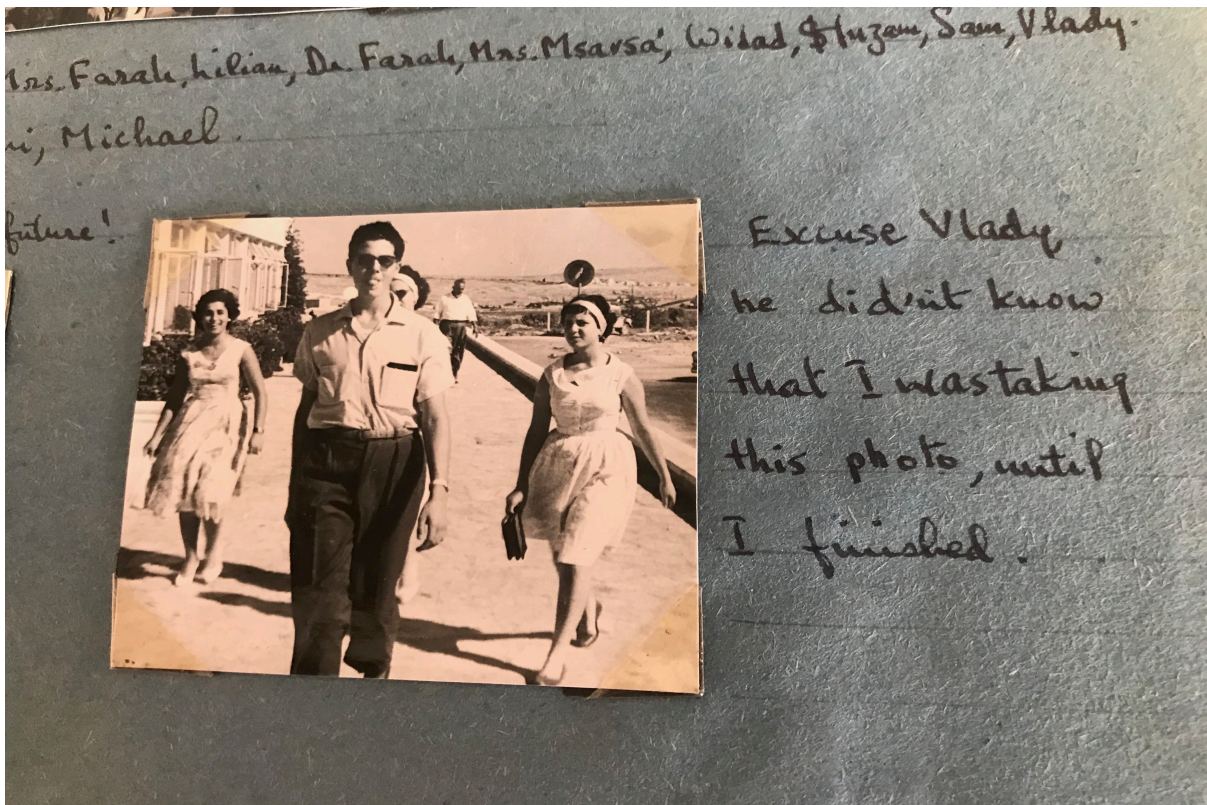
²⁰¹ Vladimir Tamari, "Vladimir Tamari Remembers His Friend Hani Jawherieh," *Vladimir Tamari* (blog), July 30, 2016, <https://vladimirtamari.com/memoire-of-hani-jawharieh-english-illustrated.pdf>.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid., 1.



