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Notes on
Fierté nationale: De Jéricho vers Gaza

SVEN AUGUSTIJNEN



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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

by due permission of the Malmö Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts, Lund University,
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2 October 2026 at 10 am.

Faculty opponent
Prof. Stefan Jonsson

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Film

Fierté nationale: De Jéricho vers Gaza

Directed by Sven Augustijnen

Video, colour, 16:9, Arabic and French spoken, BE, 2025, 93 min

(For access to the film, please contact Malmö Art Academy.)

Abstract

The object of study of this thesis is *Fierté nationale: De Jéricho vers Gaza*, a film that I shot in 2019 and completed in 2025, which follows Hassan Al Balawi—a Palestinian diplomat to Europe—as he returns to Palestine on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the death of Yasser Arafat, former leader of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Rather than beginning with a predefined research question, the thesis proceeds through an analysis that unfolds in the writing itself; it departs from a series of dreams that I had in relation to the film. In dialogue with the historical narratives constructed in other films shot in Palestine and Israel, and drawing on the microhistory method and Jacques Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage, I analyse the entangled relationship between the European filmmaker and his subject, through which Al Balawi emerges neither as the romanticised figure of the freedom fighter nor as the stereotype of the Palestinian “terrorist,” but as the representative of the Palestinian Authority (PA), caught between the revolutionary legacy of the PLO and the paradoxes of governance under occupation. A moderate voice, Al Balawi epitomises, perhaps tragically, an impossible position, torn between symbolic formations of national pride that both sustain and constrain him. The filmmaker himself is no less implicated, carrying a camera on his shoulder and driven, consciously or unconsciously, by the intertwined legacies of European guilt and the historical betrayal of Palestine. Ultimately, the thesis explores whether documentary cinema can reveal latent symbolic structures and historical configurations, and thereby become a tool for understanding the question of Palestine differently.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the selection committee—Jürgen Bock, Sarat Maharaj and Gertrud Sandqvist—for approving my proposal, as well the rector of Malmö Art Academy, Maj Hasager, and Lund University for giving me the opportunity to pursue this PhD. I would like to thank Sarat Maharaj, my principal supervisor during the first two years of my PhD, for challenging me intellectually through his sustained questioning and his ongoing exploration of what a PhD in the arts might be and the form it might take—an unfinished enquiry that inspired me to pursue this PhD and shaped the form it has ultimately taken. I would like to thank, in particular, Gertrud Sandqvist, founder and head of the PhD programme at Malmö Art Academy, who was my assistant supervisor during the first two years and my principal supervisor during the final three years, for guiding me through this very difficult but also deeply interesting and enriching journey. Her true dedication, her sharp and critical mind, together with her love for the world—as if she has found a way of putting Hannah Arendt’s *amor mundi* into practice—made this a truly unique experience. Moreover, without her understanding of the artist’s mind—her ability to sense my way of thinking and writing—as well as her insight into life’s difficulties, I would not have been able to complete this thesis. I would like to thank Matts Leiderstam, who was present at the seminars during the first two years of the PhD as a *trait d’union*, an intermediary between the supervisors, the theoreticians and us—the PhD candidates, curators and artists—for his sensitive eyes and attentive ears. I would also like to thank Andreas Broeckmann, my assistant supervisor during the final three years of the PhD, for his meticulous reading of the materials. I would like to thank my fellow PhD candidates—Yael Bartana, Jürgen Bock,

Bouchra Khalili, Tarik Kiswanson, Jacob Korczynski and Emily Wardill—for their engagement with the programme and for their contributions to my own participation in it. It must be stressed that the main insights and breakthroughs of the written component of this thesis emerged, directly or indirectly, from discussions with my fellow candidates during and between seminars. I would like to thank Julia Willén for being my opponent at the 50% seminar and Magnus Bårtås for being my opponent at the 75% and 90% seminars. Their sharp analysis of my proposition, exposing its lacks and its flaws, as well their suggestions of specific solutions were crucial for the development and finalisation of the thesis. I would like to thank all the people at the Academy who facilitated our journey in the best of possible conditions: Joakim Sima and Sophie Ljungblom, Charlotta Österberg and Evalena Tholin, Annika Westberg and Madeleine Bergquist, and everyone else that has been working behind the screens. I would like to thank the ULB Library at the Erasmus Faculty of Medicine in Brussels, as well as its students, for allowing me to work in their spaces and for inspiring me through their perseverance in becoming medical doctors. I would like to thank my children—José, Elisão and Luís Andrei—for their patience and support through the years I have been working on this thesis. I would like to especially thank Hassan Al Balawi, the protagonist of the film, for his engagement, trust and patience over nearly a decade. In the early years of our collaboration, we jokingly called each other “*camarade*,” but now that he has become an ambassador, I jokingly call him “*Excellence*,” just as he will probably jokingly call me “*Doctor*”—as he did with many Palestinian friends during the film shoot, who, as if they didn’t have anything else to do, sat down and wrote their own theses, a testament both to their resilience in the challenging conditions of life under occupation and to the high level of education within the Palestinian population. I would like to thank all the institutions and individuals who collaborated or supported the production in one way or another. As the list is too long to mention here, I refer to the end credits

of the film. I would like nevertheless to take the opportunity to thank my producers, without whom the film simply wouldn't have been made: my colleagues at Auguste Orts—Herman Asselberghs, Boris Belay, Manon de Boer, Anouk Declercq, Fairuz Ghammam, Marie Logie and Catherine Pleneveaux—Daniel De Valck of Cobra Films and Herwig Onghena. Finally, I would like to thank Sergio Fant, film programmer at Visions du Réel, Nyon, who saw the film during the final process of editing and suggested a few changes—suggestions that proved to be crucial to the film's final form.

Introduction

This thesis was written in 2025 after completing *Fierté nationale: De Jéricho vers Gaza*, the film that I shot in Palestine and Israel in October and November 2019, and edited in 2023 and 2024.¹

Although this was not the initial plan, Hassan Al Balawi, a Palestinian diplomat to Brussels, became the focal point of the film over the course of this years-long process. I met him for the first time in 2016 at the Palestinian Mission in Brussels.² I remember that first meeting vividly, as if it happened yesterday: we went for a Lebanese lunch across the street, and I placed Yezid Sayigh's book *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement*

¹ The film's international premiere was at Visions du Réel in Nyon, Switzerland, on 8 April 2025, and was subsequently shown at Dream City, Tunis; Bozar, Brussels; and Lo Schermo dell'Arte, Florence, and elsewhere. See "Fierté nationale: De Jéricho vers Gaza," Visions du Réel, accessed 22 November 2025, <https://www.visionsdureel.ch/film/2025/fierte-nationale-de-jericho-vers-gaza/>.

For a complete list of film screenings, see "Fierté nationale: De Jéricho vers Gaza; Sven Augustijnen," Auguste Orts, accessed 22 November 2025, <https://augusteorts.be/en/catalogue/177/fierte-nationale-de-jericho-vers-gaza>.

The film is referred to throughout this thesis by its original French title, *Fierté nationale*. While it may be translated as either *National Pride* or *National Dignity*, the French title is retained because *fierté* carries both meanings simultaneously.

Fierté nationale: De Jéricho vers Gaza, directed by Sven Augustijnen (Belgium: Auguste Orts, 2025).

² It was Michel Khleifi, a Palestinian filmmaker based in Brussels since the 1970s, who put me in contact with Al Balawi shortly after he arrived in Brussels, following the completion of his terms in Paris at UNESCO and the Palestinian Mission in France.

1949–1993 on the table—the thousand-page volume I was about to finish, a key reference on the history of the Palestinian national movement that Al Balawi had also read.³ This, and the conversation it prompted, immediately established a sense of connection between us. It would take us three years to turn our first conversation into shooting the film on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the death of Yasser Arafat, the former leader of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, on 11 November 2019.⁴ The long time between shooting the film and its completion—about five years—speaks volumes about the difficulty of the film’s realisation, as much as about the fact that this text was only written when the film finally came into being.

During my research and the writing of this thesis, I encountered and worked with many languages—Arabic, English, French, German, Hebrew, Italian and Yiddish, among others—and I tried to keep them in the equation as much as possible, since we think differently in different languages and move from one to

³ Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

⁴ Following our conversation, I took my first field-research trip to Palestine in October 2016, and I returned to Palestine a year later, again in October, for supplementary research. During these field trips, Issa Abdelhafiz, a former fedayee and close friend of Al Balawi, introduced me to different personalities in the various factions of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), which differs from the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah) to which he himself belonged: the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and the Palestinian People’s Party (PPP). Abdelhafiz was also supposed to play an important role in filming, as he witnessed various events of the revolution, including the PLO’s exodus from Beirut in 1982. Unfortunately, he suffered a haemorrhagic stroke just before we began shooting the film, an event that marked and changed the shoot and thus the final outcome of the film.

the other and back, shaping our thoughts.⁵ Moreover, these many languages reflect the interweaving of perspectives, histories and voices from the Levant and beyond, as well as my own position: as a Belgian, non-Jewish, non-Palestinian, I speak from a European horizon, which inevitably forms the perspective from which this research is conducted and through which I engage with the material; this also reveals the lens through which the film is shot, and thus the gaze through which we encounter the images, hear the sounds, read the texts and experience the film as a whole.

For general clarity, I use “I” in this thesis, as I am the filmmaker, although when talking about the process of the making of the film, I would rather use “we,” since we were operating as a small film crew.⁶ The same applies to the editing process, where I again use “I,” as I was responsible for the film and the final cut. However, it goes without saying, the post-production of the film was also a collaborative effort.⁷

⁵ I used existing and available translations for the texts that I quoted; for quotes with no available translations, I translated the French and German quotes myself; Karam Said and Dareen Abbas, the Arabic; and Ravit Bechor, the Hebrew.

⁶ Besides Al Balawi as the main protagonist and myself as the cameraman and filmmaker, the crew included the sound engineers—Benoit Bruwier for the first shoot in October and Sacha Hackier for the second shoot in November—and Fairuz Ghammam, the production assistant who kept the film rolling. For our trip to Israel, Aisha Bargouthi-Saifi served as the driver. Behind the scenes, many people helped with making contacts and obtaining permits, especially Issa Abdelhafiz and Rawan Manna, two close friends of Al Balawi.

⁷ Karam Said translated the rushes, which were predominantly spoken in Arabic; I couldn’t have accessed the material without him. Mathieu Haessler edited the film in close collaboration with me on and off over a two-year period. Many other people also assisted with the screenings of the various versions of the film throughout the process and offered their feedback.

Finally, a word of explanation: I didn't have a formal working contract with Al Balawi nor a contract of principles about the outcome of the film, and I did not ask him to sign a consent form either.⁸ Through the years of preparing the project, a relationship of mutual understanding and trust developed between us, enabling us to navigate the struggles of making the film. Whenever I proposed ideas that he disagreed with while shooting the film, Al Balawi would say so, and I respected this—mostly it was the situations themselves and their unfolding that guided us in determining what made sense, or not. Although Al Balawi did not wish to intervene in the film's final outcome, respecting the principle of the director's artistic autonomy that he himself advocated, I was in close contact with him about the general structure of the film, as well its details during the editing process, consulted him frequently during the writing of the film's text panels and asked him about matters that I didn't understand or about which I had doubts or needed clarification in order to conclude the film. It must be stressed that the film was only possible thanks to Al Balawi and his persevering engagement, just as it would not have been possible without my holding the camera and persevering, in turn, in our shared search for what the film might become.

⁸ In fact, although we had consent forms with us, we did not ask any of the people appearing in the film to sign them, as the complex circumstances of the shoot made this impractical. We therefore did not pursue it further.

Method

This thesis was written in 2025, during the second year of the (latest) war in Gaza.⁹ The harsh reality of the images that reach our retinas daily through our phones and other screens caused me to dream about Palestine; three dreams that I forgot and later returned to, much like dreams that linger in the mind, fading and reappearing; three dreams that triggered this very piece of writing and that brought me back to the land where I had been several times in the last decade.

⁹ For centuries, Gaza has been a strategic crossroads linking Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. It has witnessed successive conquests and battles involving, among others, the Romans, the Crusaders, the Ottomans, the forces of Napoleon, the British, and, more recently, Palestinians and Israelis. Following the 1948 Arab–Israeli War—known in Israel as the War of Independence and to Palestinians as the Nakba (النكبة, lit. “the catastrophe”)—the Gaza Strip became home to hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who had been expelled or had fled from villages in what became southern Israel. Administered by Egypt from 1948 until 1967, Gaza was also the site of fighting during the 1956 Suez Crisis. Israel occupied the Gaza Strip during the Six-Day War in 1967, a military occupation that continued until the Oslo Accords of 1993 initiated a process of limited Palestinian self-rule. Triggered in part by the First Intifada, which began in Gaza in 1987, the Oslo process ultimately failed, and the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000 was followed by Israel’s unilateral withdrawal of its settlements and military forces from Gaza in 2005. After Hamas took control of the Strip in 2007, Gaza became the scene of repeated wars between Hamas and Israel—in 2008–2009, 2012, 2014, 2021, and 2023. The Hamas-led attack on Israel of 7 October 2023 and Israel’s subsequent military campaign resulted in the unprecedented devastation of Gaza.

Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Gaza: A History*, trans. John King (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

I speculate that these dreams were probably not only caused by the images of the war and the deep impression they left on me, but also by the difficult process of the realisation of the film. Perhaps they were even a way to find a solution for the challenges I was confronted with in what seemed to be an impossible film, or at least an unfinished film that couldn't come to a conclusion.¹⁰ This sense of incompleteness was amplified by the fact that Hassan Al Balawi and I had planned to go back to shoot more footage, specifically in Gaza, but the situation on the ground had been turned upside down on 7 October 2023, with Hamas's attack on Israel and the ensuing Israeli retaliation and destruction of Gaza.

It is within this context that we can situate the three dreams that I had. Dream images that made me associate them with film images that were deep down in my mind and that were evoked by the dreams. Or perhaps even the other way around: film images that constituted my dreams, a condition that led me to think through and write through my own film by way of other films. Film sequences or shots, images that deal with or are associated with the land where I shot the film; the land I had been going back to in my dreams, years later, through those

¹⁰ The images that compose the film date from 2019, and were part of a larger project, a trilogy to be shot in several countries on different continents, tracing correspondences between various liberation movements—the PLO, the African National Congress (ANC) and the Cuban revolutionaries—at once evoking their historical and present forms of solidarity and co-operation, while also raising the difficult question of what has become of the grand ideals of armed struggle and revolution, and to what ends they have ultimately led. However, the Covid-19 pandemic forced me to abandon this larger project, and I moved forward with the footage I had shot in Palestine, turning it into what over time I came to call “a failed film,” giving me a complex, or, after accepting what it eventually became, “hardly a film,” made up of the leftovers of “the failed film.”

images. Film—experiencing it through watching—probably comes closest to dreaming: through its images and sounds, through its power of association and speculation, through its stream of consciousness. An ongoing chain of images and thoughts that propel themselves forwards while layering meanings that surface from history—the living memory of landscapes and bodies, filmed and exposed in their bare presence, which reappear in our dreams, possessing them with infinite and shifting interpretations. It is perhaps paradoxical that it is through dreams that I started to approach and tackle the films, since the films in question are all—including my own film—in one way or another, committed to the real conditions of history and politics, that is, to the realm of the documentary (or more precisely, how I relate to that cinematographic terminology and compartmentalisation). Films by filmmakers from the land itself, but also, and probably predominantly, from Europe, whether it be Palestinian filmmakers going back to their homeland, Jewish filmmakers from Europe or European filmmakers *tout court*, most of them French speaking, such as Chris Marker, Claude Lanzmann, Michel Khleifi and Eyal Sivan. Thinking it over again, it is perhaps not so paradoxical after all that it is through dreams that I analyse and tackle the films of these filmmakers, as well as my own. Each one of them engages in one way or another with the notion of the dream, perhaps not so much the dreams we dream at night, but rather utopian dreams. The aspirations and promises that the films address as they are embodied by the people that inhabit them, such as the Palestinian fedayeen dreaming of land and liberation, the Israelis carrying forward Herzl's dream of a return to Zion, or the filmmakers' dream of contributing to the liberation of the land or the fulfilment of the Promised Land, the fulfilment of wishes of all kinds—as if we are dealing with dreams dreamt at night that fulfil our deepest aspirations. As much as we may distinguish between different notions of the dream, it seems these notions divert and transgress into one another in the context of this study, as we are dealing with the land of miracles and promises of all kinds—a land that has

inspired and preoccupied us for centuries, that inhabits our lives day and night, and that lives in the deepest parts of our souls. As such, it occupies our dreams: the dreams of the day and the dreams of the night. But to return to the films and the filmmakers in question who have been dealing with the land of miracles and promises of all kinds, the method of seeing and analysing my film through other films became particularly illuminating when, during the editing process, I discovered an episode of the television programme *La Rage d'écrire* about Yael Dayan, featuring interviews and other biographical footage, produced for Belgian television in 1966.¹¹ Dayan—a former member of the Knesset and daughter of the renowned Moshe Dayan—is one of the people Al Balawi meets in my film, when he goes to Tel Aviv for the first time in his life. Watching this episode, shot in black-and-white 16mm film, I was not only perplexed by how the young Dayan contrasted with the image I had made of her more than half a century later, marked as she was by history and time, but above all by how closely the television programme's opening resembled the opening scene of my own film: young soldiers performing military drills and shouting nationalist chants, as if they mirrored each other, the Israeli and Palestinian soldiers, both performing their own distinct national pride. However, more than half a century separated them, and they concerned opposite sides of the conflict, expressed through different languages and opposing histories: on the one hand, young Israeli soldiers filmed by a Belgian television crew just before the Six-Day War in 1967; on the other, the Palestinian recruits I filmed at the Al-Istiqlal University in 2019. This observation of opposing sides through time—yet seemingly so entangled and similar—led me to Jacques Lacan's text on the concept of the mirror stage as a way of seeing and analysing images and the world according to the symbolic structures into which we are born and that

¹¹ *La Rage d'écrire*, episode “Yaël Dayan,” directed by Jean Antoine, first aired 23 March 1966 on Radio-Télévision Belge Francophone—RTBF, <https://auvio.rtbf.be/media/archives-sonuma-litterature-la-rage-d-ecrire-2661709>.

determine and constrain us, including the film I realised and the time in which it was made. My film is after all a record, a document of the historical context in question—twenty-five years after the Oslo Accords and fifteen years after the death of Yasser Arafat—and thus of the symbolic structures it contains and reveals. Although my reading of Lacan’s text was triggered rather accidentally by seeing the 1966 footage of the young Dayan, the concept of the mirror stage ultimately proved more fundamental for understanding this land of miracles and promises of all kinds in which Al Balawi and I travelled and shot the film, and it therefore recurs several times throughout the essay. Perhaps not only fundamental in figuring out what is at stake in the film, but also in relation to the text and the concept of the mirror stage itself, which seems to resist complete comprehension no matter how many times one rereads it. Reading through Lacan means, of course, also reading through Freud,¹² since Lacan

¹² It goes without saying that Freud and Lacan were important influences when writing this essay because of the dreams I dreamt, as both wrote extensively on the subject—Freud in *Die Traumdeutung*, and Lacan through many of his writings, particularly in “L’Instance de la lettre dans l’inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud,” “Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse,” and *Le Séminaire, Livre V: Les Formations de l’inconscient*. It must be stressed that the dreams in my essay function primarily as a generative tool for the writing of this thesis, and that the analysis of the dreams is not an end in itself. For a more historical and political take on dreams, see Sharon Sliwinski’s *Dreaming in Dark Times: Six Exercises in Political Thought*.

Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* (Leipzig: Franz Deuticke, 1900); reprinted in *Gesammelte Werke*, vols. 2–3 (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1961); translated as “The Interpretation of Dreams,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vols. 4–5, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953).

Jacques Lacan, “L’Instance de la lettre dans l’inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud,” in *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966); translated as “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason since Freud,” in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 412–444.

Jacques Lacan, “Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse,” in *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), translated as “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 197–268.

returned to the father of psychoanalysis through his own structuralist perspective, influenced as he was by Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss, who respectively shaped the fields of linguistics and anthropology. From a more contemporary perspective, these readings were complemented by the works of Edward Said and Jacqueline Rose, two thinkers who have been deeply and intimately entangled with, affected by and engaged in writing about the question of Palestine and Israel throughout their lives—Said, as a scholar of comparative literature and a founder of post-colonial studies; Rose, as a literary critic and cultural theorist working through psychoanalysis.

Lacan enabled me not only to analyse my film through other films and vice versa, and to drift away from them, but more importantly to turn around the matter of the question: namely, to take this writing process as a way to delve into the matter and write towards what this thesis is about.¹³ My research thus

Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre V: Les Formations de l'inconscient*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998); translated as *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V: Formations of the Unconscious*, trans. Russell Grigg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

Sharon Sliwinski, *Dreaming in Dark Times: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

¹³ This engagement with Lacan draws in part on the filmed lecture *Jacques Lacan parle*, demonstrating Lacan's refusal to predetermine either the subject or form of address. The seminar was published as "Jacques Lacan, Conférence de Louvain," edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, with the note: "Texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller. Cette Conférence a été prononcée le 13 octobre 1972 à la Grande Rotonde de l'Université catholique de Louvain. Autant que je sache, elle a été filmée par la RTBF sans l'accord de Lacan." ("Text edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. This lecture was delivered on 13 October 1972, at the Grande Rotonde of the Catholic University of Louvain. As far as I know, it was filmed by RTBF without Lacan's consent.") The introduction by Jacques Schotte, Belgian psychoanalyst and Lacan's friend, was omitted in Miller's edition. Schotte stated, "Mesdames, mesdemoiselles, messieurs, je crois qu'en l'occurrence, ce serait à la fois trop peu et déjà trop dire que de s'en soumettre à la formule classique qui

follows an inverted method. Instead of starting with a question and building arguments towards a conclusion, it unfolds through a process of writing and thinking, accumulating observations, associations, speculations, facts and arguments. Rather than providing definitive answers, this essay—as this seems to be the form that the writing has taken—drifts into questions as they develop and unfold throughout the text. This mode of writing finds an early articulation in Michel de Montaigne’s *Essais* (1580), where philosophical reflection takes shape through digression, self-questioning and attention to lived experience, a form that re-emerges in modernity in the work of Walter Benjamin, before also becoming a specific form of filmmaking—the essay film—as practised by Chris Marker and others. The very name *essais* (“attempts” or “tests”) signals the exploratory character of the form, privileging intuition, analogy and personal reflection over systematic reasoning and closure. In other words, this text is not written to obtain systematic knowledge in some given form, but rather to disclose the process of its coming into being.

consisterait à vous dire qu’on ne présente pas Jacques Lacan. On le présente d’autant moins en l’occurrence que comme vous avez pu voir il a choisi selon son style, tout à fait justement comme on a vu sur les affiches, de parler sans déterminer d’avance, c’est-à-dire sans limiter d’avance son sujet et la manière, soit monologuante, soit dialoguante, qui l’allait utiliser pour le traiter.” (“Ladies and gentlemen, I believe that in this case, it would be both insufficient and excessive to resort to the classic formula of saying that Jacques Lacan needs no introduction. He needs no introduction, especially since, as you have seen, he has chosen, in his own style, as we saw on the posters, to speak without determining in advance, that is, without limiting in advance his subject and the manner, whether monologue or dialogue, in which he will treat it.”)

Jacques Lacan parle, directed by Françoise Wolff (Belgium: Radio-Télévision Belge Francophone—RTBF, 1972); see “Lacan—Conférence de Louvain—1972—Extraits,” posted on 1 March 2018 by Pas Tout Lacan, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfdyQZUJpRA>.

Jacques Lacan and Jacques-Alain Miller, “Jacques Lacan: Conférence de Louvain,” *La Cause du Désir* 96 (2017): 7–30, https://www.uclouvain.be/system/files/uclouvain_assetmanager/groups/cms-editors-laa/Louvain_1972.pdf.

Over the course of its becoming, this text has been structured above the line and below the line, as if working through different layers of the psyche. Above the line is composed of images and associations, and written in a more speculative and passionate way, while below the line is more factual and distant, consisting of all kinds of elements that underpin what appears above, thus creating a double reading—whether it be through descriptions or dialogues of film shots and sequences, quotations or interviews of filmmakers and writers, biographies, historical information, exhibitions, analytical texts, personal experiences, and references. The line between below and above is, like the mind, permeable, or semipermeable. At times, what lies below pushes upwards; at other times, everything is turned upside down in the process of writing, as though the very structure of this form coming into being were resisting itself—resistance understood, historically, as the struggle against injustice (colonialism, fascism, Nazism, and the like), but psychoanalytically as an obstacle, a blindness that prevents analysis.

While certainly triggered by my dreams, this writing is neither Lacanian, nor Freudian; in fact, it resists following any single theoretical line, instead drawing on certain concepts insofar as they prove useful. What is common throughout the thesis, however, is that the analysis emerges through a close reading, or rather a close looking at the film, or more precisely at the process of what has been the becoming of the film—a method in line with the principles and traits that are referred to as microhistory. In reaction to the grand narratives of the

twentieth century—such as Marxist theory, which explains historical, political, economic and social structures from a macro-level perspective—the Italian historians Carlo Ginzburg, Giovanni Levi and Edoardo Grendi developed, in the 1970s, a methodological shift towards the study of individual experiences, local histories, and the complexities of and contradictions and ambiguities inherent in reality, a movement that came to be known as microhistory.¹⁴ Ginzburg speaks of the clue as a tiny element that reveals a hidden reality, and of the evidential or conjunctural paradigm, a method based on interpreting marginal, minute

¹⁴ In his article “Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It,” Carlo Ginzburg traces the origins of the term back to the nineteenth century and across different continents. In Italy, he links the term *microstoria* to Primo Levi’s use of it in the conclusion of *The Periodic Table*: “The reader, at this point, will have realized for some time now that this is not a chemical treatise: my presumption does not reach so far—‘ma voix est faible, et même un peu profane.’ Nor is it an autobiography, save in the partial and symbolic limits in which every piece of writing is autobiographical, indeed every human work; but it is in some fashion a history. It is—or would have liked to be—a microhistory, the history of a trade and its defeats, victories, and miseries, such as everyone wants to tell when he feels close to concluding the arc of his career, and art ceases to be long.” Ginzburg’s own trajectory was shaped by a rejection of ethnocentrism and of the teleological thinking that had dominated nineteenth-century historiography. Historians of that era often relied on overarching frameworks—such as the rise of the nation state, the industrialisation of society and the belief in economic progress, the emergence of the bourgeoisie, and the so-called civilising mission of the white race—to impose both conceptual coherence and narrative unity on their accounts. “The rejection of ethnocentrism had brought me not to serial history but to its opposite: the minute analysis of a circumscribed documentation, tied to a person who was otherwise unknown.”

Carlo Ginzburg, “Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It,” *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (1993): 15, 21, 22.

Primo Levi, *The Periodic Table*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), 224.

The original Italian passage reads: “Il lettore, a questo punto, si sarà accorto da un pezzo che questo non è un trattato di chimica: la mia presunzione non giunge a tanto, ‘ma voix est faible, et même un peu profane.’ Non è neppure un’autobiografia, se non nei limiti parziali e simbolici in cui è un’autobiografia ogni scritto, anzi, ogni opera umana: ma storia in qualche modo è pure. È, o avrebbe voluto essere, una microstoria, la storia di un mestiere e delle sue sconfitte, vittorie e miserie, quale ognuno desidera raccontare quando sente prossimo a conchiudersi l’arco della propria carriera, e l’arte cessa di essere lunga.”

Primo Levi, *Il Sistema Periodico* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1975), 229.

clues to reconstruct larger structures.¹⁵ His focus on individuals, families and communities resonates strongly in my film, where the Palestinian National Liberation Movement is refracted through the lens of Hassan Al Balawi, the son of Fathi Al Balawi, one of the founders of the movement. Yet the forms of agency, contingency and complexity foregrounded by microhistory are also problematised when approached through a psychoanalytic reading—one that attempts to transpose concepts developed for the analysis of subjects that are oriented around repetition, drive and “the Real”¹⁶ onto the domain of collective and historical processes. The friction in the writing of this essay—and, by extension, probably also in its reading—lies therefore not only in the different dynamics of above the line and below the line, which function as two voices speaking simultaneously, but also in the tension between microhistorical approaches versus the grand structures and theories that seek to dominate and be pushed to the fore as if they were naturalised truths.

Although he was not a Freudian, but a Marxist, it is interesting to view Walter Benjamin’s approach through Hannah Arendt’s introduction to *Illuminations*, where she depicts him as “the most peculiar Marxist the movement has ever produced.” While he was deeply engaged with Marx’s historical materialism and explored how cultural artefacts and historical events reflect the social and economic contexts in which they emerged, Benjamin was far less interested in

¹⁵ Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

¹⁶ I refer here to Lacan’s concept of “the Real,” which both differs from and intersects with the question of the real in documentary filmmaking. Whereas documentary cinema claims a privileged relation to reality, Lacan’s “Real” designates the dimension that resist representation and symbolisation.

the derivative historical and philosophical theories and doctrines developed by Marx's followers, than in Marx's heuristic methodology itself: "What fascinated him about the matter was that the spirit and its material manifestation were so intimately connected that it seemed permissible to discover everywhere Baudelaire's *correspondances*, which clarified and illuminated one another if they were properly correlated, so that finally they would no longer require any interpretative or explanatory commentary." Benjamin's concern lay in tracing the correlations between seemingly disparate phenomena—from "a street scene, a speculation on the stock exchange, a poem, a thought"—linked by a hidden line that "enables the historian or philologist to recognize that they must all be placed in the same period."¹⁷ To elucidate Benjamin's methodology, Arendt concludes her introduction with the image of a pearl diver, who descends into the depths of the sea to retrieve those elements of the past that have sunken to the bottom, "not in order to resuscitate them as they once were or to contribute to the renewal of extinct ages," but to bring to the surface small pearls in which historical forces and processes crystallise into fragments of thought that she describes as "the rich and the strange," and according to Benjamin himself, "perhaps even as everlasting *Urphänomene*."¹⁸

What is at stake in my film ultimately constitutes both the central question and the driving force of this writing; the text delves into the material—thoughts and images alike—in order to see what crystallises from them. To avoid any misunderstanding, it must be said that the image of the pearl diver who sees

¹⁷ Hannah Arendt, "Introduction—Walter Benjamin: 1892–1940," in *Illuminations*, by Walter Benjamin, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 11–12.

¹⁸ Arendt, "Walter Benjamin: 1892–1940," in *Illuminations*, 50–51.

crystally clear when diving and, in a simple gesture of grace, brings images and thoughts up to the surface as pearls, seems somehow misleading in this context. Reflecting on the process of filming, I would rather depict myself as a blind man who is walking in a minefield of impossibilities and pitfalls, all the while being guided by a man who is burdened by the impossible promise and the unfulfilled dream of the liberation of his people. The liberation of a land that is continuously violated and taken by Israel despite the United Nations declarations and resolutions that have been made for three quarters of a century, as if a symbolic order is at work and inscribed in history as a law beyond all the ones we know and can call upon. However, it was through the editing process that the images—shot intuitively and thus, one might say, in a certain blindness—seemed to crystallise. Perhaps even more strongly, the intuition that led me to work with Al Balawi and to place him in the situation we created through filming appeared to crystallise during the selection and editing of the images and the writing of the text panels, through which the work ultimately took form. The film’s method thus moves between different forms of knowledge, between deliberate construction on the one hand, and blind intuition on the other—between erring without sight and insight.

Although Benjamin appears only very briefly at the end of my essay, he nevertheless proves key to the analysis of my film. Not only does he remind us of the messianic times we are reliving, as we witness the debris of Gaza piling up sky-high before our eyes—much as the Angel of History does in his “On the Concept of History”—but, more importantly, Benjamin provides the missing link between Lacan’s notion of symbolic structures and the filmmaker’s eye through his concept of “optical unconscious,” developed concisely in *The Work*

of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. In this seminal text, Benjamin suggests images made by the camera may bring to light dimensions of experience that go beyond conscious perception, and as such, open a space in which cinema can engage with latent symbolic structures and historical configurations. The so-called slips of the tongue or unnoticed or overlooked details that are exposed by the camera become significant later, as well as underlying patterns we are not aware of at first. We can think of the fold in Al Balawi's neck, exposed at length during the commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of Arafat's death, as seeming to encompass the burden and plight of Palestine and of all Palestinians; or of the moments when he loses his voice while visiting Arafat's adoptive children, when he cannot find the right direction to go at various moments in the film, exposing how lost Al Balawi is in his own land; or instances in which the camera lingers too long, exposing painful situations such as Al Balawi's encounter with Yael Dayan, an impossible conversation between two moderate voices that embodies the hopelessness of the situation and preludes the dead end of the film.

Besides serving as this missing link, Benjamin is also crucial for his interest in correspondence. In this spirit, my thesis brings together a wide range of sources and disciplines—spanning film, historical and political research, psychoanalysis and others—which are interwoven throughout the analysis. What emerges is a method of entanglement, a practice that resists disciplinary compartmentalisation as generally practised in academia. This research does not situate itself within the epistemic frameworks of film theory, political history, philosophy, or psychology; rather, it locates itself within the arts, where enquiry unfolds in the very act of writing—one that seeks to articulate both the

trajectory of my own thought and the immanent thinking of the work itself. Once set in motion, the work begins to take form as it follows its own laws and rules, inscribed from the very first gestures of its making—laws and rules that must be understood and listened to, even though they do not readily reveal themselves, as they are embedded in the material itself. It is in this sense that my method of seeking to disseminate the meaning that is found within the work’s own logic resonates with Magnus Bärtås’s concept of the “workstory”: “A work story is a written or oral narrative about the forming of materials, immaterial units, situations, relations, and social practices that constitutes, or leads to, an artwork. By discussing analogies between storytelling, collecting, and biographical accounts ... the work story is not only crucial for the understanding of the artwork but that the act of making and the very order or sequence in which the making proceeds often have symbolic, metaphorical, metonymical, political, and even epistemological meanings.”¹⁹ While this definition provides a useful point of departure, my method is slightly different: my writing doesn’t really concern all that happened during the process of creation, but rather the thoughts it provoked or resuscitated in the aftermath of the film’s completion, functioning as a kind of afterthought to the film—an appendix or postscript that has taken on a life of its own.

My writing concerns three dates in 2025: 18 February, 8 July and 6 October. Although these dates mark the beginning of the writing process for the three parts of this essay, and thus inscribe the writing process in time—making the

¹⁹ The Swedish term that Bärtås uses for *work story* is *verkberättelse*.

Magnus Bärtås, “You Told Me: Work Stories and Video Essays/Verkberättelser och videoessäer” (PhD diss., Valand School of Fine Arts, University of Gothenburg, 2010), abstract.

writing explicitly dated and part of history—this work does not take the form of a diary in the strict definition. Rather, it is a way of travelling in the footsteps of films, memories and biographies, and time itself. As such, this writing is the reflection, condensation and tracing of the images and thoughts in the aftermath of making the film; it marks the dreams I dreamt and the thoughts I thought in relation to the film and the historical events that were taking place, the news I was confronted with on a daily basis, the articles that were published or republished during that period, the books or the excerpts of books that I read and so on. Simultaneously, it was nurtured or challenged by other sources and ideas, in particular by the films that were in my mind for years and decades, as well as those I discovered during my research.

Perhaps it could not be otherwise, for this method of writing through the film aligns closely with the method of filming and the subsequent editing of its material. Just as these texts are dated and thus trace a performative process of writing through time, the filming was done on certain days: days where I took the camera and followed Al Balawi from the moment that he left the hotel in the morning until his return in the evening. In long takes, I filmed him from the back, looking over his shoulder at the scenes unfolding in front of us. Long performative acts that enabled me to not only enter the *coulisses* of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, in which he had lived all his life and to which he introduced us, but also, all the while keeping Al Balawi in the frame, to show him as he had to live up to his father's legacy as one of Fatah's founders: the fulfilment of his father's dream, the creation of an independent Palestinian state, which, if it wasn't clear from the beginning, after the signing of the Oslo peace agreement in 1994, turned out to be a false promise, an

illusion turned into disillusion. As such, twenty-five years later, in 2019, intentionally or not, we shot “the situation,” as the Palestinians call it themselves: the further occupation and annexation of Palestinian territories by Israel, the death knell of the two-state solution and the Oslo Accords. In short, the close filming of Al Balawi offered a glimpse of what has become of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah) and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), and how he, as a representative of the Palestinian Authority (PA) that emerged from these events and organisations, embodies—perhaps even symbolises—the impossible situation into which history has manoeuvred them, and him with them. This microhistorical analysis of Al Balawi—and with, or through, him the “situation” —was excavated from the material through long sessions of simultaneous translation followed by equally long editing sessions, assembling scenes into a form that, paradoxically or not, didn’t seem to find its purpose and its coming into being, as if the film resisted the very folds of history we were taken by.

The ambiguity transpired by the film material is revealed throughout the editing process, traversing not only Al Balawi and the historical legacy he carries in his body, but also myself, caught in the symbolic structures of the European with the camera on his shoulder and the European values he projects onto Palestine. Thus, the film not only documents Al Balawi’s journey in his homeland—as we literally follow his footsteps—but also a journey through the history of Palestine as seen through the eyes of the filmmakers: patterns that materialise in the depictions of the freedom fighters’ drills versus the Israeli military occupation; life in the refugee camps versus the continuous construction of Israeli colonies; the prisoners, the martyrs and their tombs; the wall and the passing (or not)

through the checkpoints; and the living memory of what has been lost, through chants and poems, flags and other symbols. These images are, among others, repeated over and over in the many films made about the Palestinian cause.²⁰ And some recur in my film; the choices that I made reflect my way of depicting Palestine, mirroring those predominantly European filmmakers who were also compelled to film the shattered dreams of Palestine, or the miracle of the return to Zion. Consciously or unconsciously, they reflected their own position, as if they were performing their own journey, the footsteps of the filmmakers, the traces they left behind in the images and the sounds they recorded—forms of resistance or expressions of indignation and condemnation, strategies or discourses of legitimisation and justification, modes or gestures of apology or denial, evidence of guilt and so on. All become part of the very symbolic structures of history they consciously or unconsciously sought to film, including my own film as well; even though my film attempts to comment on this history, to formulate its own perspective and distinguish itself, it cannot escape the very

²⁰ During my first research trip to Palestine in 2016, I met, among others, the Palestinian curator and filmmaker Reem Shilleh, who presented her film project *Perpetual Recurrences* in Ramallah. Her description of the project: “I consider myself as an interventionist who asks questions: What is memory? What are historical narratives? How are they established? How do they survive? ... I was interested in the Palestinian struggle between 1967 and 1982. It was a turning point in global politics. People were joining the struggle, a lot of filmmakers emerged, especially in the seventies. It was all about radical politics, a certain way to affiliate themselves to the struggle. ... They created their own images. They made films about themselves. But there was a certain pattern that was created, recreated, about what was Palestinian resistance. It established a memory. But I wanted to dig through to see what is left today. ... I did a lot of research and the first thing that caught my attention was the repetition of scenes from one movie to another. Something in these scenes holds together. One of the first themes I spotted was the classroom. You would be surprised to see how many Palestinian films about the revolution are set in a classroom. The editing work condenses the theme in order to make the obvious more obvious.”

Perpetual Recurrences, directed by Reem Shilleh (Palestine: Idioms Film, 2016).

Reem Shilleh, “There Is a Mythology About What Return Is,” interview by Hassina Mechaï, *Middle East Monitor*, 24 June 2017, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170624-there-is-a-mythology-about-what-return-is/>.

structures of which it is part. In fact, it could hardly have been otherwise. Working with Al Balawi—who was raised within the Information Department of the PLO—meant *de facto* working within the tradition of Fatah and the PLO, which brought foreign filmmakers and journalists to Palestine to expose the occupation and advocate for the Palestinian cause. Constrained by this format and the expectations it produces, it seems that the filmmaker—myself—is doomed to walk the same path as his predecessors, without ever fully being able to fulfil the task, which touches upon the underlying betrayal of Palestine by Europe.²¹ As matters are always more complex than one wishes or believes, the steps one makes are, of course, also very much determined by the path one has already traversed. In other words, the method is formed in relation to my own history. Like anybody else, I am formed by my own family and national history—my grandparents’ histories in particular, which I touch upon in the essay—and probably even more predominantly by my own aspirations, successes and defeats. All together, these form a constellation of elements that affect the way I make films, intentionally or not, consciously or unconsciously, perhaps indeed even more by default. One of those elements is the films I have seen, which, whether one wants it or not, have influenced my own methods and given form to my entangled relationship with Al Balawi through the mirroring, appropriation and alteration of the cinematographic methods found in the films discussed throughout the essay, or the artistic processes I was confronted with

²¹ In *Palestine: La Trahison européenne*, Stéphane Hessel and Véronique de Keyser argue that Europe bears a particular moral and political responsibility towards Palestine. They identify the Balfour Declaration of 1917 as the historical starting point of this responsibility and of Europe’s subsequent failure to uphold Palestinian rights. Issued by Britain, then the predominant European power, the declaration was implemented through the British Mandate, which facilitated the establishment of the Jewish National Home while failing to safeguard the political rights of the Palestinian Arab majority. After 1948, and especially after 1967, European states repeatedly failed to uphold international law and their own stated principles regarding the occupation of Palestinian territories.

Stéphane Hessel and Véronique de Keyser, *Palestine: La Trahison européenne* (Paris: Fayard, 2013).

when I was young. These include, for example, Claude Lanzmann and Marcel Ophüls, who have worked through the major traumas of the twentieth century—such as the Holocaust or the collaboration—by means of the camera, bringing their subjects back in time and to the sites of the crimes, while simultaneously inserting themselves into the scenes as the driving force in their perpetual search for truth.

Despite the apparent simplicity of its form, the film thus emerged through a complex assemblage of methods over time, in line with the entanglements and correspondences addressed—and indeed enacted—throughout the film. It addresses not only the political question of Palestine in 2019—the State of Palestine, the PA and its limited sovereignty versus the State of Israel and its absolute sovereignty—and the question of representation through the figure of Al Balawi, but also the question of Palestine’s long history of resistance and liberation, including its failure. This is embodied and remembered through lived experiences and appearances during Al Balawi’s encounters with the various actors of the Palestinian national movement,²² situated in different settings and landscapes marked by the legacy of past political commitments and their failed outcomes. It is through the interaction between memory and the present that a narrative of disillusionment, but also of continuity, emerges, reflecting how unresolved political questions continue to shape bodies, voices, and places.

²² During the shoot, Al Balawi referred more broadly to the Palestinian national movement as a whole, or to a Palestinian national consciousness, as we met with individuals from different factions of the PLO. In the film, however, most of the subjects belong to Fatah, the faction Al Balawi was born into and to which he continues to belong today. In this text, both formulations are used, as they overlap in Al Balawi’s personal trajectory.

Thinking this through, one can see the film and this written text (together) as one body of work, as work to be worked through, whether it be the work of resistance and justice, the work of mourning the dead and the loss, or simply the work of trying to understand all of it, historically, politically and psychoanalytically.

So far, I have explored the method of writing at length and, in bits and pieces, the method of filming, which is further explored throughout the essay, as I attempt to understand the film and the situation it depicts. In other words, the cinematographic lens functions as an analytical tool within both the writing and the film itself, for the situation and the people it depicts as much as for the one who films and writes through them.

