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HOUSES WITHOUT FOUNDATIONS: ON BELONGING IN PALESTINIAN WOMEN'S CINEMA

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Abstract: This article analyzes several Palestinian women's films, in which damaged or compromised (occupied, besieged) houses nevertheless serve as the grounds for building a sense of home, claiming belonging, and fostering collectivity. Using the house as both a figural and a material frame for exploring how Palestinian women filmmakers posit questions of sociality and collectivity in constrained contexts of dispossession, dispersion, and siege, this article argues that films such as Annemarie Jacir's 2008 *Salt of This Sea* and Alia Arasoughly's 2006 short *The Clothesline* envision forms of belonging that defy conventional national modes. To account for these alternative forms of belonging and unbelonging, the article draws from queer diasporic, queer of color, and women of color feminist critiques, ultimately arguing that these films posit neither a clear politics of resistance nor a hopeful vision of future possibilities, but rather compel a persistent internal critique of community-building, nation/home, and solidarity.

Keywords: Palestinian women's cinema, home, nation, belonging.

CASAS SEM FUNDAÇÕES: O SENTIDO DE PERTENÇA NO CINEMA DE MULHERES PALESTINIANAS

Resumo: O presente artigo analisa vários filmes de mulheres palestinas, nos quais casas embora danificadas ou em risco (ocupadas, cercadas) servem como motivo para a criação de um sentimento de lar, a reivindicação de um sentido de pertença e o desenvolvimento de uma coletividade. Utilizando a casa enquanto enquadramento tanto figurativo como material, de modo a explorar como colocam as mulheres palestinas realizadoras de cinema questões de sociabilidade e coletividade em contextos de grande constrangimento – como privação, dispersão e cerco – por realizadoras de cinema palestinas, este artigo argumenta que filmes como *Salt of This Sea* (2008), de Annemarie Jacir's e a curta-metragem *The Clothesline* (2006), de Alia Arasoughly's, configuram formas de pertença que desafiam modalidades de convenções nacionais. Com o objetivo de dar conta destas formas alternativas de pertença e de não pertença, o artigo apresenta desde crítica feminista *queer* da diáspora, crítica feminista *queer* não-branca e crítica feminista de mulheres não-brancas, acabando por argumentar que estes filmes não se posicionam numa política clara de resistência, nem numa visão de esperança quanto a possibilidades futuras, obrigando antes a uma crítica interna e persistente sobre a construção das comunidades, nação/do lar e da solidariedade.

Palavras-chave: cinema de mulheres palestinas, lar, nação, pertença.

In Alia Arasoughly's 2006 short *The Clothesline*, a woman takes refuge in her home during an Israeli-imposed curfew. Set during the Second Intifada, Israeli military tanks invade the streets of Ramallah. Incorporating documentary footage of the siege, the film constructs a sharp distinction between the exterior military zone just outside the woman's door and the house's artificially lit interiors, which comprise the primary location of the film's personal drama. The clothesline separates these two realities, providing a kind of domestic screen through which the woman seals herself off from the smoke and destruction outside. The interior shots unfold a subtle, anxious scenery as the woman boils water, gathers her purse and papers, and resorts to sleeping on the floor. The everyday banality of boiling water and moving about the house becomes eerie and claustrophobic as the woman camps out, like a squatter, in her own home.

A voice-over track suggests a conflict that might be spoken to a lover – *why did you make me wait?* This seemingly personal narrative dissolves into one more obviously related to the siege, indicating that house searches have begun – *when will they get to mine? What will they find?* The sound track bridges the interior and exterior image tracks, making the violence implied by the psychological siege and confinement to the home more legible. A heightening sense of the soldiers' potentially immanent intrusion in the woman's house renders the personal space even more unhomelike. The odd mix of anxiety, boredom, and fear of military-imposed curfew transforms the way the woman lives in her home – tightly framed shots emphasize the constraint of her predicament. Yet, although the woman's home seems claustrophobic, uncomfortable, and unlikely to provide safety or refuge, she is determined to stay. Can such a house – under siege, liable to an immanent military intrusion – still be considered a home? How is the notion of home (and by extension notions of belonging, nation, privacy, and family) re-configured under such conditions of duress?