Jawherieh's personal Album - Jawherieh's friends, Vladimir Tamari in the middle (pic.13)

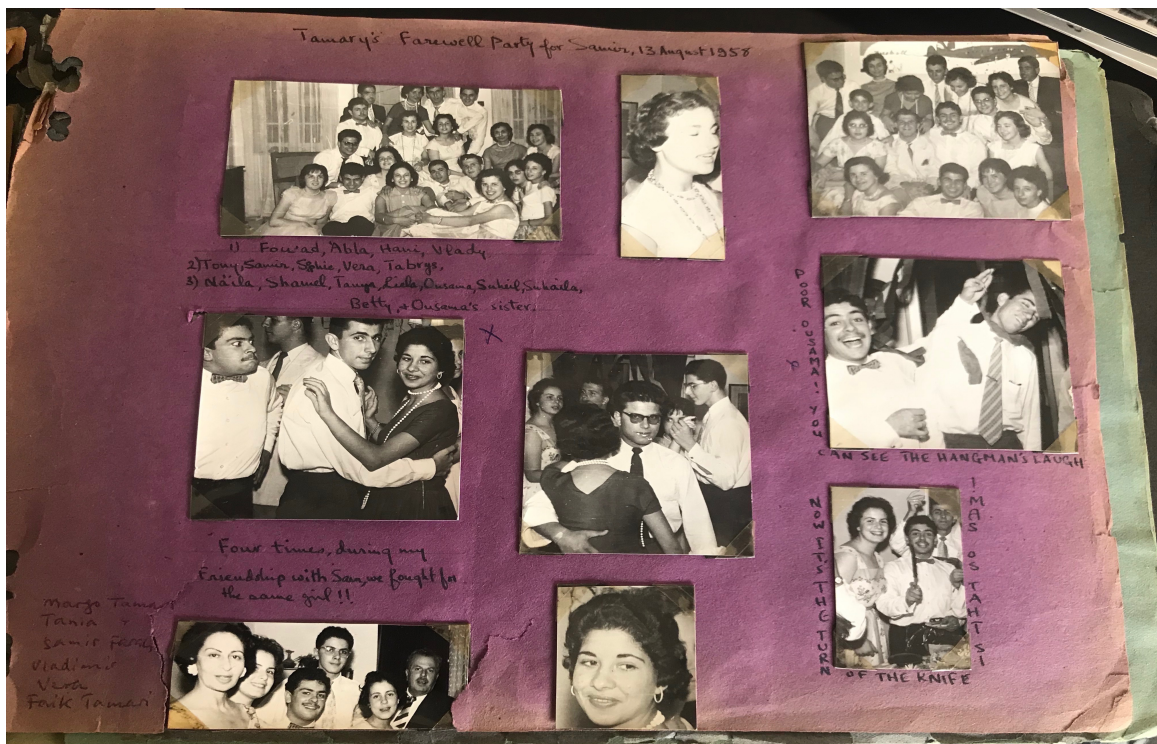


Jawherieh's personal Album, Qalandia airport, Vladimir Tamari, (pic.14)