18 February 2025

In a short period of time, I dreamt of Palestine twice.²³

I was there when the bombs were falling. I was running between the tall apartment blocks and the dusty streets, feeling the blasts coming nearer, chasing us, the dust blowing into the streets between the buildings that were still standing, when I woke up. The strange thing is that I didn't wake up in a panic, but that I was completely calm, perhaps even at peace, a sensation I cannot recall having had for quite some time. Since I woke up suddenly, I could still hear the sound of the scene, feel the dust on my skin and the spatial and visual sensation of being there. As I lay awake in bed, the clear-cut image of my dream puzzled me. Where was I when I was running away from the bombs? Like everybody else, I have seen the images of Gaza being bombed on a daily

²³ I didn't note the exact date of my dreams, but it must have been in October or November 2024, five years after shooting *Fierté nationale* in Palestine and Israel, and one year after Hamas's attack of 7 October 2023 and Israel's retaliation and destruction of Gaza.

basis for more than a year, but I have never been to Gaza, only to the West Bank. How could I have been there in my dream? Perhaps the dream was engendered by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in October²⁴ and the images of bombs falling and buildings collapsing in Beirut, or perhaps it was Tyre?²⁵ But I haven't been to either city. The closest that I have been to Lebanon is its border, which I saw from Kibbutz Manara on the Naftali mountain range when I visited Rachel Rabin, the sister of late Yitzhak Rabin, during my research trip in 2016. After visiting her house, we stood outside on the street and could see the border just down the road, in a valley, and on the other side, the houses of her Lebanese neighbours, whom she used to visit.²⁶ Perhaps I assembled the dream

²⁴ Israel invaded Lebanon on 1 October 2024, which took place after almost twelve months of conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, who joined Hamas after 7 October 2023, launching rockets into northern Israel and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. A ceasefire agreement between Lebanon and Israel was signed on 26 November 2024. However, Israel didn't withdraw from Lebanon as was agreed upon; its military forces continue to occupy Southern Lebanon to this day. More than a million people were internally displaced in Lebanon, while half a million fled to Syria. This invasion marked Israel's sixth invasion of Lebanon since the first one in 1978, followed by the invasions of 1982, 1993, 1996 and 2006.

²⁵ Tyre is one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world with many ancient sites, as a whole listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Israel's bombardment of Tyre on 23–25 October 2024 demolished multiple buildings, damaged archaeological sites, and caused mass evacuations, turning Tyre into what residents described as a "ghost town." Many of the two hundred thousand people that fled were Palestinian, as the city, being close to the Israeli border, hosts three of the twelve Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Most of the refugees come from northern Palestine, particularly Galilee, Acre, Haifa, Safad, and the surrounding areas, where Palestinian villages were depopulated during the Nakba, the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians by Zionists during the 1948 War. A much smaller number of refugees arrived after the Six-Day War in 1967, mainly those displaced from Palestinian camps in the West Bank and the Golan Heights. The camps also hosted some internally displaced people during the Lebanese Civil War and later conflicts (e.g., 1982 Israeli invasion). See, among others, "Israel Bombs Lebanon's Ancient City of Tyre," Al Jazeera, 24 October 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/10/24/israel-bombs-lebanons-ancient-city-of-tyre>; Sana Hammoudi, "Rashidiyya Refugee Camp," *Interactive Encyclopaedia of the Palestine Question*, accessed 18 February 2025, <https://www.palquest.org/en/highlight/30630/rashidiyya-refugee-camp>.

²⁶ Rachel Rabin talks about it to the journalist Uriel Levy in an interview for the weekly Israeli magazine *Davar: Workers, Society and Economy in Israel Since 1925*, on the occasion of the twenty-sixth

from spatial experiences or images from my time in Egypt, of downtown Cairo, or perhaps from streets and apartment blocks in Alexandria, which were cracked and collapsed by one of the many earthquakes that have hit the city?²⁷

Moreover, beyond its composition, what about its meaning? Was it the fulfilment of my wish to be there, to go and film in Palestine, despite all the warnings to leave the country while it was still possible?²⁸ Most importantly, despite my mother's warnings, who sensed my plan to complete this unfinished business, this unfinished film, by returning with Hassan Al Balawi to the place where he had first set foot on Palestinian soil, Gaza?²⁹ Or, more Freudian, as the

anniversary of her brother's assassination, 4 November 1995. The interview opens with a photograph of her with the border fence and the valley in the background; the journalist comments that she "casts a longing look down at the valleys of Lebanon, for a peace that never came to pass." Rachel Rabin moved to Kibbutz Manara just after the Independence War in 1948. She had to leave for the first time during the recent war in Southern Lebanon, October 2024, at one hundred years old.

Uriel Levy, "My Brother Yitzhak," *Davar: Workers, Society and Economy in Israel Since 1925*, 3 November 2021, <https://en.davar1.co.il/342970/>.

²⁷ Thinking it over, perhaps my dream was also constructed of the little back streets with their dense, tall apartment blocks that my fixer in the West Bank sometimes took when we wanted to pass Qalandiya refugee camp, in order to avoid the traffic around the checkpoint. These streets and apartment blocks are in Area C of the occupied territories, which is completely under Israeli military control. Thus, the PA has not built any civil structures and has not done any urban planning there, which has turned it into a concrete jungle, on top of the fact that it is a place with no law and order beyond Israel's military rule.

²⁸ Belgium cancelled all its flights to and from Israel, and the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged its citizens to leave the country after 7 October 2023. One year later, the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged its citizens to leave Lebanon in the wake of Israel's invasion and bombing of Southern Lebanon and the bombardment of certain neighbourhoods in Beirut, the Beqaa valley and other places in Lebanon.

²⁹ The warning of Hassan Al Balawi's mother to not enter and get stuck in Gaza at the end of *Fierté nationale* seems to be repeated in my mother's warning, five years later.

See *Fierté nationale*, 01:23:20:00 – 01:24:48:00.

dream fulfilment of my longing for a woman whom I once loved in Palestine? As an architect, she had been working on the preservation and restoration of Palestinian architecture, as a way to preserve what is still left of Palestine. Dreaming as the only way to reach and be with her in Palestine? Dreaming as the only way to preserve Palestine?

Let me first describe my second dream, a dream from which, contrary to the first one, I woke up in fear. I was at the lake, the sun high and strong, its light reflecting off the water, when some scary figure came towards me at high speed and talked to me in an incomprehensible language, vigorous and violent, almost robotic. Although I couldn't understand what the figure was saying, I could clearly understand the message. Get out, get away. Or you will die. Or, at least, that is how I understood it. There was something artificial in the language and in the figure itself, perhaps referring to the artificial intelligence warfare used by Israel against the Palestinians in Gaza.³⁰ It puzzled me that everything was

³⁰ The Israeli military integrated artificial intelligence systems into its operations in Gaza, one notable example being Habsora ("The Gospel"), an AI-driven algorithm designed to identify and prioritise bombing targets. This system—tested during the Gaza War in 2019 when we shot the film—creates a "factory-like" process for the selection of targets, which, compared to human control, multiplies the pace and scale of strikes.

See, among others, Harry Davies, Bethan McKernan and Dan Sabbagh, "The Gospel: How Israel Uses AI to Select Bombing Targets," *The Guardian*, 1 December 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/01/the-gospel-how-israel-uses-ai-to-select-bombing-targets>; Leila Katibah, "The Genocide Will Be Automated: Israel, AI, and the Future of War," *Middle East Research and Information Project* (MERIP), 16 October 2024, <https://merip.org/2024/10/the-genocide-will-be-automated-israel-ai-and-the-future-of-war/>; "Questions and Answers on Israeli Military's Use of Digital Tools in Gaza," Human Rights Watch, 10 September 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/10/questions-and-answers-israeli-militarys-use-digital-tools-gaza>.

happening on the lake, which is a clear reference to the Sea of Galilee and Jesus walking on the water. Perhaps we were not walking on the sea itself but on a small road built on the sea? It was out of focus, since all my concentration was on the quickly approaching figure and the threatening and commanding language that immediately followed its arrival. The biblical scene of the Sea of Galilee has always interested me. As a child, I had recurring dreams of elevation and flying, but not of walking on water, as Jesus did, at least as it was told through the writings of the apostles in the Bible. Moreover, I have never been to the Sea of Galilee. During my trips through Israel, I remember seeing the direction signs to get there, but I never made it to the water.

The biblical scene in question is wonderfully depicted by Pasolini in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, with Judas Iscariot, one of the disciples in disbelief of what they are seeing, saying “It’s a ghost!”³¹ Alternating between the faces of the disciples and zooming in on Jesus walking on the water, the scene culminates in Jesus responding, “It is I, fear not!” He then asks, “Why did you doubt?,” when Peter steps out of the boat and sinks but is then saved by the hand of Jesus, making it a parable of faith.³²

³¹ *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* [*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*], directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini (Italy: Arco Film; France: Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France, 1964).

Matthew 14:22–34.

³² The Italian wordings in the film are, respectively, “È un fantasma!”; “Sono io, non temere!”; “Perché hai dubitato?” The voices in the film are post-synchronised, which gives the spoken words an autonomous dimension, at once connected to the characters depicted in the film, as the voices are beautifully interpreted, and functioning as the biblical word that has been transmitted for two millennia and has now come down to us. Concerning the zoom shots, perhaps this effect was also transmitted in my dream, as the figure was coming towards me so quickly, just as Jesus is coming very quickly towards the disciples

Pasolini didn't shoot the film, nor the scene in question, in Palestine; he shot it in Southern Italy.³³ Images of the actual Sea of Galilee appear in his preparatory

through the cinematic technique of fast zoom in, drawing Jesus towards the disciples Peter and Judas Iscariot in one powerful camera movement. Pasolini, a Marxist and atheist, remarks that the miracle exists for the Italian peasants of the Mezzogiorno (who were his actors, from Southern Italy), as much as it existed for those of Palestine during the time of Jesus, challenging our scientific and objective vision of reality: "The miracle is the innocent and naïve explanation of the real mystery that inhabits man, of the power that hides itself in him. ... In *The Gospel*, on the one hand, the story is seen through my own eyes; on the other, it is seen through the eyes of a believer. But I lived in osmosis with this man of the people who believes. The two natures had merged. Yet in my opinion, there is a moment when the film falls, when the balance is broken, when Christ walks on the water. Then, there is an excess of the presence of the man who believes, there is no longer equality between him and me. This means that I did not know how to maintain the balance between myself and my character."

Pasolini commente son film, directed by Alain Bergala (France: CRÉRÉN-CNDP, L'Eden Cinéma, 2002).

In another interview, Pasolini comments on the cinematography of the film: "And then when I was shooting the baptism scene near Viterbo I threw over all my technical preconceptions. I started using the zoom, I used new camera movements, new frames which were not reverential, but almost documentary [combining] an almost classical severity with the moments that are almost Godardian, for example in the two trials of Christ shot like *cinéma vérité*. The point is that ... I, a non-believer, was telling the story through the eyes of a believer. The mixture at the narrative level produced the mixture stylistically." Quoted in John Wakeman, *World Film Directors*, vol. 2 (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1988), 746.

³³ Pasolini himself was born in 1922 in Bologna, in Northern Italy. His father, a lieutenant in the Royal Italian Army, was a Mussolini supporter and was involved in the attempted assassination of the Fascist leader in Bologna in 1926, when he apprehended the alleged assailant, Anteo Zamboni. Pasolini was murdered in Rome shortly after completing his most controversial film, *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* [*Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, 1975], which transposes de Sade's tale to the final days of the fascist Republic of Salò. The film is an unflinching reckoning with fascism, depicting it not merely as a political regime but as a system of dehumanisation, sexualised violence, and the destruction of individual will. See Millicent Marcus, *The Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

documentary film, which he shot in Palestine,³⁴ as well in Chris Marker's film *Description d'un combat*, which was shot in Israel a few years before Pasolini's take on the Holy Land.³⁵

In *Description d'un combat*, Marker makes a eulogy of the daily life of the young State of Israel in 1960, almost like in a dream.³⁶ Very early in the film,

³⁴ *Sopralluoghi in Palestina per il Vangelo secondo Matteo* [*Location Hunting in Palestine*], directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini (Italy: Arco Film, 1965).

Although Pasolini shot the documentary images in Israel and Jordan before he shot *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* in Italy, the documentary was edited and released the year after. Pasolini was at once disappointed by the modernised and industrialised landscapes that he found in Israel—we can see, for example, some hills with big rectangular building blocks on them—and inspired by the small size of the biblical land as he also found in Southern Italy for his film shoot, which formed his humanistic vision of *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*. Pasolini doesn't comment much on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, beyond simply showing the border that divided Jerusalem, between Israeli West Jerusalem and East-Jerusalem then under Jordanian rule. When searching for the sites and the actors for his film, he was more interested in the ancient architecture of the Arabs, Bedouins and Druze, and the proletarian faces from those populations inhabiting the Holy Land. The Sea of Galilee is present in the beginning of the film, as it seems to be important for him, coming back again towards the end, with a beautiful shot with a tree on the left side of the frame, and the sun reflecting off the lake's waves that recalls those of the scene in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, as well as those in my dream.

³⁵ *Description d'un combat* [*Third Side of the Coin*], directed by Chris Marker (France: Société de Production Artisanale Cinématographique [SOPAC]; Israel: Van Leer Productions, 1960).

³⁶ The film was shot in 1960, twelve years after the founding of the young State of Israel, proclaimed on 14 May 1948, by David Ben-Gurion, the head of the Jewish Agency. The opening text of the film reads:

“Nation élué, nation errante, nation martyre, nation resuscitée, Israël a connu le combat sous toutes ses formes. Il en découvre, aujourd'hui une nouvelle—le combat qu'un jeune État plein de forces doit mener contre lui-même pour rester fidèle, dans la victoire, à ce qui fut sa gloire dans l'oppression. Sous les images de la vie quotidienne en Israël, moins apparent que celui des armes, et peut-être le seul décisif.”

Chris Marker, *Commentaires I* (Paris: Aux Éditions du Seuil, 1961), 116.

(“Chosen nation, wandering nation, martyred nation, resurrected nation, Israel has known combat in all its forms. Today it discovers a new one—the combat that a young state full of strength must wage against

there is a shot of a young man standing in the waves of Lake Tiberias, as Marker calls the Sea of Galilee.³⁷ A bit later, the lake reappears as the backdrop for a procession of Sephardic Jews, who are celebrating a miraculous rabbi buried near the lake, asking him to grant them wishes, blessings and salvation.³⁸ While the beginning is very innocent and joyful, the atmosphere shifts halfway through the scene when the real sound is faded out and taken over by music. The erratic movements of the dancers holding the Torah scrolls evoke an uncanny sublimeness, which is accentuated by the many Israeli flags carried along the road next to Lake Tiberias, waving energetically as the trees sway in the wind rising over the lake. It takes on a biblical resonance, with the donkeys pulling carts in the procession and the small boats accompanying it from the lake's edge, a harbinger of the strong winds of history yet to come and to be overcome.

itself to remain faithful, in victory, to what was its glory in oppression. Under the images of daily life in Israel, less apparent than that of weapons, and perhaps the only decisive one.”)

³⁷ The Sea of Galilee is also called Lake Tiberias, or Lake Kinneret (אגם הכנרת) in Hebrew. Marker's text is read in a voice-over accompanying the images: “Les signes ont la vie brève ... et cet homme debout sur les flots, à Tibériade, ne doit plus y être. Les seuls signes durables sont sur l'écorce des arbres et sur la peau humaine.”

Marker, *Commentaires I*, 118.

(“Signs have a short life ... and this man standing on the waves, in Tiberias, must no longer be there. The only lasting signs are on the bark of trees and on human skin.”)

The young man in question is not walking on the waves of the Sea of Galilee, but rather standing on a barrel that is floating. In the next shot, we see the lake with trees in front of it on the shore, similar to Pasolini's shot of the young man, or boy, sitting on what now seems to be a rubber tyre floating on the water.

³⁸ Marker's text reads: “Un rabbin miraculeux est enterré près du lac de Tibériade. Chaque année, les Sefardim viennent en cortège célébrer ses mérites, et lui demander d'exaucer leurs vœux.”

Marker, *Commentaires I*, 120.

(“A miraculous rabbi is buried near Lake Tiberias. Every year, the Sephardim come in procession to celebrate his merits, and ask him to grant their wishes.”) It refers to Rabbi Meir, “Meir of the miracle,” a Jewish sage who lived in the second century CE.

Throughout the film, Marker carries us further and further into the recurring theme of dreams, miracles and nightmares: “Many dreams have been dreamt about the land of Galilee. Dreams of Messiahs, of Kingdoms, of miracles. Dreams of a land called Israel, where, against reason, against history, the people of shepherds to whom this land was once promised would gather. This country would come into existence, the dreamer would awaken there after a two-thousand-year sleep filled with nightmares, and cities would rise, like the desert sun, all at once. And the country exists.”³⁹

“Today, the miracle is organised,” Marker says about the transformation of the marshy lands around the lake by the kibbutz, in the desert or in the mountains.⁴⁰ Marker filmed in Manara, where Rachel Rabin leads the General Assembly. The kibbutzim were one of the new utopian forms of society that drove him to Israel to shoot the film. At the same time, he addresses that the kibbutzim are but a small community within Israel, just like the Arab community, “the thorn

³⁹ The original French version: “On a beaucoup rêvé, sur cette terre de Galilée. On y a rêvé de Messies, de Royaumes, de prodiges. On y a rêvé d’un pays qui s’appellerait Israël, où se rassemblerait, contre le bon sens, contre l’histoire, le peuple de bergers à qui cette terre un jour fut promise. Ce pays existerait, le rêveur s’y éveillerait après un sommeil de deux mille ans, peuplé de cauchemars, et des villes s’y lèveraient, comme le soleil du désert, d’un seul coup. Et le pays existe.”

Marker, *Commentaires 1*, 122–123.

⁴⁰ The sentence is written using a reflexive verb in French: “Aujourd’hui le miracle s’organise.”

Marker, *Commentaires 1*, 129.

in the flesh of Israel,”⁴¹ as he doesn’t fail to address, adding that “a border incident broke out last night” with the Arab neighbours, which, while watching the film, reminded me of my journey with Hassan Al Balawi to Israel, and more particularly the border with Gaza, while rockets were launched back and forth between Gaza and Israel.

⁴¹ The full sentence: “À l’autre bout de l’échelle, il y a aussi une minorité—celle en revanche qui est l’épine dans la chair d’Israël, qui donne mauvaise conscience aux meilleurs—la minorité arabe.” Marker, *Commentaires I*, 133.

(“At the other end of the scale, there is also a minority—the one that is the thorn in Israel’s side, who gives a guilty conscience to the best—the Arab minority.”)

Israel, Herzl's powerful dream,⁴² is the miracle born of the war and fulfilled in blood.⁴³

⁴² On the first page of his diaries, Theodor Herzl made the following statement while writing his book *Der Judenstaat*: "Ich arbeite seit einiger Zeit an einem Werk, das von unendlicher Größe ist. Ich weiß heute nicht, ob ich es ausführen werde. Es sieht aus wie ein mächtiger Traum. Aber seit Tagen und Wochen füllt es mich aus bis in die Bewusstlosigkeit hinein, begleitet mich überallhin, schwebt über meinen gewöhnlichen Gesprächen, blickt mir über die Schulter in die komisch kleine Journalistenarbeit, stört mich und berauscht mich. Was daraus wird, ist jetzt noch nicht zu ahnen."

Theodor Herzl, *Theodor Herzls Tagebücher, 1895–1904* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1922), 3, https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_-O4OAAAQAAJ/page/18/mode/2up.

("For some time past I have been occupied with a work of infinite grandeur. At the moment I do not know whether I shall carry it through. It looks like a mighty dream. But for days and weeks it has possessed me beyond the limits of consciousness; it accompanies me wherever I go, hovers behind my ordinary talk, looks over my shoulder at my comically trivial journalistic work, disturbs me and intoxicates me. It is still too early to surmise what will come of it.")

Theodor Herzl, *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, ed. Raphael Patai, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Herzl Press; Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), 1:3, [ia801800.us.archive.org/27/items/the-complete-diaries-of-theodor-herzl/The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl.pdf](https://ia801800.us.archive.org/27/items/the-complete-diaries-of-theodor-herzl/The%20Complete%20Diaries%20of%20Theodor%20Herzl.pdf).

⁴³ The following text accompanies images of the War of Independence: "Douze ans ... Israël naissait de la guerre, et la guerre naissait de l'imprévoyance. Herzl n'avait pas prévu que son utopie s'accomplirait dans le sang. L'Angleterre n'avait pas prévu que ses concessions ambiguës à un Foyer Juif amèneraient une nouvelle nation. L'Occident n'avait pas prévu que le Moyen-Orient cesserait un jour d'être sa station-service, et que les premiers occupants auraient leur mot à dire. Il est vrai que personne n'aurait prévu qu'un jour les États-Unis et l'Union Soviétique se trouveraient d'accord, à l'ONU, pour voter la naissance de l'État d'Israël—quitte à s'en laver les mains par la suite. Mais ce geste-là, la Bible l'avait prévu." Marker, *Commentaires I*, 136.

("Twelve years ... Israel was born of war, and war was born of improvidence. Herzl had not foreseen that his utopia would be fulfilled with blood. England had not foreseen that its ambiguous concessions to a Jewish homeland would lead to a new nation. The West had not foreseen that the Middle East would one day cease to be its gas station, and that the first occupants would have their say. It is true that no one would have foreseen that one day the United States and the Soviet Union would find themselves in agreement, at the UN, to vote for the birth of the State of Israel—even if it meant washing their hands of it afterwards. But the Bible had foreseen that gesture.")

It is only at the end of Marker's film that, along with the images of the War of Independence, the preceding reality of the concentration camps seeps in,⁴⁴ as an

⁴⁴ The beautiful images shot in 16mm colour film of the young State of Israel are contrasted at the end of the film with black-and-white images of Meyer Levin's film *The Illegals*, which was made in 1947 before the creation of Israel. The black-and-white images in question were shot by Bertrand Hesse from *Pathé Journal*, depicting a clandestine Haganah boat leaving the port of La Spezia, Italy, transporting Holocaust survivors on 16 December 1947. In a striking moment, the boat is intercepted by British war ships, which accompany the displaced people to the port of Haifa, only to then re-embark directly for Cyprus, where, a moment later in the film, we see images of concentration camps guarded by the British. This sequence evokes *Le Bateau de l'exile*, a film by the Lebanese filmmaker Jocelyne Saab, depicting Yasser Arafat's and the PLO's exodus from Beirut, Lebanon, 30 August 1982, on the cruise ship *Atlantis*, escorted by US Navy and French Navy ships, heading to Greece and then finally to Tunis. The evacuation of Yasser Arafat and the PLO was a US-brokered deal and overseen by United Nations Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar. The vessel in question was chartered by the Greek Ministry of Merchant Marines and flew both Greek and UN flags, intended to help assure the safety of the evacuees, as a precaution against Israeli aggression. Although completely different times and situations—we see Arafat and the highly trained senior military cadres of the PLO heading for another journey in their odyssey around the Middle East and the Mediterranean, while in the other case, we see a clandestine boat with Jewish refugees, who survived the Central European concentration camps, in a state of despair—it is the resemblance of the military vessels that escort or intercept both ships that triggers the idea of the inversed historical movement of refugees and their dispersal around the world. In total, fourteen thousand Palestinian fighters were evacuated, some of them to Cyprus, where Jewish Holocaust survivors had been living in camps for displaced persons after World War II; they had been trying to immigrate to Mandatory Palestine by ship from ports on the Mediterranean, but had been intercepted by the British naval and military forces and kept there in concentration camps. In 1939, the British government already implemented a policy limiting Jewish immigration to Mandatory Palestine, after a quarter of a million European Jews arrived, fleeing Nazism, and the rebellion of Palestine's Arab population between 1936 and 1939. After the war, the British government maintained its policy by allowing a maximum of fifteen thousand Jews per year to immigrate to Mandatory Palestine. There were twelve British concentration camps in Cyprus, which operated from mid-1946 to early 1949, when all its detainees, more than fifty thousand Jews, were shipped to the newly created State of Israel.

Le Bateau de l'exile [*The Ship of Exile*], directed by Jocelyne Saab (France: TF1 Production, 1982).

undercurrent, invisible and repressed, but at work.⁴⁵ Claude Lanzmann, in contrast, sets the tone straight away in his film *Pourquoi Israël*.⁴⁶ In the first moments of the film, Gert Granach, a German Jew who escaped from Nazi Germany to British Mandatory Palestine in 1936, plays the accordion and sings

Jocelyne Saab was born in Beirut into a Lebanese Maronite family. She directed several films on the Palestinian cause—which led to death threats from within her own community. Her commitment earned the trust of the PLO, who granted her the rare privilege of being the only reporter on board the *Atlantis*. Clarisse Fabre, “Jocelyne Saab, cinéaste libanaise et pionnière du cinéma documentaire au Proche-Orient, est morte,” *Le Monde*, 10 January 2019, https://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2019/01/10/jocelyne-saab-cineaste-libanaise-et-pionniere-du-cinema-documentaire-au-proche-orient-est-morte_5407203_3382.html.

As for Chris Marker, as a young man, he assisted Alain Resnais with the voice-over for his seminal film *Nuit et Brouillard* (1956), the first documentary on the concentration camps, shot at Auschwitz–Birkenau and Majdanek. *Description d'un combat* (1960) belongs to a group of films—together with *Letter from Siberia* (1957) and *¡Cuba Sí!* (1961)—in which Chris Marker expresses his sympathy towards and optimism for (emerging) socialist states. Although no definitive evidence or precise date exists, it appears that Marker later ceased distributing *Description d'un combat*, as he no longer identified with, or could agree with, Israeli state policies.

Nuit et Brouillard [*Night and Fog*], directed by Alain Resnais (France: Argos Films, 1956).

⁴⁵ Jacqueline Rose, *The Question of Zion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 137.

⁴⁶ *Pourquoi Israël* [*Israel, Why*], directed by Claude Lanzmann (France: Parafrance; Stephan Films, 1973).

Lanzmann shot the film in 1972, and it premiered at the New York Film Festival on 7 October 1973, coinciding with the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War (6–25 October 1973). Lanzmann was part of the editorial board of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir's journal *Les Temps modernes* and edited a thousand-page issue on the Israeli–Arab conflict on the occasion of the Six-Day War of 1967.

Les Temps modernes: Le Conflit israélo-arabe, special issue, no. 253 bis (July 1967), accessed 24 February 2025, <https://www.gallimard.fr/catalogue/les-temps-modernes/3260050603164>.

Pourquoi Israël was a reaction to some of his friends' anti-colonial stances on this issue. In an interview in 2007, he explains more concretely how he turned his back on the part of his life devoted to the anti-colonial struggle.

Claude Lanzmann, quoted in Stéphane Bou, “Entretien avec Claude Lanzmann: ‘Israël est un pays de guerre civile, mais le consensus est le plus fort ...,’” *Revue d'Histoire de la Shoah*, no. 195 (2011/2): 309–315, originally published in *Charlie Hebdo*, no. 785 (4 July 2007), <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-d-histoire-de-la-shoah-2011-2-page-309?lang=fr>.

International Brigades and Spartacist songs,⁴⁷ followed by images of Yad Vashem with a rabbi singing a Jewish prayer song for the Holocaust.⁴⁸ The scene cuts to the bone as the camera pans over the floor, where the names of the concentration camps are engraved—Auschwitz–Oświęcim, Mauthausen, Jasenovac, Klooga, Stutthof, Drancy, Lwów-Janowska, Bergen–Belsen, Dachau, etc.—and then enters the Hall of Names: six million names in binders on endless racks in one big room. More than three hours later, the film ends with the same scene in the Hall of Names, which Lanzmann had cut short at the beginning of the film: the archivist takes out a binder and starts to enumerate all the Lanzmanns who perished in the Shoah, until Lanzmann turns to the camera and says, “Cut!”⁴⁹ This is followed by Granach continuing to play his accordion and singing another Spartacist song, ending the film where it started.⁵⁰ Granach embodies his transportation through time and space even more powerfully throughout the film, animated by history itself and enacted with a feverish intensity, making the sounds of the trumpets and the drums; you can feel him

⁴⁷ Gert Granach is the son of Germany’s most famous Yiddish actor, Alexander Granach, who left for the United States with Lubitsch when Hitler came to power. The Spartacist songs were connected to the communist Spartacus League, commemorating the January 1919 uprising in Berlin and the murder of its leaders, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

⁴⁸ The Jewish prayer song for the Holocaust is called “El Malei Rachamim” (אֱלֹהֵי רַחֲמִים), which means “God, Full of Mercy.” It is a traditional Jewish memorial prayer (often recited at funerals and Yizkor services) that has been adapted specifically to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust.

“El Male Rachamim: Holocaust Memorial Prayer,” *Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMD)*, accessed 18 February 2025, https://www.hmd.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/el_male_rachamim_holocaust_memorial_prayer.pdf.

⁴⁹ Lanzmann says it in French: “Coupe.”

⁵⁰ The song in question, “*Brüder, zur Sonne, zur Freiheit*,” was originally a Russian revolutionary anthem, but was adapted into German by Hermann Scherchen in 1918. It became a key anthem of socialist and workers’ movements in Germany.

Eckhard John, “*Brüder, zur Sonne, zur Freiheit*,” *Populäre und traditionelle Lieder. Historisch-kritisches Liederlexikon* (April 2013), accessed 17 July 2026, https://www.lieder-archiv.de/brueder_zur_sonne_zur_freiheit-notenblatt_300532.html.

marching back in Berlin as if possessed by the past he lived in Berlin before the war, a past he now re-enacts in Jerusalem in the present.⁵¹ He seems to invoke everyone else who appears in the film, most strikingly the German Jews who Lanzmann depicts at an evening party, where the discussion of restitution and reparation flares from the mouths of bankers and other wealthy survivors, setting out Germany's, and Europe's guilt.⁵²

⁵¹ Granach sings "Die rote Front marschieret," a song that reflects the militant spirit of the communist movement in Germany. The situation may be approached through Freudian concepts of displacement, dislocation and anachronism. Granach is geographically and temporally exiled from himself, repetitively and compulsively re-enacting the past in the present, as a chain of distorted and displaced eruptions of his psyche through his body. Reliving the past in the present, either displaced or by returning to the site of crime, is a method that Lanzmann would use in his acclaimed masterpiece *Shoah*.

Shoah, directed by Claude Lanzmann (France: Les Films Alephs, 1985).

⁵² The scene in question starts with a statement by Dolf Michaelis (1906–1982), a German Zionist leader and one of the negotiators of the Haavara (Transfer) Agreement of 1933 between the Jewish Agency and Nazi Germany enabling sixty thousand Jews to flee from Germany to Mandatory Palestine: "You cannot forgive, not now, never, the murder of six million Jews. You cannot forgive, not now, or ever, the murder of one Jew. But what you can do, and what you can demand, and what the Germans agreed to do is to make restitution for what they stole from the Jews. This is what restitution is."

Recently, in 2020, Palestinian lawyers have been asking for reparations from Britain as part of a lawsuit that "lays the responsibility on the government of Britain for the consequences of the Balfour Promise, which gave Palestine as a national homeland to the Jews and enabled the Zionist gangs to occupy Palestine, and the consequences that stem from its behaviour that contradicts international rules, morals, and law."

Palestinian Media Watch, "Palestine Puts Britain on Trial Under the Charge That 'the British Mandate Bears Responsibility for the Crimes That the Zionist Movement Committed,'" *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida* (official PA daily), 23 October 2020, <https://palwatch.org/page/18471>.

The initial claims date from after the Nakba, when around 750,000 Palestinian Arabs were displaced during the 1948 war. The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 (1948) called for the return of refugees or compensation for those who chose not to return, but this resolution was rejected by Israel, arguing that Arab states refused to recognise Israel, and the situation remained unresolved. During the Oslo Accords (1993–1995), which acknowledged Palestinian self-rule in certain areas, the discussion on the right of return and property claims were postponed.

In Dimona, a city in the Negev desert,⁵³ Lanzmann films a ceremony commemorating its twinning with the German town of Andernach.⁵⁴ There, he meets local Sephardic Jews,⁵⁵ including Léon Roisch, curator of the Dimona Museum. Lanzmann manages to get Roisch to talk about how he, like all the others, was tricked into coming to a place that was not a place to begin with, by asking him bluntly, “Who made this false promise?” “Like always, the Jewish Agency delegates,” answers Roisch. He continues, “Lying is wrong. However ... to build the country, one had to fill it, and to fill it, one had to lie.”⁵⁶ This little lie to make the dream of Dimona come true, embodied and spoken by Léon Roisch, is mirrored by the bigger one, as the country was not empty when Jewish people from all over returned to the Promised Land. In short, the miracle was based on a lie.⁵⁷

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), “Resolution 194 (III): UN General Assembly Resolution on the Return and Compensation of Palestinian Refugees,” 11 December 1948, <https://www.unrwa.org/content/resolution-194>.

⁵³ The most southerly town in the Negev, which was founded in 1955, where Israel developed its nuclear programme.

⁵⁴ Andernach is one of the oldest cities in Germany, founded by the Romans in 12 BCE, located on the Rhine. In the scene in question, the mayor of Andernach’s discourse and body language reveal a sense of his guilt and his need of *Wiedergutmachung*.

⁵⁵ In the film, these are Sephardic Jews from France, Morocco and Tunisia. Lanzmann interviews *le papa de Dimona* (the old man of Dimona), who came with the first thirty-six families that arrived in 1955 in what was not yet a town, but the desert, and who says that he is very proud to be one of its founders: “Dans mon pays, je suis fière. Très très fière.”

⁵⁶ See *Pourquoi Israël*, Lanzmann.

⁵⁷ In “History of the Lie: Prolegomena,” Jacques Derrida examines how lies shape history and how narratives are created to make dreams come true. The lecture, originally titled “Histoire du mensonge: Prolégomènes,” was delivered in April 1997 at the Collège International de Philosophie in Paris, then

Lanzmann's first film, *Pourquoi Israël*, was preceded by Christian Ghazi's film *Resistance—Why*.⁵⁸ Their inverse-mirror titles, both without question marks, speak volumes.

Like many other militant films on the Palestinian cause, *Resistance—Why* starts with images of Palestinian fighters doing military drills.⁵⁹ After the reporter and spokesman Nabil Shaath starts his revolutionary speech,⁶⁰ the camera pans away

translated into English and published in the *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* that year. The French version was later published in the *Cahier de l'Herne: Jacques Derrida* in 2004, the year of Derrida's death. Derrida was born into a Sephardic Jewish family in French Algeria in 1930.

Jacques Derrida, "History of the Lie: Prolegomena," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 19/20, no. 2/1 (1997): 129–161.

Jacques Derrida, *Histoire du mensonge: Prolégomènes* (Paris: Galilée, 2012).

⁵⁸ *Resistance—Why*, Christian Ghazi (Lebanon: Fifth of June Society, 1971).

Christian Ghazi is a Lebanese filmmaker. *Resistance—Why* dates from 1971 and was recently rediscovered after it was considered to have been lost during the Lebanese Civil War in the 1980s. This experimental and militant documentary blends direct political interviews with avant-garde film techniques. The film was banned in Lebanon and faced censorship due to its explicit revolutionary stance.

"Resistance—Why," Palestine Film Institute, accessed 10 March 2025, <https://www.palestinefilmintstitute.org/en/pfp/archive/resistance-why>.

⁵⁹ In this case, preceded by images of a fair with children in a refugee camp in Lebanon, seamlessly followed by the military drills, which are an integral and foundational part of the activities in the camps.

⁶⁰ Nabil Shaath was born in 1938, in Jaffa, in Mandatory Palestine. His father, a school headmaster, was accused by British Mandate authorities of inciting unrest and forced into exile in 1947 to Alexandria, Egypt, prior to the Nakba of 1948, when around a hundred thousand Arabs fled Jaffa—many by sea. Shaath completed his studies in Alexandria and later earned a PhD in economics in the USA. He was a key representative of the PLO and an architect of its foreign policy in the 1970s and 1980s. He served as chief

and films young children watching the Palestinian fighters: “Fatah is a liberation movement. It is part of the Palestinian revolution, probably the backbone of the Palestinian revolution and therefore its aim is to liberate Palestine. So a new Palestine can be created, a Palestine that is democratic, secular, non-sectarian, progressive and military. The one Palestine is planned for. This new Palestine that we are fighting today to achieve is a Palestine that will allow all the Jews who live today in Palestine to become Palestinian citizens, as well as all the non-Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Arab Palestinians who have been exiled from the country, have been uprooted by Zionism, or those who live today oppressed under occupation. All of these will become the new citizens of the new Democratic Palestine.”

negotiator at the Oslo Accords (1993), and became a close adviser to Yasser Arafat and later Mahmoud Abbas, holding major posts in the PA in Gaza City, and Ramallah, where he continued his political and academic work until his death on 27 February 2025.

European Council on Foreign Relations, “Nabil Shaath (Fatah): Foreign Policy Adviser,” Mapping Palestinian Politics, accessed 30 March 2025,

https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_palestinian_politics/nabil_shaath_plc/.

William Booth, “Onetime Palestinian Peace Negotiator Goes Home to Jaffa—But Just for a Day,” *The Washington Post*, 15 May 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/a-onetime-palestinian-peace-negotiator-goes-home-to-jaffa---but-just-for-a-day/2015/05/15/1e054872-fa7d-11e4-a47c-e56f4db884ed_story.html.

Nabil Shaath, “The Oslo Agreement: An Interview with Nabil Shaath,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 23, no. 1 (Autumn 1993): 5–13, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2537854>.

Nabil Shaath, “Lettre ouverte à mes amis israéliens,” *Revue d’études palestiniennes*, no. 87 (Spring 2003): 10, <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-d-etudes-palestiniennes-2003-2-page-10?lang=fr>.

This is only the beginning of Shaath's voice-over, which is spread throughout the entire film.⁶¹ Later on, he explains that the Palestinian resistance movement's aim is to liberate Jews from Zionism, Arabs from reactionaries and Palestine from imperialism and colonialism.⁶² Besides the first images where we see him talk, he never comes back into the frame, but is always present through his voice-over. At the end, it is as if his voice has been interchanged with that of Yasser Arafat's,⁶³ as their voices are similar; or perhaps it is my imagination or am I dreaming? In any case, even if it was Arafat's voice, the words must have been mainly Shaath's, as he wrote most of Yasser Arafat's famous speech at the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York on 13 November 1974, with its powerful words and images. It addressed the Israeli delegation, whose

⁶¹ The parts with his voice-over are interspersed with comments by other Palestinian factions and spokesmen, including Ghassan Kanafani, Palestinian writer, journalist, and spokesman for the PFLP, a major Marxist-Leninist faction within the PLO; George Habash, founder and leader of the PFLP; Leila Khaled, member of the PFLP, known for her role in plane hijackings as part of Palestinian resistance tactics; and Jean Genet, the French writer and activist, known for his strong support of the Palestinian cause. The film also includes interviews with members of the Vietnamese resistance, Latin American revolutionary groups and European leftist movements, situating the Palestinian struggle within a global anti-colonial and anti-imperialist context. The film is predominantly spoken in English, which points to Ghazi's intention to reach an international audience.

See end credits of *Resistance—Why*, Ghazi.

⁶² See *Resistance—Why*, Ghazi.

⁶³ Yasser Arafat (born Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Qudwa al-Ḥusseini, Cairo, Egypt, 24 August 1929 – Clamart, France, 11 November 2004), popularly known as Abu Ammar, was the central figure of the Palestinian national movement. He studied engineering at Cairo University, where he served as president of the Palestinian Students' League from 1952 until his graduation in 1956. During a visit to Gaza in 1955, he met Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad), who led small groups of guerrillas in the Gaza Strip. In 1959, while working in Kuwait, Arafat co-founded Fatah with al-Wazir and other exiles. Fatah adopted armed struggle as its strategy, launching its first symbolic guerrilla operation on 31 December 1964, marking 1 January 1965 as the start of the modern Palestinian revolution. Arafat became and remained the chairman of the PLO, president of the State of Palestine, and president of the PA until his death on 11 November 2004. His funeral in Ramallah was attended by hundreds of thousands.

Interactive Encyclopaedia of the Palestine Question, "Yasir Arafat," accessed 15 March 2025, <https://www.palquest.org/en/biography/6562/yasir-arafat>.

members had walked out of the Assembly before Arafat started to speak⁶⁴ and therefore missed Arafat's dream for a peaceful future in Palestine's sacred land⁶⁵ and the famous gestures and phrase, "Today I have come bearing an olive

⁶⁴ "If we return now to the historical roots of our cause we do so because present at this very moment in our midst are those who, while they occupy our homes, as their cattle graze in our pastures, and as their hands pluck the fruit of our trees, claim at the same time that we are disembodied spirits, fictions without presence, without traditions or future."

United Nations General Assembly, "Palestine Question / Arafat Statement – GA Debate – Verbatim Record," Official Records, 29th Session, 2282nd Plenary Meeting, 13 November 1974, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-187769/>.

”وإذا كنا نعود إلى جذور قضيتنا، فلأنه ما زال بين الحاضرين هنا من يحتل بيوتنا ويرتع في حقولنا ويقطف ثمار أشجارنا ويدّعي أننا أشباح لا وجود لها ولا تراث ولا مستقبل.“

⁶⁵ This is the section where Arafat expresses the word *dream(s)* several times, which Shaath didn't use during his whole voice-off in the film: "I am a rebel and freedom is my cause. I know well that many of you present here today once stood in exactly the same resistance position as I now occupy and from which I must fight. You once had to convert dreams into reality through your struggle. Therefore, you must now share my dream. I think this is exactly why I can ask you now to help, as together we bring our dream out into a bright reality, our common dream for a peaceful future in Palestine's sacred land. ... So let us work together that my dream may be fulfilled, that I may return with my people out of exile, there in Palestine to live with this Jewish freedom fighter and his partners, with this Arab priest and his brothers, in one democratic State where Christian, Jew and Muslim live in justice, equality and fraternity. Is this not a noble dream worthy of my struggle alongside all lovers of freedom everywhere? For the most admirable dimension of this dream is that it is Palestinian, a dream from out of the land of peace, the land of martyrdom and heroism, and the land of history too."

”إنني ثائرٌ من أجل الحرية، وأعرف أن كثيرين من الجالسين في هذه القاعة كانوا في مثل هذه المواقع النضالية التي أقاتل منها الآن، وقد استطاعوا من خلال نضالهم أن يحولوا أحلامهم إلى حقائق. إنهم شركائي في الحلم إذن، من هنا أسألهم أن نمضي معًا في تحويل الحلم المشترك بمستقبل السلام في هذه الأرض الفلسطينية المقدسة إلى حقائق ساطعة.. فلماذا لا أحلم، يا سيادة الرئيس، وآمل؟ أليست الثورة هي صناعة تحقيق الأحلام والآمال؟ فلنعمل معًا على تحقيق الحلم في أن أعود مع شعبي من منفاه، لأعيش مع هذا المناضل اليهودي ورفاقه، ومع هذا المناضل الراهب المسيحي وإخوانه، في ظل دولة واحدة ديمقراطية، يعيش فيها المسيحي واليهودي والمسلم في كنف المساواة والعدل والإخاء. ألا يستحق هذا الهدف الإنساني النبيل أن أناضل من أجل تحقيقه مع كل الشرفاء في العالم؟ ولعل أروع ما في هذا الحلم أنه من أجل فلسطين، أرض القداسة والسلام، أرض الاستشهاد والبطولة.“

Yasser Arafat, "Speech Before the United Nations General Assembly," Palestine Red Crescent Society, accessed 9 March 2025, https://www.prc.ps/uc_files/download/app_files/wp-uploads/2018/04/%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-

branch and a freedom fighter's gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand. I repeat: do not let the olive branch fall from my hand. War flares up in Palestine, and yet it is in Palestine that peace will be born.”⁶⁶

The circumstances of the writing of this speech, its performance and the question of armed struggle versus the first gesture towards peace with Israel was the subject of the first interview that Al Balawi did when we set foot in Palestine in October 2019.⁶⁷ Although we had to stop the interview because Shaath didn't feel well, I see it as an important first encounter for our film—one that traces the two-decade-long struggle of the PLO to finally meet the Israelis face-to-face and engage in peace talks. This process culminated in the Oslo Accords of 1993, and the decades that came after the PLO's return to Palestine, marked by all the delusions and dead ends of the post-Oslo era, of which we bore witness, at least in its later phase. Moreover, I was struck by the mirroring in time of Al Balawi and a young Shaath, as he appears on screen in suit and tie in *Resistance—Why*, just as Al Balawi is dressed in *Fierté nationale*, playing multiple roles at once: the journalist and diplomat who brings a foreign crew to Palestine to expose and condemn the Israeli occupation and thus help the

%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A9-
%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%85-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%A9-
.pdf?vsig=733f025c314b815505a61664262e7523.

⁶⁶ These words are the final lines of the speech. They were originally part of the discourse elsewhere, but were placed at the end by Mahmoud Darwish to underline its poetic and symbolic gesture of an opening towards peace.

”لقد جئناكم، يا سيادة الرئيس، بغصن الزيتون مع بندقية تائر؛ فلا تُسقطوا الغصن الأخضر من يدي، لا تُسقطوا الغصن الأخضر من يدي.
سيادة الرئيس، الحرب تندلع من فلسطين، والسلام يبدأ من فلسطين.”

⁶⁷ The interview was done on 8 October 2019, Ramallah, Palestine, in Nabil Shaath's office.

Palestinian cause.⁶⁸ However, as the camera keeps Al Balawi in the frame—unlike Ghazi’s film treats Shaath—my film increasingly centres on him, the son of one of the founding members of Fatah and the PLO,⁶⁹ while at the same time, he is, just as any other Palestinian, subject to Israel’s subjugation, its regime of domination and humiliation, occupation and colonisation, violence and death, when he sets foot on its soil.

Fierté nationale starts with Al Balawi running into a scene where aspiring soldiers of the Al-Istiqlal University in Jericho are raising and saluting the flag.⁷⁰ Al Balawi then marches in front of the soldiers and at their pace, his soft, somewhat shapeless physique and loose-fitting suit contrasting with the toned, uniformed bodies of the recruits, and then listens to the university’s nationalistic anthem as sung by them, while the camera seeks out the different groups responding to each other. It is remarkable that the aspiring soldiers wear

⁶⁸ This practice goes back to 1968, when “a small group of Palestinians in Amman, Jordan, came together to photograph and film the Palestinian political and military activities taking place around them.

Associated with Fatah, the largest of the Palestinian militant organizations at that time, they formed a film unit that continued to produce films until the exodus of the PLO from Beirut in 1982.” Other political factions, such as the PFLP and the DFLP, also created their cinema cells and were centralised by the PLO under the Palestinian Cinema Institution (PCI) to make films about the unfolding Palestinian revolution. The PCI actively collaborated with foreign filmmakers in order to internationalise the Palestinian cause, particularly those from leftist and anti-colonial movements, to create films that could reach global audiences.

Nadia Yaqub, *Palestinian Cinema in the Days of Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 1.

⁶⁹ See introductory text in the first scene of *Fierté nationale*, constructed out of conversations with Hassan Al Balawi. *Fierté nationale*, 00:02:30:00 – 00:03:37:00.

⁷⁰ This procedure refers both to the flag of Palestine and to that of the Al-Istiqlal University, the PA’s security academy. *Istiqlal* means “independence” in Arabic, hence the name Independence University, أكاديمية الاستقلال.

small laptop bags and carry no arms. The only weapons we see are wooden rifles shouldered by the five soldiers accompanying the raising of the flag, indeed turning them into *soldats de bois*.⁷¹

At the university, Al Balawi interviews General Tawfiq, who remained faithful to Yasser Arafat until the end.⁷² Tawfiq introduces him to a young soldier, to whom Al Balawi asks where the armed struggle has brought the Palestinian cause today, but she doesn't know how to answer. One of her colleagues whispers in her ear the slogan "What has been taken by force ...," which she incorrectly completes as "What has been taken by force, shall not be reconquered by force." After being corrected by Al Balawi, "... shall be reconquered by force,"⁷³ she burst out a poem that she wrote in honour of her father, who was imprisoned for seventeen years by occupying Israel, a

⁷¹ French for "toy soldiers," referring to small wooden figurines used as children's toys.

See *Fierté nationale*, 00:03:10:00 – 00:03:50:00.

⁷² General Tawfiq defended Arafat throughout the siege of the Muqata in Ramallah by the Israel Defence Forces, from March 2002 until his evacuation to a French hospital in October 2004, after which the Palestinian leader soon died. According to Terje Rød-Larsen, one of the architects of the Oslo Accords, this siege and the destruction of the Muqata marked "the beginning of the death of the two-state solution"—effectively dismantling the Palestinian state in the making. General Tawfiq had been condemned for being an Arafatist by the Syrian regime after the PLO's departure from Beirut in 1982 and imprisoned in Damascus for a decade, before being released in the early 1990s and returning to Palestine after the Oslo Accords.

See *Fierté nationale*, 00:08:25:00 – 00:13:00:00.

⁷³

– إنَّ مَا أُخِذَ بِالْقُوَّةِ لَا يُسْتَرَدُّ بِالْقُوَّةِ
– إِلَّا بِالْقُوَّةِ.

One can ask if she misquoted the sentence because of the fear of saying something she was not supposed to say, out of the fear of being disloyal to the PA she serves, or to the Palestinian revolution at large?

nationalistic poem that shifts from lamentation to resistance, and from theological invocation to revolutionary prophecy:

“I am the poem.

I am the poem written for the prisoner.

My words hold shame and they are scattered in my memory.

Tears flow at the sound of the words I used to describe it. Enough is enough, my soul suffers, my scars bleed and my eyes overflow.

My tears flow at the mention of the hero.

Prisoner, you make me proud, and I bow my head when I say your name.

Teach them, teach them the meaning of the word heroism.

Teach them, teach them that you should never betray an oath.

You are a knight. You are a knight on a steed riding towards what is right.

I beg you, hero, to forget all your past suffering.

I promise we will get our revenge, no matter how long it takes.

I promise Almighty God,

He who protected Jonah in the belly of the whale, that the revolution of the prisoners will happen and freedom will shine forth.

And they will seek refuge in their shelters.

Stay in your burrows.”⁷⁴

⁷⁴ See *Fierté nationale*, 00:13:21:00 – 00:16:30:00.

It is General Tawfiq who introduces her by asking if her father was imprisoned for seventeen years, which she confirms. The poem is spoken in Arabic:

”أنا القصيدة
أنا القصيدة اللي نظمّت كرمال الأسير
خجلت حروفي، تبعثرت من ذكرته فيها
حتى نزل الدمع، من كلمات اللي ما تحلّي وصفته فيها
خلص مكفي تعذبت روجي
تفتّحت جروحي من بكا عيوني
تنزل دموعي من أذكر البطل
يا أسير تعظّم شموخي من عزتك

Shaath's ongoing voice-over in *Resistance—Why* reminds us that it was the Israelis who pushed Palestinians into the sea and not the other way around,⁷⁵ juxtaposed with images of Israeli fighter jets violently flying through the skies, subjugating the land and denying its people their sovereignty.⁷⁶ The Israeli fighter jets are part of almost every militant Palestinian film, but especially

أندي جيبني من أذكرك
علمهم، علمهم كيف البطولة تكون
علمهم، علمهم أن القسم، هو القسم أبداً ما تخون
يا فارس، يا فارس، على الخيال شد السرج وسار
أرجاك، أرجاك يا بطل تنسى كل العذاب اللي صار
أو عدك، أو عدك ننتقم منهم مهما الزمن لف ودار
قسماً بربّ العزة والجبروت، قسماً بمن حمى يونس في بطن الحوت
ستقام ثورة الأسرى
وستشرق شمس الحرية
وسيهربو إلى ملاجئهم
التزموا جحوركم.

After the poem, Al Balawi claps his hands and comments, “Excellent. That was beautiful. You make us proud. God bless you.”

“ممتاز، ممتاز كثير جميل، بيرفع الرأس.”

⁷⁵ See *Resistance Why*, Ghazi.

⁷⁶ For a concrete illustration of the idea of sovereignty among Israeli settlers, see an interview with Daniella Weiss, one of the founders of Kedumim, an illegal settlement under international law, in the West Bank where she is a neighbour of Bezalel Smotrich, leader of the National Religious Party–Religious Zionism Party, minister of finance and minister in Defence Ministry from 2022 on. Weiss argues that Palestinians should accept the fact that in the Land of Israel and in the State of Israel, there is only one sovereign, the Jews, and that the Palestinians can live in Israel if they accept their sovereignty, but have no right to vote in the Knesset elections.

Isaac Chotiner, “The Extreme Ambitions of West Bank Settlers,” *The New Yorker*, 11 November 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/the-extreme-ambitions-of-west-bank-settlers>.

Claude Lanzmann's *Tsahal*,⁷⁷ in which Israel's building up of its military strength with tanks and fighter jets is filmed at length, in particular the dream and practice of becoming a fighter-jet pilot, depicted when Lanzmann visits the Israeli Air Force Flight Academy and gets into the mind of one of the trainees who doesn't pass the exam and sees his dream shattered, but "will be a star," in Lanzmann's words.⁷⁸

While the opening scene at the Al-Istiqlal University is undoubtedly indebted to Lanzmann's film, *Fierté nationale* ultimately takes a deconstructive approach, as there are no Palestinian tanks or fighter jets to be showcased with pride, nor are there any Israeli tanks or fighter jets shown to depict the military occupation of the West Bank. However, as Al Balawi attends the commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of Yasser Arafat's death, completely surrounded by the

⁷⁷ After Claude Lanzmann had directed *Shoah*, his nine-hour-and-twenty-six-minute-long film on the destruction of the Jews in Europe, he was asked by Israeli President Chaim Weizmann to make a film on the War of Independence. Lanzmann responded that it would be impossible for him to make this film, as there are two sides of the story, those of Israel and Palestine, and that he couldn't cover the Palestinian side. However, he proposed to make a film on *Tzahal* (צה"ל), because without the *Tsava ha-Haganah le-Yisra'el* (צה"ל, the Israel Defence Forces, IDF) "the question of peace between Israel and its former enemies would never have arisen: Israel would no longer exist." Yitzhak Rabin, then Israeli defence minister, said to Claude Lanzmann in 1987, "We do not have a shekel to offer you, but I put the army at your disposal; we will not hide anything from you, it will open its secrets to you."

"*Tsahal*," Claude Lanzmann's official website, accessed 11 March 2025, <https://en.claude-lanzmann.com/film/tsahal>.

Tsahal, directed by Claude Lanzmann (France: Les Films Aleph/Les Productions Dussart, 1994).

For *Tzahal*, see Israel Defence Forces (IDF), accessed 17 March 2025, <https://www.idf.il/en/>.

⁷⁸ See *Tsahal*, Lanzmann. In the sequence, Lanzmann attends the Israeli Air Force Flight Academy (Kurs Tais, קורס טיס) at Hatzerim Airbase, near Be'er Sheva (באר שבע) located in the heart of the Negev desert in southern Israel. The officer in question is called Adi Gan.

masses gathered to pay tribute at Arafat's tomb, their collective attention—focused on the speech of Mahmoud Abbas, president of the PA⁷⁹—is suddenly interrupted by the sound of two Israeli fighter jets soaring overhead, making them look up into the sky in search of the source.⁸⁰ As a matter of fact, the Israeli military occupation is hardly visible throughout the film. We don't see how Jericho, where Al Balawi first sets foot at the Al-Istiqlal University, is an enclave completely surrounded by Israeli military territory.⁸¹ Nor do we see the Beit El colony and its military base just outside of Ramallah, where Al Balawi gets his permit to enter Israel for a couple of days, as its view is blocked by a wall he drives by.⁸² Nor do we see the Israeli jets flying overhead, however one

⁷⁹ Mahmoud Abbas was born in 1939, in Safed, today in Israel. Also known as Abu Mazen, he succeeded Yasser Arafat as president of the PA in 2004, and has served as chairman of the PLO and of Fatah since 2009. A founding member of Fatah in 1959, Abbas earned a PhD in history in Moscow on the relationship between Nazism and Zionism, a work criticised for alleged Holocaust revisionism. Closely involved in the Oslo peace process and an advocate of the two-state solution, Abbas has ruled the PA by presidential decree since 2007, following the split with Hamas that left the PA controlling the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza.

Encyclopedia Britannica, "Mahmoud Abbas," accessed 10 August 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mahmoud-Abbas>.

⁸⁰ See *Fierté nationale*, 00:31:31:00 – 00:31:48:00.

⁸¹ In Area C, which comprises 60% of the West Bank, the Israeli military maintains full civil and security control. Around five hundred thousand Israeli settlers, residing in settlements considered illegal under international law, live alongside approximately three hundred thousand Palestinians in the area. While settlements continue to expand onto privately owned Palestinian land, Israel's Civil Administration—the military body overseeing the occupation—restricts Palestinian construction in the area.

Jonathan Kuttab, "Israel Is Almost Done Absorbing Area C of the Occupied West Bank," Arab Center Washington DC, 28 October 2021, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/israel-is-almost-done-absorbing-area-c-of-the-occupied-west-bank/>.

⁸² The Beit El colony, "The House of God" (בית אל), is situated northeast of Al-Bireh, adjacent to Ramallah. It was founded in 1977–1978 by the ultra-nationalist group Gush Emunim; today, it is populated by more than six thousand mainly orthodox Jews, constituted by a diverse group of immigrants from countries such as India, Peru, Ethiopia and Russia. The settlement hosts the headquarters of the IDF's 887th Judea and Samaria Division, which is responsible for military operations in the West Bank. Additionally, the Civil Administration, the branch of the Israeli military governing civilian affairs in the

can hear them off-screen, making them present: not visible, but tangible and therefore not less oppressive for the Palestinian masses that are driven towards Arafat's grave at the Muqata. The setting is symbolic: it is the location where Arafat was beleaguered for more than two years and his last refuge;⁸³ it also

occupied territories, operates from Beit El. Beit El is where the biblical patriarch Jacob had his dream of a ladder leading towards Heaven during his flight from his brother Esau, as described in the Book of Genesis.

Gen. 28:10–19.

⁸³ The Muqata in Ramallah is one of the approximately eighty Tegart forts that were built during the British Mandate for Palestine period. These fortified police stations were constructed to suppress the Great Arab Revolt (1936–1939) and later to control Jewish paramilitary groups. The forts were named after Sir Charles Tegart, a British colonial security expert who designed them based on his experience in British India. After the British left in 1948, the Muqata was used by the Jordanians and taken over by Israel as its military headquarters when it occupied the West Bank in 1967 until the establishment of the PA in 1994. It then became Arafat's official headquarters in the West Bank in 1996, known as "Arafat's compound."

Hassan Al Balawi attended the site on the fifteenth anniversary of Arafat's death, where he salutes and prays at Arafat's grave.

See *Fierté nationale*, 00:33:40:00 – 00:34:47:00.

The inscription on Yasser Arafat's tomb reads:

”بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَنْ يُقْتَلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتٌ بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ.
هَذَا يُسَجَّى جَثْمَانُ الرَّئِيسِ الرَّاحِلِ الشَّهِيدِ يَاسِرِ عَرَافَاتِ
الَّذِي وُلِدَ فِي ٤/٨/١٩٢٩ هـ
وَأَسْتَشْهِدَ فِي ١١/١١/٢٠٠٤ الْمَوَافِقِ ٢٨ / ٩ / ١٤٢٥ هـ
لِرُوحِهِ الطَّاهِرَةِ السَّلَامَ، الْفَاتِحَةُ.”

(“In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

‘O believers, seek support in patience and in prayer. God is with those who endure.

Do not call those killed in God's way “dead”; they are alive, though you do not sense it.’

Here lies the body of the late president, the martyr Yasser Arafat.

Born on 4/8/1929,

Killed on 11/11/2004 corresponding to 28/9/1425 AH

Peace to his pure soul.

Al-Fātiḥa.”)

John Cahill, “The Tegart Police Fortresses in British Mandate Palestine,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 75 (Autumn 2016): 53–70, https://www.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/jq-articles/Pages_from_JQ_75_-_Cahill.pdf.

represents the gradual occupation, colonisation and de facto annexation of Palestinian territory, accomplished by Israel driving Palestinians out of their territory in the West Bank and concentrating them in isolated towns.⁸⁴ When Al Balawi passes the Qalandiya checkpoint the day after Arafat's commemoration,⁸⁵ the Israeli soldiers are also visually absent, but made all the

Samir Harb, "Ramallah's Mukataa: Architectural Colonial Object," *The Funambulist*, 8 June 2017, <https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/06-object-politics/ramallahs-mukataa-architectural-colonial-object-samir-harb>.

⁸⁴ Ahmad Ezzeddin As'ad, "Barriers, Closures and Restrictions on Movement in the West Bank Following October 7," Institute for Palestine Studies, 2023, <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1654908>. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Fact Sheet: Movement and Access in the West Bank, September 2024," 25 September 2024, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/fact-sheet-movement-and-access-west-bank-september-2024-0>.

⁸⁵ Following the Oslo Accords in 1993, Israel established checkpoints to control the movement of Palestinians to and from the ever-changing frontiers of the State of Israel. These checkpoints control Palestinian mobility, forming what has been described by the scholar Salim Tamari as "a total regime of movement." Established Under the pretext of maintaining Israel's security, the checkpoints are officially justified as temporary measures in response to "terrorist threats" by Palestinians, yet, despite their so-called temporary nature, they have persisted in many forms since the 1990s. Checkpoints vary from simple "flying checkpoints" to massive, permanent installations. Qalandiya has undergone all the stages; by 2019, it had become the principal checkpoint separating the northern West Bank from Jerusalem, processing an average of twenty-six thousand Palestinians daily by foot, car or bus, mainly East Jerusalem residents and West Bank citizens holding special-entry permits. For Palestinians who grew up before the 1967 war, Qalandiya evokes the "golden days" of the 1960s, when the nearby Jerusalem Airport—commonly called Qalandiya Airport—linked the city to Cairo, Beirut, Damascus and beyond. After 2000, this checkpoint was transformed into a heavily militarised crossing by the construction of the West Bank wall and associated "border controls," becoming a site emblematic of Palestinian restriction and exclusion from Jerusalem. The checkpoint is today officially referred to by Israel as the "Atarot Crossing" (מעבר עטרות). Reem Shraydeh, "The Politics of Power Around Qalandiya Checkpoint: Deconstructing the Prism of Im/mobility, Space, Time for Palestinian Commuters," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 88 (Autumn 2021): 65–81, <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1652283>; Salim Tamari, "Qalandiya: Jerusalem's Tattered Frontier," Institute for Palestine Studies, *Jerusalem Quarterly* 79 (Spring 2019): <https://www.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/jq-articles/The%20Politics%20of%20Power%20around%20Qalandiya%20Checkpoint.pdf>; <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1649526>.

more present by a comment made by his driver, Aisha Barghouti-Saifi,⁸⁶ after correcting Al Balawi when he steps out of the car and heads in the wrong direction, looking for the entrance for Palestinians—separate from that for Israelis and Europeans—to pass the checkpoint: “They will shoot him if he goes there.”⁸⁷

Passing the checkpoint is not only a physical passing, but also and perhaps foremost a psychological passing. This is already embodied when Al Balawi comes out of the civil administration office of the Beit El colony, his permit to go to Israel in his hands, in disbelief that he got it, but also perhaps realising what it means to go there now that he has permission. We are left in suspense until the next day, when he actually drives towards the checkpoint and tries to understand the details of the permit, discussing them with his driver, embodying his rising uncertainty, weakening resolve and fear about what is going to happen.⁸⁸ Of course, as a Palestinian, one can be shot in the territories at the various checkpoints and blockades or during raids by the Israeli military or armed colonisers just as much as in Israel itself, and as such the fear of death is all around. Moreover, as we learn from the text that scrolls over the screen, it is

⁸⁶ Aisha Barghouti-Saifi is a Palestinian citizen of Israel, which enabled her to drive us in a car with an Israeli licence plate from Ramallah through the Qalandiya checkpoint into Israel. She is part of the well-known Palestinian Barghouti family.

⁸⁷ See *Fierté nationale*, 00:55:27:00 – 00:56:57:00.

Indeed, by crossing the checkpoint, Al Balawi could have been shot. One night during filming in the West Bank, while returning from Hebron to Ramallah, Al Balawi mistakenly took a wrong turn. Realising he was approaching an Israeli settlement, he panicked, commenting that “we could be killed.”

⁸⁸ See *Fierté nationale*, 00:52:16:00 – 00:55:26:00.

his first visit to the State of Israel.⁸⁹ Beyond the fear of death, there is the fear of what Israel is and represents, what Al Balawi and the Palestinians at large imagine or construct it is and represents: first and foremost, that it is the enemy who has taken and continues to take their land, break their bones⁹⁰ and slaughter their children, or perhaps also something completely different and unknown.⁹¹

Crossing the checkpoint and stepping into Israeli territory can be (seen as) an act of resistance, for example, Al Balawi's wearing of, as small as it is, a Palestinian flag pin on his lapel. However, it can also be (seen as, and therefore

⁸⁹ Most probably, following 7 October 2023, he will never set foot in Israel again, as he is unlikely to obtain a permit. It is just as doubtful that Al Balawi would wish to return.

⁹⁰ During the First Intifada, Yitzhak Rabin, at that time minister of defence of Israel, infamously ordered his soldiers to use "force, might and beatings" in order to subdue the Palestinian rebels, earning him a reputation as the "bone-breaker."

⁹¹ In the decades following the Six-Day War of 1967, thousands of Palestinians crossed daily into Israel to work in construction, agriculture and the service industries. However, since the Second Intifada (2000–2005) and the construction of the separation wall, these crossings have been drastically reduced. Today, interaction largely persists through the permit system, checkpoints, and the pervasive Israeli military presence in the occupied territories. This represents a shift from relatively normalised (though highly unequal) economic interdependence to a regime of segregation and control, in which proximity to settlements and the infrastructure of occupation determine Palestinians' daily contact with Israelis. The situation has deteriorated even more since the Oslo Accords (1993–1995), which, despite being supposed to be a step towards peace, institutionalised the fragmentation of Palestinian territory, the complete control over its resources and the mobility of Palestinians by Israel. See Baruch Kimmerling, *Politicide: Ariel Sharon's War against the Palestinians* (London: Verso, 2003); Gershon Shafir, *A Half Century of Occupation: Israel, Palestine, and the World's Most Intractable Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017); Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007); Neve Gordon, *Israel's Occupation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Tareq Baqoni, *Hamas Contained: The Rise and Pacification of Palestinian Resistance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

he can also be accused of) an act of normalisation and thus further capitulation, by having normal contact with Israeli people, as the PA that he serves is already seen as an Israeli collaborator.⁹² The fear of stepping on Israeli soil is not only the fear of the known and unknown enemy, living separately on the same strip of land, but also the fear of non-resistance and of the impossibility of resistance against Israel. This raises the question of what Al Balawi is seeking in Israel in the first place, while Israel's colonisation of the West Bank and the blockade of Gaza is ongoing, if not to meet up with Israelis who still believe and want to work towards a peaceful co-existence of Palestinians and Israelis, whether in the form of a "two-state solution" or otherwise. Ultimately, and probably also more fundamentally, stepping on Israeli soil is for Al Balawi a matter of honour, pride and loyalty. Or to say it another way, a matter of possibly dishonouring his father and the resistance the latter had taken up against Israel (as well as against Arab leaders who didn't support the Palestinian cause), and by extension, possibly dishonouring the revolution, the spirit of the revolution in which Al Balawi was raised by his father, and by Fatah and the PLO at large, which has permeated his whole being and which he feels compelled to honour. Despite the PLO's recognition of Israel in the Oslo Accords—which lead to the creation of the PA, the very body that Al Balawi serves and represents as a diplomat—this deep, embodied resistance to Zionism and to Israel remains the

⁹² Driving towards the Beit El colony to get his permit at Israel's Civil Administration of the West Bank, he refers, in conversation with his colleague Akram Salaqqa, to the Palestinians who work there as "the collaborators" of the Israelis. This conversation is not in the film; it preceded the shot of Al Balawi driving towards the Beit El colony. Similarly, the PA is seen as Israel's "collaborator" by the vast majority of the Palestinians, as it has been partially responsible for the situation in which the Palestinians find themselves today. This is especially so for the National Security Forces of the PA, which collaborate with Israel to maintain security in the territories of the West Bank (Areas A and B) and suppress uprisings. Akram Salaqqa worked with Hassan Al Balawi on the protocol for Yasser Arafat's Palestinian presidency during their years in Gaza. After 2019, he returned to Gaza for work. He was still there on 7 October 2023, but he managed to escape Gaza for Egypt, where he is now a refugee.

locus of the historical trauma of the Palestinian people. This persistence, which Al Balawi seems to carry in his very being, is further intensified by successive Israeli governments' violations of the agreements, actions that have systematically undermined—and ultimately sabotaged—the so-called “two-state solution.”

Entering Israel as Al Balawi does inevitably also evokes the spectre of terrorism: the moment when he passes the checkpoint, walks towards the camera and puts on his belt, which he had taken off before he crossed the checkpoint and passed through the metal detector.⁹³ Or the moment when he enters the staircase of Yael Dayan's apartment at Rabin Square in Tel Aviv⁹⁴ and rings the bell of an apartment door, which is momentarily opened by two older Israelis, as it happens to not be Dayan's door.⁹⁵ Finding Dayan's apartment two floors above, then entering and saluting, Al Balawi states that he already knows her from when she visited and met Yasser Arafat in Tunis in 1992, when Al Balawi was working for Arafat at the Unified Information department of the PLO. He praises her, despite her having served in the army, for working in the peace camp for the co-existence of the two peoples. After asking her how this conversation with Arafat in Tunis went, Dayan responds that it was an interesting conversation but that, at that time, Arafat and the PLO

⁹³ See *Fierté nationale*, 00:59:00:00 – 01:00:30:00

⁹⁴ Rabin Square, located in the heart of Tel Aviv, was originally named Kings of Israel Square (*Kikar Malkhei Yisrael*, כיכר מלכי ישראל) upon its establishment in 1964. The square was designed alongside the Tel Aviv City Hall, serving as a central public space for the city that hosted various public events, such as military exhibitions on Israel's Independence Day. The square was renamed Rabin Square in 1995 following the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at the site after a peace rally.

⁹⁵ See *Fierté nationale*, 01:02:40:00 – 01:04:10:00.

didn't foresee Hamas becoming an important force that was going to oppose the PLO and go against its interest.⁹⁶

This sets the stage for the antagonistic conversation that follows, leading to a dead end between what can be seen as two moderate voices: Yael Dayan, a former Israeli Knesset member for the Labour Party and a member of the Israeli peace camp; and Al Balawi, a former cabinet member during Yasser Arafat's presidency and now an active diplomat representing the PA which recognised the State of Israel during the 1993 Oslo Accords. This impossible dialogue is embodied by two tragic figures who mirror each other. The eighty-year-old Dayan, hooked up to an oxygen machine because of a long-term illness, embodying the declining and dying Labour Party⁹⁷ and peace camp,⁹⁸ while Al Balawi, still in his suit and tie, embodies the weakened PA that he represents as a diplomat. Although from different generations, they are also both the children of two prominent figures in their respective national histories: Yael Dayan as

⁹⁶ See *Fierté nationale*, 01:04:55:00 – 01:08:21:00.

⁹⁷ Founded in 1968, the Israeli Labour Party dominated national politics for a decade, entered the opposition after the 1977 elections, joined a national unity government with Likud in 1984, and returned to power in 1992. Following Rabin's assassination in 1995, Shimon Peres called early elections but lost to Benjamin Netanyahu. Labour regained power in 1999, but Prime Minister Ehud Barak resigned on 10 December 2000, during the early months of the Second Intifada, marking the beginning of the party's long decline. In 2024, what remained of the party merged with Meretz into The Democrats. On the decline of the Israeli Labour Party, see Myron J. Aronoff, *Power and Ritual in the Israeli Labor Party: A Study in Political Anthropology* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993; London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2015); Eifram Inbar, "The Decline of the Labour Party," in *Israel Affairs* 16, no. 1 (January 2010): 69–81.

⁹⁸ Over the past two decades, Israel's peace camp has significantly declined, due to a shift in politics to the right, and the normalisation of the occupation. See Rifat Kassis, "Why the Israeli Peace Camp Disappeared," *Mondoweiss*, 18 August 2024, <https://mondoweiss.net/2024/08/why-the-israeli-peace-camp-disappeared/>.

the daughter of the famous Moshe Dayan, Israel's minister of defence between 1967 and 1974 and the negotiator of the Egypt–Israel peace treaty of 1979;⁹⁹ Hassan Al Balawi as the son of Fathi Al Balawi, one of the founders of Fatah and the PLO, and who was close to its leader, Yasser Arafat.¹⁰⁰

When I was editing the scene with Dayan and researching her life and work, I came across interviews and biographical footage of her made for a Belgian television programme in 1966.¹⁰¹ I was struck, not only by seeing Dayan being interviewed when she was young, which was sharply contrasted with the interview that Al Balawi conducted with her in 2019,¹⁰² but also by the striking resemblance between the young Israeli women serving in the IDF in 1966 and the young Palestinian women in formation whom I filmed in 2019 at the Al-

⁹⁹ See *Fierté nationale*, 01:01:27:00 – 01:02:12:00.

¹⁰⁰ See *Fierté nationale*, introductory text in the first scene, 00:02:30:00 – 00:03:37:00.

Regarding Hassan Al Balawi's relation with Yasser Arafat: Al Balawi first met him as a child, when Arafat visited his father, a close friend, while the Al Balawi family was living in Qatar. Later, in the late 1970s, Al Balawi encountered him again during holiday camps in Syria. He subsequently worked closely with Arafat in Tunis within the PLO's communications department, and later in Gaza during his presidency, where Al Balawi was responsible for French-language communication with journalists, politicians and visiting delegations, frequently serving as Arafat's translator. This account is based on a conversation with Hassan Al Balawi during the shooting of *Fierté nationale*, Ramallah, November 2019.

¹⁰¹ *La Rage d'écrire*, "Yaël Dayan."

¹⁰² Yael Dayan was born in 1939 in Mandate Palestine, and was therefore twenty-seven in 1966. We interviewed her in her apartment on Rabin Square in Tel Aviv, November 2019, when she was eighty. She died after a long-term illness on 18 May 2024 at the age of eighty-five.

Alexandra Swartzbrod, "Disparition Israël: Yaël Dayan, mort d'une militante d'avant-garde," *La Libération*, 18 May 2024, https://www.liberation.fr/international/moyen-orient/israel-yael-dayan-mort-dune-militante-davant-garde-20240518_CJNC6C5G2VDDTNSPMYQSD6MWWU/.

Istiqlal University of the PA in Jericho, West Bank, for the opening scene of my film.

Just as the young Israeli women in 1966 were proud of their fledgling state and showed their commitment by serving in the IDF, convinced that Israel was encircled by hostile Arab states and that its survival depended on their readiness to defend it, so too are the young Palestinian women who salute the flag of their beloved land, chant nationalistic songs and recite nationalistic poems with equal belief and determination, despite the fact that Jericho and the university are completely encircled by Israeli troops and could be occupied or destroyed at any moment. Both the young Israeli and Palestinian women, through their military drills, chants and studies, are proud of their homeland. Though they represent opposing nationalisms, their expressions of pride and patriotism are oddly similar, with a delay of half a century.

This leads me to think that despite the fact that we are dealing with two completely antagonistic societies, despite the security wall, the checkpoints and the attempts to separate the Palestinian population from the Israeli one, despite the fundamental opposition of their goals and aspirations, and despite, or perhaps rather due to all the belligerence, oppression, domination, destruction, pain and hatred, a great deal of mirroring is going on. It almost seems as though a kind of double is being created, like the slave who mimics the master's

behaviour to eventually gain mastery over him.¹⁰³ For example, some of the newer constructions in the West Bank are so similar that it's sometimes hard to tell whether they are Israeli settlements or Palestinian buildings.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps this is not entirely surprising, as Palestinians often work on the construction of Israeli colonies in the West Bank. It connects to the idea that a child discovers himself in the mirror: in this case, one wonders if the Palestinians, while trying to build their own nation state, have adopted certain features that resemble the Israeli one.

These words, “to build their own nation state,” remind me of my first meeting with Hassan Al Balawi in 2016, at the Palestinian Mission in Brussels, when it was located behind the Berlaymont building where the European Commission is located.¹⁰⁵ I approached him with the question of the armed struggle and the

¹⁰³ On this point, see G. W. F. Hegel's account of the master-slave dialectic in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 111–119.

¹⁰⁴ I encountered this ambiguity several times during my research trip to the West Bank and Israel in 2016. Sandi Hilal, a Palestinian architect, and her collaborator Alessandro Petti founded, with Eyal Weizman, the Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency (DAAR) in Beit Sahour, West Bank. Their work critiques how Israeli settlements function as visual and spatial instruments of occupation, strategically placed to oversee Palestinian spaces, which is later replicated in newly built Palestinian neighbourhoods. The resemblance blurs the line between settler and Palestinian architecture.

Sandi Hilal, Alessandro Petti and Eyal Weizman, “Decolonizing Architecture,” *Roulotte Magazine*, 2011, <https://roulottemagazine.com/2011/04/decolonizing-architecture-sandi-hilal-alessandro-petti-eyal-weizman/>.

¹⁰⁵ At that time, the Palestinian Mission was located on Rue Franklin, Brussels. This building had previously been occupied by the ANC, which offered it to the PLO when the apartheid regime in South Africa was dismantled and the ANC moved to the South African Embassy on Rue de la Loi, Brussels. Following the Gulf War, financial difficulties forced the PLO to sell its building and leave its headquarters

state of the revolution today, and I brought with me Yezid Sayigh's book *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993*, which Al Balawi had also read. It is considered the definitive history of the Palestinian national movement, at least up until 1993, the year of the Oslo Accords. Writing this now, I realise that the film I made reflects what happened after the events described in Sayigh's book, focusing on the period following the Oslo Accords and the hopes and attempts, pitfalls and failures in building a nation on the actual land of Palestine.¹⁰⁶

Although the film doesn't show any weapons—except the rifles of the Palestinian presidential guard that we can discern in the background during the commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of Arafat's death in Ramallah¹⁰⁷—the idea of armed struggle, in the past and today, is however omnipresent. As a matter of fact, the day after Arafat's commemoration, when Al Balawi made his first trip to Tel Aviv, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad fired rockets at Israel after one of their leaders was assassinated in Gaza, to which the IDF responded with airstrikes and artillery fire on Gaza, killing several people.¹⁰⁸ This prompted Dayan to tell Al Balawi that “there won't be any solution as long as the affair of

at Avenue de l'Observatoire 7 in Uccle, which it had occupied since 1976. Today, the Palestinian Mission is located at Avenue d'Auderghem 289, Etterbeek.

¹⁰⁶ Sayigh's book shows that the PLO created a state within a state in Lebanon, with its own army, security forces, political branches, ministries of interior and foreign affairs, schools and research centres, newspapers and cultural production, co-operative industries and so on. See Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*.

¹⁰⁷ Filmed on 11 November 2019. The rifles are AK-47s. See *Fierté nationale*, 00:28:20:00 – 00:29:10:00.

¹⁰⁸ “Israel and Islamic Jihad Reach Cease-Fire After Two Days of Fighting,” *Haaretz*, 15 November 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2019-11-15/ty-article/islamic-jihad-israel-gaza-rockets-ceasefire-tel-aviv-hamas-syria/0000017f-ed56-ddba-a37f-ef7edc710000>.

Gaza continues,” pointing to terrorism and the internal division in Palestine “as unworthy of a Palestinian state.”¹⁰⁹

Her statements were not only very disappointing for Al Balawi, who considered her use of a discourse of terrorism and internal division in Palestine as “unworthy of a progressive Jew.”¹¹⁰ First of all, she herself brings up that Yitzhak Rabin was murdered on the square just outside of her apartment, and thus points towards the internal division in Israeli society as well.¹¹¹ Second, when Al Balawi mentions that Gaza has survived three wars with thousands of casualties and that it has been completely isolated by Israel since the Hamas takeover in 2007, she claims she “doesn’t count in terms of symmetry” when referring to the death tolls on the Israeli and Palestinian sides, a statement that paradoxically highlights the asymmetrical balance of power between Israel and Palestine and the unequal valuation of their citizens’ lives. Furthermore, it is an

¹⁰⁹ Yael Dayan emphasises this by taking out her phone and looking at an app that shows where and when the last rockets were launched from Gaza and to which Israeli town that day.

See *Fierté nationale*, 01:08:23:00 – 01:10:35:00.

¹¹⁰ Said by Al Balawi after the interview at the Rabin memorial, as we were filming. We decided not to use this statement in the film, but to keep the part where Al Balawi discovers and looks at the memorial in silence and bewilderment, thus emphasising the dead end of his conversation with Yael Dayan, which preceded the scene at the memorial.

See *Fierté nationale*, 01:17:36:00 – 01:21:30:00.

¹¹¹ During a rally defending the Oslo Accords on 4 November 1995, Rabin was murdered by Yigal Amir, a law student and a religious right-wing extremist who opposed the peace agreement. Now, thirty years after Rabin’s assassination, the Labour Party no longer exists, and the right-wing Likud, having made an alliance with smaller, extreme right-wing religious parties, is governing the country. In this sense, the undercurrent that Yigal Amir represented in 1995 has thrived in Israeli society.

Encyclopedia Britannica, “The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin,” accessed 15 August 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/assassination-of-Yitzhak-Rabin>.

open secret that Hamas was financed by Israel in order to weaken the PLO.¹¹² Israel applied the divide-and-conquer policy that was used by the British in Mandate Palestine, and by the Romans in ancient times. Finally, it also needs to be noted that the Jewish Irgun and Stern Gang were the first terrorist organisations, *avant la lettre*, in Mandate Palestine. They were responsible for high-profile bombings, assassinations and mass killings (such as the assassination of Lord Moyne, the King David Hotel bombing, and the Deir Yassin massacre),¹¹³ which contributed to the British decision to withdraw from Palestine, since the cost of maintaining control and the lack of a clear political solution made the Mandate unsustainable for Britain.¹¹⁴ However, this terrorism

¹¹² For documented assertions that Israeli policies effectively helped foster the rise of Hamas as a counterweight to the PLO, see “Why Israel Created Hamas,” Swiss Policy Research, 23 October 2023, <https://swprs.org/why-israel-created-hamas/>. See also Christoph Reuter, *My Life Is a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing*, trans. Helena Ragg-Kirby (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

¹¹³ On 6 November 1944, members of the Zionist militant group Lehi assassinated Lord Moyne, the British minister of state for the Middle East, in Cairo; on 22 July 1946, the Irgun bombed the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, targeting the British administrative headquarters and killing ninety-one with forty-six injured; and on 9 April 1948, the Irgun and Lehi attacked the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin, resulting in over a hundred deaths, including women and children. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Stern Gang,” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Stern-Gang#ref99345>; “Irgun Zvai Leumi,” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Irgun-Zvai-Leumi>; “Deir Yassin,” <https://www.britannica.com/place/Deir-Yassin>, all accessed 16 August 2025.

¹¹⁴ Yael Dayan’s father, Moshe Dayan, was not involved in these terrorist acts, as he was part of the elite Palmach unit of the Haganah (Hebrew: *ההגנה* ha-Haganah, lit. “The Defence”), which was the main Zionist paramilitary organisation representing the majority of the Jews in Mandate Palestine, originally founded to defend Jewish settlements against Arab attacks. The Haganah took a more moderate stand than Irgun and Stern. However, Moshe Dayan served as the commander of the Jerusalem front during the 1948 Arab–Israeli War and was responsible for the events that led to the killing of about two hundred Palestinians and the subsequent depopulation of Lod and Ramle, an episode that remains one of the darkest in Israel’s founding. He later became chief of the general staff of the IDF from 1953 to 1958, overseeing operations during the 1956 Sinai War. As defence minister during the Six-Day War in 1967, he became an iconic symbol of Israel’s military strength, but resigned following the Yom Kippur War in 1973. In his role as foreign minister, Dayan played a key part in negotiating the historic 1979 peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.

was successfully inverted, as it was Islam that was depicted as a terrorist theology and Arabs as terrorists ontologically. Edward Said uses similar terms in his critique of Benjamin Netanyahu's book, *Terrorism: How the West Can Win*, arguing that the State of Israel "is increasing in viciousness as the spurious excuse of 'fighting terrorism' serves to legitimize every case of torture, illegal detention, demolition of houses, expropriation of land, murder, collective punishment, deportation, censorship, closure of schools and universities. The point is that such episodes are almost completely swept off the record by the righteous enthusiasm for deploring Arab, Moslem and non-white 'terrorism.'"¹¹⁵

Beyond the striking resemblance in the camera movements that capture the soldiers' drills in the opening scenes of both my film and the television episode about Yael Dayan, there are differences that stand out, most notably in the depiction of weapons. As a matter of fact, the contrast couldn't be greater or more symbolic. In the 1966 biographical footage shot of Dayan, a young Israeli soldier is filmed assembling an Uzi, the little Israeli submachine gun.¹¹⁶ In my film, on the other hand, the Palestinians at the university have wooden replicas of rifles, symbolising the conditions agreed upon in the Oslo Accords: that in return for being recognised by Israel as the legal representative of the

Tom Segev, *1949: The First Israelis* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 134–138.

Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 72–75.

¹¹⁵ Edward W. Said, review of *Terrorism: How the West Can Win*, by Benjamin Netanyahu, *Arab Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 201, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41857908?seq=1>.

¹¹⁶ The Uzi submachine gun was designed by Uziel (Uzi) Gal just after the establishment of the State of Israel, becoming a symbol of Israel's military successes.

Encyclopedia Britannica, "Uzi," accessed 10 August 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/technology/Uzi-submachine-gun>.

Palestinian people, the PLO recognised the State of Israel and agreed to disarm as a condition of their return, thus coming under Israeli military control and subject to further occupation by the IDF. This situation led to the gradual weakening of the PLO and the PA that grew out of it, in contrast to the Islamist movements such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which advocated more radical strategies.¹¹⁷

Edward Said dissects the Oslo Accords in “The Morning After,” written about a month after their signing in Washington, DC, on 13 September 1993: “Now that the euphoria has lifted, it is possible to re-examine the Israeli-PLO agreement with required common sense. What emerges from such scrutiny is a deal that is more flawed and, for most of the Palestinian people, more unfavourably weighted than many had first supposed. The fashion-show vulgarities of the White House ceremony, the degrading spectacle of Yasser Arafat thanking everyone for the suspension of most of his people’s rights, and the fatuous solemnity of Bill Clinton’s performance, like a 20th-century Roman emperor shepherding two vassal kings through rituals of reconciliation and obeisance: all

¹¹⁷ See the opening scene of *Fierté nationale*, 00:04:35:00 – 00:05:55:00; text superimposed on the images of young Palestinians in formation and marching at the Al-Istiqlal University. Rashid Khalidi argues that the Oslo process “perpetuates the occupation” by fragmenting the PA and giving key dimensions of sovereignty to Israel, thereby weakening the PLO while creating space for Islamist groups opposed to negotiating compromise. Beside Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, other factions have been militarily active in Gaza, such as the leftist PFLP and DFLP, the nationalist Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades of Fatah and the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC), or more extreme Islamic groups such as the Salafi-Jihadist groups (linked to the Islamic State).

Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 231–235; Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017* (New York: Picador, 2021), 207–228.

these temporarily obscure the truly astonishing proportions of the Palestinian capitulation.”¹¹⁸

Hassan Al Balawi addresses this question during a walk with Hassan Saleh, the mayor of Jericho and a former fedayee,¹¹⁹ along a small road leading into the fields of Jericho, gently pointing out to him that, despite all the revolutionary rhetoric, the fedayeen didn’t return to Palestine in a tank.¹²⁰ What Al Balawi doesn’t say, but we can make out of the preceding texts, is that arms were taken up by Hamas and other revolutionary movements that did not agree with the conditions of the 1993 Oslo Accords imposed on them, ultimately leading, three decades later,¹²¹ to Hamas’s attack on 7 October 2023.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Edward Said, “The Morning After,” *London Review of Books* 15, no. 20, 21 October 1993, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v15/n20>.