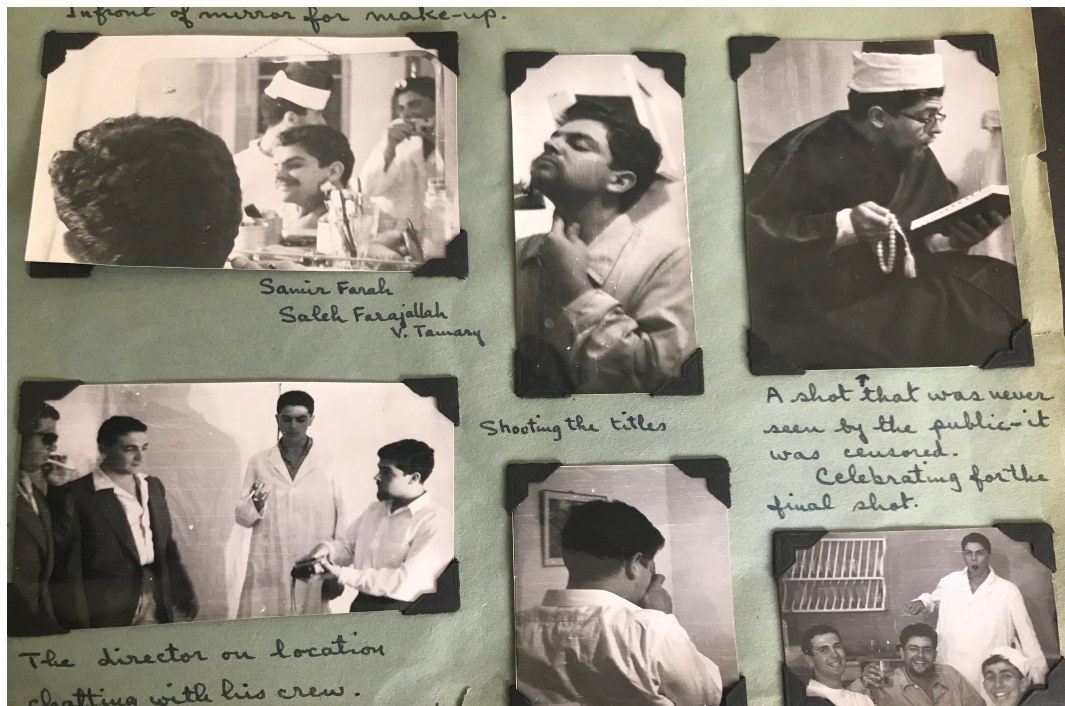
Samir's Surprise Farewell Party that given to him by the whole group on 23 Aug. 1958



Jawherieh's personal Album Party, 1958, Vladimir Tamari sitting on a chair left of the image and Jawherieh at the bottom of the image in the right. (pic.15)



Jawherieh's personal Album - Parties, Jerusalem (pic.16)



Jawherieh's personal Album, Jawherieh's, Tamari and their friends on a film set in Jerusalem (pic.14)

Tamari and Jawherieh along with their other friends called themselves the Musketeers of Art in Jerusalem. In Tamari's recollection of the past, he writes about the art projects they were doing and the ones they never got to do as their lives were interrupted. In pic, 17, Jawherieh, Tamari, and their friends are on a film set in Jerusalem. It was the filming of a comedy that they were shooting. The young artists were occupied mainly with social issues, and Arab nationalism within the context of changes that were occurring in the world. One of the projects that they were thinking of executing told the story of the dream of landing on the moon, while Arab society still struggles with emancipation issues.

The turning point in their lives appears to have occurred in 1967—when Israel invaded East Jerusalem and the West Bank. At that time Jawherieh was working in Jordan and Tamari was in Lebanon.

Hani had an 8 mm camera. He took it and went to the bridge (crossing point from the West Bank to Jordan). He began filming the refugees that were crossing into Jordan.

There were thousands of them. Some of them were tired from the journey and looked like they could no longer keep going. Hani used to stop recording, help them to cross, and then go back to filming. He was the only one with a camera there, recording.²⁰⁴

The subject of Jawherieh's camera changed at that moment. He was suddenly making portraits of individuals who were transitioning into an unknown future as they were becoming refugees. Jawherieh on that day took still and moving images. The photos and film footage he made formed the early base of the Palestine Film Unit archive in Jordan and later on became part of the Palestine Cinema Institute archive, which was plundered in 1982.

Tamari, a few years following the occupation of East Jerusalem, would try to return to his city. "I was arrested and taken with my family to Jerusalem, handcuffed, and blindfolded in an Israeli military vehicle," he said, continuing:

In prison, I climbed to peer from a narrow window near the cell's ceiling to see our beloved Jerusalem, in which I with Hani and our friends used to wander in so freely, now seen for the first time after so many years in exile. The city was so beautiful, its domes minarets and churches glowing pink in the light of dawn.²⁰⁵

The world of Jawherieh and Tamari had become forbidden to them and the life they had before became impossible to regain.