¹¹⁹ Hassan Saleh is a poet and a member of the Palestinian National Council.

¹²⁰ See *Fierté nationale*, 00:19:43:00 –00:21:35:00.

This walk mirrors Yael Dayan’s stroll around the banana plantations in the RTBF television programme, made about her in 1966. In one of the interviews, she explains the meaning of *Sabra*—a term originally used to refer to Jews born in British Mandate Palestine and Ottoman Syria, derived from the *tzabar*, the prickly pear cactus, “spiky on the outside but sweet on the inside,” as Dayan describes it in the episode. (Original French wording: “épineux à l’extérieur mais doux à l’intérieur.”)

¹²¹ The Second Intifada and Israel’s subsequent major military operations in Gaza—including Operations Cast Lead (2008–2009), Pillar of Defence (2012), and Protective Edge (2014)—represented devastating setbacks for Palestinian governance and further entrenched the fragmentation of the PA established under Oslo. See Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*. See esp. chap. 6, “The Sixth Declaration of War, 2000–2014,” which outlines Israeli military assaults on Gaza as part of the broader post-Oslo erosion of Palestinian sovereignty.

¹²² Rashid Khalidi situated the Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023 within a long history of colonial domination and oppression, describing Gaza as a “pressure cooker” whose explosion was predictable. See “Historian Rashid Khalidi: Palestinians ‘Living Under Incredible Oppression, ... It Had to Explode,’”

The attack is seen and experienced, and thus framed by certain analysts as a contemporary pogrom,¹²³ and by others as an outbreak, an insurrection of the ghetto of Gaza,¹²⁴ in what one might see an inverted ghetto transferred in history and geography, a reversal in that the destruction of Gaza evokes the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto.¹²⁵ From this perspective, Dayan's statement, that "there

Radio Free, 9 October 2023, <https://www.radiofree.org/2023/10/09/historian-rashid-khalidi-palestinians-living-under-incredible-oppression-it-had-to-explode/>, originally posted on *Democracy Now!*, 9 October 2023, https://www.democracynow.org/2023/10/9/rashid_khalidi_palestine_israel_explosion; and "Rashid Khalidi: 'Israel's Nightmare Scenario' (I)," interview, *World-Outlook*, 11 December 2024, <https://world-outlook.com/2024/12/11/rashid-khalidi-israels-nightmare-scenario-i/>.

¹²³ The term *pogrom* was used by various commentators in reference to the 7 October massacres. Derived from the Russian verb *pogromit*, meaning "to destroy" or "attack," the word evokes the reality of Jewish life in Tsarist Russia and the violent anti-Jewish attacks from the 1880s onwards. See Robert Zaretsky, "Why So Many People Call the Oct. 7 Massacre a 'Pogrom'—and What They Miss When They Do So," *Forward*, 27 October 2023, <https://forward.com/culture/567188/pogrom-october-7-massacre-israel-yerushalmi/>.

¹²⁴ See, among others, the statements of Refaat Alareer, the Palestinian poet from Gaza, after 7 October: "Israel [is] heading toward genocide," he declared on 13 October, decrying the Western world's overwhelming support for the bombing in Gaza, and what he saw as its refusal to recognise the historical or political context for the events of 7 October. In the early hours of the still-unfolding attack, he told the BBC, "This is exactly like the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. This is the Gaza ghetto uprising against 100 years of European and Zionist colonialism and occupation," adding that such an operation was "legitimate and moral."

Refaat Alareer, quoted in Sarah Aziza, "'How Many Dead Palestinians Are Enough?': The Unbearable Prescience of the Late Poet Refaat Alareer," *The Guardian*, 10 December 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/dec/10/refaat-alareer-book-gaza-palestine-poet>.

¹²⁵ Al Balawi uses the word *ghetto* in the introduction to his publication *Gaza: Dans les coulisses du mouvement national palestinien*: "Les Israéliens ont les moyens de poursuivre la colonisation et la construction du mur, de nous enfermer dans des ghettos. Ils sont plus forts que nous. Ils sont même plus forts que tous les États arabes."

won't be any solution as long as the affair of Gaza continues"¹²⁶ is highly revealing. Thus, the Jewish question is transferred and transformed into the Palestinian question, more particularly Gaza.¹²⁷

In his text *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience*, Lacan relates the mirror stage to the fragmented body that manifests itself in dreams, referring to the visionary paintings of Hieronymus Bosch depicting the Spanish Inquisition of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with their fragmented bodies and limbs scattered around, which are related to what happened in the extermination camps during the Second World War, and as such possess our dreams. Lacan then continues, "Correlatively, the *I* formation is symbolised in dreams by a fortified camp, or even a stadium—distributing, between the arena within its walls and its outer border of gravel-pits and marshes, two opposed fields of battle where the subject bogs down in his quest for the proud, remote inner castle whose form

Hassan Al Balawi, *Gaza: Dans les coulisses du mouvement national palestinien* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 2008), 11.

("The Israelis have the means to continue colonisation and the construction of the wall, to lock us in ghettos. They are stronger than us. They are even stronger than all the Arab states.")

¹²⁶ See *Fierté nationale*, 01:14:05:00 – 01:15:10:00.

¹²⁷ Although Yael Dayan did not use the expression "turn Gaza into dust" or "reduce Gaza to dust," and her statement was made without any such intention, her words nevertheless evoke a rhetoric that has become increasingly common in Israeli public discourse since 7 October 2023. While such remarks are not official policy statements, but rather extreme expressions made by individuals in the context of war, they form part of a broader discursive field in which calls for the destruction of Gaza have become thinkable and publicly articulated.

Clash Report (@clashreport), "Israeli police officer on duty threatens Al Araby TV journalist while he was reporting live from Ashdod: You better be saying good things, We will reduce Gaza to dust! You hear? To dust!," X post, 18 October 2023, <https://x.com/clashreport/status/1713853744738119867>.

(sometimes juxtaposed in the same scenario) strikingly symbolises the id. Similarly, though here in the mental sphere, we find fortified structures constructed, the metaphors for which arise spontaneously, as if deriving from the subject's very symptoms, to designate the mechanisms of obsessive neurosis: inversion, isolation, reduplication, undoing what has been done, and displacement.”¹²⁸

Throughout the film, one wonders about Al Balawi's mission, which only becomes clear at the end. He is driving towards Gaza in the rain, talking on the phone with a friend in Gaza. He is telling her that he cannot enter the Gaza Strip but that it is “his dream to be there” and that he wants to get as close as possible, to see it and to smell its air.¹²⁹ In other words, being in Gaza is his

¹²⁸ Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” in *Écrits: The Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 97–98.

Original French version: “Corrélativement la formation du *je* se symbolise oniriquement par un camp retranché, voire un stade, distribuant de l'arène intérieure à son enceinte, aux gravats et aux marécages de son pourtour, deux champs de lutte opposés où le sujet s'empêtre dans sa quête de l'altier et lointain château intérieur, dont la forme (parfois juxtaposée dans le même scénario) symbolise le ça de façon saisissante. Et de même, ici sur le plan mental, trouvons-nous réalisées ces structures d'ouvrage fortifié dont la métaphore surgit spontanément, et comme issue des symptômes eux-mêmes du sujet, pour désigner les mécanismes d'inversion, d'isolation, de reduplication, d'annulation, de déplacement, de la névrose obsessionnelle.”

Jacques Lacan, “Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du je, telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique,” presentation, XVIe Congrès international de psychanalyse, Zurich, 17 July 1949, first published in *La Revue Française de Psychanalyse* 13, no. 4 (1949): 449–455, and reprinted in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), 97–98.

¹²⁹ See *Fierté nationale*, 01:21:54:00 – 01:23:01:00.

The conversation is with Jannat Nassar, a Palestinian official working at the Institut Français in Gaza. She managed to escape Gaza after 7 October 2023. Al Balawi had made a Facebook post that he was “on the

drive, which is paradoxical, as we know from Al Balawi's visit to Yasser Arafat's adoptive children, that two of their adoptive brothers are stuck and completely isolated in Gaza, and that the situation in Gaza is horrible because it is completely blockaded, and because of Hamas, as to the words of Zubayda Zankari, one of the adoptive children of Yasser Arafat. Al Balawi omits this part in his translation to me, pointing to the internal division in Palestine and the painful fact that Hamas weakened the PLO's and PA's power.¹³⁰ When Al Balawi gives the book that he wrote on Gaza to Yael Dayan at the end of their conversation, she sympathises by saying that she adores Gaza, its land and the sea, but that "it needs a normal life," with which Al Balawi agrees.¹³¹ The end of this conversation with Dayan echoes harshly with the present situation and more particularly President Trump's statement that he wants to transform Gaza into the Riviera of the Middle East¹³² after it is completely destroyed by Israel in retaliation for the 7 October attacks, using American bombs.¹³³

road to Gaza," which provoked people to start calling him, as they were worried given the fact that clashes were going on.

¹³⁰ See *Fierté nationale*, 00:45:54:00 – 00:47:39:00. The two brothers are called Haytam Yasser Arafat and Firaz Yasser Arafat.

¹³¹ See *Fierté nationale*, 01:15:25:00 – 01:17:13:00.

¹³² This statement was made by President Trump on 5 February 2025.

David Smith, "Trump Says US Will 'Take Over' Gaza Strip in Shock Announcement During Netanyahu Visit," *The Guardian*, 5 February 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/05/donald-trump-plan-to-take-over-gaza-strip-netanyahu-visit>.

Following this statement, Trump released an AI-generated video on his platform Truth Social.

"Donald Trump Shares Bizarre AI-generated Video of 'Trump Gaza,'" posted 26 February 2025 by Guardian News, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PsOp883rfl>.

¹³³ The United States of America provided \$18 billion in military aid to Israel in 2024, the highest annual total ever. In Europe, Germany is the greatest supplier, with exports up to €100 million. In 2024, Israel's military spending rose 65% to \$46.5 billion, with defence costs reaching 8.8% of GDP—the world's second highest.

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), "Unprecedented Rise in Global Military Expenditure as European and Middle East Spending Surges," 28 April 2025,

But that is what Al Balawi's dream was, to go to Gaza, to go back to the place he first set foot on Palestinian soil in 1995, the place where he built his house, worked for Yasser Arafat during his presidency and saw the PA being born and the first stones of the State of Palestine being laid.¹³⁴ A place that today lies in ruins, bombarded by tanks and fighter jets that drop their bombs and reduce entire apartment blocks to rubble, even intruding upon my own dreams while safe and sound in Europe. Beyond the living nightmare endured by the Gazans trapped in the Strip and struggling to survive, one wonders how many generations to come will see this haunt their dreams. Furthermore, it also shattered Al Balawi's dream to ever return to this place, and with him all the Palestinians from Gaza who want to return, mostly people who have also been dreaming of the place they originally were driven away from, villages in the south of Israel that were mostly destroyed and wiped off the Israeli map after

<https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2025/unprecedented-rise-global-military-expenditure-european-and-middle-east-spending-surges>.

William D. Hartung, Linda J. Bilmes and Stephen Semler, "United States Spending on Israel's Military Operations and Related U.S. Operations in the Region, October 7, 2023–September 30, 2024," Costs of War Project, Brown University Watson Institute, 7 October 2024, https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2023/2024/Costs%20of%20War_US%20Support%20Since%20Oct%207%20FINAL%20v2.pdf.

Andreas Malm argues that the destruction of Gaza is part of a larger imperial plan that finds its precedent in the destruction of Akka (St. Jean d'Acre) during the British bombardment of the city in 1840, fully exposing how imperial conquest and domination function.

Andreas Malm, "The Destruction of Palestine Is the Destruction of the Earth," *Verso Blog*, 4 April 2024, https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/news/the-destruction-of-palestine-is-the-destruction-of-the-earth#_ednref63.

¹³⁴ See *Fierté nationale*, 00:26:23:00 – 00:27:41:00.

the 1948 Nakba.¹³⁵ Then there is also the blowing up of hospitals, universities and other civil buildings and infrastructure, historical churches and mosques that we can see online, with Israeli soldiers pulling the trigger and watching the explosions and buildings transforming into dust,¹³⁶ which brings us back to the spectre of the ghetto of Warsaw.¹³⁷ Besides the underground resistance, there is also the isolation and the starving of the Jews over the long term, and finally, the complete destruction of the ghetto, including the Great Synagogue of

¹³⁵ Salman H. Abu-Sitta, *Atlas of Palestine, 1917–1966* (London: Palestine Land Society, 2010), part 1, e-book, <https://www.plands.org/en/maps-atlases/atlas/the-atlas-of-palestine/pdfs/atlas-part-1.pdf>; Walid Khalidi, ed., *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992), Institute for Palestine Studies, accessed 1 May 2025, <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1649445>. Both works document the origins of Gaza’s current population in southern Palestinian villages, displaced during the 1948 Nakba.

¹³⁶ See, among others, *Investigating War Crimes in Gaza*, an investigation that exposes Israeli war crimes in the Gaza Strip through the medium of photos and videos posted online by Israeli soldiers themselves. *War Crimes in Gaza*, Al Jazeera Investigations, Al Jazeera, 3 October 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/program/investigations/2024/10/7/war-crimes-in-gaza-i-al-jazeera-investigations>.

¹³⁷ In her film *Mur*, exploring the physical and psychological dimensions of the wall built to divide Israel and the Palestinian territories, Simone Bitton interviews a kibbutz official who eloquently points out the irony of a people who were once crowded into ghettos now intentionally walling themselves in. In a conversation between her and the Palestinian filmmaker Elia Suleiman, Bitton alludes to the idea that the Jews duplicated, in a transformed and displaced way, the ghettos in which they had been imprisoned in Europe before and during the Second World War. Following Bitton’s argument, the construction of the wall can be understood as an imprisonment in a double sense—walling out the Palestinians, walling in themselves—an inversion of its intention, where the safety of the wall turns into the neurosis of being walled in, and pushes for the “Greater Israel.” It is like some kind of transformed and displaced inversion in time, undoing what was done to them, their persecution and extermination in Europe, by annexing new territories and developing new colonies where Jews once lived in the Levant.

Simone Bitton was born in Rabat, Morocco, in 1955 into a Moroccan Jewish family that emigrated to Israel when she was eleven years old. Today she lives in Paris.

Mur, directed by Simone Bitton (France: Ciné Sud Promotion, Arna Productions, 2004).

“Simone Bitton et Elia Suleiman: Entretien 5,” from *Mur*, directed by Simone Bitton (France: Ciné Sud Promotion, Arna Productions, 2004).

Warsaw being blown up.¹³⁸ When SS Commander Jürgen Stroop, who was called in by Himmler for the Great Operation, the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, was asked why he issued the orders for his men to go from basement to basement with flamethrowers to murder the last Jews who were still alive in the Warsaw ghetto, he answered, “The Ukrainian breadbasket, milk and honey from Ukraine,” thinking of his experiences of constructing the highway to the east, which would reconnect Germany to the Donbass, and ultimately also with the Caucasus, the Middle East and Africa, the *Lebensraum*.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ SS Commander Jürgen Stroop spoke about it: “What a marvellous sight it was. A fantastic piece of theatre. My staff and I stood at a distance. I held the electrical device which would detonate all the charges simultaneously. Jesuiter called for silence. I glanced over at my brave officers and men, tired and dirty, silhouetted against the glow of the burning buildings. After prolonging the suspense for a moment, I shouted: *Heil Hitler* and pressed the button. With a thunderous, deafening bang and a rainbow burst of colours, the fiery explosion soared toward the clouds, an unforgettable tribute to our triumph over the Jews. The Warsaw Ghetto was no more. The will of Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler had been done.” Kazimierz Moczarski, *Conversations with an Executioner*, translated by Jane Zielonko (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 164.

¹³⁹ *Lebensraum* was the Nazi policy of eastwards expansion to colonise land and resources for Germans while displacing Jewish and Slavic populations. The exhibition at the Dossin Barracks in Mechelen in 2019 portrays Auschwitz not only as an extermination camp but also as an industrial complex with factories and slave-labour camps. Heinrich Himmler explained, “If we don’t fill our camps with slaves ..., then we will not have enough money to create settlements that give German people the opportunity to live a life in dignity.” Imperialism, colonialism, racism, economics and extermination converged at Auschwitz, transforming the rural town into what the Nazis called *Interessengebiet Auschwitz* (Auschwitz Interest Zone).

Encyclopedia Britannica, “Lebensraum,” accessed 15 May 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lebensraum>.

“Auschwitz Camp,” Kazerne Dossin, accessed 15 May 2025, <https://auschwitz.camp/en/exhibition/>.

Returning to my visit to Rachel Rabin in 2016, what was most striking was the interior of her house: it was as if it had been completely transposed from a village in Ukraine, where the Rabins were originally from. As a matter of fact, being born in 1922, her brother, Yitzhak Rabin, could have been one of the thousands of young Jewish men who perished while being forced to construct Stroop's highway, if their parents hadn't immigrated to Mandate Palestine at the end of the First World War, to a moshava on the shores of the Sea of Galilee,¹⁴⁰ before moving to Jerusalem. After Al Balawi's tormented conversation with Yael Dayan—whose father Moshe Dayan was born on a kibbutz on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, a child of Ukrainian Jewish immigrants as well¹⁴¹—he goes down the stairs of her apartment building and finds himself in Rabin Square. There he turns around uncomfortably at Yitzhak Rabin's memorial, an impossible position as all this happens beneath the flag of the State of Israel, the site where the prime minister of Israel was assassinated by a Jewish extremist, after Rabin had signed the Oslo Accords with Yasser Arafat, which Al Balawi had witnessed from the coulisse, as he worked in Arafat's cabinet in Gaza at the time.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ The Rabin family lived in Moshava Mishmar HaYarden (משמר הירדן, Guard of the Jordan) located near the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. This moshava was part of the early Jewish settlements in the region and played a role in Yitzhak Rabin's upbringing before he moved to Jerusalem. During the 1948 Arab–Israeli War, Rabin and his unit fought at the shore of the Sea of Galilee near Kibbutz Degania Alef (דגניה א'). Degania is often considered the “first kibbutz” and is located at the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee. It was a strategic location in several battles during that period.

Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab–Israeli War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 397–398.

¹⁴¹ Moshe Dayan spent part of his early life and military career at the Degania Alef kibbutz. In 1948, Dayan commanded forces in the Galilee region and was involved in battles to capture key Arab towns and villages around the Sea of Galilee that became part of the nascent State of Israel.

Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab–Israeli War*, 278–280, 385–390 and 397–398.

¹⁴² Al Balawi was in Gaza serving Yasser Arafat during his presidency when he heard the news of Rabin's assassination. Conversation with Al Balawi in Tel Aviv, November 2019.

In both *Pourquoi Israël* and *Tsahal*, Claude Lanzmann invokes the Masada myth—the story of the Jews in the fortress of Masada who chose to commit collective suicide rather than surrender when besieged by Roman troops during the First Jewish–Roman War in the first century CE—as an act of ultimate resistance.¹⁴³ While in *Pourquoi Israël* he visits the site with young people during their nation-building excursion,¹⁴⁴ Lanzmann captures the ancient fortification in *Tsahal*, built on an isolated rock plateau in the Judean Desert, overlooking the Dead Sea, while circling over it with a plane. The shot is intercut with a lengthy interview with Ehud Barak, then chief of general staff of the IDF and later prime minister of Israel.¹⁴⁵

Barak’s intervention¹⁴⁶ is quite interesting when analysed from today’s perspective in how it mirrors and critiques certain aspects of both sides: the

¹⁴³ Judi Magness, “Masada: A Heroic Last Stand Against Rome,” Princeton University Press, 17 June 2020, <https://press.princeton.edu/ideas/masada-a-heroic-last-stand-against-rome>.

¹⁴⁴ See *Pourquoi Israël*, Lanzmann.

¹⁴⁵ “Ehud Barak | The Most Decorated Soldier in Israeli History,” *IFCJ News / Stand for Israel Blog*, International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, 11 September 2023, <https://www.ifcj.org/news/stand-for-israel-blog/ehud-barak-most-highly-decorated-soldier-in-israeli-history>.

¹⁴⁶ An excerpt of Lanzmann’s interview with Ehud Barak:

“It is not just an incident that all along the 3,500 years of Jewish history, we had only three periods of sovereignty. The first Kingdom, the Kingdom of the Maccabees, and the re-established State of Israel. The whole story of Jewish sovereignty is the story of the struggle between fanaticism or extremism and pragmatism. It was clearly the case during the last of the Jewish sovereign entities, created by the Maccabees two hundred years before Christ and destroyed by Rome as a result of the extremists taking

politics of Israel's government as well as Hamas's. Beyond the fact that every few years a war almost inevitably erupts due to the immense pressure caused by Gaza's isolation and deprivation, one can speculate if Hamas's 7 October attack on Israel and its lasting resistance is also ultimately some form of collective

over. It's truly an irony of history that they saw the seeds for the re-emerging of [the] fighting breed of Jews ... by the example they gave on their way to self-destruction, able to prefer death to slavery. In Masada, they were fighting for sacred values, but the price was destruction. It happened to an extent during the first Kingdom, constituted by Saul, then David and Solomon: the permanent motive of the political discussion whether we should fight against all the superpowers of the world, Babylon or Egypt and so on, or should we fight the medium way, the golden way, the pragmatic way. Whenever the questions on the national agenda come closer to the basic ones, these kinds of schisms between pragmatic and visionary feed up the arena. The very achievements of Zionism in the last three generations encourage in a sense illusionary thinking about reality. No one could expect that, thirty-five years after Trumpeldor had been killed in Tel Hai, a nuclear reactor would be built in Dimona. We have been operating against all odds. But there is no way to mark the demarcation line between illusionary brain and the ability to bring together the skill and vision. It can be ultimately judged only in retrospective. In the provinces of spirit, you can be extremist; the sky is the limit. It all happens in your mind, or in the minds of your congregation. In the provinces of political reality, nothing happens in a vacuum. Everything influences every step that you are taking, your neighbours, rivals, bystanders all around the world. You know, one among the political motives of the prophets was preaching for reasonable policies; they were preaching for extreme demands of the individual upon his own behaviour and behaviour of government, behaviour of certain strata in civil society towards each other and they shaped the moral heritage that so deeply influenced all the Western culture. But politically, they were preaching pragmatism. Moderate, trying to look into the long-run potential of rivals and trying to judge, not to alienate superpowers when it is not really needed for something concrete. There is an old story about the reasons that the Jewish heritage recorded and imprinted into the written letters of these two periods [of] sovereignty and what they have written or recorded is the strong demand to avoid inner struggle. To avoid senseless ...

– Civil war.

– Yes, senseless internal fights and hatred. And the need to avoid fighting against the rest of the world.”

See *Tsahal*, Lanzmann.

suicide and martyrdom, a deliberate or undeliberate escalation strategy that could generate future fedayeen.¹⁴⁷

If there was a political rationale for putting the question of Palestine back on the agenda after the Abraham Accords,¹⁴⁸ it is difficult to conceive of any viable military strategy beyond the targeting of Israeli military sites and the capture of its soldiers to leverage the release of Palestinians held in Israeli prisons, given the overwhelming imbalance of military power. Its goal to overthrow the situation and the idea that a regional war would break out as it did during the Yom Kippur War of 1973¹⁴⁹ seems illusionary and was turned around into the

¹⁴⁷ The historian Jean-Pierre Filiu remarks on the matter of the sacrifice of the population, citing one of Hamas's spokesmen exiled in Qatar, who said, in May 2025, "The wombs of our women will give birth to many more children than those who died as martyrs."

Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Hamas Bears Overwhelming Responsibility for the Palestinian Catastrophe," *Le Monde*, 31 August 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2025/08/31/hamas-bears-overwhelming-responsibility-for-the-palestinian-catastrophe_6744897_23.html.

¹⁴⁸ Documents reviewed by *The Wall Street Journal* show that Hamas planned the 7 October attack to block the Saudi–Israeli normalisation, which would further obscure the Palestinian plight.

Markus Walker and Summer Said, "Hamas Wanted to Torpedo Israel-Saudi Deal With Oct. 7 Attacks, Documents Reveal," *The Wall Street Journal*, 18 May 2025, <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/hamas-wanted-to-torpedo-israel-saudi-deal-with-oct-7-attacks-documents-reveal-a70ec560>.

Hamas's attack on 7 October 2023 and Israel's response have undeniably transformed the global popular movement for Palestine, though foreign Western policy vis-à-vis Israel remains largely unchanged.

Internally, Hamas has experienced a surge in popularity among the Palestinians both in the West Bank and Gaza, and has definitely also sowed the seeds for further recruitment.

¹⁴⁹ On 6 October 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israel during Yom Kippur, exploiting reduced vigilance on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. The attack shattered Israel's sense of military invincibility, exposing its vulnerability and leaving a deep national trauma despite the Israeli counteroffensive. During the three-week war about 2,800 IDF soldiers lost their lives, and it remains Israel's most deadly conflict in terms of military casualties since the War of Independence, when more

perfect legitimation for Israel to take it all. The result is that Hamas has delivered its own population into the arms of Israel's wrath and retaliation, Israel's drive for historical revenge and hunger for territory. Perhaps Hamas's attack even liberates the Israelis from the inversed ghetto they had built for themselves, to push the Palestinians out, push them into the sea or the Sinai Desert, which reverberates both with Jewish historical memory of exile, from the biblical Exodus into the wilderness after fleeing Egypt, and with the more recent history of Jewish expulsion in Europe.¹⁵⁰

Another scene in *Tsahal* is also remarkable and reverberating. It is of the mountains around the Sea of Galilee, where Lanzmann filmed recreational hang-glider pilots slowly diving and sailing downwards.¹⁵¹ When we left to drive from our hotel to the Qalandiya checkpoint, Al Balawi brought a Mars chocolate bar with him; while eating it, he started to tell us that it was eaten by the suicide commando of 1987, led by the two commandos of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command, before infiltrating Israel through the border of Lebanon using two hang gliders. They attacked an IDF base and killed six soldiers, which was the catalyst for the First Intifada, the

than six thousand soldiers died. Nearly fifty years later, on 7 October 2023—during Simchat Torah and Shabbat—Hamas infiltrated Israel when alertness was low and attacked on multiple fronts to overwhelm border defences, a tactic that for many observers evoked the psychological shock of 1973.

Abraham Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter That Transformed the Middle East* (New York: Schocken, 2004).

¹⁵⁰ The biblical story of the Israelites' flight into the desert is foundational to Jewish memory (Exodus 13–16). It is echoed in the historical expulsions of Jewish communities for three millennia.

¹⁵¹ See *Tsahal*, Lanzmann.

popular uprising from within the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza, which finally led to the Oslo Accords of 1993.¹⁵²

The tactic of the hang gliders, in some sort a revenant of the past,¹⁵³ was also used by Hamas to infiltrate Israel on 7 October 2023, during which they killed 1995 people and took 250 hostages, experienced by Israelis as a frontal attack on their military invincibility, superiority and pride, as well as a contemporary pogrom that touched upon the deepest trauma and fear of persecution and extermination that the Jewish people have lived with for centuries, one that instigated Israel's "second war of independence," in the words of the current prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² The attack took place on 25 November 1987, near Lebanon's southern border and is known as the "Night of the Gliders." The attack preceded the uprising in the Jabalia refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, which was triggered by an Israeli military truck that collided with civilian vehicles and killed four Palestinians on 9 December 1987.

Jonathan Edwards, "Paragliding Fighters Invading Israel Echoes Attack from 35 Years Ago," *The Washington Post*, 9 October 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2023/10/09/israel-night-of-the-gliders-2023/>.

¹⁵³ The attack from 7 October differs in the political spectrum it represents, as the 1987 suicide commando was led by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command (PFLP-GC). George Habash's PFLP is considered as the most left-wing faction within the PLO; however, the General Command is a splinter group led by Ahmed Jibril that redirected the PFLP's leftist theoretical discourse back towards armed struggle as a means to liberate Palestine. In that sense, a revenant appears in the more radical position that Hamas took towards the PLO and the PA, just as the PFLP-GC opposed the PLO and Yasser Arafat in the late 1980s, refusing any political settlement with Israel.

¹⁵⁴ Peter Beaumont, "Netanyahu Declares a 'Second War of Independence' as Fears for Gazans Grow," *The Guardian*, 28 October 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/28/netanyahu-declares-a-second-war-of-independence-as-fears-for-gazans-grow>.

One wonders if the wars that Israel faced and fought after the War of Independence of 1948, including the present one, are not all a “repetition compulsion”¹⁵⁵ of the miracle of what Chris Marker called the “first fight” during the “time of miracles,” Israel’s coming into being, its being born out of the dust and blood of war, as much as they all deal with the second battle he refers to in the endnotes of *Description d’un combat*: “Its existence, its freedom, was at stake in the first fight. It was the time of miracles. But miracles die with those who have seen them. A second fight begins. To become a nation like the others is to acquire the right to the selfishness of nations, to their blindness, to their vanity. But the whole history of Israel has risen up in advance against a

¹⁵⁵ The concept of repetition compulsion was first described by Freud in an article in 1914, entitled “Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten” (“Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through”), in which he noted how “the patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, he *acts* it out, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it.” This observation undermined Freud’s concept of the pleasure principle, after which he developed the concept of the death drive. The case of Israel seems to confirm that both concepts are entangled. Thriving on the image and the psyche of the eternal victim, Israel, in its hunger for redemption and territory, faces in the Palestinian resistance the death needed to make another miracle possible, a victory in which Israel finds pleasure, which ultimately reverses the roles of the victim and the perpetrator, the shifting paradigm that is at once denied yet performed and acted out in plain sight.

Sigmund Freud, “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 12:145–156.

Original German version: “Der Analysierte erinnere überhaupt nichts von dem Vergessenen und Verdrängten, sondern er agiere es. Er reproduziert es nicht als Erinnerung, sondern als Tat, er wiederholt es, ohne natürlich zu wissen, daß er es wiederholt.”

Sigmund Freud, “Weitere Ratschläge zur Technik der Psychoanalyse (II): Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten,” in *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* 2, no. 6 (1914): 489; reprinted in *Gesammelte Werke* (London: Imago Publishing, 1946), 10:129.

force that is only power. Force and power are themselves only signs. And the greatest injustice that weighs on Israel is perhaps not having the right to be unjust.”¹⁵⁶

Marker didn’t make it to Gaza, but Claude Lanzmann did, both in *Pourquoi Israël* and *Tsahal*. In *Pourquoi Israël*—in which Israel’s border was still at the Suez Canal, as it was filmed in 1972¹⁵⁷—Lanzmann depicts R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, very respectfully referred to as “the professor” by the soldiers,¹⁵⁸ holding binoculars to look at the other side and speaking of the fact that “a people that really is like other peoples wouldn’t feel the need to emphasise this.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ “Son existence, sa liberté, c’était l’enjeu du premier combat. C’était le temps des miracles. Mais les miracles meurent avec ceux qui les ont vus. Un deuxième combat commence. Devenir une nation comme les autres, c’est acquérir le droit à l’égoïsme des nations, à leur aveuglement, à leur vanité de nations. Mais toute l’histoire d’Israël s’est élevée d’avance contre une force qui n’est que la puissance. La force et la puissance ne sont elles-mêmes que des signes. Et la plus grande injustice qui pèse sur Israël, c’est peut-être de n’avoir pas le droit d’être injuste.”

Marker, *Commentaires I*, 140.

¹⁵⁷ During the June 1967 Six-Day War, Israel occupied the Sinai Peninsula, extending its border to the eastern bank of the Suez Canal. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Six-Day War,” accessed 17 August 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Six-Day-War>.

¹⁵⁸ Raphael Juda (R. J.) Zwi Werblowsky, born in 1924, escaped Nazi Germany at the end of the 1930s to Mandate Palestine. Although Werblowsky was not a student of Gershom Scholem, he became deeply impressed by Scholem’s approach to Jewish mysticism. He translated Scholem’s magnum opus on Shabtai Tzvi, the seventeenth-century false messiah from Smyrna, into English.

¹⁵⁹ See *Pourquoi Israël*, Lanzmann.

It is remarkable that we find Werblowsky at the Suez Canal. In the preceding scenes, Lanzmann films him in his library in his house in Jerusalem.

After his lengthy elaboration with Werblowsky, Lanzmann cuts to an image of two Palestinian men with their arms raised, being checked from top to bottom by an armed Israeli soldier for weapons, filmed frontally with the title “GAZA” appearing at the bottom of the screen, followed by their papers being checked. The camera then follows the soldiers walking through the streets of Gaza, after which Lanzmann asks the soldiers on the occupation of the territories, leading them to come up with the idea of the terrorist.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ This is the conversation that Lanzmann has with the soldiers in question. One of the soldiers translates from English to Hebrew and back to English. Although clearly rendered in English as “the terrorist,” the original Hebrew wording from the soldier is less clear:

“They like to be in Gaza?”

– Not at all.

– Why not?

– He says it is not real soldier’s work; it is dirty work. It is work with civilians. It is like a game of hunting of cat and mouse. And he doesn’t like it because it is dirty work.

– But why they do it?

– He says you have no choice. You have to finish the terrorists.

– And they think they are finishing the terrorists?

– He says that the list of the suspects was narrowed very much.”

This part is edited in towards the end of the film, comparable to Marker, who, at the end of his essay, addresses “the Arab question.” It should be noted that in 1972, when Lanzmann shot the film, the Israelis he encountered spoke of “the Palestinians,” while in *Description d’un combat*, Marker still speaks only of the Arabs.

See *Pourquoi Israël*, Lanzmann.

In *Tsahal*, Lanzmann pushes this narrative further, not only the question of the army, but also the related question of the occupation, or simply the fact that the land that the Zionists see as their land, the land of Israel, where they are historically and divinely the chosen ones, happens to be also populated by others that have been living there for ages: the Arabs, the Palestinians. He finds himself back in Gaza twenty years later, at the end of the First Intifada.¹⁶¹ Embedded as Lanzmann was in the army, he filmed a substantial portion of the second part of *Tsahal* in or around Gaza. The narrative is built up dramatically. It goes from elaborations on the doctrine of assault and how it is taught by Matan Vilnai, Ariel Sharon and Ehud Barak¹⁶² to elaborations on the Sayeret Matkal special forces¹⁶³ by Moshe “Muki” Betser and Ehud Barak, where they

¹⁶¹ The film was shot during 1991 and 1992, at the end of the First Intifada that took place from 1987 until 1993, when the Oslo Accords were concluded.

¹⁶² The well-known Ariel Sharon is discussed in *Fierté nationale* by Zubayda Zankari, one of the adoptive children of Yasser Arafat, who sees him as responsible for the massacres of Sabra and Shatila in Beirut, September 1982, when the PLO had retreated from the city, and Lebanese Phalangists massacred between 700 and 3,500 Palestinians, depending on which side the source is from. Lanzmann doesn't touch upon the matter in his conversation with Sharon. In 1982, Sharon was minister of defence, and, although he first refused, he ultimately stepped down after the Kahan Commission concluded that he was personally responsible for “ignoring the danger of bloodshed and revenge” and “not taking appropriate measures to prevent bloodshed” in relation to the massacres.

Bayan Nuwayhed Al-Hout, *Sabra and Shatila: September 1982*, trans. Peter O'Brian (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

Matan Vilnai is a lesser-known military man who later had a political career. As a member of the Labour Party and the deputy minister of defence since 2007, he stated on the Army Radio in February 2008, while Israel was bombarding Gaza, that Gazan Palestinians “will bring upon themselves a bigger *Shoah* because we will use all our might to defend ourselves.”

“Deputy Defence Minister Vilnai: Palestinians Will Bring on a Bigger Shoah,” *Haaretz*, 4 February 2008, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5019839>.

¹⁶³ Sayeret Matkal, the General Staff Reconnaissance Unit, was established in 1957 and was modelled after the British Special Air Service (SAS). It's an intelligence-gathering unit, “conducting deep reconnaissance behind enemy lines to obtain strategic intelligence. Sayeret Matkal is also tasked with counter-terrorism and hostage rescue beyond Israel's borders.” “Sayeret Matkal,” IDF, accessed 10 August 2025, <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/our-corps-units-brigades/elite-units/sayeret-matkal/>.

describe in detail the raid and assassinations of senior members of the PLO in Beirut 1973 (an event briefly alluded to by Al Balawi in his interview with General Tawfiq).¹⁶⁴ The film then moves into the discourse of eliminating terrorists¹⁶⁵ and cuts to scenes of the occupation of the territories, with a zoomed-out shot of binoculars watching Gaza from a high watchtower building. In these images, we can see the already densely constructed Gaza Strip, as a background for teenagers throwing stones¹⁶⁶ and patrolling Israeli soldiers.¹⁶⁷ Lanzmann interviews from within and out of an army jeep, Lanzmann Brigadier General Schmuel Zucker, commander of the Gaza Strip, who goes to see some of his young soldiers who had “possibly” shot and wounded Palestinians in

¹⁶⁴ See *Fierté nationale*, 00:11:00:00 – 00:11:39:00.

¹⁶⁵ See *Tsahal*, Lanzmann.

¹⁶⁶ These images of Gaza are alternated with images from the mountains surrounding Nablus, and of Israeli soldiers patrolling the casbah of the old city, a place that I particularly know well since we also filmed there, more particularly in Yasser Arafat’s hiding place before he crossed the Jordan River and started the revolution out of Jordan in 1965. By that time, Israel had already tried to assassinate Yasser Arafat. It is estimated that over the decades Mossad made more than forty attempts to execute the Palestinian leader. Ronen Bergman, “How Arafat Eluded Israel’s Assassination Machine,” *The New York Times Magazine*, 23 January 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/23/magazine/how-arafat-eluded-israels-assassination-machine.html>.

Nablus is also the city where Hassan Al Balawi was born on 20 July 1965.

¹⁶⁷ These images look very much like the images of *Scenes of the Occupation from Gaza*, Mustafa Abu Ali’s seminal short documentary, that dates from the same year as Lanzmann’s film *Pourquoi Israël*, 1973. This thirteen-minute film is one of the earliest cinematic portrayals of life under Israeli occupation in Gaza following the Six-Day War of 1967 from a Palestinian perspective. However, watching this film, one is puzzled about how a Palestinian filmmaker could have filmed so closely and from the perspective of the Israeli soldiers? As a matter of fact, the film was constructed from footage originally shot by a French news crew accompanying Israeli military patrols in Gaza. Mustafa Abu Ali re-edited this material and constructed a counternarrative to the images by adding a voice-over with historical context and detailed descriptions of the Palestinian resistance in Gaza.

مشاهد من الاحتلال في غزة [*Scenes of the Occupation from Gaza*], directed by Mustafa Abu Ali (Lebanon: Palestine Cinema Group of the Research Centre, 1973).

“Scenes of the Occupation from Gaza,” Palestine Film Institute, accessed 1 May 2025, <https://www.palestinefilmstitute.org/en/pfp/archive/scenes-of-the-occupation-from-gaza>.

order to scatter them during a protest at Jabalia.¹⁶⁸ The testimony is first told in full by General Zucker, after which the young soldier who had opened fire repeats the same version of the facts under the watchful eye of the general¹⁶⁹—which is somehow a similar situation to when the young Palestinian Lieutenant Ayat Housheiyia was made to say what one should think about the armed struggle in the beginning of my film. It is near Jericho—where Al-Istiqlal University is located today—that Lanzmann films the Allenby Bridge over the Jordan River,¹⁷⁰ where the corpse of a Palestinian is shown being transferred from one ambulance to another.¹⁷¹ After this, he shows a man from Gaza, who works in Dubai as a civil engineer, crossing the Allenby Bridge Terminal for his yearly visit to his family, reminiscent of Al Balawi in his younger years, with a

¹⁶⁸ The First Intifada started in Gaza in the refugee camp of Jabalia, on 9 December 1987.

Interactive Encyclopaedia of the Palestine Question, “The First Intifada, 1987–1993: Exhilaration of Revolt, Promise of Freedom,” accessed 1 May 2025, <https://www.palquest.org/en/highlight/29773/first-intifada-1987-1993>.

¹⁶⁹ See *Tsahal*, Lanzmann.

¹⁷⁰ In this scene, we see the old British bridge; underneath, we can sense the Jordan River and the vegetation growing on its banks. The Allenby Bridge is the crossing point for Palestinians over the Jordan River between the West Bank and Jordan. It is named after the British General Edmund Allenby (1861–1936), who had a new bridge built in 1918 on the remnants of the Ottoman one that had been there before. This bridge was destroyed by the Palmach, the main Jewish paramilitary organisation during the “Night of the Bridges” operation in June 1946, cutting off the route between Mandatory Palestine and Transjordan. The bridge was destroyed again by the Jordanian Army during the 1967 Six-Day War, after which Israel installed a temporary bridge in 1968. Following the 1994 Israel–Jordan Peace Treaty, a modern bridge was constructed, standing today beside the older wooden structure. Allenby was a British field marshal who commanded the Egyptian Expeditionary Force of the British Empire at the end of World War I. He won the Third Battle of Gaza in November 1917, which led to the capture of Jerusalem in December of the same year, and in 1918, he defeated the Ottomans in Syria, which marked the end of Ottoman rule in the region.

“About: Allenby Land Border Crossing,” Israel Airports Authority, accessed 1 May 2025, <https://www.iaa.gov.il/en/land-border-crossings/alenbi/about/>.

Encyclopedia Britannica, “Edmund Henry Hynman Allenby, 1st Viscount Allenby,” accessed 1 May 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edmund-Henry-Hynman-Allenby-1st-Viscount-Allenby>.

¹⁷¹ As part of the repatriation of a corpse to Palestine. See *Tsahal*, Lanzmann.

moustache and in suit and tie, with a similar kind of attention to interaction and communication.¹⁷²

Al Balawi not only walks in the footsteps of this Palestinian man, as he had to enter the West Bank through the same crossing and undergo the same daily humiliations as all Palestinians have since the Six-Day War of 1967 to enter their land, if they are granted access and the border is open;¹⁷³ he also walks in the footsteps of Nabil Shaath and other Palestinians, incorporating them into his own body and language, and he even mirrors at moments Claude Lanzmann in some of his gestures and interviewing style. We can think about the moment when he interviews Lieutenant Ayat Housheiyia at the Al-Istiqlal University and asks her what she thinks of the armed struggle, in the past and today. When she doesn't know what to answer, he gestures and says that she is wearing an army uniform,¹⁷⁴ reminding one of Lanzmann's hand and arm gestures when he insists on something or when he doesn't agree or wants to get something more out of his subjects. For example, in a scene with Uri Ariel, a colonist in the

¹⁷² See *Tsahal*, Lanzmann.

¹⁷³ Hassan Al Balawi travelled from Brussels to Amman, Jordan, and then took a taxi to the border, crossed the bridge and took another taxi. This is the only passage for Palestinians to enter the West Bank, and before the Rafah crossing to Egypt was established in 2005, it was also the only way into Gaza. We, the film crew, walking in the footsteps of Al Balawi, couldn't film this crossing, since we, as Europeans, travelled through Ben Gurion Airport and then took a taxi to Ramallah, where Al Balawi joined us. We also couldn't film Al Balawi obtaining his permit at the Civil Administration of the West Bank at Beit El colony, nor Al Balawi's actual crossing at Qalandiya checkpoint to enter Israel. It shows the limits of the camera following a Palestinian diplomat in his homeland; however, these limitations and interdictions are "solved" cinematographically in the film through eclipses that make them tangible, like a kind of negative film image.

¹⁷⁴ See *Fierté nationale*, 00:13:50:00 – 00:14:38:00.

West Bank, where Lanzmann tries to make him understand that perhaps one day he will need to leave.¹⁷⁵

Lanzmann is fully under control, as he is the one who asks the questions and directs; he doesn't let himself be questioned. In contrast, the relationship that emerges between Al Balawi, his interlocutors, their environment and myself as filmmaker—holding the camera on my shoulder while directing or un-directing him—creates a more unstable dynamic.¹⁷⁶ One example is the particularly

¹⁷⁵ See *Tsahal*, Lanzmann.

¹⁷⁶ There is no doubt that I have been inspired by Claude Lanzmann and other filmmakers such as Marcel Ophüls, who, as reporters and researchers of their subjects, deeply engaged themselves in their own films. Through their questioning, their presence outside the frame as voices, and their interventions by stepping their bodies into the frame and staging themselves as the unrelenting investigator or the ironic commentator. The difference is that I trained myself in film by observing situations, and then creating situations in which I staged the so-called “guide”: in this case, Hassan Al Balawi, a journalist, reporter, writer, diplomat, PLO spokesman, translator and Palestinian returning to his homeland. Whereas Lanzmann and Ophüls use the camera as an instrument that follows their directions, in my case, it is the man carrying the camera on his shoulder who directs, or un-directs, the “guide,” staged in front of the lens and performing himself in given or constructed situations. In other words, we can speak of a more hybrid form of filmmaking, where the relation between filmmaker and subject is unstable, perhaps even ambiguous. Hassan Al Balawi, his interlocutors, myself as filmmaker, and the spectators are all caught within the very situation staged before us, a situation into which we collectively fall when Al Balawi steps into the opening scene of the film at the Al-Istiqlal University in Jericho. As a dignitary, he inspects the troops, observing and following their marching and chants, all the while bringing in a foreign camera crew in the tradition of the Palestine Cinema Institution in order to show the fedayeen who will liberate Palestine and to expose the Israeli occupation. Yet historical time has changed: from the very first moment of the film, Al Balawi is lagging behind—much like the Palestinian security forces, who, following the Oslo Accords, became structurally entangled in maintaining the very occupation they were meant to resist. For a critique on Lanzmann's *Tsahal*, see Amnon Kapeliouk, “When Claude Lanzmann Made Propaganda for the Israeli Army,” *Verso Blog*, 23 July 2018, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/news/3940-when->

telling moment in the scene with Yasser Arafat's adoptive children, who are living in an apartment in a newly constructed residential neighbourhood in Ramallah, a stark contrast with the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut where they were found as babies after their parents were massacred, and subsequently adopted by Arafat. After initiating the conversation and taking control in his role as an interviewer, Al Balawi loses his voice as he listens to their testimonies and is unable to ask any further questions.¹⁷⁷ Arafat's adoptive children then confront Al Balawi, saying that they recognise him from their childhood as the son of Fathi Al Balawi; he turns in on himself as he is exposed as "the son of." At the end of the encounter, he says to himself, "May their souls rest in peace."¹⁷⁸ It becomes clear during the conversation that he is referring to his father and uncle, Fathi and Hakam Al Balawi. His father was the director of the Al-Quds school in Tunis, which the adoptive children attended, and his uncle the Palestinian ambassador to Tunisia in the 1980s, when the PLO had left Beirut and installed its headquarters in Tunis.¹⁷⁹

claude-lanzmann-made-propaganda-for-the-israeli-army?srsId=AfmBOomJL8ZmXfo6CzGOqyP9f6HZ1oJ-JI7pQB7Ivf1IpItHRleblu.

¹⁷⁷ See *Fierté nationale*, 00:42:48:00 – 00:44:00:00.

“هادي اصعب مقابلة هادي”

Analysing this moment, one can remark that Al Balawi's voice is attenuated throughout the film, lessened or weakened (in amount, force or magnitude), long and thin as if from having been stretched, thinner.

¹⁷⁸ The original wording:

“الترقد ارواحهم بسلام”

¹⁷⁹ See *Fierté nationale*, at the end of the scene with Yasser Arafat's adoptive children, 00:47:41:00 – 00:48:49:00.

At the end of the 1982 Lebanon War, Israel's siege of Beirut forced the PLO to leave its base there. Approximately twenty-two thousand PLO fighters left for Algeria, Tunisia, Sudan, North and South Yemen, Iraq, Jordan and Syria, while the PLO installed its headquarters in Tunis. This dispersion broke the PLO's semi-state apparatus, and severed its direct link with the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and Syria. See Jamil Hilal, "PLO Institutions: The Challenge Ahead," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 23, no. 1 (Autumn 1993): 46–60.

Whereas *Tsahal* was filmed at the end of the First Intifada, Michel Khleifi and Eyal Sivan's *Route 181: Fragments d'un voyage en Palestine–Israël* was filmed ten years later,¹⁸⁰ during the Second Intifada.¹⁸¹ It responded in some way to what Lanzmann refused to do: indirectly making a film on Israel's War of Independence by following the UN line of partition of 1947 through the land and filming from both the Palestinian and Israeli points of view, the dreams and aspirations of the people on both sides whom they encounter on the road. In the first part of the film,¹⁸² Khleifi and Sivan search for this line around Gaza and meet an older Palestinian woman who tells them about a dream she had, depicting the washing away of the Israeli occupation.¹⁸³ This dream is referred

¹⁸⁰ *Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Palestine–Israel / Route 181: Fragments d'un voyage en Palestine–Israël*, directed by Michel Khleifi and Eyal Sivan (France: momento!; Belgium: Sourat Films; Germany: WDR, 2003).

Eyal Sivan, "Route 181, Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel," Eyal Sivan's official website, accessed 5 May 2025, <https://eyalsivan.info/index.php?p=fichefilm&id=5>.

¹⁸¹ The Second Intifada, or the Al-Aqsa Intifada, took place from 28 September 2000 to 8 February 2005. It was triggered by Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to Haram Al-Sharif (the Temple Mount) in Jerusalem, as well as by the underlying failure of the final-status negotiations at Taba, Egypt, in January 2001—talks that sought to resolve core issues such as borders, refugees, Jerusalem and settlements but ultimately ended without agreement, contributing to the collapse of the Oslo process.

Michael Fishbach, "XI. The Al-Aqsa Intifada and the End of an Era in Palestinian Politics," *Interactive Encyclopaedia of the Palestine Question*, accessed 10 August 2025, <https://palquest.palestine-studies.org/en/highlight/31123/xi-al-aqsa-intifada-and-end-era-palestinian-politics>.

¹⁸² The film is structured in three parts, titled "The South," "The Centre" and "The North," corresponding to the geographical areas of Palestine and Israel where Khleifi and Sivan filmed.

¹⁸³ The full sentence:

“أخذوا أرضي، وبعد أسبوع هطلت أمطار غزيرة ودمرت كل شيء. حتى سيارات الجيب جرفتها المياه. إن شاء الله، فُقدت إلى الأبد.”
 (“They took my land and a week later a torrential rain fell and devastated everything. Even the jeeps were washed away. God willing, lost forever.”)

to in the second part of the film by the evocation of a miracle by a guide at the Herzl House, who repeats Rabin's words that he "would like to wake up one day and see Gaza swallowed up by the sea,"¹⁸⁴ echoing both Al Balawi, who

¹⁸⁴ The interview is rather chilling, as little by little, the guide's thoughts are revealed:

"The Jewish National Fund, Keren Kayemet Le Israel, raised funds for the Zionist movement to prepare the ground for the future state. It bought the land where we stand, for example. After the First World War, the Fund continued to buy land and raise funds for the Zionist movement. It also carried out actions such as planting trees. This was for agricultural, ecological and political reasons: to demonstrate the ownership of the land intended for Jewish settlements, to show that the land belonged to the Jewish people. Donations financed construction and development. A Jew who had fought in the War of Independence financed the construction of this house. Factories were also built with donations. Likewise, universities and public buildings, on which plaques are affixed to commemorate the names of the donors. I now suggest you go inside to visit. Nothing here is authentic.

'If you will it, it is no dream.' [A Herzl quotation that is printed on a panel in the exhibition, shown on film and a subtitle in Khleifi and Sivan's film, *Route 181*.]

The old railway line that connected Jaffa to Jerusalem ran near here. It dated from 1892. The idea was to build Jewish settlements all the way to Jerusalem. We built all along it, wherever possible. We increased the Jewish people's influence. The Jewish National Fund, with money collected from piggy banks, stamps, and the *Golden Book*, bought as much land as possible. Then, we always found a way to create Jewish settlements and extend the influence of Jewish property on the country until the creation of a state, the Jewish state in Israel, created in 1948.

– How much land was bought before 1948?

– I don't remember; I'll have to check. The first company that bought land was the Anglo-Palestinian Company. 'The Dream Takes Root.' [Another Herzl quotation, filmed and subtitled.]

It was a kind of bank for the Zionist movement. In 1907, the Jewish National Fund bought the land from it.

– First bought from whom?

– From the inhabitants of the Arab village, the neighbouring village, Kfar Huldeh. There was an Arab village here before 1948. It was called Kfar Huldeh. It hasn't existed since the War of Independence.

– Do you want to know where this land came from?

– The Arab villages had land. After the conquest, the people fled or were expelled. The state used the village land. Some of it went to Kibbutz Hulda, and the rest to the settlements created after independence.

The land was purchased legally and paid for in hard cash. Abraham himself bought the Hebron burial ground and paid a good price for it; I would even say, an exorbitant price. So, let's leave that aside ... How far back in history can we go?

– Did you just go back three thousand years? You just mentioned Abraham ...

finds himself lost and swept away under a deluge of rain at the end of *Fierté nationale*, and the Zionist dream, in its miracle becoming true once more—although not by the sea, but by a sea of bombs dropped “on the biggest ghetto of the world,” as Sivan calls it at the beginning of the film.¹⁸⁵

The matter of the “ghetto” comes back in the middle of the film, when Khleifi and Sivan evoke at large the events of the Lod Ghetto, more particularly about the 250 Arabs who were driven into the Dahmash Mosque and massacred on 12

– But that doesn’t mean ... There’s a limit that we have to ... It’s politics. There might be a day ... Rabin said that he would like, one day when he wakes up, to see Gaza swallowed up by the sea. He was criticised for saying that. It wasn’t politically correct. But if such a miracle ever happened, I don’t think I would regret it. On a human level perhaps, but not on a national level. It would rid us of a serious problem that occupies us a lot. If, in 1948, we had done like the Americans with the Indians, for everyone, it would be ... Some would no longer be there to talk and others ... We would be at peace. It would have been better. It happened differently. We have to deal with it. Now let’s return to the Zionist point of view, to our memorial.

‘A Dunam Here and Dunam There.’ [Another Herzl quotation, filmed and subtitled.]”

Beyond Rabin’s words of his wish for a “Gaza swallowed up by the sea,” the interview also reveals the fact that the land was not empty, that not all of Israel’s land was bought from the Arabs but conquered, and that there was no mercy in driving the people out, which is called a miracle. Throughout the film, Khleifi and Sivan are both convinced that the situation in which they find themselves, having been born in the country they decided to return to and to film, is a pathological/ideological construct made by humans and can therefore also be undone by them.

¹⁸⁵ When he meets an Israeli at the border of Gaza who has a plan to transform an old abandoned Palestinian house into an art gallery, Sivan responds in disbelief:

“לִיד הַגֶּטוֹ הַגָּדוֹל בִּיּוֹתֵר בְּעוֹלָם?”

(“Next to the largest ghetto in the world?”)

July 1948.¹⁸⁶ In the film, the facts are told by an old Arab barber—while cutting the hair of a customer in his barbershop—who survived the massacre and cleaned the corpses, referring to the famous scene in Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, suggesting a mirroring of the Shoah and the Nakba, the ethnic cleansing of about 750,000 Palestinians from Mandatory Palestine, first by Zionist paramilitaries and, after the establishment of the State of Israel, by its army in 1948.¹⁸⁷ This mirroring—filmed in an environment with actual mirrors, both in *Shoah* and *Route 181*—led to an accusation of plagiarism, Antisemitism and incitement to commit violence and cause the destruction of Israel by Alain Finkelkraut, which led Sivan to file a libel suit against the French philosopher.¹⁸⁸ Although the scene clearly refers and responds to Lanzmann’s

¹⁸⁶ The raid on Lod, or Lydda, was launched the day before, on 11 July 1948, and carried out on the initiative of Moshe Dayan and his armoured Eighty-Ninth Battalion, machine-gunning about 150 to 200 Arabs in the city streets. Benny Morris, “Operation Dani and the Palestinian Exodus from Lydda and Ramle in 1948,” *Middle East Journal* 40, no. 1 (Winter 1986): 82–109, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4327250>.

¹⁸⁷ *Interactive Encyclopaedia of the Palestine Question*, “Overall Chronology,” accessed 10 August 2025, <https://www.palquest.org/en/overallchronology?sideid=175>.

¹⁸⁸ Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman, “The Barber Trial: Sivan vs. Finkelkraut,” *Cabinet Magazine*, no. 26, Summer 2007, https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/26/keenaw_weizman.php.

The trial adds to our discussion on Lanzmann’s statement in his interview with Stéphane Bou that he profoundly believes that Tzahal “is not an army of bastards and Nazis” and that “it was the Arabs who declared war on Israel in 1948,” echoing a classic Israeli/Zionist narrative: that the new State of Israel was attacked by surrounding Arab states immediately after its declaration of independence, and that it was therefore “a war of survival.” This framing downplays or omits the prior context of civil war and displacement already happening between Palestinians and Jewish militias before May 1948. Between late 1947 and May 1948, before the Arab armies entered, Jewish paramilitary groups like the Haganah, Irgun and Lehi carried out military operations that led to the depopulation of hundreds of Palestinian villages. By May 1948, around three hundred thousand Palestinians were already displaced. When the Arab states entered into the war, they did so partly in response to this already ongoing displacement. In *Route 181*, Khleifi and Sivan encounter a few Israelis who state that Palestinians rejected the 1947 UN Partition Plan (Resolution 181) and instead declared war, seeking to prevent the creation of a Jewish state and are therefore to blame themselves. For many Israelis, this is the “original sin” of Palestinian politics: refusal to

accept partition, which then “forfeited” the possibility of statehood. From the Palestinian and broader Arab perspective, the war of 1947–1948 was not an “unprovoked war,” but a response to the UN Partition Plan of 1947 (Resolution 181), which allocated 55% of Mandatory Palestine to a Jewish state, even though Jews made up about one-third of the population and owned less than 10% of the land. Palestinians saw this as the forced loss of their homeland, and resistance was both local (villages, irregular militias) and regional (intervention by Arab states). This “rejectionism” argument resurfaces again and again: In 1978, when the PLO rejected the deal at the Camp David Accords when Israel and Egypt made peace, offering the Palestinians only limited autonomy, not statehood. In 2000, again in Camp David and during the Taba Talks when Ehud Barak offered a version of statehood that Yasser Arafat refused, citing non-contiguous territory and lack of sovereignty over East Jerusalem. There seems to be a historical pattern: at every stage, Israel and its allies frame Palestinian refusals as rejection of peace itself. Palestinians see it as being offered less than freedom, dignity and real statehood.

For a concise chronology of the civil-war phase and subsequent interstate fighting, see *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “1948 Arab–Israeli War,” accessed 18 August 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/event/1948-Arab-Israeli-War>; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Arab-Israeli Wars,” accessed 18 August 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Arab-Israeli-wars>.

For the partition framework itself, see UN General Assembly Resolution 181 (II), “Plan of Partition with Economic Union” (29 November 1947), accessed 5 May 2025, <https://www.un.org/unispal/data-collection/general-assembly/>.

For Palestinian and critical historiographies emphasising dispossession during the 1947–1948 civil war and the expansion from the UN-allocated 55% to Israel’s control of c. 78% by the 1949 armistices, see Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), overview at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/birth-of-the-palestinian-refugee-problem-revisited/8AE72A6813CEA7DDDE8F9386313F0D97>; Walid Khalidi, ed., *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992); Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*. For an expressly settler-colonial interpretation foregrounding planned expulsions, see Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).

For the Israeli argument that Palestinians have consistently rejected peace proposals, see Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab–Israeli War*, 63–92.

For a Palestinian perspective, emphasising the structural injustice of successive proposals, see Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*.

For a historiographical synthesis and for an analysis of Israel’s strategy to negotiate from overwhelming strength, offering only limited concession, see Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (London: Penguin, 2014).

famous scene with Abraham Bomba, the barber of Treblinka,¹⁸⁹ *Route 181* is, in its methodology and form, closer to Lanzmann's *Pourquoi Israël*, because of the spontaneous interviewing of the people they encounter by chance on the road through the land. *Route 181* responds to *Tsahal* as well, as it follows the borders of the failed UN Partition Plan of 1947 and engages with both sides of the 1948 war, the Palestinian and the Israeli sides; in fact, Lanzmann declined Weizmann's initial proposal because he couldn't cover the Palestinian side of the story. Lest there be any doubt, the Israeli fighter jets cover the sky of *Route 181* throughout the film, as Khleifi and Sivan took their road trip during the Second Intifada and during the siege of Ramallah,¹⁹⁰ marking the beginning of the end of the Oslo Accords and the two-state solution. However, even despite the disillusion, the film maintains—through its open form and its meandering between the two sides—the possibility of permeability and contact between the different populations. Somehow, it reveals the filmmakers' dream of living together, a dream that seems to be oppressed while it is also omnipresent, the dream of undoing what has been done, the dream of two states or even a united state with equal rights for every human being that lives on the land.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ See *Shoah*, Lanzmann.

Lanzmann found Bomba in Israel. Already retired, Lanzmann brought him to a barbershop, where he staged the scene in question.

¹⁹⁰ *Interactive Encyclopaedia of the Palestine Question*, "Massive Israeli Invasion: Operation Defensive Shield (28 March 2002–10 May 2002)," accessed 10 August 2025, <https://www.palquest.org/en/overallchronology?sideid=13043>.

¹⁹¹ The filmmakers are not alone in this dream. Support for a one-state solution in the Israeli–Palestinian context includes Palestinian and Jewish advocates such as Edward Said, who argued that "real peace can come only with a binational Israeli–Palestinian state"; Omar Barghouti and Ali Abunimah, who promote a secular, democratic state with equal rights for all citizens, including refugees; and Jeff Halper, co-founder of the One Democratic State Campaign (ODSC), who calls for dismantling occupation structures in favour of shared citizenship. Edward Said, *Peace and Its Discontents: Essays on Palestine in the Middle East Peace Process* (New York: Vintage, 1999); Omar Barghouti, *BDS: Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions* (London: Pluto Press, 2007); Ali Abunimah, *One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli-Palestinian*

In contrast to Khleifi and Sivan's *Route 181*, *Fierté nationale* doesn't offer much respite, as the characters seem to be caught in the entrenched national and revolutionary discourse they are compelled to embody and perform for the camera. As a matter of fact, *Fierté nationale* is hardly a film; it consists of just a few moments and movements, a few days in the occupied territories of the West Bank and in Israel, and documents Al Balawi's comings and goings as he visits his homeland of Palestine. It follows his footsteps, from close by, step by step, as a hero or rather an anti-hero is portrayed in fiction movies, throwing this technique back into the harsh and bare banality of reality and history.

Fierté nationale also doesn't offer any respite by cutting up scenes and bringing them into contrapuntal structures, as Lanzmann and Marker have mastered. The image simply moves on, just as time and history move on, as the camera films and documents Al Balawi's body moving on. Moreover, these sequences are edited in a contrarian a/dischronological structure, with at most slight eclipses and fractures, interruptions and stretches of time and space that drive us, stumbling and bumping, into the abyss of history in which Al Balawi, and we, the spectator with him, happen to be folded.

Impasse (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); Gideon Polya, "Democratic One-State Solution (Unitary State, Bi-National State) for Post-Apartheid Palestine," *Countercurrents*, 22 December 2018, <https://countercurrents.org/2018/12/democratic-one-state-solution-unitary-state-bi-national-state-for-post-apartheid-palestine/>.

In opposition to the prevailing norms of non-linear narration in contemporary art and moving-image-making, I inversed this so-called deconstructive technique of Western linear time, narrative progression or cause-and-effect logic. However, time is stretched to the limit, and no purpose, respite or resolution is offered. In its method and form, the film is therefore close to *Route 181*, Khleifi and Sivan's road movie, as it always continues and moves on. However, *Fierté nationale* was made fifteen years after *Route 181*, at a time when the situation had moved more and more towards a dead end, as by then, Gaza had been placed under blockade and the separation wall had been built, fragmenting the West Bank into disconnected enclaves, making the movement of Al Balawi in the territories extremely difficult. *Fierté nationale: De Jéricho vers Gaza* also follows another geographical trajectory, namely one that comments on the Gaza–Jericho Agreement of 1994,¹⁹² concluded shortly after the Oslo Accords. It established the PA with the promise that the Palestinian State would be built, a dream that seemed to have been shattered when we took our trip twenty-five years later, in 2019. While Khleifi and Sivan¹⁹³ could still move rather freely, the reality of shooting *Fierté nationale* was completely different. The scene where Al Balawi gets his permit and crosses the Qalandiya checkpoint to go to Tel Aviv for the first time in his life confronts us with the

¹⁹² United Nations, "Letter Dated 19 November 1947 from the United Nations Mediator Addressed to the Secretary-General," UN Document A/364 (19 November 1947), <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-185298/>.

¹⁹³ Both Khleifi and Sivan had access to Israel and the occupied territories as Israeli citizens. A Palestinian filmmaker based in Brussels, Khleifi was born in Nazareth in 1955, within the internationally recognised borders of the State of Israel, which automatically entitled him to Israeli citizenship by birth. Sivan, on the other hand, was born to a Jewish family in Haifa in 1964 and grew up in Jerusalem, but he has been living in Paris and Marseille since 1991.

fact that Palestinians hardly can't access their homeland or move around.¹⁹⁴ As a matter of fact, getting the permit was a coup,¹⁹⁵ even though it didn't give Al Balawi the permission to go to Gaza, where his house and archives were still located in 2019. While Khleifi and Sivan meander around the UN partition line of 1947, trying to go back in time and pursue their dream of living together, *Fierté nationale* is bound to Al Balawi's physical and legal status as a Palestinian, and defined by the further vanishing of the dream.

If there is any respite from the harsh, bare and abrasive reality and this contrarian a/dischronological structure, then it is perhaps the non-diegetic music that opens and closes the film with Franz Liszt's transcription for piano of Wagner's "Isolde's Liebestod,"¹⁹⁶ played by Vladimir Horowitz in his final recording.¹⁹⁷ Just as Lanzmann opens and closes *Pourquoi Israël* with Gert Granach playing his accordion and singing Spartacus League songs, *Fierté nationale* joins in with the same structure of *entre parenthèses*,¹⁹⁸ with the

¹⁹⁴ As a European, I could move around much more freely than Al Balawi could; however, this freedom of movement was strictly controlled and monitored—particularly when leaving Israel via Ben Gurion Airport—through lengthy questioning, the inspection of phones and computers, and by contacting individuals whose details must be provided upon arrival in order to verify the accounts given.

¹⁹⁵ One that was granted by the Geneva Initiative. See Geneva Initiative, "Geneva Initiative, An Israeli–Palestinian Initiative to End the Conflict," accessed 18 August 2015, <https://geneva-accord.org/>.

¹⁹⁶ "Liebestod" is the final aria of Wagner's opera *Tristan and Isolde* from 1865.

¹⁹⁷ Horowitz completed his final recording four days before his death, 5 November 1989.

Vladimir Horowitz, "Liebestod" (piano transcription after Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*), in *Horowitz: The Last Recording* (Deutsche Grammophon, 1989).

¹⁹⁸ French term used by Stéphane Bou, who interviewed Lanzmann about *Pourquoi Israël*: "Tout le film est ensuite monté comme une longue parenthèse de plus de trois heures qui divise un même plan tourné dans la salle des noms de Yad Vashem."

Lanzmann, quoted in Bou, "Entretien avec Claude Lanzmann."

difference being Lanzmann's diegetic-music technique, which he has practised and defended throughout his cinematographic work.¹⁹⁹

While Lanzmann starts and ends with Granach playing the accordion, I follow his structural approach more closely by splitting the following scene into two parts: at the beginning of the film he searches for the book, whereas its

("The whole film is then edited as a long parenthesis of more than three hours which divides a single shot filmed in the Hall of Names at Yad Vashem.")

"In parentheses" can be seen as a digression or an afterthought, as well as a suspension: a suspension of time that folds in upon itself.

¹⁹⁹ We can experience this particularly in *Shoah*, where Claude Lanzmann opens the film, after a long rolling introductory text, with Simon Srebnik re-enacting the German Nazi songs he had to sing to "entertain" the Nazis as he rows a boat on the Ner River in Poland, near the Chelmno extermination camp—the same boat he had been forced to use during the war—as past and present collapse into one another. In this powerful opening scene, Lanzmann immediately establishes his approach by bringing Srebnik back to the place where, as a teenager, he had been forced by the Nazis to dispose of the bodies of murdered Jews, after which he was shot and left for dead, though he survived. Lanzmann's methodology is to not rely on archival footage, but instead to bring survivors—or, at times, perpetrators—back to locations where they experienced horror, if not physically then at least mentally. If the latter scene anachronises the act, it nevertheless situates it precisely where it occurred during the war and, as such, does not displace it. This stands in contrast to Gert Granach, who sings his pre-war German songs from Berlin in post-war Jerusalem, to be at once displaced and anachronistic. Lanzmann makes an exception to his principle of using diegetic music in *Pourquoi Israël*, namely by using a Yiddish song about the ghetto sung by Sarah Gorby, juxtaposed with the extraordinary images of the red mountains and the Sinai Desert along the Red Sea, a sublime moment of anachronism and displacement in the film. The song is "Moyde Ani," a traditional Jewish morning prayer (*Modeh Ani*) expressing gratitude upon awakening. In this rendition, the lyrics are reinterpreted to reflect dislocation, loss and searching—resonating with the ghetto experience. However, when set against images of the Sinai, they transcend the specific connotations of the Jewish ghettos of Nazi-occupied Europe, instead evoking the millennia-long experience of exile and the longing for a return to Zion—a return that is here presented as having been realised.

Pourquoi Israël, Lanzmann.

Sarah Gorby, "Moyde Ani," on *Les Inoubliables chants du ghetto*, Vogue Records, 1958.

discovery and the naming of all the Lanzmanns who perished in the Holocaust are deferred until the end, suspending the revelation of the director's relationship to the film's subject from the beginning to the end of the film. Looking more closely into my splitting of Liszt's *Liebestod*: it corresponds exactly to the transcription that Liszt made of Wagner's piece, in which he added to the final aria a fragment from earlier in the opera, namely the first notes of the love duet, sung to the words "sehrend verlangter Liebestod,"²⁰⁰ which also form the opening notes of the film.

Just like the Spartacus League songs or the Yiddish songs of the ghetto, Liszt's transcription of Wagner is displaced, yet remains also deeply connected to nineteenth-century European Romanticism and nationalism, which went hand in hand with the rise of Antisemitism and Zionism.²⁰¹ Hence, it resonates in the

²⁰⁰ "Wagner called the prelude the 'Liebestod' (Love-death) and the Act III finale Isolde's 'Verklärung' (Transfiguration). Liszt, though, evidently had his own ideas about this: in 1867 (published 1868; revised edition 1875) he made his strict and masterly transcription of the finale—Isolde's 'Mild und leise'—and christened that section the 'Liebestod.' As if to underscore the point, he prefaced it with a four-bar musical motto from the second-act love duet at the words 'sehrend verlangter Liebestod' (ardently loved for love-death)." Liszt's transcription became well known throughout Europe well before Wagner's opera reached most places, and it is Liszt's title for the final scene that persists.

Charles Suttoni, introduction to *Franz Liszt: Complete Piano Transcriptions from Wagner's Operas* (New York: Dover Publications, 1981), ii.

²⁰¹ Wagner's work can be situated in the Romantic nationalism of the time, which sought to regenerate an authentic German cultural identity through mythic drama and music, yet Wagner's vision was marked by an exclusionary ideology, denouncing Jewish composers as corrosive to the very culture he sought to regenerate. In doing so, Wagner contributed to the intellectual and cultural climate of Antisemitism in nineteenth-century Europe, where Romantic nationalism and racialised notions of identity increasingly intersected. It was in this climate that Herzl witnessed the virulent Antisemitism surrounding the Dreyfus affair in 1890s France—an experience that helped crystallise his conviction that Jewish assimilation within

present with the question of Israel and Palestine, while also bringing me back to my own position as a European born after the Second World War, in 1970, at a time when European society had begun, slowly but steadily, to talk about the destruction of the Jews, not only as a crime perpetrated by Nazi Germany,²⁰² but also as one in which most European nations and their collaborating governments, including Belgium, the country where I was born and have lived my entire life, were implicated.²⁰³

European nation states was untenable, ultimately leading him to articulate the Zionist project in *Der Judenstaat* (1896). Wagner had lived in Paris in the early 1840s, where he received crucial financial support from the Jewish composer Giacomo Meyerbeer. Despite this early patronage, Wagner later violently turned against Meyerbeer and Jewish musicians more broadly, most infamously in his Antisemitic essay *Das Judenthum in der Musik* (Jewishness in Music), first published anonymously in 1850 and republished under his own name in 1869.

Richard Wagner, *Das Judenthum in der Musik* (Leipzig: J. J. Weber, 1869); George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964); Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700–1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); Michael Haas, *Forbidden Music: The Jewish Composers Banned by the Nazis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 23–26; Derek Penslar, *Theodor Herzl: The Charismatic Leader* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 56–62.

²⁰² In 1970, German Chancellor Willy Brandt visited Warsaw and knelt before the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes, a memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. This act, known as the *Warschauer Kniefall* (Warsaw Kneeling), was a spontaneous gesture of remorse for Nazi crimes during World War II.

“Kniefall revisited: Perspektiven auf Willy Brandts Kniefall von Warschau vor 50 Jahren,” Willy-Brandt-Stiftung, 30 November 2020, <https://willy-brandt.de/neuigkeiten/kniefall-revisited/>.

²⁰³ In Belgium, the Mémorial National aux Martyrs Juifs de Belgique (National Memorial to the Jewish Martyrs of Belgium) was inaugurated on 17 April 1970, the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Its walls commemorate the names of the 25,409 Jews deported from the Dossin Barracks (Mechelen) and murdered at Auschwitz–Birkenau, the Nazi concentration and extermination camp in Poland. The monument was erected by members of the Union des Déportés Juifs de Belgique (Union of Deported Jews of Belgium). It was not until 1995 that Belgium opened the original Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance in part of the old barracks of the Kazerne Dossin, and not until 2012 that it opened the Kazerne Dossin Museum in Mechelen, a newly constructed building in front of the memorial devoted to those deported to Auschwitz–Birkenau. A monument was erected in 2005, in Boortmeerbeek, where the twentieth convoy, a train travelling to Auschwitz carrying 1,631 Jews, was stopped by three young

members of the Belgian Resistance: 233 people managed to escape, 118 of which ultimately survived. This mass escape, on 19 April 1943, the same day the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising started, is the only one from a Holocaust deportation train in Western Europe. I was born in Mechelen, in a hospital close to the Dossin Barracks, and grew up in Rijmenam, the village next to Boortmeerbeek. During my childhood, my daily bicycle ride to school took me past where the attack on the twentieth convoy took place. One exception to Belgium's extended coming to terms with its war history is the Breendonk concentration camp, which was liberated in September 1944 and converted into a national memorial and museum in August 1947, as the National Memorial of Fort Breendonk, making it one of the earliest Nazi-era sites in Europe to be preserved as an official memorial.

"Memorial 20th Convoy," Traces of War, accessed 1 May 2025,
<https://www.tracesofwar.com/sights/6703/Memorial-20th-Convoy.htm>.

Agnès Bensimon, "Belgium, 19 April 1943: The Attack on the 20th Convoy," *Jews, Europe, the XXIst Century*, 25 January 2024, <https://k-larevue.com/en/belgium-19-april-1943-the-attack-on-the-20th-convoy/>;

"Fort Breendonk: Historical Overview, Breendonk Memorial," War Heritage Institute, accessed 1 May 2025, <https://fortbreendonk.be/en/historical-overview>.

As a child growing up in the 1970s, I thought the Second World War had happened a long time ago; only later did I realise that it was in fact very recent and, more importantly, omnipresent in our daily lives. We played in the craters left by the German V1 and V2 bombs in the fields near our house, and in houses that were hit by the bombs and in ruins. In particular, there were the heroic war stories that my maternal grandfather and grandmother told on Sundays, as well as my father's books on the war in our home library. In the 1980s, we also watched a documentary series on Belgian television about the Second World War by Maurice De Wilde, which left a deep impression on me. His landmark investigations for BRT (Belgische Radio en Televisie) included *De Oostfrontiers* (The Eastern Frontiers, 7 episodes, c. 1989), *De Nieuwe Orde* (The New Order, 18 episodes, February 1982–April 1983), followed by *De Collaboratie* (The Collaboration, 10 episodes, c. 1985), *Het Verzet* (The Resistance, 15 episodes, c. 1987–1989), and *De Repressie* (The Repression, 5 episodes, c. 1990). These are part of BRT's larger World War II documentary project *Productiekern Wereldoorlog II* (1973–1991), totalling around 120 episodes.

"Maurice De Wilde's Broadcasts," CegeSoma Research Collection on Belgium and WWII, accessed 18 August 2025, <https://www.cegesoma.be/en/maurice-de-wildes-broadcasts-vrt>; TheTVDB; "Maurice De Wilde: Filmography," accessed 18 August 2025, <https://thetvdb.com/people/8181111-maurice-de-wilde>.

Although the Holocaust is not mentioned in my film, it is nevertheless present because of the causal relationship between the Shoah and the existence of the State of Israel, as Lanzmann points out,²⁰⁴ and by Al Balawi setting foot on its soil, which was once his land, Palestine. The Holocaust, for which neither he nor the Palestinians at large bear responsibility or guilt, is nevertheless something they continue to carry and endure in its ongoing aftermath and consequences, transferred as it is upon them. From there, it seems that every person who appears in the film is carrying this transfer within their own history, their own bodies, as is poignantly depicted in the scene where Al Balawi visits Yasser Arafat's adoptive children, whose parents were killed during the Sabra and Shatila and the Tel al-Za'atar massacres, symbolising Arafat as the father of the revolution. This embodiment is also exposed in the preceding scene at the commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of Arafat's death at the Muqata, when Al Balawi is pressed among the Palestinians listening to the speeches of Arafat's successors and is carried with the crowds towards his tomb, where Al Balawi prays, together with other Palestinians who are, just as he is, left bewildered by "the void that his death leaves as the leader who could unite them," as Al Balawi writes.²⁰⁵

While Al Balawi is surrounded by the masses, he is also alone, as he carries another father in his body, his real father, Fathi Al Balawi, whose grave he then also visits the morning after at the cemetery of his father's home village, Balaa, a small mountaintop village in the West Bank, which was a stronghold during

²⁰⁴ Lanzmann, quoted in Bou, "Entretien avec Claude Lanzmann."

²⁰⁵ Al Balawi, *Gaza: Dans les coulisses*, 185.

the Great Arab Revolt in Palestine of 1936–1939.²⁰⁶ There he finds himself literally alone, mirroring the scene from the day before but without the masses, walking along the cemetery at dawn, praying in silence and standing at his father’s grave.

If Fathi Al Balawi lived up to his dream of returning and bringing back his son after thirty years of exile to the land of Palestine,²⁰⁷ then this dream was not

²⁰⁶ See *Fierté nationale*, 01:28:40:00 – 01:29:40:00.

Fathi Al Balawi was born in 1929 in Balaa, where as a child he witnessed the events of the 1936–1939 Great Arab Revolt, a nationalist uprising by Palestinian Arabs against British colonial rule and Zionist immigration. Beginning with a general strike and escalating into armed resistance, the Revolt was brutally repressed by the British, leading to the loss of the Palestinian leadership, and the destruction of the movement’s military capacity—effectively breaking the backbone of the Palestinian resistance, leaving it severely weakened for the 1947–1948 war.

Ghassan Kanafani, *The 1936–39 Revolt in Palestine* (New York: Committee for a Democratic Palestine, 1972), quoted in the introduction to the Marxists.org edition, May 2014,

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/kanafani/1972/revolt.htm>.

Encyclopedia Britannica, “Palestine—The Arab Revolt,” accessed 1 May 2025,

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Palestine/The-Arab-Revolt>.

Interactive Encyclopaedia of the Palestine Question, “Great Palestinian Rebellion, 1936–1939,” accessed 11 August 2025, <https://www.palquest.org/en/highlight/158/great-palestinian-rebellion-1936-1939>.

²⁰⁷ Hassan Al Balawi left Palestine when he was one month old, in 1965, the year the Palestinian revolution started. At the end of the film, in a last scrolling text on a black background, we learn that Al Balawi joined his father following the Oslo Accords from Tunis to Gaza, to set foot on Palestinian land for the first time in 1995, after thirty years of living in exile.

“Je suis revenue à Gaza, en février 1995 par l’intermédiaire de mon père qui m’a sorti une autorisation demandée par l’Autorité palestinienne mais délivrée par les Israéliens. Cette autorisation était valable pendant 3 mois et renouvelée une seule fois 3 mois. Après j’étais illégale dans mon propre pays.”

(“I returned to Gaza in February 1995 through my father, who issued me a permit requested by the PA but issued by the Israelis. This permit was valid for three months and could only be renewed once for three months. After that, I was illegal in my own country.”)

completely fulfilled. The land was not liberated, leaving the father with an unfulfilled promise to his son and the enormous task of a sovereign State of Palestine yet to be realised. As we have seen, Al Balawi has not been able to fulfil this task in the twenty-five years since their return, as the land is still occupied and further taken over by Israel, shattering the dream of the two-state solution, even though this was already a compromise.²⁰⁸

Beyond his sense of guilt for not having lived up to his task,²⁰⁹ Al Balawi moreover, and more prominently, carries in his body the guilt of the split within the Palestinian National Liberation Movement. This is present beneath the surface throughout the film, but comes into the foreground in the scene with Yael Dayan, who confronts Al Balawi with what he himself distils from her words as *l'inter-division palestinienne*.²¹⁰ At the end of the encounter, Al Balawi offers her the book that he wrote, *Gaza: Dans les coulisses du*

Conversation with Hassan Al Balawi on 15 April 2025.

Fathi Al Balawi died in Gaza, in 1996, and was buried in Balaa. Written on his tomb: “سورة الفاتحة على قبر الشهيد فتحي محمد قاسم البلعاري، الذي توفي في 23 يونيو 1996”

(“Surah Al-Fatiha on the grave of martyr Fathi Mohammad Qassem Al Balawi, who died on 23 June 1996.”)

The Qur'an, sūrah 1 (Al-Fātiḥah), accessed 18 August 2025, <https://quran.com/al-fatihah>.

²⁰⁸ Al Balawi, *Gaza: Dans les coulisses*, 11.

The book opens with a dedication to his father: “À la mémoire de mon père Fathi Al Balawi, qui a tant aimé Gaza.” (“To the memory of my father, Fathi Al Balawi, who loved Gaza so much.”)

²⁰⁹ This refers to the dream, and the promise of liberating Palestine, which is beyond his power and that he cannot fulfil, which burdens him with a sense of guilt related to his father, the revolution and the cause he has inherited. In a conversation, Alaa Jadallah, the daughter of a Fatah member, told me of the guilt of Fatah members, who, having surrendered and lost the revolution, became self-critical and self-hating.

Conversation in Brussels, December 2025.

²¹⁰ See *Fierté nationale*, 01:07:32:00 – 01:15:15:00.

mouvement national palestinien, and suggests she read the introduction to fully understand his point of view.²¹¹ In it, he indeed speaks of the miracle of peace, of the recognition of the State of Israel by the PLO, as much as the recognition of the PLO by Israel as the legitimate representative of all Palestinians—“Who could have thought that this would ever be possible.”²¹² It is, however, in the following two hundred pages that he goes into the entrails of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, Fatah, and more particularly into the role his father Fathi Al Balawi played, from initially being a Muslim Brother to becoming one of the founders of Fatah: “My father was the first to see Yasser Arafat, then a young student, as ‘an active and charismatic militant’—as Yasser Arafat himself liked to recall. He decided to welcome him onto the Muslim Brotherhood’s list for the League elections, and Yasser Arafat was finally elected president in 1953. He did not belong to the Muslim Brotherhood, even though rumours had long suggested otherwise—precisely because he had been a member of the Palestinian Students’ League. However, he was elected to the Council precisely because he was independent; the Muslim Brotherhood, who had founded the union, wanted other political sensibilities to participate.”²¹³

²¹¹ See *Fierté nationale*, 01:15:52:00 – 01:16:12:00.

²¹² Al Balawi, *Gaza: Dans les coulisses*, 11.

²¹³ “Mon père fut le premier à voir en Yasser Arafat, alors jeune étudiant, ‘un militant actif et charismatique’— comme se plaisait à le rappeler Yasser Arafat lui-même. Il prit la décision de l’accueillir sur la liste des Frères musulmans aux élections de la Ligue et Yasser Arafat fut finalement élu président en 1953. Il n’appartenait pas aux Frères musulmans, même si la rumeur l’a longtemps laissé croire— précisément parce qu’il avait fait partie de la Ligue des étudiants palestiniens. Or, s’il avait été élu au Conseil, c’était justement parce qu’il était indépendant; les Frères musulmans qui avaient fondé le syndicat souhaitaient la participation d’autres sensibilités politiques.”

Al Balawi, *Gaza: Dans les coulisses*, 54–55.

This microhistorical testimony by Al Balawi not only sheds light on his father's role in identifying Yasser Arafat as a promising young activist and future leader of the PLO, but also places that encounter within the wider regional political landscape, and more particularly how the rivalry between Arab nationalism and the Muslim Brotherhood spread across the Middle East after the Free Officers led by Gamal Abdel Nasser overthrew the Egyptian monarchy in 1952. While Nasser sought to unite the Arab world under his leadership,²¹⁴ this threatened conservative monarchies such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan, thus these regimes supported the Muslim Brotherhood, which Nasser in turn suppressed with extreme brutality: "I saw the marks left on my father by the torture sessions; like him, many activists of his generation suffered persecution. Despite this, my father admired Nasser for his attempts to unify the Arab nation. The Egyptian leader enjoyed considerable influence, even among those who opposed him. Arafat also aroused such ambivalence: as the champion of the Palestinian national struggle, he was always loved and admired, even by his fiercest critics."²¹⁵

²¹⁴ Nasser's project of Arab unity, referred to as pan-Arabism, sought to unite the Arab world under Egyptian leadership. It materialised in the United Arab Republic (1958–1961), a political union between Egypt and Syria that Nasser envisaged as the first step towards wider Arab unity.

Encyclopedia Britannica, "United Arab Republic," accessed 12 August 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Arab-Republic>.

²¹⁵ "J'ai vu les traces laissées par les séances de torture sur mon père; comme lui, de nombreux militants de sa génération ont connu les persécutions. Malgré cela, mon père admirait Nasser pour ses tentatives d'unifier la nation arabe. Le raïs égyptien jouissait d'un rayonnement considérable, y compris chez ceux qui le combattaient. Arafat suscitait lui aussi une telle ambivalence: héraut de la lutte nationale palestinienne, il n'a jamais cessé d'être aimé et admiré, y compris parmi ses plus farouches détracteurs." Al Balawi, *Gaza: Dans les coulisses*, 55.

Yet the origins of this ideological divide predated Nasser. Following Jordan's annexation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem in 1949, the Hashemite regime already sought to curb the emergence of an independent Palestinian nationalism by encouraging Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated religious and social institutions, which promoted the Islamisation of society as the path to Palestine's liberation under Hashemite rule. Early Palestinian nationalists, by contrast, argued that liberation from occupation had to precede the establishment of a Palestinian state through self-determination. It was in this context that the Muslim Brotherhood, driven from Egypt by Nasser's repression, found refuge under the Hashemite monarchy, further entrenching this ideological divide. Gaza, however, was under Egyptian military administration, and it was there that Nasser deported and imprisoned a number of members of the Palestinian Students' League in Cairo, including Al Balawi's father—after he had criticised Nasser for not doing anything to help the Palestinian cause—alongside communists, whom Nasser likewise regarded as a threat to his pan-Arab nationalist project and therefore persecuted. It was in prison that Fathi Al Balawi met the Palestinian poet and communist Muin Bseiso,²¹⁶ whose Marxist ideas he might never have encountered had Nasser not imprisoned him. Al Balawi concludes, "This objective encounter between the Muslim Brotherhood and the communists only ever took place in Palestine. Everywhere else, they fought and killed each other. But in Nasser's jails, they agreed that, beyond their

²¹⁶ Muin Bseiso (1926–1984) was a Palestinian poet born in Gaza City. A prominent figure in the Palestinian resistance, he began publishing nationalist poetry in 1944 and became involved in communist activism. After studying journalism at the American University in Cairo, he returned to Gaza, which was under Egyptian administration, where he spent seven years in prison for his political activities.