Years later, Tamari, who immigrated to Japan, would learn of Jawherieh's death:

I remember when I absorbed what happened. A grim silent moment I remember to this day. I became very angry. I do not know why that anger turned toward those toys with which I amused myself in exile while Hani lived and died in the homeland.²⁰⁶

Tamari's own description of his life after leaving Jerusalem is very telling of the problematic reality in which he found himself. He describes his own artwork as toys, only created for entertainment purposes, and the country he had been living in for years as his exile. It is as if

²⁰⁴ Hind Jawherieh, interview by the author, Amman, 2018.

²⁰⁵ Vladimir Tamari, "Vladimir Tamari Remembers His Friend Hani Jawherieh," 4.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 7.

he were struggling to find a definition for what he has become and what he is now doing in his life.

The deep displacement which Tamari described is echoed through his generation peers in Palestinian literature, where Jabra Ibrahim Jaber,²⁰⁷ a Jerusalemite himself who was expelled just like Jawherieh and Tamari in 1967, describes himself as he dwells in his various exiles to have become “the wandering Palestinian replacing the wandering Jew,” a cursed person walking the earth and never resting, scavenging, and never reaping. Jabra goes on to describe the world of wilderness in which the dispossessed found themselves.

I could comprehend Tamari’s sense of isolation and of being amputated from his past, unable to connect to his present, and as a result, the deep sense of worthlessness which he describes. What I could not understand, somehow, is his envy of Jawherieh, whose death he describes as having taken place in the homeland. Tamari knew that Jawherieh did not die in Palestine, and it is unlikely that Tamari was referring to Lebanon as the homeland, that is because both Jawherieh and Tamari were members of the PLO, whose main political proposition is the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland and against settling them in the Arab world.

Eventually they *constructed* “imaginative geography.”²⁰⁸ Spaces such as refugee camps, medical and cultural centers founded for or by Palestinians became proclaimed Palestinian territories. The PLO offered such spaces, and the Palestine Cinema Institute became the imagined geography for Palestinian filmmakers. “While other liberation movements produced militant films from a home base in an established state, Palestinian cinema, operated tenuously within the PLO, vulnerable to the political exigencies that shaped the organization.”²⁰⁹

It is very possible that the homeland to which Tamari was referring was the Palestine Cinema Institute; that is the space where friends could meet and ideas could be shared, where archives could be accumulated, and which stands in a striking contrast to the isolation and loneliness of Tamari’s exile. Later in his text, Tamari mocks this imagined geography:

²⁰⁷ Jabra I. Jabra, 1979. “The Palestinian Exile as Writer,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 8, no. 2 (1979): 77–87, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2536510>.

²⁰⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1978); Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Edward Said, “Invention, Memory and Place,” *Critique Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (2000).

²⁰⁹ Yaqub, *Palestinian Cinema in the Days of Revolution*, 2.

But what a farce, for I imagine how Hani, humble as he always was, would laugh long and hard at how life and history had turned out to be, how the entire nation was disinherited and insulted, yet we are proud about a street and cinema house.²¹⁰

The street and cinema to which Tamari is referring were in Tunisia, where a cinema hall and a street were named after Jawherieh, following his killing.

Tamari's anger offered an unexpected insight into the narrative about Jawherieh in *Palestine in the Eye*,²¹¹ where after Tamari and Jawherieh lost their whole world in Jerusalem, Tamari struggled with the loss, while Jawherieh, somehow, experienced a rebirth by joining the Palestine Cinema Institute. *Palestine in the Eye*²¹² does not depict Jawherieh's life prior to him becoming a militant photographer, because that is before Jawherieh evolved from being a refugee into a fighter, which is how members of the Palestine Cinema Institute saw themselves. The subjects seen and depicted by Jawherieh prior to his death, that is the Palestinian fighters, have been the main theme of Jawherieh's work. In other words, the last recorded minutes by Jawherieh depict what members of the PFI, and the filmmakers of *Palestine in the Eye*, thought to be the image which Jawherieh would want to see, that is Palestinian fighters fighting to reclaim what is rightfully theirs.

*Palestine in the Eye*²¹³ told the last chapter of Jawherieh's life when he emerged as a revolutionary. Tamari's text was offering an insight into the emotions, thoughts and events that shaped Jawherieh's life after and prior to him becoming the revolutionary cinematographer. It is the narrative that led to the transition of Jawherieh from what Tamari calls "a wonderful ordinary human being—extraordinarily ordinary," to the Martyr of militant cinema.

Appropriation

What started as a desire to rectify a cinematic moment, in which death is depicted, became a story of displacement and a search for a home. A narrative of two men, who after the loss of their world, one, that is Tamari, was never able to find a home and suffered deep

²¹⁰ Vladimir Tamari, "Vladimir Tamari Remembers His Friend Hani Jawherieh," 10.

²¹¹ Shlanzi et al., *Palestine in the Eye*.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

displacement, while Jawherieh resided in a newly imagined manufactured space, that is the Palestine Cinema Institute.



A Remake of a Revolutionary Film (2019), pic.15

*A Remake of a Revolutionary Film*²¹⁴ is not a remake of *Palestine in the Eye*,²¹⁵ but is instead an alternative parallel narrative of the life of Jawherieh. It is a narrative that is told from the present about Jawherieh's past. The narrative of this short video essay begins prior to the occupation of Jerusalem, when Jawherieh and Tamari still thought that a homeland could be taken for granted; that is where friendships, like their friendship, could be made.

The dismantling of their world occurs in *A Remake of a Revolutionary Film*,²¹⁶ when both are forced to change their life paths and they in one way or another depart from each other's lives. Jawherieh turns to the revolution to formulate his images while Tamari begins to inhabit an obscure space. Tamari appears in the film years after Jawherieh has passed away. He is in a hospital that could be anywhere in the world. This film footage of Tamari was taken from a film by Mohanad Yaqub,²¹⁷ who filmed him in Japan in the hospital where he was being treated for cancer prior to his passing in what appears to be a lonely, isolated space. Contrary to this, Jawherieh appears in a black and white image, that is dream like, but

²¹⁴ El Hassan, *A Remake of a Revolutionary Film*.

²¹⁵ Shlanzi et al., *Palestine in the Eye*.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Mohanad Yaqub, dir., *Memory Portraits*, Japan, Netherland, (2016).

also dwells nowhere except in his own imagination and the imagination of others who watch him.



A Remake of a Revolutionary Film (2019), Vladmire Tamari left, Hani Jawherieh, right (pic.16)

The five minutes prior to Jawherieh's death in *A Remake of a Revolutionary Film*²¹⁸ borrows the soundtrack of this sequence from *Palestine in the Eye*.²¹⁹ Sounds of fire exchange and shelling during a conversation between Mustafa Abu Ali and Jean Shammon, two filmmakers from the institute, telling viewers, that what is being seen on the screen are the last images Jawherieh saw before his death, yet the images that appear in *A Remake of a Revolutionary Film*²²⁰ are images of Jawherieh's childhood in Jerusalem.

²¹⁸ El Hassan, *A Remake of a Revolutionary Film*.

²¹⁹ Shlanzi et al., *Palestine in the Eye*, documentary.

²²⁰ Ibid.



A Remake of a Revolutionary Film (2019), pic.17



A Remake of a Revolutionary Film (2019), pic.18

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Results

Time, Trauma, Ethics and Healing

In 1999, Herbert C. Kelman, a professor of Social Ethics at Harvard University, wrote about the “interdependence of Israeli and Palestinian identities.”²²¹ Kelman discussed elements that can impact negatively on the possibility of developing a transcendent identity in which both can exist without threatening the particularistic identity of the other:

The very name “Palestinians” is troubling to Israelis because, in choosing that name, Palestinians have identified themselves as the people who belong to Palestine and to whom Palestine belongs, thus implying that Israelis are outsiders and usurpers.²²²