Interactive Encyclopaedia of the Palestine Question, "Muin Bseiso," accessed 21 August 2025, <https://www.palquest.org/en/biography/14267/muin-bseiso>.

"Muin Bseiso," Institute for Palestine Studies, accessed 21 August 2025, <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1650937>.

ideological differences, a common struggle was possible, and from this conviction, Fatah was born.”²¹⁷

As it was a secular national movement, Nasser tolerated Fatah.²¹⁸ However, Nasser’s harsh persecution of the Muslim Brothers and the split caused by its best cadres, including Al Balawi’s father, leaving to create Fatah were factors that later fuelled the conflict between the PLO and Hamas, when the latter was created in 1987 as the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ “De ce fait, naquit en prison une première alliance entre Frères musulmans et communistes. Cette rencontre objective entre les Frères musulmans et les communistes n’a jamais eu lieu qu’en Palestine. Partout ailleurs, ils se sont déchirés et entre-tués. Mais dans les geôles de Nasser, ils convinrent qu’au-delà des divergences idéologiques une lutte commune était possible, et de cette conviction allait naître le Fatah.”

Al Balawi, *Gaza: Dans les coulisses*, 57.

²¹⁸ Prior to the founding of Fatah, both Bseiso and Fathi Al Balawi taught at UNRWA schools in Gaza after their release from prison. Together, they established the Palestinian Teachers’ Union after persuading the Egyptian military administration of the value of creating such a union. Cairo approved the initiative, believing it would serve its interests within UNRWA and thereby strengthen its control over the agency. Likewise, Nasser initially tolerated Fatah, believing that he could keep the movement under his control. As leaders of the Teachers’ Union, Bseiso and Fathi Al Balawi led the demonstrations in March 1955 that put an end to the project to settle Palestinian refugees from Gaza in the Sinai Desert.

Al Balawi, *Gaza: Dans les coulisses*, 58–59.

²¹⁹ Hillel Cohen traces the split within the Palestinian national movement back to the period of Mandatory Palestine and the rivalry between the Husseini and Nashashibi families. During the Great Arab Revolt (1936–1939), supporters of the Husseinis increasingly defined dissent as treason. Violence was directed not only against the British and Zionist institutions but also against Palestinians accused of collaboration or political opposition. Hundreds of Palestinians were assassinated by fellow Palestinians during this period. Cohen argues that this internal violence fractured Palestinian society and undermined the cohesion of the national movement. These internal fractures were reinforced by Zionist institutions, which cultivated alliances with local leaders and political rivals, exploiting existing divisions and further impeding the emergence of a unified Palestinian national movement. Although Rashid Khalidi also addresses these

As a matter of fact, while it was Fatah that initially took up arms in Gaza in the mid-1950s, it was Hamas who took over the idea of armed struggle and martyrdom when the PLO was exiled and, wanting to find its base again with the people in Gaza and the West Bank during the First Intifada, was finally driven towards peace in order to return to Palestine,²²⁰ which would be the basis for the conflict in 2006 and the present division within the Palestinian national movement.²²¹

internal divisions, he argues that they must be understood within a broader colonial framework. Palestinians were confined within an “iron cage” created first by the British Mandate and later reinforced by Zionist state-building. One of Khalidi’s principal arguments is that the British allowed the Zionist movement to develop the institutions of a future state while preventing Palestinians from doing the same. Beyond Europe’s betrayal of Palestine, initiated by the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and consolidated under the British Mandate, the Palestinians also experienced repeated betrayals by neighbouring Arab states, which subordinated the Palestinian cause to their own regional interests. In the opening scene of *Fierté nationale*, Al Balawi asks General Tawfiq how Yasser Arafat reacted to the fact that no one came to his aid during the two years he was under siege in the Muqata and whether he blamed the Europeans and the Americans. Tawfiq replies that Arafat foremost blamed the Arabs.

See *Fierté nationale*, 00:11:50:00 – 00:13:20:00.

Hillel Cohen, *Army of Shadows: Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917–1948*, trans. Haim Watzman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*.

²²⁰ Al Balawi, *Gaza: Dans les coulisses*, 75–96.

²²¹ After Al Balawi gets his permit at Beit El and drives along the long wall that separates the colony, the military base and the civil administration of the occupied territory in the West Bank, we learn through a rolling text that the permit doesn’t include entering Gaza, the territory which Al Balawi has not been able to enter since the conflict between the PLO and Hamas in 2007. During the so-called “Battle of Gaza,” Hamas expelled Fatah and seized control of Gaza, deepening the territorial split between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, with Hamas controlling the Gaza Strip, and Fatah, the West Bank. The conflict broke out in the aftermath of the 2006 legislative elections in Palestine, with Hamas’s decisive victory over Fatah, winning 74 of the 132 seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council. After the elections, Mahmoud Abbas attempted to form a unity government; however, the international community blocked this possibility, viewing Hamas as a terrorist organisation committed to Israel’s destruction. Instead, international actors financed and armed Fatah troops in Gaza—inverting Israel’s earlier strategy of weakening Fatah by supporting Hamas.

The figure of the father also looms prominently in Yael Dayan's speech and body language, as we can see in the many film clips that exist of her father, Moshe Dayan, such as in his *Face the Nation* interview on CBS, where we can sense a similar kind of phrasing and tonality in his words, as well as a bodily resemblance in his features and movements.²²² In a way, Yael Dayan is just as loyal to her father as Al Balawi is to his father, mirroring each other as the children of the founding fathers. In the case of Dayan, of the State of Israel; in the case of Al Balawi, of Fatah, the PLO and the PA that was created out of it. Despite being affected by the violent history they experienced throughout their lives—the Disturbances of 1936-1939 in Mandatory Palestine, the Syria-Lebanon Campaign during the Second World War, the War of Independence, the Suez Crisis, the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War in the case of Moshe Dayan, and for Fathi Al Balawi, the Great Arab Revolt of 1936-1939, the Nakba, and the Palestinian revolution in all its stages and forms from the early 1950s to the 1990s—they wanted to make peace as they got older, leaving their children with the difficult task of bringing peace to fulfilment, and as such coming to terms with their fathers' heritage. It is therefore all the more painful that Al Balawi ultimately finds himself in an argument, perhaps with his only

Tamer Qarmout, "Predictable in Their Failure: An Analysis of Mediation Efforts to End the Palestinian Split," *International Peacekeeping* 31, no. 3 (2024): 283–308,

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13533312.2024.2338410>.

Tamar Qarmout, "What Is Behind the Palestinian Split and What Makes It Difficult to End? A Historical Institutional Analysis from a Settler Colonial Lens," *Third World Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2023): 686–704, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2158805>.

²²² "From the Archives: Israeli Defence Minister General Moshe Dayan on 'Face the Nation,' February 1972," posted 19 October 2023 by Face the Nation, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwYIfcwv3do>.

remaining Israeli friend. Dayan, who is older and dependent on oxygen, no longer seems willing or able to engage in dialogue, emphasising that she is tired and that it needs to stop, *cette affaire de Gaza*: shooting rockets day and night, targeting civilians and innocent people.²²³ The conversation, which Al Balawi diplomatically called “a discussion,”²²⁴ is rather an impasse, sounding the *glas* of the post-Oslo era, the peace agreements, and the two-state solution, foreshadowing what was yet to come.²²⁵

As Al Balawi is sitting on Rabin Square, feeling abandoned and dejected from the non-dialogue with Dayan, the camera points up to the sky into the darkness of the night. But there is an epilogue to this ending the day after: Al Balawi drives to Gaza, as it is bombarded all the while, in search for his house, his memories of those first years after returning to his homeland and the promise of the sovereign State of Palestine yet to be built. This shattered dream and the melancholia it retains are the only feeding ground on which his aspirations can survive. But even this dream of getting close to Gaza is unattainable for him, as he gets lost in the streets of Sderot under a cloudburst to the last sounds of Horowitz hammering his piano while performing “Isolde’s Liebestod.”

²²³ See *Fierté nationale*, 01:13:20:00 – 01:13:40:00 and 01:14:50:00 – 01:15:05:00.

²²⁴ See *Fierté nationale*, 01:15:05:00 – 01:15:45:00.

²²⁵ The French term *le glas* means “the death knell,” referring to the tolling of a bell to announce a death or impending death.

Larousse dictionnaire français, “glas,” accessed 5 May 2025, <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/glas/37097>.

Although I chose “Isolde’s Liebestod” as the non-diegetic intervention to start off and end the film with, I have to admit I have never been interested in Wagner’s music at all, not to mention my repugnance for the composer’s Antisemitism. But Liszt’s transcription and above all Horowitz’s interpretation—with its chromatic tones, harmonic suspension and shifting²²⁶—merge, as a ghost from the past, with the rain falling on the deserted town of Sderot, where Hassan Al Balawi is driving towards Gaza. Even though he can’t enter, he keeps going in the hope of just being close to it and getting a glimpse of it, of smelling its air, as a substitute for his dream. A dream that turned into a living nightmare when blood was shed by Hamas on 7 October 2023, driving Al Balawi mad, given the split he inherited from his father, as discussed, of which he was painfully reminded by Dayan.

Despite all the fathers who inhabit the film, it is finally Al Balawi’s mother who calls him while driving towards Gaza and warns him not to enter and get stuck

²²⁶ In his seminal work *Harmonielehre* (1911), Arnold Schönberg analyses Wagner’s harmonic innovations in *Tristan and Isolde*. In this text, Schönberg characterises certain chords as “heimatlos zwischen den Gebieten der Tonarten herumstreichende Erscheinungen von unglaublicher Anpassungsfähigkeit und Unselbständigkeit, Spione, die Schwächen auskundschaften, sie benützen, um Verwirrung zu stiften; Überläufer, denen das Aufgeben der eigenen Persönlichkeit Selbstzweck ist; Unruhestifter in jeder Beziehung, aber vor allem: höchst amüsante Gesellen.” (“Homeless beings wandering between the realms of tonality, displaying incredible adaptability and dependence, spies who seek out weaknesses and use them to cause confusion; defectors for whom abandoning their own personality is an end in itself; troublemakers in every respect, but above all: highly amusing fellows.”) This vivid metaphor illustrates Schönberg’s perception of these chords as harmonically ambiguous and destabilising elements that challenge traditional tonal structures.

Arnold Schönberg, *Harmonielehre*, 3rd ed. (Vienna: Universal-Edition, 1922), 309–310.

there, as she senses that his love for his land, his national pride transcends the matter of death, the moment of the falling together of the two, when the moment of suspense at the beginning of the film is finally released at its end with Isolde's *Verklärung* on Tristan's dead body, the "Liebestod."²²⁷

In her book *The Question of Zion*, Jacqueline Rose proposes that the origins of modern Zionism go back to Jewish mysticism, and more precisely to the figure of Shabtai Tzvi, the seventeenth-century Jewish mystic and self-proclaimed Messiah, who arrogated to himself the power to spread the belief among the Jews that messianic hope is not only spiritual, but also material and carnal, fully embodied in political time, becoming in that sense a Zionist *avant la lettre*, whose historic task was to return the Jews to Palestine. "Redemption arises on the ruins of history," argues Rose,²²⁸ linking Shabtai Tzvi's messianic

²²⁷ *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia*, "Liebestod," ed. Nicholas Vazsonyi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

When composing *Tristan and Isolde*, Wagner was inspired by Schopenhauer, but also by a mix of Indian, Asian and Christian mysticism, using the metaphors of Day and Night, the realms inhabited by Tristan and Isolde. The Day stands for the external world of social obligations, duties and constraints that suppresses their love, a world of falsehood and deception, because it requires them to deny their true feelings. The Night is the inner world of love, where the constraints of the external world are suspended and their deepest desire can be fulfilled, which is ultimately also linked to death as true fulfilment, as unity can only be achieved beyond the physical world.

Bryan Magee, "Schopenhauer and Wagner," in *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 350–402.

²²⁸ Redemption was to be found in the land of Israel, an idea that was rooted in nineteenth-century nationalism, an embodiment of *Selbst-Emanzipation*, one that would reverse the exodus and the centuries of persecution, as well as transform the Jews' self-image of weakness, unworthiness, passivity and inferiority into strength, into the new Jew.

Rose, *Question of Zion*, 19.

mission—which arose in the aftermath of the Chmielnicki massacres that devastated entire Jewish communities in Poland, Ukraine and Belarus between 1648 and 1657—with Theodor Herzl’s *Der Judenstaat*, which immediately won the hearts of the Jewish masses when it was published in 1896—as it followed another wave of violent pogroms against Jewish communities in Ukraine, Poland and Belarus when they were scapegoated for the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881.²²⁹ As a psychoanalyst, Rose doesn’t fail to mention that Theodor Herzl experienced states of exaltation and depression, as did Shabtai Tzvi, who alternated between dejection and manic illumination.²³⁰ In his own words, Herzl wrote *Der Judenstaat* “in a state of possession beyond the limits of consciousness,” although his words sound very straightforward when it comes to the concretisation of his idea: “I spoke of an army, and you already interrupted me when I began to speak of the (moral) training necessary for its march. I let myself be interrupted. And yet I have already drawn up the further details, the entire plan. I know all the things it involves. Money, money, and more money; means of transportation; the provision of great multitudes ...; the maintenance of manly discipline, the organization of departments, emigration treaties with the heads of some states, transit treaties with others, formal guarantees from all of them; the construction of new, splendid dwelling places. Beforehand, tremendous propaganda, the popularization of the idea through newspapers, books, pamphlets, talks by travelling lecturers, pictures, songs,”²³¹

²²⁹ Rose, *Question of Zion*, 19.

²³⁰ Rose, *Question of Zion*, 53, 64.

²³¹ Theodor Herzl, *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, ed. Raphael Patai, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Herzl Press and Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), 26–28.

Original German version:

“Ich sprach von einem Heer, und Sie unterbrachen mich schon, als ich von der (moralischen) Trainierung zum Marsch zu reden anfang! Ich ließ mich unterbrechen. Und doch habe ich auch das Weitere schon entworfen: den ganzen Plan. Ich weiß, was alles dazu gehört: Geld, Geld, Geld. Fortschaffungsmittel, Verpflegung großer Massen (worunter lediglich Essen und Trinken, wie in Moses einfachen Zeiten zu

a flag—all the ingredients for becoming a nation among the nations, a normal nation in order to be redeemed from the abnormalities of living in exile, a nation for the Jewish people, the Jewish Nation, *Der Judenstaat*.

However, Palestine was not a land without a people that could be simply populated by a people without a land, of which Herzl and other pioneers were perfectly aware. Notable among them was Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the spiritual father of today's Likud,²³² who knew, as the Palestinians wouldn't give up their land, that "of all the necessities of national rebirth, shooting would be the most important of all."²³³ Jabotinsky witnessed the pogroms of 1905 in Odessa, the city where he was born, and was deeply affected by them. After this, he established the Jewish Self-Defence Organisation, a Jewish militant group, to

verstehen), Erhaltung der Manneszucht, Organisierung der Abteilungen, Entlassungsverträge mit Staatshäuptern, Durchzugsverträge mit anderen, Garantieverträge mit allen und Anlage neuer herrlicher Wohnorte; vorher die gewaltige Propaganda, die Popularisierung der Idee durch Zeitungen, Bücher, Traktätchen, Wandervorträge, Bilder, Lieder, alles von einem Zentrum aus zielbewußt und weitblickend geleitet."

Theodor Herzl, "Brief an Baron Hirsch, Paris, Pfingstmontag, 3. Juni 1895," in *Zionistische Schriften* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1920), 18–19.

²³² Benjamin Netanyahu's father was Jabotinsky's secretary.

Encyclopedia Britannica, "Ze'ev Jabotinsky," accessed 5 May 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ze-ev-Jabotinsky>.

²³³ In his famous 1923 essay, "The Iron Wall," Jabotinsky argued that a strong Jewish military presence was essential for securing the Jewish state's future and that only after establishing an "iron wall" of Jewish strength could genuine negotiations with the Arabs take place, a concept that became the blueprint for Israel's politics and still persists today; it has materialised in recent history particularly in the construction of the West Bank separation barrier and the deployment of the Iron Dome missile defence system.

Ze'ev Jabotinsky, "The Iron Wall" (1923), translated by the Jabotinsky Institute, Jabotinsky Institute in Israel, accessed 9 July 2026, <https://en.jabotinsky.org/media/9747/the-iron-wall.pdf>. Originally published in Russian in *Razsviet*, 4 November 1923.

safeguard Jewish communities throughout Russia. During the First World War, he fought alongside the British against the Ottomans, who then controlled Palestine, to later take up arms against the British and the Arabs. As a matter of fact, the shooting never ended, as if the Jewish people have had to inflict the violence that was inflicted on them upon the people who happened to live in the “land without people” they had chosen as their land or were driven towards. “The messianic redemption that led to the creation of the State of Israel,” as Rose argues, “is a form of historic revenge.”²³⁴

But what are the underlying mechanisms that drive and trigger this historical revenge, in which catastrophe is met with catastrophe? Rose points first to the paradoxical nature of the matter: “It was misery that drew the Jewish people to the apocalyptic tradition and its message of catastrophe. But as they move forward to the dawn of a new history, the misery accompanies the vision, lodges itself inexorably inside the dream. The future that is meant to redeem you borrows the most dreaded trait of the past. ... As if catastrophic exultation, alongside the desire for a resolution to the conflict, had worked itself into the national mind.”²³⁵ Scholars have examined how the Holocaust was used to legitimise Israel’s existence and the building of its nation, which has led to a culture of victimhood and death that permeates Israeli society.²³⁶ However,

²³⁴ Rose, *Question of Zion*, 20.

²³⁵ Rose, *Question of Zion*, 20.

²³⁶ See Idith Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Jacqueline Rose identifies two key dynamics that perpetuate hostility in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict: first, the enduring sense of guilt in the West concerning Israel following the Second World War; and second, Israel’s persistent self-conception as a victim. She argues that this self-image is rooted in a

Rose subsequently goes back to the early years of the State of Israel, before anyone started to talk about the Holocaust, when the survivors were silent, because of the shame of having survived their families, who perished in the death camps, and the shame of having been weakhearted in the face of their oppressors and butchers. But, most strikingly, it was also because of the denigration they endured by the natives of Israel, who disdained them, as if the experience of the denigration of the Holocaust was not yet enough and needed to be amplified by having survived it.²³⁷ “The Holocaust received renewed national attention after the 1961 Eichmann trial and the 1967 War. Only a miracle can wipe out a curse. But that very fact has obscured a reality that seems to me more important. ... The fact that the Holocaust was not talked

profound fear within the Jewish historical consciousness, shaped by the trauma of the Holocaust, while at the same time, this fear has been mobilised politically to justify acts of aggression towards Palestinians, a process that paradoxically provokes further Antisemitism. This dynamic produces a cyclical pattern in which victimhood transforms into forms of oppression, which then generate shame and subsequent repression—often concealed beneath ideological or institutional frameworks. She summarises this tendency as “ideals ... are a licence to kill.”

Suzie Mackenzie, “Out of the Ivory Tower,” *The Guardian*, 4 January 2003,

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2003/jan/04/highereducation.academicexperts>.

Nesrine Malik, “How the Critic Jacqueline Rose Puts the World on the Couch,” *The New Yorker*, 21 August 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/08/21/how-the-critic-jacqueline-rose-puts-the-world-on-the-couch>.

²³⁷ “Idith Zertal has done most to chart the ambivalence—to put it mildly—with which Israel treated the survivors arriving on its shores (they were routinely referred to as ‘dust’ and ‘soap’—this last a triple allusion to Nazi soap, the pallor of their skin compared with the native-born Sabras, and to someone pliable and easily moulded into shape).”

Jacqueline Rose, *The Last Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 52.

about, or only partly, ‘does not mean that it was not powerfully at work.’”²³⁸
What is repressed will be repeated.²³⁹

Herzl’s favourite composer was Wagner. He would go to the opera and listen to Wagner whenever he lost confidence, whenever he had doubts about the truth of his ideas.²⁴⁰ Perhaps this is not so paradoxical as it sounds, given the fact that Herzl also bluntly expressed that the rising Antisemitism was good for Zionism.²⁴¹ In any case, if Zionism had roots in Jewish mysticism, then it

²³⁸ Rose, *Question of Zion*, 137.

Born in London in 1949 into a Jewish family, Rose was the granddaughter of Polish immigrants who had narrowly escaped the Holocaust. Fifty members of her extended family were killed at the Chelmno extermination camp—a trauma that, while profoundly formative, was neither discussed nor openly acknowledged.

Malik, “How the Critic Jacqueline Rose Puts the World on the Couch.”

²³⁹ Freud’s concept of the double as a return of the repressed, in “The Uncanny” (1919).

Sigmund Freud, “Das Unheimliche,” *Imago* 5, no. 5–6 (1919): 297–324; reprinted in *Gesammelte Werke* (London: Imago Publishing, 1946), 12:227–268; translated as “The Uncanny,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 17:217–256.

²⁴⁰ Rose, *Question of Zion*, 64. Theodor Herzl so admired Wagner’s music that he chose to open the Second Zionist Congress in 1898 with the overture from Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*—a striking emblem of how Wagner’s emotionally charged music and themes resonated with Zionist aspirations for a new Jewish identity and homeland.

²⁴¹ “In Paris habe ich, wie gesagt, ein freieres Verhältnis zum Antisemitismus gewonnen, den ich nun historisch zu begreifen und zu verzeihen begann. Vor allem erkannte ich die Nichtigkeit und Zwecklosigkeit des Versuches, den Antisemitismus ‘bekämpfen’ zu wollen ... Ich sah ihn als eine natürliche Erscheinung, als etwas, das die Juden zu ertragen haben—und das uns sogar nützlich sein kann.”

Herzl, *Tagebücher*, 6–7.

(“In Paris, as I have said, I achieved a freer attitude towards anti-Semitism [*sic*], which I now began to understand historically and to pardon. Above all, I recognised the emptiness and futility of trying to

certainly also grew out of the tendencies of the nineteenth century: nationalism and the failure of the integration of Jewish people into the European nation state and the rising Antisemitism, of which Wagner was a prominent representative. Although Zionism propagated itself as a secular movement, it was not exempt from its own kind of messianism, as the Jews were driven by the utopic socialism they brought with them from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russia and Eastern Europe. While the myth of the modern secular State of Israel could still hold in the first few decades, it has increasingly shifted in recent decades towards a religious-ethnic nationalism,²⁴² which is expressed in the rising fervour of redeeming the earth, of “redeeming Gaza,” as recently proclaimed by Daniella Weiss.²⁴³

‘combat’ anti-Semitism [*sic*] ... I recognised the futility of trying to ‘combat’ it ... I saw it as something natural, as something that Jews have to endure—and which could even be of use to us.”)

Herzl, *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, 6–7.

“Der Antisemitismus, so sehr er auch beklagenswert ist, so sehr er auch durch rohe Gewalt und Ungerechtigkeit sich offenbart, ist eine nützliche Bewegung für die jüdische Volksentwicklung. Er zwingt uns, zusammenzuhalten, wo immer wir auch leben, und dadurch bewahrt er uns vor der Auflösung in den Völkern.”

Theodor Herzl, *Der Judenstaat: Versuch einer modernen Lösung der Judenfrage* (Leipzig: M. Breitenstein, 1896), 28–29.

(“Anti-Semitism [*sic*], which is so widespread, and in many cases has so little foundation, is, in reality, a movement useful to the Jewish people. It forces us together in close contact, in all countries, and thus keeps us from assimilation and dissolution.”)

Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question*, trans. Sylvie D’Avigdor (London: David Nutt, 1896), 28–29.

²⁴² The Basic Law was enacted on 19 July 2018: it formally defines Israel as the national homeland of the Jewish people and elevates Jewish settlement as a national value. The law fortifies the increasing influence of religious and ethnic nationalism in Israeli politics.

Amal Jamal, “Israel’s New Constitutional Imagination: The Nation-State Law and Beyond,” *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 18, no. 2 (2019): 193–220.

²⁴³ *The Settlers*, directed by Josh Baker, written by Louis Theroux and Matan Cohen, first aired 27 April 2025 on BBC Two, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m002bm1y>.

Arab resistance to the British rule of Mandatory Palestine and against Zionist settlers already existed in the first half of the twentieth century. However, Palestinian national consciousness was born in the wake of the creation of the State of Israel by the Nakba, in different stages, until the declaration of independence of the State of Palestine on 15 November 1988 in Algiers, which mirrors the declaration of independence that was given by David Ben-Gurion on 14 May 1948 in Tel Aviv, by using the same wording: “on this land,”²⁴⁴ “in the

²⁴⁴ *Fierté nationale* starts with Al Balawi “inspecting” the troops when he arrives at the Al-Istiqlal University in Jericho. The troops shout the university’s anthem, which immediately introduces the matter of the land and history:

”العزم من البداية،
فكرة معجونة بإصرار.
هاي الأرض اللي إحنا عليها ما كانت رمل وحجار. بالحجر فوق الحجر، وبالتحدي اتعمّرت،
صارت بعد صرخًا شامخًا،
تأنقت وتألقت وتصورت، وسموها استقلال.
كيف نوى البذرة صارت شجر
وجذورها بكل الأرض اتمدّدت
وغصونها مثل أيادي المحسنين ما مع حد قصرت كل الناس استقبلت ابن الفقير، ابن الغني ابن الأسير،
ابن الشهيد ابن المرمي ع حجر
أحلى الأسامي تزينت سموها استقلال“

(“History starts at the beginning, shaped by determination.

The land we live on is more than just rocks.

It was built stone by stone and will not be shaken.

It rests under an endless sky.

It is a shining land that is crying out for independence.

Like the seed that became a tree, its roots are anchored in the soil, and its branches, like charitable hands, reach out to help the needy and anyone who seeks help.

It welcomes everyone, the rich, the poor, the free, the captive and the martyr.

name of historical and natural right,” and “our capital, Jerusalem,” as Al Balawi points out in his book.²⁴⁵

These are the names that cry out for independence!”)

²⁴⁵ “De même, la déclaration d’indépendance de l’État de Palestine proclamée par l’OLP le 15 novembre 1988 reprend à l’identique les premières phrases du discours prononcé par David Ben Gourion à l’occasion de la création de l’État d’Israël. C’est le poète Mahmoud Darwich, récemment disparu, qui a rédigé cette déclaration dont le retentissement a été énorme en Israël. En répétant les mêmes mots, les expressions ‘sur cette terre,’ ‘au nom du droit historique et naturel,’ ‘notre capitale Jérusalem,’ il a déclenché la colère des Israéliens et particulièrement de Yitzhak Shamir, tout nouveau Premier ministre, qui s’est vu forcé de répondre: ‘Jamais nous ne rendrons cette terre qui est la nôtre.’”

Al Balawi, *Gaza: Dans les coulisses*, 77.

(“Similarly, the declaration of independence of the State of Palestine proclaimed by the PLO on 15 November 1988 reproduces the opening sentences of the speech given by David Ben-Gurion on the occasion of the creation of the State of Israel. It was the recently deceased poet Mahmoud Darwish who wrote this declaration, which had a huge impact in Israel. By repeating the same words, the expressions ‘on this land,’ ‘in the name of historical and natural right,’ and ‘our capital Jerusalem,’ he provoked the anger of the Israelis and particularly of Yitzhak Shamir, the brand-new prime minister, who was forced to respond: ‘We will never give back this land that is ours.’”)

“Declaration of Independence,” The Knesset, accessed 30 May 2025,

<https://main.knesset.gov.il/en/about/pages/declaration.aspx>.

“Declaration of Independence for the State of Palestine,” Institute for Palestine Studies, accessed 30 May 2025, <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1653405>.

Interactive Encyclopaedia of the Palestine Question, “Palestinian Declaration of Independence,” accessed 30 May 2025, <https://www.palquest.org/en/historictext/9673/palestinian-declaration-independence>.

After the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995, a significant number of Palestinians—mainly PLO cadres, staff and their families—were allowed to return to the West Bank and Gaza, along with some individuals admitted through family reunification programmes. However, the accords did not permit the mass return of refugees displaced in 1948 or 1967. The question of the right of return was deferred to the “final status” negotiations, which never materialised. The collapse of the Oslo process was a key factor leading to the Second Intifada and the subsequent cycle of violence.

The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, Article 11, adopted thirty-five to fifteen with eight abstentions, resolved that “the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date.”

United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 194 (III) of December 11, 1948, article 11, accessed 5 May 2025, <https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ARES194III.pdf>.

Although the Palestinian national movement—and more particularly Fatah—drew inspiration from the Algerian Revolution and other, primarily secular and socialist-inspired revolutionary models,²⁴⁶ it also carried within it the latent split through which the struggle for liberation would become part of a religious obligation. Did this latent split not later manifest in the discourse by Hamas, notably through the use of Islamic eschatological language that invokes divine mandate and the end of times—such as the invocation of Allah in fighting the Jews before the Day of Judgement²⁴⁷—echoing, in certain respects, the messianic currents also present in strands of Zionist ideology?²⁴⁸ Resisting this

In the face of this, there is *Sumud*, a Palestinian concept of resilience and remaining on the land despite pressures of displacement. By rebuilding homes, restoring farmland, planting trees and creating local infrastructure to assert Palestinian presence, confiscation or settlement is prevented. Several organisations are active in this area, both local and international.

²⁴⁶ Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 120.

Khalidi situates Palestinian utopian visions (pre- and post-Nakba) within larger anti-colonial currents, comparing them to other national liberation movements.

²⁴⁷ Article 7 of the 1988 Hamas Charter (the “Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement”): “The Last Hour would not come until the Muslims fight against the Jews and the Muslims would kill them, and until the Jews would hide themselves behind a stone or a tree and a stone or a tree would say: Muslim or Servant of Allah there is a Jew behind me; come and kill him; but the tree of Gharqad would not say it, for it is the tree of the Jews.”

Muhammad Maqdsi, “Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) of Palestine,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22, no. 4 (1993): 122–134, <https://www.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/attachments/jps-articles/2538093.pdf>.

Founded in December 1987, at the very start of the First Intifada, Hamas published its charter on 18 August 1988, which is prior to the declaration of independence of the State of Palestine by the PLO in Algiers, in November of that year.

²⁴⁸ Jacqueline Rose, *The Last Resistance*, 131.

Rose bases her statement on the work of Christophe Reuter, who provides in-depth accounts of suicide bombers in his book *My Life Is a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing*. Reuter quotes

extensively from two letters by Ismail Masawabi—a Palestinian from Gaza who carried out a suicide attack on 22 June 2001—including an official statement and personal letter to his parents. In these letters, notions of weakness and humiliation appear closely intertwined with ideas of dignity and national pride. “Thanks be to God who brings about the mujahideen’s victory and the dictators’ defeat, and praise be to Muhammad, the faithful, honourable Prophet Muhammad, and all his friends, and all those who have followed his footsteps. Dear Muslim youth the world over: I greet you with the blessed greetings of Islam; greetings that I send to all of you who fight in the name of religion and the nation; greetings to all those who are convinced fighters and martyrs. Dear Muslim youth: I wish to let you know that I hold those of you in particularly high regard who were always first to come to the mosque for prayers. Dear brothers: there is no doubt about the situation prevailing in the Muslim Umma, the Muslim nation. This situation is clear to everyone, old and young. It’s a situation that makes us weep and makes our hearts ache because of what has happened to the Muslims. We are truly grieved about it. Before we had power, then we became weak. We live in humiliation, where we once lived in dignity. We are ignorant where we were once wise. We are now bringing up the world’s rear, where we were once its leaders. The wish to become a martyr dominates my life, my heart, my soul and my feelings. When I hear the Qur’an’s verses I become sad because I am doing nothing to change the situation ... Our nation has become so weak, and people just help themselves to whatever they want. We are a nation living in disgrace and under Jewish occupation. This happened to us because we didn’t fight them; we didn’t fight for God. I reject his terrible and dark situation which I know and experience, and I have decided to become a shining light, illuminating the way for all Muslims—and a blazing fire to burn to death the enemy of God. Just standing there and watching our Muslim people being slaughtered (by the Jews) and taking any action to change the situation is a dirty game that I will not tolerate ... Therefore, in the name of Jerusalem and the Al Aqsa Mosque, in the name of God on earth, I prefer to meet God and leave humankind behind. Therefore I have told myself that I will be with the Prophet Muhammad and his followers tomorrow... God will not forgive you if you accept such a life. The alternative is true life. God will not forgive you if you accept humiliation and don’t fight to put an end to the situation and to strengthen Islam. My brothers and my family: I shall be in paradise, where everything will be mine. So don’t be sad that you’ve lost me. In Paradise I shall be immortal, so you should be glad that I’m there. To all those who have loved me, I say: don’t weep, for your tears won’t give me peace. This is the way I have chosen. So, if you have really loved me, carry on and carry a weapon. I have decided to take up my arms and follow the brigade of Izz al-Din al-Qassam martyrs in order to make the Jews feel some of the suffering and devastation they subject my people to every day, and have subjected them to for a long time. Greetings from a martyr who wishes to see you all again one day in the paradise of God, the creator of heaven and earth. Greetings to everyone who knew and loved me, and who loves the way of the jihad and the mujahideen. I hope that God accepts me as a martyr.” From the letter to his family: “Dear Mama, dear Papa, You have taken such trouble with my upbringing; you who woke at night in order that I might rest and sleep; you who brought me up as a Muslim: you are as dear to me as my eyes and my heart. You did your very best to turn into an adult human. You helped me enormously, and

idea, Jacqueline Rose notes that “the Palestinians are strangely in tune with their messianic counterparts in Israel, one of the farthest outreaches of Zionism, in aligning nationalism with religious fervour.”²⁴⁹ From this perspective, I have wondered how Al Balawi relates to the fact that his father was affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood when he was a young man.²⁵⁰ Not to understand what

may Allah reward you for it in the best possible manner. I can’t find the right words to thank you for everything you’ve done for me, but I ask God Almighty to reunite us in Paradise. My beloved parents, I know that it’s hard and difficult for you to lose me, but don’t forget that we’ll see each other in Paradise. This is God’s promise. What a wonderful and lovely promise if we see all each other again there. Dear Mama: be patient and happy to pray to God to thank him for giving you a martyr as a son. And think of al-Khansaa, who gave her four sons as martyrs for God because she knew they would all meet again in Paradise and that he would also get there one day, too. Dear, good father: please forgive me. Forgive me for not fulfilling your dream of seeing me complete my university studies and of being proud of me for getting a job. But you should be content. Your son will not, it is to receive the *Shihada*—but will instead receive the great *Shadada*. You should be proud of that. You are the one who taught me to be a man in every situation. You are the one who raised a lion in his house, who taught the enemies of God and the Muslims fear. Forgive me, dear father, if you are surprised to receive the news of martyrdom, for I know that you’re just waiting for me to finish my studies any day now—but this is what I have to do in the present situation. And we will see each other in another life. My beloved brothers: I have loved you from the bottom of my heart. Be good to father and mother. My dear fellow believers, dear Muhammad, Ahmed and Mahmud, you are the youth of the future. When I am dead, please be good to my parents. Help my father with his work, and my mother at home. And go to the Mosque regularly. Don’t make bad friends. Read the Qur’an. My beloved, good sisters: I was always happy to see you and to talk to you. When I visited you, you welcomed me with a friendly smile and warm words. Be patient and thank God, and please forgive me if I have made a mistake.”

Reuter, *My Life as a Weapon*, 90–93.

²⁴⁹ One can question, following Rose’s analysis of the Israelis, whether the Palestinians are also driven by the historical catastrophe they endured and whose most dreaded forms of violence have become lodged in the very dream of liberation.

²⁵⁰ I addressed the matter, but Al Balawi was evasive when asked about it, perhaps because he did not want to talk about it or because he was exhausted by the events of 7 October. Although the following excerpt from his book does not provide a clear answer, it nevertheless offers a better understanding of the complexity of the issue and the practicalities involved in the deepening split: “Après la défaite militaire de l’OLP au Liban en 1983, Khalil Ibrahim Wazir, numéro deux du Fatah, s’est rendu compte que les Iraniens gagnaient du terrain et, pour affaiblir les Frères musulmans, il a entrepris de créer ou d’encourager de nouvelles organisations. Sous son impulsion, le Fatah a donc lui aussi encouragé la dissidence du Djihad

that would mean, as such, or if there is something in him that he also inherited (and that he possibly represses), but rather to better understand the split within the Palestinian national movement itself and how this split is embodied by him.

islamique et œuvré dans l'ombre à son envol. Au cours de l'intifada, le Fatah s'est abrité derrière lui pour revendiquer ses opérations militaires. Le Djihad islamique occupait donc une position à mi-chemin des Frères musulmans et du Fatah. Je connais personnellement d'anciens membres du Fatah passés au Djihad islamique qui sont restés de vrais patriotes. Le Djihad islamique, profitant de cette ambivalence, a pu récupérer les déçus des deux tendances. Composé d'une élite principalement formée de professeurs, de médecins, de cadres, le Djihad islamique, bien qu'il demeure une petite organisation, fait preuve d'une grande efficacité sur le terrain."

Al Balawi, *Gaza: Dans les coulisses*, 82.

("After the PLO's military defeat in Lebanon in 1983, Khalil Ibrahim Wazir, Fatah's second-in-command, realized that the Iranians were gaining ground and, to weaken the Muslim Brotherhood, he undertook to create or encourage new organizations. Under his leadership, Fatah also encouraged the Islamic Jihad splinter group and worked behind the scenes to foster its growth. During the Intifada, Fatah used Islamic Jihad as a cover to claim responsibility for its military operations. Islamic Jihad thus occupied a position halfway between the Muslim Brotherhood and Fatah. I personally know former Fatah members who joined Islamic Jihad and who have remained true patriots. Islamic Jihad, taking advantage of this ambiguity, was able to attract those disillusioned with both factions. Composed of an elite mainly made up of professors, doctors, and executives, Islamic Jihad, although it remains a small organization, demonstrates "highly effective on the ground.")

8 July 2025

The question of genocide or not, of a ghetto or a concentration camp or not, is not the question at stake in this writing, although it has been difficult not to address the matter, as it is entangled with the subject of my film and thesis. Intentionally or not, it touches upon Gaza and thus the question of Palestine, through Israel, and the fact that “it” cannot be denied or repressed either.²⁵¹ I am interested more precisely in the drives: what drives us and history, history and us? What drives us when we seem to be caught in forms and mechanisms of mirroring and mimesis, repetition compulsion, trying to undo what has been done by doing to others what has been done to us, forms and mechanisms of displacement and transfer, splitting and transformation and so on.

²⁵¹ Certainly, there has been a shift in public opinion on the matter since the beginning of 2025; over the course of that year, increasingly harsh language was used by some right-wing Israeli politicians inciting genocide, while the facts on the ground pointed more and more to a form of genocide.

Omer Bartov, “I’m a Genocide Scholar. I Know One When I See One,” *The New York Times*, 15 July 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/15/opinion/israel-gaza-holocaust-genocide-palestinians.html>; originally delivered as a lecture at the Collège de France, 13 June 2025.

While this question resists a definitive answer, as it lies beyond the scope of this writing, I would nevertheless like to elaborate on it briefly and reformulate it in more concrete terms. Is the creation of this history, foremost something that is passed down generationally, from father and mother to son or daughter, children and grandchildren, and so forth? Is this where, consciously or unconsciously, repressed or not, it lives on, mutates, splits, transforms and moves on in time, to re-emerge as something that visits us from the past, just as our dreams visit our minds in the darkness of the night? One of the comments I came across on the ongoing and never-ending destruction of Gaza that left its mark on me was that, in addition to all the basic necessities of life, Palestinians are also deprived of their dreams; their nights are bombarded, and sleep and thus dreaming is interrupted and no longer possible.²⁵² Parents were writing the names of their children on their very limbs, in order to be able to collect their body parts should they be bombed on these very same nights when they are deprived of their dreams: to be able to recognise the scattered pieces, collect them and bury them, to bury their children.²⁵³ Which brings us back to Lacan's text on the fragmented body, as experienced in dreams that travel over centuries in the collective unconscious and are reproduced and reduplicated. Just as we are mirroring the movements and gestures with which we identify and through which we constitute ourselves from: acts of love and hate, of life and death that our ancestors have transmitted to us, which we assume and transform over

²⁵² Samir R. Qouta et al., "Psychosocial Intervention and Dreaming Among War-Affected Palestinian Children," *Dreaming* 26, no. 2 (June 2016): 95–118, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304662831_Psychosocial_intervention_and_dreaming_among_war-affected_Palestinian_children.

²⁵³ Linah Alsaafin and Ruwaida Amer, "'So World Knows': Gaza Parents Mark Children's Names on Bodies amid Bombing," *Al Jazeera*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/28/so-world-knows-gaza-parents-mark-childrens-names-on-bodies-amid-bombing>.

time,²⁵⁴ accordingly to Lacan's conception of the image: "It suffices to understand the mirror stage in this context *as an identification*, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes [*assume*] an image—an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase, as witnessed by the use in analytic theory of antiquity's term, 'imago.'"²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ Lacan, *Écrits*, 96.

²⁵⁵ Lacan, *Écrits*, 95.

Original French version: "Il y suffit de comprendre le stade du miroir comme une identification au sens plein que l'analyse donne à ce terme: à savoir la transformation produite chez le sujet, quand il assume une image, dont la prédestination à cet effet de phase est suffisamment indiquée par l'usage dans la théorie, du terme antique d'imago." Lacan, *Écrits*, 94.

Lacan continues his thought on the following page: "Pour les imagos en effet, dont c'est notre privilège que de voir se profiler, dans notre expérience quotidienne et la pénombre de l'efficacité symbolique, les visages voilés,—l'image spéculaire semble être le seuil du monde visible, si nous nous fions à la disposition en miroir que présente dans l'hallucination et dans le rêve l'imago du corps propre, qu'il s'agisse de ses traits individuels, voire de ses infirmités ou de ses projections objectales, ou si nous remarquons le rôle de l'appareil du miroir dans les apparitions du double où se manifestant des réalités psychiques, d'ailleurs hétérogènes."

Lacan, *Écrits*, 95.

"Indeed, for imagos—whose veiled faces we analysts see emerge in our daily experience and in the penumbra of symbolic effectiveness—the specular image seems to be the threshold of the visible world, if we take into account the mirrored disposition of the *imago of one's own body* in hallucinations and dreams, whether it involves one's individual features, or even one's infirmities or object projections; or if we take note of the role of the mirror apparatus in the appearance of *doubles*, in which psychical realities manifest themselves that are, moreover, heterogeneous."

Lacan, *Écrits*, 96.

In Latin, *imago* means "image," but it had layered meanings in ancient Rome. *Imagines* were wax death masks of ancestors, kept in the family home. They were worn during funeral processions by actors to represent the deceased, becoming at once a materialised memory of the dead, a symbol of lineage and authority, and a kind of living ghost or ancestral persona. Lacan borrowed the word from Carl Jung, who used it in a lecture about Freud given at Fordham University in New York, September 1912: "Even when the parents have long been dead and have lost, or should have lost, all significance ... they are still somehow present and as important as if they were still alive. The patient's love, admiration, resistance,

However, this image is, as the text indicates, an assumed identification, which is in discordance with its own reality, because it is transformed; in other words, an illusion, a phantom. Lacan elaborates, “For the total form of his body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage, is given to him only as a gestalt, that is, in an exteriority in which, to be sure, this form is more constitutive than constituted, but in which, above all, it appears to him as the contour of his stature that freezes it and in a symmetry that reverses it, in opposition to the turbulent movements with which the subject feels he animates it. Through these two aspects of its appearance, this gestalt—whose power (*prégnance*) should be considered linked to the species, though its motor style is as yet unrecognisable—symbolises the *I*’s mental permanence, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination. This gestalt is also replete with the correspondences that unite the *I* with the statue onto which man projects himself, the phantoms that dominate him and the automaton with which the world of his own making tends to achieve fruition in an ambiguous relation.”²⁵⁶

hatred, and rebelliousness still cling to their effigies, transfigured by affection or distorted by envy, and often bearing little resemblance to the erstwhile reality. It was this fact that compelled me to speak no longer of ‘father’ and ‘mother’ but to employ instead the term ‘imago,’ because these fantasies are not concerned any more with the real father and mother but with subjective and often very much distorted images of them, which lead a shadowy but nonetheless potent existence in the mind of the patient.”

C. G. Jung, “The Complex of the Parents,” chap. 4 of *The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 4, *Freud and Psychoanalysis*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 305.

²⁵⁶ Lacan, *Écrits*, 95.

Original French version: “C’est que la forme totale du corps par quoi le sujet devance dans un mirage la maturation de sa puissance, ne lui est donnée que comme *Gestalt*, c’est-à-dire dans une extériorité où certes cette forme est-elle plus constituante que constituée, mais où surtout elle lui apparaît dans un relief

This last sentence, in particular, is quintessential for the question of Palestine, as it seems to be dominated by the question of Israel. It is an ambiguous relation that wouldn't exist without its antagonistic other, while at the same time, this antagonistic other is the one who wants to solve it. Perhaps it can also be said the other way around, as without the Palestinians, the Israelis wouldn't be able to externalise their internal terror, therefore the Palestinian annihilation mirrors their proper Jewishness and turns it around, at once confirming this entangled relation as well as trying to deny or extinguish it, as this is an impossible idea for them. It is paradoxical that Israel turns the Palestinians into something that resembles what it has deeply repressed, namely the image of the Holocaust survivor who made it to Israel but was initially viewed by the early Zionists with ambivalence, contrasting the survivors' suffering and dehumanisation, the abject, with the "new Jew," the ideal of strong, heroic Sabras. The Palestinians, ghettoised and dehumanised, resemble what Israelis can't stand in themselves, which triggers what they have repressed. Furthermore, Palestinians seem to have taken the place of the exiled Jew, as they have been scattered around the world, taking the place of the Jews' Jewishness, as Jewishness became a test of humanity itself after the Holocaust and the Jewish question became the human question. Thus, today the Jewish question has turned into the Palestinian

de stature qui la fige et sous une symétrie qui l'inverse, en opposition à la turbulence de mouvements dont il s'éprouve l'animer. Ainsi cette *Gestalt* dont la prégnance doit être considérée comme liée à l'espèce, bien que son style moteur soit encore méconnaissable—par ces deux aspects de son apparition symbolise la permanence mentale du *je* en même temps qu'elle préfigure sa destination aliénante ; elle est grosse encore des correspondances qui unissent le *je* à la statue où l'homme se projette comme aux fantômes qui le dominent, à l'automate enfin où dans un rapport ambigu tend à s'achever le monde de sa fabrication.”
Lacan, *Écrits*, 94–95.

question.²⁵⁷ Of course, matters transform and split constantly during these processes, these historical processes, constituted by—or rather constitutive of—the trajectories that humans cross through time, just as those humans are themselves crossed by time and by the trajectories that constitute and transform them, and so on.

Let's recapitulate the matter exposed by the film, and this text: the question of armed struggle as the only possible way of defence and liberation, the legitimacy of armed struggle—paradoxically raised by the disarmed and defeated PLO and PA, now even regarded as collaborators of the coloniser, the occupier, the oppressor—versus the question of the impossibility of peace between two societies and people that are completely antagonistic yet mirror

²⁵⁷ As Freud points out in the opening paragraph of *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, “Without the presence of others, there can be no mental life. We only exist through the others who make up the storehouse of the mind: models in our first tentative steps towards identity, objects of our desires, helpers and foes. The mind is a palimpsest in which the traces of these figures will jostle and rearrange themselves for evermore. From the very earliest moment of our lives—since without the rudiments of contact, the infant will not survive—we are ‘peopled’ by others. Our ‘psyche’ is a social space.”

“Ohne die Gegenwart anderer kann es kein psychisches Leben geben. Wir existieren nur durch die Anderen, die das Reservoir des Geistes ausmachen: Modelle für unsere ersten zögernden Schritte zur Identität, Objekte unserer Wünsche, Helfer und Gegner. Der Geist ist ein Palimpsest, in dem die Spuren dieser Figuren sich fortwährend drängen und neu ordnen. Von den allerersten Momenten unseres Lebens an—denn ohne die Rudimente des Kontakts würde das Kind nicht überleben—sind wir ‘bevölkert’ von Anderen. Unsere ‘Psyche’ ist ein sozialer Raum.”

Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 18:111–112; Sigmund Freud, *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* (Leipzig: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1921); reprinted in *Gesammelte Werke* (London: Imago Publishing, 1940), 13:111–112.

one another. They are, in all their doublings, driven to sacrifice, as peace doesn't seem possible, as they are entangled in the repetition compulsion of ongoing acts of retaliation and revenge upon retaliation and revenge, and so on. All this is embodied by the figures in the film, situated in time and place, exposed and documented, foremost by the protagonist, the melancholic Hassan Al Balawi, as he traverses the land from Jericho to Gaza; Gaza, where he first set foot in Palestine and constructed his house, his home, that, when we shot the film in 2019, he couldn't enter because of the internal Palestinian division as well as the Israeli blockade, in place since Gaza was taken over by Hamas in 2007. Thus, the film evokes and exposes the impasse of the post-Oslo era, which is stretched to its limit, to exhaustion, historically. This condition is mirrored cinematographically in shots and scenes stretched to their limits—too long, too raw, too banal—suspended by an undecisive trajectory, at once pushed as well as drawn towards the abyss that foreshadows the events that would unfold on 7 October 2023: an explosion of violence and death, evoking the eschatological and apocalyptic moments of human history, all to be washed away under a cloudburst and “Isolde's Liebestod.” Gaza, where Al Balawi carries the weight of all the sacrifices that have been made, are being made and are still to be made. And there is nothing to see, except that the film moves on, ruthless, providing no escape from the ticking time in which Al Balawi walks his path, the decisive indecisiveness, the precise imprecision of Al Balawi's steps on the path that he walks, pushed forward by the camera that follows him from behind and films over his shoulder. This cinematic technique makes us identify with him, a kind of *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema,²⁵⁸ somewhere

²⁵⁸ Cinéma vérité and direct cinema emerged in the 1960s as innovative documentary practices. Cinéma vérité, primarily made in France, emphasised the filmmaker's active participation and interaction with subjects to reveal social truths. Direct cinema, mostly made in the United States and Canada, pursued unobtrusive observation, capturing events as they unfolded with minimal interference. Both reacted against

between the two techniques, into which I bring elements of Situationism—such as *dérive* and *détournement*—appropriating real and performative acts and bringing them into “documentary” filmmaking. As these techniques were imported into fiction film and I have taken them back into the real, a simultaneously scripted and unfolding reality is captured and exposed, indecisive and decisive, observational and interactive, just as I am attached to my subject and the subject is attached to the camera, an entangled relation that persists throughout the whole film, even when I momentarily lose sight of Al Balawi as he crosses Qalandiya checkpoint, where the Palestinians pass through a different gate from Israelis and Europeans.

Another film that addresses the question of Palestine is Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville’s *Ici et ailleurs* (1976).²⁵⁹ Commissioned by the Arab League in 1970 and shot in 1971 in Jordan, Lebanon and the West Bank, it took Godard and Miéville five years to transform its initial title of *Jusqu’à la victoire* to *Ici et ailleurs*, filming the *Here and Elsewhere*,²⁶⁰ by adding a French

scripted, narrated documentaries, using portable cameras and synchronous sound to explore authentic human experience.

²⁵⁹ *Ici et ailleurs* [*Here and Elsewhere*], directed by Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville (France: Sonimage, 1976).

²⁶⁰ The English title of the film, referring to the final words used in the film, read by Anne-Marie Miéville: “En 1970 ce film s’appelait *Victoire*. En 1975 il s’appelle *Ici et ailleurs*. Ici une famille française qui regarde la télé, ailleurs des images de la Révolution palestinienne. Ici, aujourd’hui, le bruit et l’image de ce bruit d’aujourd’hui. Ailleurs, d’abord hier à l’étranger ensuite demain. Ici des images toutes simples. Des enfants regardent la télévision avant de faire leurs devoirs, et après la soupe. Ailleurs, des images toute simples. Des fedayin critiquent la façon dont ils ont franchi la rivière, sur les mitrailleuses israéliennes. Mais d’où vient-il que nous étions incapable de voir et d’écouter ces images toutes simples, et que nous avons comme tout le monde dit autre chose à propos d’elle. Autre chose ce qu’elles disaient pourtant. Sans

Parisian family watching the images of Palestine on their television, throwing the question back to us, as what drives us Europeans to Palestine and Israel: our responsibility for the destruction of the Jews of Central Europe, the question of guilt. The destruction of the Jews is after all not only a German matter,²⁶¹ but one in which collaborating European countries were complicit with Nazi Germany in the arrest and transportation of the Jews to the extermination camps,²⁶² and can also be traced back far beyond the Final Solution. At the

doute c'est que nous ne savons ni voir ni entendre. Ou alors que le son est trop fort et couvre la réalité. Apprendre à voir ici pour entendre ailleurs. Apprendre à s'entendre parler pour voir ce que font les autres. Les autres, c'est ailleurs de notre ici."

("In 1970, this film was called *Victory*. In 1975, it is called *Here and Elsewhere*. Here, a French family watches television; elsewhere, images of the Palestinian revolution. Here, today, the noise and the image of that noise today. Elsewhere, first yesterday abroad, then tomorrow. Here, simple images. Children watch television before doing their homework and after soup. Elsewhere, very simple images. Fedayeen criticise the way they crossed the river, on Israeli machine guns. But why were we unable to see and hear these very simple images, and why did we, like everyone else, say something else about them? Something else, though, is what they were saying. Perhaps it is because we do not know how to see or hear. Or perhaps the sound is too loud and drowns out reality. Learning to see here in order to hear elsewhere. Learning to hear ourselves speak in order to see what others are doing. Others are elsewhere from our here.")

²⁶¹ On the German matter, see Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage* (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1946); translated as *The Question of German Guilt*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Dial Press, 1947). In his analysis of responsibility after the Second World War, Jaspers distinguishes several forms of guilt: criminal, political, moral and metaphysical guilt.

²⁶² Chantal Akerman's mother lived in Brussels after immigrating to Belgium from Poland before the Second World War. During the war, she was sent to the Dossin Barracks in Mechelen and then transported to Auschwitz, which she survived; however, Akerman's grandparents all perished in the Holocaust. Although Akerman never wanted to be labelled as either a feminist filmmaker or a Jewish filmmaker, the effects of surviving the Holocaust, not only the experience itself but also outliving all the family members and other Jews who perished and the guilt that comes along with it, was transmitted by her mother to her as a child and followed her during her lifetime. Her last film, *No Home Movie*, is a series of conversations with her mother in the months before her death. Born in 1950, Akerman committed suicide shortly after it was released in 2015.

No Home Movie, directed by Chantal Akerman (Belgium: Paradise Films, 2015).

Peter Bradshaw, "No Home Movie review—Chantal Akerman's Haunting Final Film," *The Guardian*, 23 June 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jun/23/no-home-movie-review-chantal-akerman>;

Jerusalem trial in 1961, the late professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz observed that Eichmann was “not more than an insignificant piece in the complex setting in which he acted,” but rather “the product of two thousand years of Christian history, the whole end of which is the destruction of the Jews ... mankind’s will with regard to the Jewish people.”²⁶³

Daniel Kasman, “Chantal Akerman Discusses ‘No Home Movie,’” *Notebook by MUBI*, 17 August 2015, <https://mubi.com/en/notebook/posts/chantal-akerman-discusses-no-home-movie>.

It must be said that not all Europeans collaborated; many courageous individuals joined the resistance and various underground networks to support it, among others in helping to save Jews, especially Jewish children, by hiding them. Nevertheless, the fear of being caught by the Nazis or by collaborating forces left profound marks on people’s psyches. My maternal grandmother assisted her father in the Comète network, an organisation dedicated to hiding Allied airmen who had been shot down but survived by parachuting to the ground. She was responsible for bringing food to the airmen concealed in the hayloft on their farm. Pregnant at the time, my grandmother transmitted this fear to her unborn child—my mother—particularly during encounters with the collaborating Belgian police forces. This visceral fear persists in my mother to this day whenever she is confronted with a police officer, and it has also been transmitted to me. The fear was compounded by the fact that the collaborating Belgian police were actively searching for my maternal grandfather in order to send him to Germany as forced labour. Although he escaped several times, he was eventually captured and deported to Berlin, where he lived through and survived the final stages of the Second World War.

²⁶³ Michael Shashar, *Yeshayahu Leibowitz on the World* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1987), 79 ff., quoted in Manuel Duarte de Oliveira, “Overwhelming Complexities: Between Rome and Jerusalem,” *Open Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2022): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1515/opphil-2022-0261>.

In his film *Shoah*, Lanzmann depicts in a masterly manner how this historical wound lives on by placing Simon Srebnik, the young Jew who survived the massacres in Chelmno, in front of the town’s church among the Polish people who took the houses of the Jews who were murdered, the Poles who recognise him and sympathise with him. All the while, the scene continues and one person describes how the Jews were driven into the church, which was set on fire. After this, Lanzmann provokes them by asking why, to which they answer that Jews were “guilty of killing Jesus,” and that it was “God’s punishment” for that ancient crime.

Shoah, Lanzmann.

While Leibowitz pinpoints this historical wound of two millennia—a matter that once again goes far beyond the objectives of this writing—he remains critical of Israel’s policies and acts of subjugation and humiliation of the Palestinians, and particularly critical of former Supreme Court Judge Moshe Landau:²⁶⁴ “The entire world ... knows that we use torture in the territories. Torture! We use it by the virtue of the authorisation given by the monster, who, only three years ago, was president of the Supreme Court of the State of Israel. Someone who, in practice, is more important than the president or the prime minister, and who deliberately legalised the use of torture in order to make Arab prisoners talk. That is what I mean by Judeo-Nazi. ... There are Judeo-Nazis. I see a fact. When I raise my voice, it is because people still do not know. ... If the law ... allows the use of torture to extract confessions from prisoners, then this is evidence of a Nazi mentality.”²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ Moshe Landau was one of the presiding judges of the Adolf Eichmann trial in 1961–1962, and was the judge of the Supreme Court in Israel in 1980–1982. The Landau Commission, named after its chair, was established in 1987 after two Palestinians died in prison, to investigate the interrogation methods used by Shin Bet; the commission introduced guidelines for the use of “moderate measures of physical pressure” as a lawful mode of interrogation.

Edmund Sanders, “Moshe Landau Dies at 99; Israeli Jurist Presided Over Adolf Eichmann Trial,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 2011, <https://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-me-moshe-landau-20110503-story.html>

²⁶⁵ Extract from the documentary on professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz by Eyal Sivan.

יִתְגַּבֵּר *Itgaber: Le triomphe sur soi [He Will Overcome]*, directed by Eyal Sivan (France: Les films d’ici, Images et Compagnies, Amythos Films, 1993).

“Itgaber, He Will Overcome 1993,” Eyal Sivan’s official website.

A quote from the beginning of the second part of the film, when a television journalist introduces the topic: “The professor Leibowitz said, ‘For most Jews who identify themselves as such, Judaism is merely a blue-and-white rag, and the military activities carried out in their name to defend it. Heroism in combat and domination, that is their Judaism. That is how a Judeo-Nazi mentality is taking root.’”

"הפרופסור לייבוביץ' אמר: 'עבור רוב היהודים המגדירים את עצמם ככאלה, היהדות אינה אלא סמרטוט כחול-לבן, והפעולות הצבאיות המבוצעות בשמם כדי להגן עליו. גבורה בקרב ושליטה, זוהי היהדות שלהם. וכך משתרשת מנטליות יודו-נאצית.

The matter of torture brings me to Jean Améry,²⁶⁶ who wrote *At the Mind's Limits*. In it, he describes in detail how he passed through the Gestapo headquarters in Brussels and then Fort Breendonk—through the very same room where my paternal grandfather was interrogated, all under the gaze of a

See also David E. Hoffman, “Maverick Israeli Professor Gives Up State Prize Amid Flap,” *The Washington Post*, 24 January 1993; Jonathan Ofir, “I Used to Think the Term ‘Judeo-Nazis’ Was Excessive. I Don’t Any Longer,” *Mondoweiss*, 8 December 2023, <https://mondoweiss.net/2023/12/i-used-to-think-the-term-judeo-nazis-was-excessive-i-dont-any-longer/>.

²⁶⁶ After fleeing Austria for Belgium in 1938, immediately following the Anschluss, Jean Améry (born Hans Mayer in 1922) was arrested in Antwerp in 1940 for his militant activities and deported to the Gurs internment camp in southern France. He escaped, returned to Belgium, went into hiding, and joined the Belgian Resistance. On 23 July 1943, while distributing anti-Nazi propaganda, he was arrested again and, on 15 January 1944, deported via the Dossin Barracks in Mechelen to Auschwitz-Monowitz. He was forced to work in the Buna factories until the evacuation of Auschwitz in January 1945, after which he was transferred first via Gleiwitz II to Mittelbau-Dora, a subcamp of Buchenwald, and then to Bergen-Belsen, where he was liberated by the British army in April 1945. After the war, Améry settled in Brussels. He took his own life on 17 October 1978.

Irène Heidelberger-Leonard and Philippe Mesnard, *Jean Améry: Choisir son destin* (Brussels: Auschwitz Foundation, 2025), accessed 31 July 2025, https://auschwitz.be/images/_expo_amery/expo_amery.pdf.

photograph of Himmler²⁶⁷—where Améry was tortured²⁶⁸ before being sent to Auschwitz-Monowitz.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ In retrospect it is still shocking to realise that Himmler's portrait hung in Belgium, and probably also in the whole of occupied Europe.

²⁶⁸ The full description: “‘Now it's coming,’ he [Praust] said to me in a rattling and easy-going way. And then he led me through the corridors, which were dimly lit by reddish bulbs and in which barred gates kept opening and slamming shut, to the previously described vault, the bunker. With us were the Gestapo men who had arrested me. If I finally want to get to the analysis of torture, then unfortunately I cannot spare the reader the objective description of what now took place; I can only try to make it brief. In the bunker there hung from the vaulted ceiling a chain that above ran into a roll. At its bottom end it bore a heavy, broadly curved iron hook. I was led to the instrument. The hook gripped into the shackle that held my hands together behind my back. Then I was raised with the chain until I hung about a meter over the floor. In such a position, or rather, when hanging this way, with your hands behind your back, for a short time you can hold at a half-oblique through muscular force. During these few minutes, when you are already expending your utmost strength, when sweat has already appeared on your forehead and lips, and you are breathing in gasps, you will not answer any questions. Accomplices? Addresses? Meeting places? You hardly hear it. All your life is gathered in a single, limited area of the body, the shoulder joints, and it does not react; for it exhausts itself completely in the expenditure of energy. But this cannot last long, even with people who have a strong physical constitution. As for me, I had to give up rather quickly. And now there was a crackling and splintering in my shoulders that my body has not forgotten until this hour. The balls sprang from their sockets. My own body weight caused luxation; I fell into a void and now hung by my dislocated arms, which had been torn high from behind and were now twisted over my head. Torture, from Latin *torquere*, to twist. What visual instruction in etymology!”

Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor of Auschwitz and Its Realities*, trans. Sidney and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 32–33.

“‘Jetzt passiert's’, sagte er [Praust] rasselnd und gemütlich zu mir. Und dann führte er mich durch die rötlichdünne erleuchteten Korridore, in denen immer wieder Gittertüre aufgingen und dröhnend zufielen, in das schon beschriebene Gewölbe, den Bunker. Mit ihm und mir waren die Gestapomänner, die mich verhaftet hatten. Will ich endlich zur Analyse der Tortur kommen, dann kann ich dem Leser leider die sachliche Beschreibung dessen, was sich nun ereignete, nicht ersparen, kann nur versuchen, es knapp zu machen. Im Bunker hing von der Gewölbedecke eine oben in einer Rolle laufende Kette, die am unteren Ende einen starken, geschwungenen Eisenhaken trug. Man führte mich an das Gerät. Der Haken griff in die Fessel, die hinter meinem Rücken meine Hände zusammenhielt. Dann zog man die Kette mit mir auf, bis ich etwa einen Meter hoch über dem Boden hing. Man kann sich in solcher Stellung oder solcher Hängung an den hintern Rücken gefesselten Händen eine sehr kurze Weile mit Muskelkraft in der Halbschraube halten. Man wird, während dieser wenigen Minuten, wenn man bereits die äußerste Kraft

My grandfather, however, was neither tortured nor sent to Auschwitz–Monowitz. As the secretary of the little town of Bonheiden, just outside of Mechelen, he was picked up for interrogation by the Germans, who occupied Belgium during the war, on the suspicion that he had changed the addresses and spelling of the names of young Belgian men who were called up by the Germans for forced labour in the war industry in Germany. During his history studies, my brother filmed my grandmother, who testified that our grandfather

verausgibt, wenn schon Schweiß auf Stirn und Lippen steht und der Atem keucht, keine Fragen beantworten. Komplizen? Adressen? Treffpunkte? Das vernimmt man kaum. Das in einem einzigen, engbegrenzten Körperbereich, nämlich in den Schultergelenken, gesammelte Leben reagiert nicht, denn es erschöpft sich ganz und gar im Kraftaufwand. Nur kann dieser auch bei physisch kräftig konstituierten Leuten nicht lange währen. Was mich betrifft, so musste ich ziemlich schnell aufgeben. Und nun gab es ein von meinem Körper bis zu dieser Stunde nicht vergessenes Krachen und Splintern in den Schultern. Die Kugeln sprangen aus den Pfannen. Das eigene Körpergewicht bewirkte Luxation, ich fiel ins Leere und hing nun an den ausgerenkten, von hinten hochgerissenen und über dem Kopf nunmehr verdreht geschlossenen Armen. Tortur, vom lateinischen *torquere*, verrenken: Welch ein etymologischer Anschauungsunterricht!”

Jean Améry, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne: Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten* (1966), in *Werke*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2002), 2:72–73.

In the same essay, dating from 1966, he expressed scepticism about the German left’s sympathy for Palestine in the 1960s. In *Der ehrbare Antisemitismus* (1969), he wrote that Antisemitism is contained in anti-Zionism “like the thunderstorm in the cloud,” however, through its coding as anti-imperialism, it has assumed an honourable form.

Jean Améry, *Virtuous Antisemitism: Essays on Antisemitism, Anti-Zionism, and the Left*, trans. Lars Fischer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022), 168–169.

“Der Antisemitismus, enthalten im Anti-Israelismus oder Anti-Zionismus wie das Gewitter in der Wolke, ist wiederum ehrbar.” Jean Améry, “Der ehrbare Antisemitismus,” in *Werke*, vol. 7, *Aufsätze zur Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Stephan Steiner (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 133.

²⁶⁹ “Auschwitz III-Monowitz,” Auschwitz–Birkenau State Museum, accessed 5 August 2025, <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/history/auschwitz-iii/>.

came back, after several days, safe and sound. She expressed her worries for her husband and his responsibility in caring for a family of five boys. It leaves us with the question of what really happened during the interrogation, and what happened after? Did he give the correct names and addresses of the young men and as such collaborate with the German occupiers? Researching the matter, I found a book on the mayors of Belgium during the German occupation in my late father's library. However, although there are several notes, there is no mention of the little town of Bonheiden in the book, which isn't proof that my grandfather didn't collaborate after he was interrogated; my father's youngest brother once said that he had seen a photograph of his father with the Germans, but this was denied by his older brothers—or had they repressed it?²⁷⁰ These questions remain, but this doesn't seem to have been the case for Jean Améry: "Anyone who has been tortured remains tortured,"²⁷¹ he stated, and one

²⁷⁰ My grandfather was a First World War hero and was exposed to mustard gas used by the Germans, which gradually deteriorated his nervous system. He died before I was born; the only thing I knew about him was the wheelchair that was in their garden shed until my grandmother died. During the summers, I would mow the lawn and go into the shed where the lawn mower was kept, together with the old wheelchair. His case probably reflects what is called the "Galopin doctrine" in Belgium. As director of the Société Générale de Belgique, working under the auspices of the Belgian government in exile in London, Alexandre Galopin kept the Belgian economy going for the needs of the civilian population under occupation, all the while refusing to produce war material for Nazi Germany. However, from 1942 to the end of the war, the German authorities forced Belgian industrialists to choose between following the Galopin doctrine, under threat of death, or circumventing the doctrine and therefore collaborating. Alexandre Galopin was assassinated on 28 February 1944 by a Flemish Nazi.

²⁷¹ Arno Gruen cites the excerpt from Primo Levi's book *E questo è un uomo*: "Es ist wie Jean Améry, der auch von der Gestapo gefoltert wurde, schrieb (1966): 'Wer gefoltert wurde, bleibt gefoltert ...' Wer der Folter erlag, kann nicht mehr heimisch werden in der Welt. Die Schmach der Vernichtung läßt sich nicht austilgen. Das zum Teil schon mit dem ersten Schlag, in vollem Umfang aber schließlich in der Tortur eingestürzte Weltvertrauen wird nicht wiedergewonnen."

Arno Gruen, *Der Fremde in uns* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2024), 33–34.

("It is as Jean Améry, who was also tortured by the Gestapo, wrote (1966): 'Anyone who has been tortured remains tortured ...' Anyone who succumbed to torture can no longer feel at home in the world. The

wonders what he would think about the humiliation, abuses and torture of Palestinians by Israel? Bearing in mind that Améry was part of the German-speaking section of the Belgian resistance against the Nazi occupation during the Second World War, and that he unequivocally opposed torture, becoming increasingly critical of Israel's use of it toward the end of his life, one can reasonably infer how he might have judged the case of Walid Hanatsha, a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, who carried out the bombing attack near the Ein Bubin spring outside the Israeli settlement of Dolev in the West Bank, which killed an Israeli teenager on 23 August 2019, and who was subsequently handcuffed behind his back and suspended by a rope until he lost consciousness during interrogation by the Shin Bet, the Israeli security service, in a manner recalling Améry's own torture in 1943.²⁷² The matter seems clear; however, we seem to be caught in a mirage and to not see clearly, we Europeans, caught in our abyss of guilt.²⁷³ Perhaps that is the frightening image of my second dream, the worst thoughts for a European, the Jew transformed into some robotic torture and killing machine, according to the language and a law that I didn't understand, shattering the dream of living

shame of destruction cannot be erased. The trust in the world, which collapsed partly with the first blow, but ultimately completely with the torture, will never be regained.")

Primo Levi, *Ist das ein Mensch* (Munich: dtv, 1992).

Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man*, trans. Stuart Woolf (London: Orion Press, 1959).

Primo Levi, *E questo è un uomo*, Biblioteca Leone Ginzburg 3 (Turin: F. De Silva, 1947).

Gruen develops in these pages his analysis that unacknowledged childhood trauma leads individuals to disown their own victimhood and project it onto an external "stranger." By imagining themselves as the injured party, they justify violence while evading guilt, perpetuating cycles in which unresolved suffering is repeatedly displaced onto others.

²⁷² "Leaked Pictures Show Torture of Palestine Prisoner in Israel Prison," *Middle East Monitor*, 18 January 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200118-leaked-pictures-show-torture-of-palestine-prisoner-in-israel-prison/>.

²⁷³ Jennifer Rankin, "EU Accused of 'Cruel and Unlawful Betrayal' of Palestinians over Failure to Confront Israel," *The Guardian*, 16 July 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jul/16/eu-cruel-unlawful-betrayal-palestinians-failure-sanctions-israel>.

together, the miracle of peace, the very question of humanity itself, as well as the dream of making a film, one that both anticipated and annihilated the first dream. Was it the fulfilment of my wish to go to Gaza, understood as an identification with and a mirroring of Hassan Al Balawi's dream to be in Gaza, and to film it, as a moment in time, crystallised at last?²⁷⁴ A melancholic act of

²⁷⁴ A recent post by Nour Alsaqqa, a communication officer for Doctors Without Borders in Gaza, confronts certain segments of European society with what may be our moral bankruptcy, and perhaps, too, with a longing for Gaza: "A white person living in Europe is able to say they don't care about politics, because they're not exposed to the firsthand effects. But if even one of the things that happen on a daily basis in Gaza, was to happen in the West, it would move nations. In political science class we used to learn about things like ethics, and human rights, and international law. But life in Gaza will teach you that these things are just propaganda. Propaganda that fooled us into believing that if only people knew what was going on, they'd stop it. It was this naive notion that led us, at least me and all of my friends, to film and document and speak and share on our stupid Instagrams. But I've lost the will. It's too exhausting. Everyone has disassociated from our reality. We have nothing to eat, but we have these phones. We get to watch our international friends going about their days normally. Who are we even talking to? You cannot rely on the conscience and moral compass of those in power. We've tried for so long. It doesn't work. You have to put pressure on them. You have to disrupt their systems. You have to move and mobilize and obstruct and protest and cost them things. It's the only thing they listen to. Life in Gaza does teach you. For the longest time I wanted to leave, but now I don't feel like I could bear living anywhere else in this world. Gaza feels like the only real place left on earth."

Nour Alsaqqa, Médecin Sans Frontières, reposted by Omer Shatz (@omer.shatz) on 2 September 2025, Facebook,

<https://www.facebook.com/omer.shatz/posts/pfbid035vt2wFz42BxKrRBMN1rWmgUpVWuibtdqfgZhNwjYMKMTAN3qWKfEkL6XL6RtxSc3l>.

resistance,²⁷⁵ exposing the very folds of history we are enveloped by,²⁷⁶ slowly but certainly?

In a text addressed to her deceased friend Edward Said, Jacqueline Rose cites him: “‘Zionism for the Jew was a wonderful thing. They say it was their liberation movement. They say it was that which gave them sovereignty. They finally had a homeland.’ But, as you laid it out so clearly in *Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims*, Zionism suffers from an internal ‘bifurcation’ or even, to push the psychoanalytic vocabulary one stage further, splitting: ‘between care for the Jews and an almost total disregard for the non-Jews or native Arab population.’ Not only unjust, this splitting is self-defeating for the Israeli nation. In the eyes of the Arabs, Zionism becomes nothing other than an unfolding design ‘whose deeper roots in Jewish history and the terrible Jewish experience

²⁷⁵ In her book *The Last Resistance*, Jacqueline Rose reminds us that for Freud, resistance, beyond its usual understanding, “was a psychic reality that blocked the passage of the psyche into freedom,” adding that, on the eve of the catastrophe facing European Jews, he was on the verge of becoming a displaced person. “Like resistance, displacement has its psychoanalytic meaning, which points to the mind’s infinite capacity to defend and dupe itself. People on the move carry with them the burden of a past that cannot always be recognised, a burden that shifts its shape, inciting new fears and dangers, as they arrive on uncertain shores.” Indebted to the writings of Idith Zertal, Rose continues her analysis, arguing that “trauma enters the national psyche in the form of resistance to its own pain.” While she speaks here for the Israelis, it is equally applicable to Palestinians, who carry with them their own catastrophe—the Nakba. In this sense, we can see Al Balawi, carrying the burden of Palestine (and the failed Palestinian state) on his shoulders, while at the same time resisting the pain it causes.

Rose, *The Last Resistance*, 6.

²⁷⁶ One might wonder what moved or animated Gert Granach to play the accordion and sing those German Spartacus League songs evoking the revolutionary will to act; this striking image could be called the *accordion of History*, a metaphor for the folds of time and struggle in which we ourselves remain caught.

was necessarily obscured by what was taking place before their eyes.’ Freud of course spoke of the ‘blindness of the seeing eye.’”²⁷⁷

²⁷⁷ Edward Said, “Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims,” *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 83, quoted in Rose, *The Last Resistance*, 196. The original phrasing comes from Freud’s *Studies on Hysteria*:

“I accordingly inferred from Miss Lucy R.’s having succumbed to hysterical conversion at the moment in question that among the determinants of the trauma there must have been one which she had sought intentionally to leave in obscurity and had made efforts to forget. If her fondness for the children and her sensitiveness on the subject of the other members of the household were taken together, only one conclusion could be reached. I was bold enough to inform my patient of this interpretation. I said to her: ‘I cannot think that these are all the reasons for your feelings about the children. I believe that really you are in love with your employer, the Director, though perhaps without being aware of it yourself, and that you have a secret hope of taking their mother’s place in actual fact. And then we must remember the sensitiveness you now feel towards the servants, after having lived with them peacefully for years. You’re afraid of their having some inkling of your hopes and making fun of you.’ She answered in her usual laconic fashion: ‘Yes, I think that’s true.’ – ‘But if you knew you loved your employer, why didn’t you tell me?’ – ‘I didn’t know—or rather I didn’t want to know. I wanted to drive it out of my head and not think of it again; and I believe latterly I have succeeded.’” Freud commented on it as such: “I have never managed to give a better description than this of the strange state of mind in which one knows and does not know a thing at the same time. It is clearly impossible to understand it unless one has been in such a state oneself. I myself have had a very remarkable experience of this sort, which is still clearly before me. If I try to recollect what went on in my mind at the time I can get hold of very little. What happened was that I saw something which did not fit in at all with my expectation; yet I did not allow what I saw to disturb my fixed plan in the least, though the perception should have put a stop to it. I was unconscious of any contradiction in this; nor was I aware of my feelings of repulsion, which must nevertheless undoubtedly have been responsible for the perception producing no psychical effect. I was afflicted by that blindness of the seeing eye which is so astonishing in the attitude of mothers to their daughters, husbands to their wives and rulers to their favourites.”

Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 2, 1893–1895, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 100–101.

German original version: “Ich zog also daraus, dass Miss Lucy R. in jenem Moment der hysterischen Conversion verfallen war, den Schluß, daß unter den Voraussetzungen jenes Traumas *eine* sein müsse, die sie absichtlich im Unklaren lassen wolle, die sie sich bemühe zu vergessen. Nahm ich die Zärtlichkeit für die Kinder und die Empfindlichkeit gegen die anderen Personen des Haushaltes zusammen, so ließ dies alles nur *eine* Deutung zu. Ich hatte den Muth, der Patientin diese Deutung mitzuteilen. Ich sagte ihr: ‘Ich

glaube nicht, daß dies alle Gründe für Ihre Empfindung gegen die beiden Kinder sind; ich vermute vielmehr, dass Sie in Ihren Herrn, den Director, verliebt sind, vielleicht, ohne es selbst zu wissen, daß Sie die Hoffnung in sich nähren, tatsächlich die Stelle der Mutter einzunehmen, und dazu kommt noch, daß Sie so empfindlich gegen die Dienstleute geworden sind, mit denen Sie Jahre lang friedlich zusammengelebt haben. Sie fürchten, daß diese etwas von Ihrer Hoffnung merken und Sie darüber verspotten werden.’ Ihre Antwort war in ihrer wortkargen Weise: Ja, ich glaube, es ist so. – Wenn Sie aber wußten, daß Sie den Director lieben, warum haben Sie es mir nicht gesagt? – Ich wußte es ja nicht oder besser, ich wollte es nicht wissen, wollte es mir aus dem Kopf schlagen, nie mehr daran denken; ich glaube, es ist mir auch in der letzten Zeit gelungen.”

Freud noted: “Eine andere und bessere Schilderung des eigentümlichen Zustandes, in dem man etwas weiß und gleichzeitig nicht weiß, konnte ich nie erzielen. Man kann das offenbar nur verstehen, wenn man sich selbst in solch einem Zustand befunden hat. Ich verfüge über eine sehr auffällige Erinnerung dieser Art, die mir lebhaft vor Augen steht. Wenn ich mich bemühe, mich zu erinnern, was damals in mir vorging, so ist meine Ausbeute recht armselig. Ich sah damals etwas, was mir gar nicht in die Erwartung paßte, und ließ mich durch das Gesehene nicht im Mindesten in meiner bestimmten Absicht beirren, während doch diese Wahrnehmung meine Absicht hätte aufheben sollen. Ich wurde mir des Widerspruches nicht bewusst, und ebenso wenig merkte ich etwas von dem Affekt der Abstoßung, der doch unzweifelhaft Schuld daran war, dass jene Wahrnehmung zu gar keiner psychischen Geltung gelangte. Ich war mit jener Blindheit bei sehenden Augen geschlagen, die man an Müttern gegen ihre Töchter, an Männern gegen ihre Ehefrauen, an Herrschern gegen ihre Günstlinge so sehr bewundert.”

Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studien über Hysterie* (Leipzig: Franz Deuticke, 1895), 100–101; reprinted in *Gesammelte Werke* (London: Imago Publishing, 1952), 1:174–175.

Ronald Britton wrote the following in the opening line of his text “The Blindness of the Seeing Eye: Inverse Symmetry as a Defence Against Reality”: “As early as 1893, Freud drew attention to a state of mind that he described as ‘blindness of the seeing eye,’ in which ‘one knows and does not know a thing at the same time’ (p. 117). Later he was to use the noun *Verleugnung* to describe this non-psychotic form of denial, which Strachey translated as *disavowal* (Freud, 1924, 1927, 1940). In 1938, Freud wrote of it as a ‘half measure’ in which ‘the disavowal is always supplemented by an acknowledgement; two contrary and independent attitudes arise and result in ... a splitting of the ego’ (p. 204).”

Ronald Britton, “The Blindness of the Seeing Eye: Inverse Symmetry as a Defense Against Reality,” *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 14, no. 3 (1994): 365,

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/07351699409533991>.

Jacqueline Rose continues, in her post-mortem dialogue with Edward Said, that he never ceased to insist on the colonial nature of the foundation of the State of Israel, and the cruel orientalism of how the Arab people were treated and portrayed, all the while asking him, “But what if the key to understanding the catastrophe for the Palestinians, of 1948 and after, were to be found in the love that the Jewish people—for historically explicable reasons—lavish on themselves? We have entered the most stubborn and self-

defeating psychic terrain, where a people can be loving and lethal, and their most exultant acts towards—and triumph over—an indigenous people expose them to the dangers they most fear. For it is not just of course that Israel's conduct has made it impossible for the Arabs to understand her, nor that Israel has been blind towards the Arabs ...; but that she sees things in the wrong place: Everything that did stay to challenge Israel was viewed not as something *there*, but as something *outside* Israel and Zionism bent on its destruction—from the outside. Israel is vulnerable because it cannot see the people who—whether in refugee camps on the borders (the putative Palestinian state), or inside the country (the Palestinian Israelis), or scattered all over the world (the Palestinian diaspora)—are in fact, psychically as well as politically, in its *midst*.”

Rose, *The Last Resistance*, 197.

6 October 2025

I dreamt again that I was in Palestine.

Unlike my two previous dreams, I can recall the exact night it occurred: in the early hours of Saturday 4 October. There was a heavy rainfall on the roof, waking me up in the middle of the night, and the dream was crystal clear in my mind. But I fell asleep again, and when I woke up in the morning, I had lost the dream. The dream lingers at the tip of my tongue, but I can't recall it as I did so clearly with the two previous ones from almost a year before—to my great frustration.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ The frustration is not only because of the dream as such, but also because it could have given me an analysis, a clarification, an understanding of my first two dreams, as is often the case in dreams that succeed each other and are related. See Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 525.

What I do recall are the circumstances of the evening before I fell asleep and in the morning after I woke up: I had been texting with Hassan Al Balawi since he had posted a recent image of an Israeli sniper holding a Belgian machine gun,²⁷⁹ an image that resonated with a post by a British surgeon who had just returned from Gaza and who testified that what he had witnessed—as had many other doctors—was far worse than anything he had ever imagined. One day the Palestinian young boys who were targeted by Israeli snipers arrived to the hospital with wounds to the head or the neck; the next day, to the chest; the following day, to the abdomen; and the day after, to the testicles—as if the sniper had been programmed by some automaton that methodically mapped Palestinian children in order to strike them, with precision, in different parts of their bodies.²⁸⁰ I’m not sure whether it was that same evening that I also saw

²⁷⁹ The Israeli sniper depicted is using an FN MINIMI machine gun. Israel has used weapons made by the Belgian Fabrique Nationale d’Armes de Guerre since the mid-1950s, and since the early 1960s, produced the FN FAL, FN MAG and FN MINIMI under license in Tel Aviv, in the Israeli Military Industries (IMI) factory.

Youssef Boussoumah, Facebook post, reposted by Hassan Al Balawi, Facebook, 1 October 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/100000202386558/posts/25559385903651472/?rdid=Vn4GUO9fsjRzgurm>. Note that the initial project that would eventually become *Fierté nationale* was on the Fabrique Nationale d’Armes de Guerre and, more precisely, on the production and distribution of these arms around the world and their use in armed conflicts by NATO armies and their allies, such as Israel and South Africa, but also by revolutionary movements such as the Cuban Revolutionary Army, the armed wing of the ANC in South Africa (Umkhonto we Sizwe, MK, meaning “Spear of the Nation”) and certain factions within the PLO. Upon arriving in the West Bank with Al Balawi, former fedayeen were however not eager to talk about the armed struggle and the weapons they used, as this information could always be used against them by Israel. Although intended as a MacGuffin, I didn’t manage to properly install this line of Belgian arms as a pretext to talk about what happened to the grand ideals of the revolution and the armed struggle. From this perspective, the film failed with regard to its initial idea, and thus has a poor, stripped or naked structure, because I constructed it out of the leftover footage, material that conveyed the concept of national pride in a form that was abstracted from the pretext of the Belgian arms.

²⁸⁰ Zeteo (@zeteo), Instagram post, 10 August 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DNLOZuUMIqI/>.

images of Palestinians on the beach in Gaza, catching little fishes and a few larger ones in a small fishing net they had taken out into the sea. I remember the sheer joy they expressed—as if they were witnessing a miracle. How was that possible? Were they dreaming? They fell into the water in disbelief amongst the little fish, catching the big ones by their tails and tossing them into the air, as if to test whether the fish might transform into birds—but no, the fish were real; they were going to grill and eat them.²⁸¹ It reminded me of Pasolini and his search for faith and miracles—which he sought among the people of Palestine and ultimately found in Southern Italy—but also of that moment in the film when Hassan Al Balawi asks Yael Dayan if she likes the fish of Gaza, which she confirmed by saying that she loved the whole place, but that it needs a normal life.²⁸²

Al Balawi once told me that, when he was working in the protocol office during Yasser Arafat's presidency, in the early years after the Oslo Accords and their return to Palestine, he invited foreign journalists to go to the beach in Gaza, buy a fish from a fisherman, and have it grilled right on the spot. He had recounted the scene to me as if he could still taste the fish and smell the sea. He wanted to see Gaza, smell and taste it, hear the sounds of the city and of the sea, sense it. But to return to my dream in question—the dream I dreamt but cannot recall—what I do know this time is that I was in Gaza, as we—I was with Hassan Al

²⁸¹ Miranda Vidak (@mirandavidak), Instagram post, 3 October 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DPVrpz-jqon/?hl=fr>.

²⁸² The images encountered online recall Pier Paolo Pasolini's scene showing the multiplication of fish and bread miracle in the *Vangelo secondo Matteo* and the final scene between Al Balawi and Dayan. See *Fierté nationale*, 01:16:20:00 – 01:17:00:00.