Palestine here is portrayed as having emerged as a geographical space independently. It is as if the land itself decided to call itself Palestine, and then Palestinians choose to identify with it and call themselves Palestinians. I recall Kelman now, in a study about Palestinian photos and film, for two reasons. The first is that both the inhabitants and the makers of the images, prior to a plundering attack and after it, remain Palestinians, although their imagery has been greatly altered. The Palestinian visual project that began prior to the creation of the Israeli state, in which photography was already established as a visual Palestinian art form and Palestinian cinema was taking its first baby steps, was largely brought to a halt following the horrific events of 1948, when plundering commenced. It was not until the 1960s that Palestinian cinema professionals reinvented themselves and their subject and, since then, they have not stopped. Yet, the Palestinian narrative of today is no longer only about Palestine and the Palestinians: now the plunderers are always present, even if they themselves are not in front of the camera. The film protagonists recall them, and their effect on the daily life and the geography of the place is felt tangibly.

²²¹ Herbert Kelman, “The Interdependence of Israeli and Palestinian National Identities: The Role of the Other in Existential Conflicts,” *Journal of Social Issues* 55, no. 3 (1999): 581–600.

²²² *Ibid.*

The second reason I recall Kelman is in relation to the geographical space—that is, Palestine—and belonging to it, which is his subject. This geographical space is now the mise-en-scène of two narratives, the Palestinian and the Israeli one. Ibtisam Azem describes how this intersection in the space works:

Your Jaffa resembles mine. But it is not the same.
Two cities impersonating each other.
You carved your names in my city, so I feel like I am a returnee from history.
Always tired, roaming my own life like a ghost. Yes, I am a ghost who lives in your city.
You, too, are a ghost, living in my city.
And we call both cities Jaffa.²²³

The presence of the other is felt not only by Palestinians, but also by Israelis. Sela describes the Palestinian presence in Israeli images: “The photographs intend to portray the Zionists’ presence, but that of the Palestinians slips in unintentionally as well.”²²⁴

Kelman, like many others, wrote about the blurring of the boundaries between Palestine and Israel and the intertwining of Palestinian and Israeli identities. I agree with Kelman, and Fanon for that matter. It is no longer possible for either party to return to where they were before the collision between the two occurred. Yet, the assumption that the erasure of Palestinians and, to remain faithful to this study, the erasure of Palestinian images, is possible and that settler colonial enterprise can be completed is false, in this day and age.

Through this work three Palestinian narratives emerge. The first is the narrative of the Palestine Cinema Institute. It unfolds almost unintentionally as films, photos and a 16 mm camera that belonged to the institute prior to its plundering are explored. They tell the story of Palestinian filmmakers and cinematographers who confronted the loss of visual archives in 1948 by creating and constructing new visual narratives and by manufacturing a new image of the Palestinian: the fighter who emerged out of the loss to liberate the self.

²²³ Azem, *The Book of Disappearance*.

²²⁴ Sela, *Looted and Hidden*.

The second narrative that emerges is that of Hani Jawherieh, the Palestinian cinematographer and photographer whose work was nearly entirely plundered by the state of Israel. Much of the research into Jawherieh's work is about piecing together the scarce remains of his work. The few images that were taken by Jawherieh and that remain with us today, including his personal photo album and his camera, construct a narrative about the cycle of violent plundering. They tell us how this artist responded to looting and destruction by creating new images and how his images later became a subject of the violence.

The third narrative that emerges is my own narrative; that is the narrative of a Palestinian filmmaker who is attempting to transcend the recurring theme of loss that has dominated Palestinian films. It is an attempt to liberate films protagonists and the self from the absence of visual images of a past that has been plundered, by finding a new relationship with what remains of photos and films, today. In this work, I have used myself as a subject of research studying and assessing my own relationship with images that remain un plundered.

I began this research with assumptions about what I would find. I knew from experience with my films' protagonists that trauma inhabits the relationship of individuals with what remains in their possession after looting and destruction: photos, films and other objects that survive plundering. I could sense the film protagonists' identification and sympathy with their objects, but I still saw a distinction between the object and the subject. In this work, the boundaries between remains of plundering and research subjects who interacted with these remains of photos, films and media objects increasingly appeared to blur. The subject and the object seemed to become intertwined: both were damaged by the violence, and both emerge out of it changed. In the coming sections, I will look at findings and themes that appeared as both objects and subjects interacted.

Trauma

The traumatic effect of violence is visible on photos and films that remain un plundered and on the dispossessed as she interacts with these visual remains. The subjects in the images—the men, women and children who once paused for their photos to be taken or who sat in front of a film camera recording a testimony about their lives— encountered the violence of

plundering, as their recordings and personal narrative was abducted. When visual remains emerge, access to the trauma of the subjects who inhabit the images can be unlocked. The figures appear to be specters who have come to ask the spectator of what has remained of their images to take an ethical stance against the violence; they are also phantoms that have come to communicate their trauma and transmit their story to the next generation.

The looting and destruction of archives happens typically during invasions and bombings. The individuals who survive these attacks develop an affinity with objects that, just like them, emerged out of the violence. This was evident in the engagements in this research, in how the dispossessed handled visual remains of plundering and other objects that had crossed paths with the plunderers. The name of this shared sympathy and identification is trauma. Many times, in engagements that were undertaken in this research, the dispossessed struggled to overcome the trauma that inhabits her and the object she is handling.

Healing

I have repeatedly used artistic engagement to perform a cathartic act in my films, most obvious performance was in *3 cm Less*,²²⁵ where healing was demanded by the film protagonists. In *Hands on Visual Remains*, as I searched for new uses of what remains unlooted, handling what has survived, assembling images, and attempting to construct narratives of material that belonged to an archive that had been looted exemplified for me, as a researcher and a subject of research, an act of healing. The process of restoring a film that had sustained damage due to plundering and to perform an act that allowed the film to regain its rightful look, was a healing act.

Jawherieh's family and filmmakers Arab Lutfi and Layali Bader, who shared their salvaged films, photos and objects for exploration in this research, were also engaging in a healing process; it was important for them that the story of the abduction of the archive to which this material belonged be told and that what they had salvaged and kept in their homes be released and returned to the public domain.

²²⁵ Ibid.

The physical engagement of the dispossessed with objects that are remains of plundering and sometimes their inability to use these objects in the same manner in which they were previously used did lead to a search to find a new use for them. A new encounter with what has survived the violence has proven useful in allowing trauma to surface. Jawherieh's camera, which could no longer function as a recording device, was used in one of the engagements as a medium to unlock the trauma of the cameraman and his daughter, revealing a transgenerational trauma. The unlocked sentiments and feelings is a finding that suggests that much more can still be explored if more visual remains are tracked down and there is further physical engagement with them. The hope is that this research has paved the way for other, similar engagements with Palestinian remains of plundering.

Time

The need of the dispossessed to hold time still, which I previously portrayed in *The Place*²²⁶ and *Title Deed from Moses*,²²⁷ found its causes in this study. In *Hands on Visual Remains*, evidence of the ejection of Palestinian images from present and past time—of reversing the Palestinian presence such that it falsely appears to belong to a distant past—proved to be an integral part and a direct effect of looting and destruction. Looting and destruction eliminate the presence of an object in a specific time, erasing it from time as if it had never existed. To counter erasure from time the dispossessed desperately attempt to hold time still. They attempt to recall their objects as they were – unchanged and untouched by the plunderers.

In this study, violence inflicts not only what is looted or destroyed but, also what survives the violence. Archives that survive the Israeli destruction of Palestinian archival institutions return to a pre-archival time, becoming the property of the individual who salvaged them and who maintains them in her private space. So, while nations and countries in this modern age and time now possess archival institutions, plunderers have set the Palestinian archive project in a time before the present.