Balawi—were amongst the Palestinians. It was Gaza after two years of war and not as he has known it from before 2007. When I woke up and looked at the news, there was a breakthrough: Hamas had accepted the peace proposal that President Trump had brokered together with Türkiye, Egypt and Qatar.²⁸³ It is not the first peace proposal,²⁸⁴ and will probably also not be the last. Every peace agreement seems to be preceded, and followed, by another one as well as by an uproar of violence. It is as if Palestine's and Israel's history is being played like an accordion of war and peace agreements—or whatever you want to call them—with Israel moving borders and settlements, building and destroying and rebuilding elsewhere, and Palestinians living through displacement upon displacement, in tents transformed into concrete, bombed and destroyed, only to seek shelter again in tents and so on.

Perhaps the images of two years of war took over and flooded my dream in the darkness of the night. They could have easily fit into the prologue of *Notre Musique*, Jean-Luc Godard's film from 2004, in which he assembles film clips—whether documentary or fictional—of different massacres, exposing the

²⁸³ “Trump’s 20-Point Gaza Peace Plan in Full,” BBC News, 9 October 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c70155nked7o>.

The Trump administration’s official statement was on 13 October 2025.

The White House, “The Trump Declaration for Enduring Peace and Prosperity,” WhiteHouse.gov, 13 October 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/10/the-trump-declaration-for-enduring-peace-and-prosperity/>.

²⁸⁴ It’s hard to call it a peace agreement. Critics called Trump’s plan “a blueprint for perpetuating injustice” and offering “death disguised as hope.”

See Ranjan Solomon, “Trump’s Gaza Peace Plan Is a Moral and Deliberate Failure,” *Middle East Monitor*, 1 October 2025, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20251001-trumps-gaza-peace-plan-a-moral-and-deliberate-failure/>.

human species' tendency to dominate, to shoot and kill, and to die, as though it was our music.²⁸⁵ Godard brilliantly juxtaposed the colour images as a silent film set to piano music,²⁸⁶ just as he later staged, in Sarajevo, a conversation between Mahmoud Darwish and a young Jewish woman, in which he says that the Palestinians are famous because of her, the Jews, and the world's interest in the Jewish question: "You defeated us. But you brought us fame."²⁸⁷

With this scene in mind, we can ask what Al Balawi embodies in his journey throughout my film—is he also driven by this principle of defeat and fame? Certainly fame,²⁸⁸ but even more so defeat and loss I would say, and the

²⁸⁵ *Notre musique* [*Our Music*], directed by Jean-Luc Godard (France: Avventura Films, 2004).

²⁸⁶ Although I didn't consciously realise it while making the film, and although the diegetic sound of the film recording is still present in the film, I engage with this aspect of dramatising the beginning and end scene of my film by using piano music, which relates to the silent-film tradition.

²⁸⁷ The scene is situated in the Holiday Inn, the famous hotel that hosted all foreign journalists during the Siege of Sarajevo as depicted by Marcel Ophüls in his film *Veillées d'Armes*. Contrary to Lanzmann, Ophüls makes abundant use of non-diegetic music in his masterpiece *Veillées d'armes*, in which he stages Sarajevo under siege during Christmas through the ironic use of American Christmas songs. This musical choice underscores the cruel dissonance between the festive and peaceful atmosphere of Christmas and the reality of war, while at the same time pointing to the pervasive presence—cultural as much as military—of the United States in post-war Europe. The use of music thus functions not only as an emotional accompaniment but also as a critical device, introducing irony and political commentary. Marcel Ophüls's sensitivity to such strategies can also be situated in relation to his father, Max Ophüls, who escaped Nazi Germany, emigrated to the United States, and worked as a director in Hollywood, bringing to his fiction films a formal elegance and reflexive awareness of history and exile.

Veillées d'armes [*The Troubles We've Seen*], directed by Marcel Ophüls (France: Little Bear Productions, 1994).

²⁸⁸ In one of our first conversations, Hassan Al Balawi told me that he was very shy when he was young, partly because he was kind of corpulent, but that he overcame his shyness by becoming a journalist. He also showed me pictures of a Palestinian play in which he acted as a young adolescent. The play was by

melancholy and the solitude that comes along with it; that is what Al Balawi carries in his body. That and the humiliation, which seems to be one of these drives that bounce back and forth in all sorts of directions and transformations through time and space, between perpetrators and victims who become in turn perpetrators to other victims and so on. Perhaps it's there that my dream is to be situated, those humiliations—along with the torture and rape,²⁸⁹ and shame—

the Palestinian poet and writer Muin Bseiso, with whom Al Balawi's father was jailed in Gaza. Getting onto the scene or into the picture was a personal drive that went hand in hand with his drive for the Palestinian cause, working as a journalist and as a diplomat.

²⁸⁹ For recent reports on torture and rape, see among others, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, “‘More Than a Human Can Bear’: Israel’s Systematic Use of Sexual, Reproductive and Other Forms of Gender-Based Violence Since 7 October 2023,” Human Rights Council, United Nations, 13 March 2025, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/report-of-the-commission-of-inquiry-israel-gender-based-violence-13march2025>.

Middle East Monitor, “Leaked Pictures Show Torture of Palestine Prisoner in Israel Prison,” 18 January 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200118-leaked-pictures-show-torture-of-palestine-prisoner-in-israel-prison/>.

Torture has been widespread during the recent Gaza War, and has been reported by various human rights organisations.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), “Israel’s Escalating Use of Torture Against Palestinians in Custody Preventable,” August 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/08/israels-escalating-use-torture-against-palestinians-custody-preventable>.

The film *Ghost Hunting* directed by Raed Andoni, depicts former Palestinian prisoners who recreate scenes of their interrogation and torture experiences inside the notorious al-Moskobiya detention centre. The performers—many former detainees—reconstruct the prison from memory and enact their own trauma as a form of testimony and collective catharsis.

اصطياد أشباح [*Ghost Hunting*], directed by Raed Andoni (France: Les Films de Zayna; Palestine: Dar Films; Switzerland: Akka Film, 2017), accessed 31 July 2025, <https://www.akkafilms.ch/en/ghost-hunting-3/>.

Torture has been also widespread in many Arab states, such as for example was the case in Syria during the Assad regimes, in Iraq by Saddam Hussein, as well in Egypt by Nasser, Mubarak, and more recently Morsi and Sisi. Finally, also both the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, have established machineries of repression to crush dissent, including through the use of torture.

that Palestinians have endured, day in and day out, year after year, for three quarters of a century now—transmitted or transferred and transformed from the deathcamps of central Europe. I cannot recall the dream image, but I can recall, or rather sense, the oppression, and I believe it has to do with what was built up in Al Balawi's body as I filmed it.

And there were the images of the freedom flotilla.²⁹⁰ I believe it is due to the fact that the Israeli navy was occupied intercepting the freedom boats on the sea that the Palestinians managed to catch the fish.²⁹¹ Lest there be any doubt, the

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *UN report: Palestinian detainees held arbitrarily and secretly subjected to torture*, July 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/07/un-report-palestinian-detainees-held-arbitrarily-and-secretly-subjected>.

²⁹⁰ If Hamas has succeeded in anything, it is in bringing the Palestinians back onto the international agenda—through global marches of millions, freedom flotillas to Gaza, and widespread attention. Though the military has not been defeated, the population has: Gaza is nearly destroyed, life is unsustainable, and the terms of imposed peace or ceasefires are humiliating. Many Palestinians have expressed themselves in this way, such as the anthropologist Ala Rabiha Hourani: “Anyone who claims that 7 October was a victory for resistance, that 7 October was necessary to evolve global solidarity and attention to the question of Palestine, is ignoring the value of Palestinian lives. Two years of genocide have resulted in over 80,000 dead, 500,000 injured and nearly 2 million displaced. Gaza's history and infrastructure are in ruins; does that matter? Palestinian life matters more than an idea or a revolutionary dream.” Ala Rabiha Hourani, Facebook post, 11 October 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/alaa.r.hourani>.

²⁹¹ This is confirmed by some images, but also by a statement from one of the flotilla members, Kieran Andrieu, British Palestinian political economist who reflects on their mission asking what they achieved: “We didn't reach Gaza, true. We didn't bring the aid. And we didn't bring anyone back to life. But I'm told that—because we kept the IDF busy that night on 1 October—Palestinians in Gaza were able to catch and eat fish from their own waters for the first time in months.” This paragraph is preceded by his account of being detained for two days in Ketziot prison in the Negev desert, where his Palestinian half-brother had once been imprisoned and tortured. He describes degrading conditions, physical abuse, sleep deprivation, and humiliation at the hands of Israeli guards. Yet he also recounts how, as the detention continued, fear gave way to collective defiance, exposing what he perceived as the fragility of colonial power. His account

freedom boats were all intercepted and their crews arrested and imprisoned in the desert; it took some time to get them freed and repatriate them to their home countries. All eyes were on her, although Greta Thunberg was the first to say that it is not about her, concerning her experience of being imprisoned: “I don’t want to share what I went through. Because I don’t want to see headlines announcing that ‘Greta was tortured.’ Because that’s not what this is about. I can give you an example that, in my opinion, illustrates their attitude well. We kept asking people for vital medicines. People were fainting all the time. And when we asked for doctors and these vital medicines, they locked up to sixty people in tiny cages and repeatedly said they were going to gas us. This is just one example among many, but it illustrates their attitude towards us.”²⁹²

points to the notion of violence used as something to protect or hide an enormous wound or weakness, something that Arno Gruen developed in his writings and that can be synthesised through the following quote: “Gewalt ist die Folge innerer Ohnmacht.”

(“Violence is the consequence of inner powerlessness.”)

Arno Gruen, *Der Wahnsinn der Normalität: Realismus als Krankheit—eine Theorie der menschlichen Destruktivität* (Munich: dtv, 1987), 54. Translated into English as: Arno Gruen, *The Insanity of Normality: Toward Understanding Human Destructiveness*, trans. Margit McCone (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1992), 47.

Kieran Andrieu, “My Time as a Prisoner of Israel,” *Current Affairs*, 21 October 2025, <https://www.currentaffairs.org/news/my-time-as-a-prisoner-of-israel>.

²⁹² Greta Thunberg’s press appearance at Sergels torg in Stockholm on 7 October 2025.

“Jag vill inte berätta om vad jag har gått igenom. För jag vill inte se rubriker som säger att ‘Greta torterades.’ För det är inte det det handlar om. Jag kan ge er ett exempel som, enligt min mening, illustrerar deras attityd väl. Vi bad människor om livsviktiga mediciner. Folk svimmade hela tiden. Och när vi bad om läkare och dessa livsviktiga mediciner, låste de in upp till 60 personer i små burar och sa upprepade gånger att de skulle gasa oss. Detta är bara ett exempel bland många, men det illustrerar deras inställning till oss.”

“Greta Thunberg Alleges Torture in Israeli Detention After Gaza Flotilla Arrest,” Reuters, 7 October 2025, <https://www.reutersconnect.com/item/greta-thunberg-alleges-torture-in-israeli-detention-after-gaza-flotilla-arrest/dGFnOnJldXRlcnMuY29tLDIwMjU6bmV3c21sX1ZBMTM3MjA3MTAyMDI1U1Ax>.

One example among many, perhaps also one dark Jewish joke and one slip of the tongue among many, in the sense that it reveals how the conflict is not, at its core, about the Palestinians themselves, but rather about the fact that we Europeans were the ones who gassed the Jews of Europe. Perhaps it is also the fact that Europe and the world at large now wants to lecture Israel about what humanity is, as though it were necessary to teach them lessons on the practice and morality of torture, starvation and mass killings such as those inflicted upon them by the Nazis and collaborating Europeans during the Second World War, as it seems to be that nothing can stop—as if an automaton is at work—Israel’s inexhaustible thirst for revenge,²⁹³ that historical revenge Jacqueline Rose pointed out.²⁹⁴

I used the word automaton in my reflection on the British surgeon’s statement which links back to Lacan’s text on the mirror stage and the fragmented body

²⁹³ Triggered by Hamas’s attack of 7 October 2023, and the fact that fifty years after the Yom Kippur War, Israel’s military invincibility or supremacy has been defied once more.

J. E. Rosenberg, “The Illusion of Israeli Military Invincibility,” *People’s World*, 17 June 2025, <https://peoplesworld.org/article/the-illusion-of-israeli-military-invincibility/>.

David Makovsky, “The Collapse of Israel’s Hamas ‘Conceptzia,’” *The National Interest*, 27 October 2023, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/collapse-israels-hamas-conceptzia-207058>.

²⁹⁴ A post by António Guterres, UN secretary-general since 2017, invokes the notion of the “beyond,” a concept that captures the incomprehensible scale and moral extremity of the Holocaust when studied in depth. “The situation for Palestinians in Gaza is beyond description, beyond atrocious and beyond inhumane. For too long the world has been witnessing an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe, marked by relentless death and destruction.”

António Guterres, LinkedIn post, October 2025, https://www.linkedin.com/posts/antonio-guterres_the-situation-for-palestinians-in-gaza-is-activity-7381808123235368960-tvf2.

that returns in our dreams. We can question whether it is also present in the image of the accordion of history, and what drives this accordion to be played as it is? In his text on the mirror stage, Lacan doesn't explain what this automaton is, if it acts according to its own will or not.²⁹⁵ And if not, it's unclear who or what animates it.²⁹⁶

Lacan reintroduces the concept of the automaton in his seminar on *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, where he elaborates on Freud's *Wiederholungszwang*—repetition compulsion—in the domain of the death drive, not as biological self-destruction,²⁹⁷ but in the structure of repetition

²⁹⁵ The word *automaton* is the Latinisation of the Ancient Greek *automaton* (αὐτόματον), which means “acting of one's own will.”

Online Etymology Dictionary, “automaton,” accessed 27 November 2025, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/automaton>.

²⁹⁶ We cannot really know as we cannot look inside the mirror, so to speak, because the mirror reflects what is projected on it. Lacan writes about it in this way and tries to capture a glimpse of the gestalt, “full of correspondences uniting the *I* with its own projections and the phantoms that dominate them, the automaton with which the world of his own making tends to achieve fruition in an ambiguous relation.” Lacan, *Écrits*, 77–78. See footnote 284, for original French version.

²⁹⁷ Freud initially conceived the repetition compulsion as operating within the pleasure principle, but he later decided that it belonged to the domain beyond the pleasure principle, the death drive. The following statement summarises Freud's introduction of *Todestrieb*, the death drive:

“Wenn wir es als ausnahmslose Erfahrung annehmen dürfen, daß alles Lebende aus inneren Gründen stirbt, ins Anorganische zurückkehrt, so können wir nur sagen: Das Ziel allen Lebens ist der Tod, und zurückgreifend: Das Leblose war früher da als das Lebende.”

Sigmund Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (Leipzig: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1920); reprinted in *Gesammelte Werke* (London: Imago Publishing, 1940), 13:40.

“If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything dies for *internal* reasons—becomes inorganic once again—then we shall be compelled to say that ‘*the aim of all life is death*’ and, looking backwards, that ‘*inanimate things existed before living ones*.’”

itself. The satisfaction sought is located not in reaching any external goal but in the very circularity of the drive's circuit, and Lacan adopts the term *automaton* precisely to name this structural circuit of repetition.²⁹⁸ The death drive is the insistence of repetition beyond the pleasure principle—that is, the insistence of the signifier where satisfaction fails. In other words, the death drive is the automaton of repetition of the symbolic order, the repetition of the network of signifiers that precedes us, into which we are born and by which we are constituted and determined: the laws, languages, differences and structures of society that exist and will continue to exist beyond our lifetime. The structural operator of this symbolic order is what he calls *Nom-du-père*—The Name-of-the-Father. The other side of the coin is what Lacan calls the *tuché*,²⁹⁹ the encounter with the Real: that which resists symbolisation, paradoxically the real kernel around which repetition turns.³⁰⁰

Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 18:38.

²⁹⁸ As Lacan formulates it: “Toute pulsion est virtuellement pulsion de mort ...,” and, “Ce qu’il en est de la pulsion est ceci: si elle peut être satisfaite sans avoir atteint ce qui, au regard d’une totalisation biologique de la fonction, serait la satisfaction à sa fin de reproduction, si elle peut être tout autre chose, c’est qu’elle est pulsion partielle, et que son but n’est point autre chose que ce retour en circuit.”

Lacan, “Position de l’inconscient,” in *Écrits*, 848.

Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XI*, 209.

“Every drive is virtually a death drive ...,” and, “If the drive may be satisfied without attaining what, from the point of view of a biological totalisation of function, would be the satisfaction of its end of reproduction, it is because it is a partial drive, and its aim is simply this return into circuit.”

Lacan, *Écrits*, 719.

Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 179.

²⁹⁹ Lacan borrows *tuché* from the Greek τύχη (*týchē*), meaning chance or encounter, to designate the contingent encounter with the Real, as opposed to *automaton* (repetition governed by the symbolic order).

Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XI*, 53–54.

³⁰⁰ “Le réel est ce qui gît toujours derrière l’*automaton*, et il est assez évident, dans toute la recherche de Freud, que c’est cela qui est son objet.”

Perhaps we have to analyse the film—and Hassan Al Balawi as the protagonist of the film—as entirely surrounded by and embedded within the symbolic order: the languages and laws, structures and differences that determine him?³⁰¹ Should we understand Al Balawi as inscribed not only within the symbolic coordinates of the State of Israel that occupies his land and his people,³⁰² but also within those of the PA that he represents? And even more fundamentally, within the Palestinian revolution and Fatah with its constellations of chants and poetic traditions, historical narratives and memorial sites, in particular the tombs of Yasser Arafat and of his own father?³⁰³ A symbolic order where he is caught between the revolutionary legacy of Fatah and the PLO that is running through his blood and veins since he was born, and the paradoxes of governance under occupation by the PA in which he became enrolled, where armed struggle is exchanged for diplomacy and security cooperation in the promise of a two-state solution? Moreover, does Hassan Al Balawi not expose the impossibility of national unity and the way this impossibility is inherited, reproduced and transmitted intergenerationally? Is his father's position at the very site where the

Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XI*, 54.

“The Real is what lies behind the automaton, and it is quite clear throughout Freud's research that this is its object.”

Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, 54.

³⁰¹ Lacan's conception of the symbolic refers to the network of signifiers that structures subjectivity and social existence. See Lacan, *Écrits*, especially “La Lettre volée” and “Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage.”

³⁰² Alaa Jadallah, a Palestinian friend of Hassan Al Balawi, told me that “occupation is in every cell of us, they control our lives, decisions, movements, air, land ... everything!”

³⁰³ On the role of the national movement as a symbolic order with its own rituals, narratives and sites of memory, see Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

Palestinian national movement oscillated between unification and internal splitting not repeated in Al Balawi's divided symbolic positioning, in the sense that the fractures of political reality are not only reflected in him but inscribed in him?

Turning to the mirroring relation, one can question if Israel's own subjectivity is also determined by the symbolic coordinates of the Palestinian national movement and its internal divisions and splits—as the question of Israel's security is largely determined by the Palestinian question, just as Israel's symbolic order is structured by the Holocaust as a traumatic founding signifier. The following statement by Yvan Attal is symptomatic of this: “Since 1948, the Palestinians have built themselves up as a mirror image of Israel and have wanted to reclaim our history. They want to be us. They even envy us our Holocaust. They absolutely want genocide. But why? Because they think that the world gave us Israel after the Holocaust, after a real genocide. So, they say to themselves, we're going to move the world by saying that we too are victims of genocide, and they'll give us a territory.”³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ Yvan Attal, “Radio J Interview,” 31 March 2025, Facebook reel, posted by AJ+ français, <https://www.facebook.com/ajplusfrancais/videos/632245819576812/>.

Original French version: “Depuis 1948, les Palestiniens se sont construits en miroir d’Israël et ont voulu se réapproprier notre histoire. Ils ont envie d’être nous. Même notre Shoah, ils nous l’envient. Ils veulent absolument un génocide. Mais pourquoi? Parce qu’ils pensent que le monde nous a donné Israël après la Shoah, donc après un vrai génocide. Donc ils se disent on va émouvoir le monde en disant que nous aussi on est victime d’un génocide et on va nous donner des territoires.”

Attal is a French actor, born in 1965 in Tel Aviv to Sephardic parents who fled Algeria to Israel and then moved to France shortly after his birth.

Should Hassan Al Balawi's return to the sites within the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since the Six-Day War of 1967 be read as a traversal of a space in which every checkpoint and every segment of landscape bears the traces of promises broken or deferred, and of a political order enduring a state of division and suspension, attrition or hollowing out? And should we regard the first crossing into Israel—a place where he had never previously set foot—and the imagined or aspirational passage towards Gaza as movements that figure a longing for the Real, for what is structurally lost, and the desire for a momentary dissolution of the symbolic order—corresponding, in a literary and

Israeli society itself is driven by internal divisions—hard-line Zionists vs. moderates, Ashkenazim vs. Mizrahim, religious vs. secular, settlers vs. emigrants—splits that are not merely sociological, but structural effects of the symbolic order into which Israeli subjects are born. The transition from the “weak, humiliated Jew” of Europe to the Sabra constitutes a massive symbolic reorganisation, but one that never escapes the gravitational pull of the trauma from which it emerged. In this view, Israel's founding war of 1948 becomes a repetition—an inverted repetition—of the encounter with the Real that the Holocaust represented. And every subsequent conflict, including what Netanyahu has called the “Second War of Independence,” reads as a compulsive return, a perpetual attempt to break from the traumatic symbolic order by entering the Real through military force, only to be caught once more in repetition. From this perspective, Israel is trapped in a symbolic dialectic that, in a displaced and anachronistic form, echoes the master-slave dynamics that Jews inherited from their history with Nazi Germany. Not in a literal historical way, but in a structural repetition: the attempt to overcome the position of the persecuted subject by occupying the position of the master, and thereby remaining bound to the persecutory symbolic order one seeks to escape. This is where Attal's use of the word *envy* becomes revealing. Nazi Antisemitism was itself structured by a profound envy directed at the Jews—as a people “chosen,” as bearers of a special symbolic privilege. The Nazis inverted this envy through the logic of the *Herrenrasse*, the *Herrenmensch*, and the designation of Jews and Slavs as *Untermenschen*. Today, one finds a disturbing echo of this symbolic structure in some Israeli discourse, where Palestinians are dehumanised and positioned as radically other—yet simultaneously imagined as envying the very trauma that made Israel possible.

musical register, to Isolde's yearning to reunite with Tristan?³⁰⁵ Is it a coincidence that his mother calls him specifically to warn him not to enter Gaza, while at the same time conveying greetings from someone called Yasser—a name that immediately evokes the tutelary figure of Yasser Arafat, the symbolic father of the adoptive children who figure in the film, and also the namesake for many Palestinian children?³⁰⁶

I don't know exactly when, and I can't retrieve it since the post has disappeared, but Al Balawi—or perhaps one of his family members—had posted images of his father as a young man, taken probably sometime in the late 1960s. In one of them, we see him standing next to Yasser Arafat at a rally, addressing the public. The photograph not only shows the intensity of Fathi Al Balawi's appearance and engagement, but also the striking resemblance between father and son.³⁰⁷ At the same time, another post was published with photographs of Arafat visiting Fathi Al Balawi at the Al-Shifaa Hospital,³⁰⁸ photographs that

³⁰⁵ The analogy to the story of Tristan and Isolde refers to a structure of desire oriented towards an impossible encounter with the Real. For Lacan's articulation of the Real and its relation to desire, see *Le Séminaire XI*.

³⁰⁶ Yasser Arafat, as "Abu Ammar," occupies a paternal symbolic position within the Palestinian national imaginary; the recurrence of the name "Yasser" functions as a signifier of this paternal lineage.

See *Fierté nationale*: 01:24:00:00 – 01:24:48:00.

³⁰⁷ Some photographs of Fathi Al Balawi have been kept by his widow, Zahira Omar Zaadine, Hassan Al Balawi's mother, in Amman, Jordan, where she lives. Other photographs are kept by Al Balawi's brother in Doha, Qatar.

³⁰⁸ The major hospital in Gaza. It was hit two times by Israeli raids and is barely functioning after two years of war.

Samuel Forey and Lucas Minisini, "Israeli Troops Leave Al-Shifa Hospital in Ruins," *Le Monde*, 2 April 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/04/02/israeli-troops-leave-al-shifa-hospital-in-ruins_6667166_4.html.

were taken about a week before his death in 1996,³⁰⁹ evidence of the strong bond between the two old friends.³¹⁰

Jehad Alshrafi, “Photo Essay: Gaza’s Main Hospital Barely Functions After Israeli Raids and 21 Months of War,” AP News, 9 July 2025, <https://apnews.com/photo-essay/israel-palestinians-hamas-war-shifa-hospital-raids-photo-essay-6b90eb6210b52f3037443685b9b45a5d>.

³⁰⁹ There is also a photograph taken after Fathi Al Balawi’s death, showing Yasser Arafat among the family members, including Hassan Al Balawi. One of the grandchildren is holding a portrait of Fathi Al Balawi.

³¹⁰ These photographs of Yasser Arafat at different times in his life reminded me of my father, as he surprisingly resembled the Palestinian leader quite a lot, with his short beard and Mediterranean look, and more specifically because my brother and I had jokingly nicknamed him Yasser Arafat, which my father didn’t really like. Thinking about it now, it must have been in the 1980s, when I was a teenager, and I wonder why my father disliked this comparison (he died in 2008, so I cannot ask him anymore). Didn’t he want to be associated with the Palestinians and their cause, and Arafat in particular? Did he have an outspoken opinion on Israel? Was he a supporter of the State of Israel? I remember that he was impressed by the fact that Israelis had revived the ancient Hebrew language, although he never visited the country. His library was primarily filled with books on resistance and collaboration in Belgium, as well as many works on the Flemish national movement, which overlapped with a book I discovered on Belgian mayors during the Second World War, and with his research into his father’s role during the war. My father was born in 1938, and his memories of the war were sharp as he transmitted them to me. After the war, he went to school at Sint-Romboutscollege in Mechelen, and then studied psychology as well as political and social sciences at Ghent University—he was the first student from his town to get a university degree. After graduating, he became director of the Psycho-Medisch-Sociaal Centrum (PMS, Psychological-Medical-Social Centre; today the Centrum voor Leerlingenbegeleiding—CLB, Student Guidance Centre) in Mechelen, then director of the Dosfel Instituut, the research and study centre of the Volksunie (VU), the Flemish national party. This party split in 2001 into a progressive wing, ID21, which was later integrated into the Flemish Socialist party, and a conservative wing, Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (NVA, New Flemish Alliance), which is the ruling party today, both regionally in Flanders and nationally. From my point of view, my father, a jazz pianist and an ecologist, was a rather progressive person when I was younger; however, towards the end of his life, he supported and voted NVA and not ID21. It is possible that he became more conservative as he got older, but it is also possible that his experiences dealing with French-speaking politicians made him more Flemish-minded than he was initially. My mother told me that when she met him in the early 1960s, he wasn’t so Flemish-minded (part of his library is French literature with authors like Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Baudelaire, etc.). However, he did study at the Rijksuniversiteit Gent, which was the first Flemish-speaking university in Belgium, from which he graduated in the early 1960s. *Leuven Vlaams* was Flanders’s May 1968, demanding the split of the Université Catholique de Louvain

into a Flemish division and a French division, which left the city of Leuven for the newly constructed city and university grounds on the other side of the linguistic frontier, Louvain-la-Neuve. My father was a primary negotiator of the Egmont pact for the VU, which turned Belgium into a federal state in 1977, when the party was elected to the government for the first time in its history. The complexity of the Flemish emancipation struggle and the Flemish national movement had its roots in the First World War, when Flemish soldiers were used as *chair à canon*, while the French-speaking officers were spared. However, by then, there was already a split within the Flemish movement in which collaborators who worked with the German occupation forces were known as “activists.” They were an extremist minority within the Flemish movement who sought to achieve Flemish nationalist goals, such as cultural and political autonomy, by collaborating with the Germans through policies called *Flamenpolitik*, for example, by splitting ministries into Flemish and Walloon sections, as well as the creation of the Flemish university of Ghent in 1916, one of their major achievements. The German *Flamenpolitik* was a means to weaken Belgium, and it created a major rift in the Flemish movement, which was also divided between “passivists” (who opposed collaboration) and “frontists” (who focused on the grievances of Flemish soldiers on the front). In 1933, the Vlaams Nationaal Verbond (VNV) was created and went on to collaborate with Nazi Germany during the Second World War. However, it must be said that in addition to Flemish extremists, Walloon extremists also collaborated with Nazi Germany; the Belgian King Leopold III was forced to abdicate because of the deal he wanted to make with Hitler to stay in power, while the Belgian government was in exile in London. The VNV was banned and its members were imprisoned after the war. The VU was created in 1954 (from the Vlaamse Concentratie and the Christelijke Vlaamse Volksunie, two parties created in 1949 that united to oppose Flemish oppression), and more than twenty years later, it was able to govern for the first time. Some of its founding members had contact with former VNV members, and the more extremist members went on to create the Vlaams Blok (a far-right Flemish nationalist party) in 1978, although some of those members later joined the NVA. From my childhood, I remember VU politicians who were also outspoken pacifists, ecologists and anti-nuclear critics—Green Party *avant la lettre*—and who were sympathetic to the struggles of the Kurdish or the Basque, or other minority groups. In the current NVA party, not much remains of this more progressive part of the Flemish emancipation struggle, as it became the leading conservative liberal party. My grandfather died before I was born, and I never discussed with my father whether his father’s gradually deteriorating disability had an impact on his engagement with the Flemish emancipation movement. I never felt my father had any sympathy for the Germans, nor can I imagine my grandfather would have had. As a matter of fact, as a Belgian hero of the First World War and the Blitzkrieg of the Second World War, he fled with his family when the Nazis arrived, fearfully remembering the massacres of the Belgian civilian population perpetrated by the Germans during the First World War. Coming back to their home after the Germans had passed through, he once again took up his position as secretary of the town of Bonheiden, where he changed the names and addresses of Belgian men who were conscripted for forced labour by the German Reich until this was discovered by the German occupation forces.

Although Al Balawi is critical about the Palestinian national movement in his book—pointing towards its inner split as going back to the movement’s early years, before Israel started to exploit it—one can question if this is a form of disloyalty towards his father and the revolution. I wouldn’t say so; on the contrary, he is extremely loyal towards his father. In fact, he serves the revolution by being slightly critical of it and pointing to how it was also formed by and failed due to the Arab and Palestinian intraregional political and historical dynamics and divisions. He also does a microhistorical analysis of it through exposing his father’s role in Fatah and the very early split he embodied, which Hassan Al Balawi has inherited. Being the son of Fathi Al Balawi—in a way the son of Yasser Arafat’s kingmaker—Hassan Al Balawi is uniquely placed to make this analysis precisely because his intimate, and absolutely loyal, connection to his father, that permits him to do so. As a matter of fact, I believe it is specifically this relationship, this breach, so to speak, that also enabled me to work with Hassan Al Balawi and make our film, despite everything; the film I called “hardly a film.” It is my identification with Al Balawi and his loyalty towards me—through the promise of embodying Palestine’s national pride—that enabled the film to surpass the idea and the expectations of it being a film made for the Palestinian cause, in service of and as a propaganda tool to denounce Israel’s occupation. A film that would instead expose, microhistorically through the character of Al Balawi, a glimpse of the “situation” as lived by the Palestinians, in that specific moment of the end of the Oslo Accords and the foreshadowing of what was yet to come.

The question goes also in the other direction, in the sense that it is not only about Hassan Al Balawi's loyalty towards his father, the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, myself and the film, but also about my loyalty towards Hassan Al Balawi. One could say he is a melancholic man in his fifties, facing and traversing an impossible situation twenty-five years after returning to his home country, where he had never set foot, himself as fragmented as the territories that this country once was. He is a figure we would also not immediately associate with the iconic image of the Palestinian freedom fighter, the *fedayee*, but someone who embodies in his suit and tie the PA—an authority without much sovereignty, the authority of an illusionary state, of a non-state that is moreover despised by its own population for being corrupt and collaborating with the occupying forces. In short, what is my loyalty to him in depicting him, one could say, despite all good intentions, as an anti-hero? Al Balawi represents neither the romantic image of the freedom fighter nor the Palestinian “terrorist,” but the lesser mediatic representative of the PA. He is not an extremist who can simply be exposed and deconstructed; he is a moderate voice who is tragically stuck in an impossible position and mission, as he is divided between different symbolic entities of national pride that both sustain and constrain him. Moreover, he fails in his missions, whether it be in the interviews where he doesn't manage to get what he wants or loses his voice, in finding the right way to cross the checkpoint or the right apartment to meet Yael Dayan in Tel Aviv, or in finding the road to see Gaza, as he is lost in his own land. He embodies as such what documentary theory describes as the “charismatic failure” and stages the contradictions of a historical moment and a geopolitical situation in which a stable heroic position is impossible—a

situation in which subjectivity is constituted through fragmentation and repetition, failure and longing rather than through mastery and fulfilment.³¹¹

My identification with him—as a consequence of being attached to him in this situation—was somehow enabled by carrying the camera on my shoulder and filming him from behind step by step, shot by shot, territory by territory, memory by memory, history by history. The camera, another kind of automaton, one could say, seemed however—although I was the one holding and directing it—to have its own way of saying, or rather seeing. It possesses this peculiar capacity, as Walter Benjamin states in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, to introduce us “to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses,” where the camera reveals aspects of reality that are hidden, subconscious elements, slips, and traces that expose deeper truths beyond what the filmmaker consciously intends.³¹² We can think of the moment when Al Balawi loses his voice, and more generally how the camera exposes how he walks, how his head moves, and his neck is bent, painting a picture of drive and determination with overall despair, embodying the plight of Palestine and the Palestinians. It is interesting to note here that Carlo Ginzburg also traces his method of microhistory back to unconscious elements. In his essay “Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm,” he quotes Freud’s famous essay “The Moses of Michelangelo,” in which Freud writes that

³¹¹ On the notion of the “charismatic failure,” see Paul Ward, *Documentary: The Margins of Reality* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 88–96.

³¹² Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935), in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 239.

See also Rosalind Krauss, *Photography and the Optical Unconscious* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

long before he knew anything of psychoanalysis, he learnt of a Russian art expert, Ivan Lennolieff, who revolutionised European galleries by questioning the authorship of paintings: he showed how to distinguish originals from copies by focusing on tiny, characteristic details—like fingernails or ears—which copyists usually missed. Freud later discovered that Lennolieff was actually an Italian doctor, Morelli, who had died in 1891 as a senator of Italy. “It seems to me that his method of inquiry is closely related to the technique of psychoanalysis. It, too, is accustomed to divine secret and concealed things from unconsidered or unnoticed details, from the rubbish heap, as it were, of our observations.” Ginzburg comments on Freud that for Morelli, “these marginal facts were revealing because they constituted the instances when the control of the artist, who was tied to a cultural tradition, relaxed and yielded to purely individual touches ‘which escaped without his being aware of it.’ What is so remarkable, even more than the allusion to the unconscious, not exceptional for the period, is the identification of the essence of artistic individuality with elements outside conscious control.”³¹³

³¹³ Ginzburg concludes his essay by stating that “imponderable elements come into play: instinct, insight, intuition,” constituting a form of conjunctural, speculative knowledge.

Carlo Ginzburg, “Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm,” in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 99–101.

Sigmund Freud, “The Moses of Michelangelo,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 13, 1913–1914, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 222.

The original passage in German: “Lange bevor ich etwas von der Psychoanalyse hören konnte, erfuhr ich, daß ein russischer Kunstkenner, Ivan Lermolieff, dessen erste Aufsätze 1874 bis 1876 in deutscher Sprache veröffentlicht wurden, eine Umwälzung in den Galerien Europas hervorgerufen hatte, indem er die Zuteilung vieler Bilder an die einzelnen Maler revidierte, Kopien von Originalen mit Sicherheit unterscheiden lehrte und aus den von ihren früheren Bezeichnungen frei gewordenen Werken neue Künstlerindividualitäten konstruierte. Er brachte dies zustande, indem er vom Gesamteindruck und von den großen Zügen eines Gemäldes absehen hieß und die charakteristische Bedeutung von untergeordneten Details hervorhob, von solchen Kleinigkeiten wie die Bildung der Fingernägel, der Ohrläppchen, des Heiligenscheines und anderer unbeachteter Dinge, die der Kopist nachzuahmen vernachlässigt, und die

To return to Benjamin's idea of the optical unconscious, perhaps it applies not only to what the camera keeps in its frame, despite all its instability—the subject of filmmaking, the protagonist and the scenes that unfold in front of us—but also to the man with the camera on his shoulder. Although invisible, I am present from the beginning, running behind Al Balawi, who translates the first phrases from Arabic, indicating that I do not understand the language. Also, that I am a foreigner, more precisely a European filmmaker who speaks French with Al Balawi—French being my second language—and who is almost *a priori* suspected of filming his own projections onto Palestine, being dragged into the situation and dealing principally with the complex of “the European gaze complex,” resulting most probably in another “oriental” depiction of the place and the people, like so many have been made, in the sense that Edward Said pointed out in his seminal book *Orientalism*.³¹⁴ However, that I don't

doch jeder Künstler in einer ihn kennzeichnenden Weise ausführt. Es hat mich dann sehr interessiert zu erfahren, daß sich hinter dem russischen Pseudonym ein italienischer Arzt, namens Morelli, verborgen hatte. Er ist 1891 als Senator des Königreiches Italien gestorben. Ich glaube, sein Verfahren ist mit der Technik der ärztlichen Psychoanalyse nahe verwandt. Auch diese ist gewöhnt, aus gering geschätzten oder nicht beachteten Zügen, aus dem Abhub—dem “refuse”—der Beobachtung, Geheimes und Verborgenes zu erraten.”

Sigmund Freud, “Der Moses des Michelangelo,” in *Imago: Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften III*, no. 3 (1914), 15–36; reprinted in *Gesammelte Werke* (London: Imago Publishing, 1949), 10:185.

³¹⁴ Edward Said is one of the founders of post-colonial studies. In 1974, he published the foundational text *Orientalism*, arguing that “the Orient” was an invention, a narrative constructed by the West that portrays the East as exotic, backwards and in need of Western guidance, thus justifying Western imperialism and colonialism. Said was born in 1935, in Mandatory Palestine. His father relocated his family to Egypt when fighting broke out between Jewish and Palestinian Arab communities following the UN Partition Plan of 1947—by which time, around 250,000 Palestinians had already fled their homes amid attacks on villages and towns. His father, who had earned American citizenship for himself and his entire family by fighting

understand the language spoken also means that I have to understand the situation foremost by trusting what is translated to me by Hassan Al Balawi, and by hearing, seeing and sensing the situation non-verbally. This creates a double sensitivity, at once very close and intimate yet with a certain distance, giving the film its observing and sensing, searching and questioning character. My non-understanding of the language meant that I was “filming blind,” as I referred to it, in the sense that I couldn’t understand what was being said, and therefore couldn’t really direct properly Al Balawi during his conversations and interviews;³¹⁵ this gave the film an un-direction, or rather, it partly placed the film into Al Balawi’s hands and partly into the camera’s apparatus. I trusted the camera’s capacities, as the optical unconscious, to capture, expose and reveal the situations and its circumstances that unfolded between me and Al Balawi, between me and the interlocutors. This tension of directing and un-directing

for the American Expeditionary Forces in the First World War in France, sent his son to the United States to study in 1951. Said went back to Palestine in 1992 for the first time in forty-five years, in part to search for his childhood home, the house of a wealthy Palestinian Christian family in which he grew up: “I have pleasant memories of it because I was born in Jerusalem where our house was. It is still there, in West, or Israeli Jerusalem. That was basically all Arab before 1948: we were driven out of it. When I first went back in ’92, I was expecting to find an Israeli family living there, but I found an international Christian embassy, which is a fundamentalist Christian organisation, which is also Zionist. Now you won’t believe the next part: they believe (and the reason they support Israel) that all Jewish people, from all over the world, will be gathered there for the second coming, in order for them to be killed.”

Kevin Whelan and Andy Pollak, “Interview with Edward W. Said,” *Postcolonial Text* 3, no. 3 (2007): 2–3.

Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

Edward W. Said, “Orientalism, an Afterword,” *Raritan* 14, no. 3 (Winter 1995).

Edward Said, “Between Worlds,” *London Review of Books* 20, no. 9, 7 May 1998, 3–7,

<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v20/n09/edward-said/between-worlds>.

Edward W. Said, “Imperial Continuity: Palestine, Iraq, and U.S. Policy,” lecture, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, The Walker-Ames Lecture Series, 8 May 2003, posted 28 February 2011 by Palestine Diary, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtteoJ1LihU>.

³¹⁵ In the first days of shooting the film in Palestine, Al Balawi translated the conversations and the interviews; however, as the conversations were long and the translations laborious, we decided to stop doing this in order to not obstruct the spontaneity and fluidity of the encounters and conversations.

bled into my relationship with Al Balawi,³¹⁶ and put the matter of loyalty at stake, into ambiguity, into suspension, as I was foremost driven by the underlying forces of the film. This inner logic of the film could even go against the grain of my own tastes and sympathies, convictions and intentions—for example, the choice of Liszt’s transcription of Wagner’s “Liebestod”—and thus could also go against the intentions, expectations or the wishes of the protagonist of the film, Al Balawi. In short, I am predominately loyal towards the film, and thus also possibly to the detriment of the protagonist. However, by serving the underlying forces of the film, I ultimately also serve the protagonist of the film, despite or perhaps rather thanks to depicting him as an anti-hero, which resonates with Darwish’s words: “There’s more inspiration and humanity in defeat than there is in victory.”

When following and depicting Al Balawi on his journey through Palestine, across memory, diplomacy and longing, I captured his flaws and missteps, his weakness,³¹⁷ but also his quiet strength and honesty, however paradoxical and

³¹⁶ My position as the filmmaker can be defined as silent yet unmistakably present. While all mediation occurs through Hassan Al Balawi, who speaks, translates and negotiates access, my presence is articulated through proximity, attention and a sustained focus on the people being filmed rather than on declarative statements. What emerges is a form of relational attentiveness. The film makes perceptible not mastery but vulnerability—moments of uncertainty, awkwardness and shared disorientation are not edited out but integrated into the structure.

³¹⁷ In one of the interviews we did during our shoot in November 2019, namely with Intisar Al-Wazir, the widow of Khalil Al-Wazir, the second-in-command of the PLO and Yasser Arafat’s military right arm, who was killed by an Israeli commando in Tunis in 1988, Al Balawi suddenly said that “we,” the Palestinian Authority, “are weak.” Al-Wazir dismissed this remark, as if it was not to be talked about, as if it was an admission of powerlessness and defeat, what Edward Said describes as surrender, shame and not fitting the discourse of the revolution. This situation triggered my initial idea for the film that was swept

ambiguous it may seem to say so. He is a Palestinian, a human being like any other despite the defeat and the fame that the revolution brought, that burden of history I talked about. This portrayal evokes nothing overtly loud or political in the usual way, but rather something unspectacular, even banal; yet, at the same time, it is vulnerable, quietly disruptive, and unsettling.³¹⁸

away, namely the dignity of the weapon, that object and symbol of resilience, which I was not able to fit into the film and which was therefore absent, since, as I came to realise, the people we saw in the West Bank were disarmed, a condition of their return to Palestine. This is something they did not want to talk about, as any information they gave us could have been used against them by the Israelis.

³¹⁸ A final question, or rather a thought that came to mind about what has transpired from all this as a common denominator is what we could call *travers*: to traverse, to cross the fragmented territories and their circumstances, their situation, by and through Al Balawi, a traversal of memory and history, diplomacy and belonging, a longing for what is lost. The longing for Gaza and a traversal from father to son, from the protagonist to the filmmaker, from one to the other, from Palestine to Israel and Europe, and all the other places of the diaspora, and forth and back. But also the film's methods as *à travers*, through or across, a journey through Palestine, across its memory and its future shadow, which is slightly out of joint: too long, too stretched, as though being under permanent oppression and suspension, and *de travers*, crooked, awry or askew, but also not as intended, in the wrong way, or at odds with expectations, or "against the grain" in the sense of something done contrary to the usual flow or norm, or received unfavourably.

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