²²⁶ El Hassan, *The Place*.

²²⁷ El Hassan, *Title Deed from Moses*.

The separation of archival photos and films from institutions that were created to preserve and maintain them triggers an unnatural or, more precisely, accelerated process of aging for the photos and films that survive plundering. In this work, in which images were assembled, restored and looked at, the effect of the separation of photos and films and the forced aging that these images endured—the degeneration of delicate materials and film reels brought on by humidity and other adverse conditions—situated them falsely in the distant past.

In this study, the movement of time that is manufactured by the plunderers can partially be reversed. Through film restoration, the false aging effect forced upon films and photos can be turned back, making film restoration a tool that can be used to reclaim and arrest the effect of plundering.

Ethics

There is an assumption that any ethical wrong toward archives, including the remains of photos and films that survive plundering, is committed only by the colonial structure and its plunderers. As a result, the society and its members who have been subjected to looting and destruction are freed of any ethical obligation. As the victims of plundering, the colonized are assumed to enjoy an ethical superiority. Yet, the findings of this research demonstrate that the interaction of the dispossessed with remains of plundering is riddled with ethical dilemmas. The lack of recognition that remains of plundering that have survived a traumatic experience need to be handled and approached even by the dispossessed in an ethical manner can turn the dispossessed into an accomplice to the crime of plundering. Although the dispossessed recognize the trauma that inhabits these remains, this recognition does not relieve them of wrongdoing if visual remains of plundering are not handled ethically.

The desire of a world that has been subjected to looting and destruction to confront the plunderers and expose the violence often leads the plundered society to override its individual needs for the “national good.” For example, an artist whose work has been plundered, with only fragments surviving, might not want to share these fragments with the world; or a person whose image has been violated by plundering might not wish to be exposed to the world, even if doing so is of benefit to the whole culture. This is not a straightforward subject to

resolve; not making this material public due to issues of consent, or lack thereof, might mean feeding into the act of colonial erasure. Yet, it is an issue that needs serious consideration when dealing with visual remains of plundering.

Although an ethical framework for handling visual remains and media equipment that are remains of plundering is not proposed in this work, the research suggests that such a framework needs to be *called upon*.

In the end, this study demonstrates clearly that Palestinians and their images and objects are altered by each instance of plundering to which Palestinian objects have been systematically and repeatedly been subjected. It also demonstrated that returning to a point prior to looting and destruction is not possible. Today, there are more than seven million Palestinian refugees who have been dispossessed of their objects and who now live in various communities and cultures around the world. As they continue to exist, they are generating new visual archives that have become intertwined with the archives of the worlds in which they now dwell. The use of digital technology is increasingly being employed to preserve, accumulate and maintain Palestinian images. The virtual world is flooded with Palestinian images. The process of duplicating, sharing and creating new Palestinian images is in continuous motion and will not be stopped.

Research Projects and Productions

The Void Project

The Void Project is a multimedia art platform for and about what remains of visual Palestinian archives following plundering. It holds screenings and exhibitions online and in the actual world.

www.thevoidproject.org

Exhibition

The Found Archives of Hani Jawherieh: The Art of Accessing Forbidden Art.

<https://p21.gallery/exhibitions/the-void-project-the-found-archive-of-hani-jawherieh>.

Films Restorations

- Before and after clip: <https://www.thevoidproject.org/palestinianrestoredfilms>.
- *Palestine in the Eye*, 1967 (restored version): <https://vimeo.com/512499604>.
- *Jerusalem, Flower of All Cities*, 1969 (restored version): <https://vimeo.com/512517726>.
- *The Road to Palestine*, 1983 (restored version): <https://vimeo.com/512227375>.
- *The Upper Gate*, 1991 (restored version): <https://vimeo.com/433362585>.

Short Film

A Remake of a Revolutionary Film (2019): <https://www.thevoidproject.org/peparchive>.

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