In this essay I look at several Palestinian women's films, in which damaged or compromised (occupied, besieged) houses nevertheless serve as the grounds for building a sense of home, claiming belonging, and fostering collectivity. Using the house as both a figural and a material frame for exploring how Palestinian women filmmakers posit questions of sociality and collectivity in constrained contexts of dispossession, dispersion, and siege, I argue that the films I discuss here envision forms of belonging that defy conventional national modes, particularly those compelled and regulated by the Israeli state. To account for alternative forms of belonging and unbelonging articulated in these films, I draw from queer diasporic, queer of color, and women of color feminist critiques of home, resistance, and solidarity. As Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson argue, women of color and queer of color

feminism provide “an analytic for understanding how the creation of categories of value and valuelessness underpins contemporary racialized necropolitical regulation,” which shapes contemporary life and social organization (Hong and Ferguson, 2001: 16). I look to queer diaspora scholarship to think about how home and nation shape categories of value and belonging. I also attend to the specific history in which Palestinians are repeatedly construed in terms of “unbelonging,” including the forced expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians during the 1948 *Nakba*, the ongoing dispossession of refugees at home and in the diaspora, and the myriad material and conceptual ways in which Zionist settler colonialism and Israeli occupation, apartheid, and institutionalized social inequality maintain certain conceptual and material modes of belonging over others. I provide this context not simply to compare Zionist Israeli and Palestinian belonging narratives, nor to suggest that Palestinian modes of resistance and self-definition arise always or only in response to Zionist and Israeli modes. Rather, I hope to illuminate the urgency and grounded meaning of alternative notions of homemaking in Palestinian cinema, and to underscore both the productive potential as well as the limits of artistic and cultural productions such as filmmaking. Finally, by focusing on women filmmakers, I do not intend to make any over-arching claims about Palestinian women, nor about gender relations in Palestinian society, and neither do I intend to define a body of films as “women’s cinema.” Just as Palestinian cinema has been known to resist easy classification as a “national cinema,” “women’s cinema” has often proved to be an unproductive category.¹ Moreover, films by Palestinian women share many of the unique and dominant characteristics associated with Palestinian cinema more generally, including a meta-concern with filmmaking and/or narrative as cultural practices that have questionable and shifting relationships to Palestinian political and social struggles. The films I discuss here are perhaps especially rooted in a distinctly Palestinian tradition given that “focusing on the dispute of the physical house as its bearing on the idea of a national home, is common in Palestinian films” (Tawil-Souri, 2005: 133). The films discussed here relied on different models of funding and production, reflecting the challenges of Palestinian filmmaking and, in the case of Shashat, a feminist model for promoting production and reception of women’s cinema.

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¹ For more on the structuring paradox of a national cinema without a nation, see Alexander (2005). Helga Tawil-Souri similarly describes Palestinian cinema’s definitional challenges: “The notion of Palestinian cinema begs the question of how it can be classified as such in the first place. Is a film ‘Palestinian’ that is directed by a Palestinian person? And what if that person is an exile, a refugee and/or has taken citizenship elsewhere? Or is it a film shot on location in ‘Palestine’, and if so according to which borders? Is a Palestinian film to be determined by where the production company is located, where financing came from, where it was edited, who distributes it, or even who its intended audience is? Can there be such a thing as Palestinian cinema when there is no such thing, in geo-political terms at least, as Palestine?” (Tawil-Souri, 2005: 113-114).

Focusing on particular projects by Palestinian women filmmakers, I find different ways to consider the role of cinema in Palestinian liberation, as well as varied representations of home and diaspora which, I argue, may offer a new contribution to queer theory and queer and feminist politics.²

Hamid Dabashi suggests that because of the conditions of dispossession, Palestinian cinema is necessarily militant insofar as its “defining moment” is the *Nakba*, whereby “what ultimately defines what we may call a *Palestinian cinema* is the mutation of that repressed anger into an aestheticized violence – the aesthetic presence of a political absence.” (Dabashi, 2006a: 11). For Dabashi, aestheticized violence marks the “mimetic crisis” and paradox of Palestinian cinema and its “traumatic realism.” (*ibidem*). Dabashi literally relates the militant to the filmmaker when discussing renowned Palestinian filmmaker Elia Suleiman, who deploys

a manner of storytelling when all else has failed. Elia Suleiman does with his camera what the Palestinian fighters do with their mutilated bodies. They both find ways of telling their stories – one with exploded bodies, the other with disjointed staccatos of narrative stutters that magically mutate into coherent statements, with pitiless precision. (Dabashi, 2006b: 136)

Guy Hennebelle takes a similar approach when conceptualizing the militant cinema of the late 1960s and 1970s, although aware that it was unclear then, as now, what effect cinema would and could have in the Palestinian context. In the late 70s, for instance, Hennebelle (along with Janine Euvrard) edited a special issue of *CinemAction*, which was arranged around the question “Israel-Palestine: What Can Cinema Do?” Omar al-Qattan similarly questions the role of cinema in relation to struggle when he writes:

One of the things that I have learnt over the last fourteen years making films as a Palestinian is how organically linked are the subjective and the objective, metaphor and militancy, the aesthetic and the political indeed the struggle for Palestine and the strategies deployed for making films on and in it. (Dabashi, 2006b: 110)

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² A significant limitation of this paper is my focus on just English language queer and feminist theory, which thereby excludes important work taking place in and largely for local communities (for instance the Arabic writing of Palestinian queer organization alQaws for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society).

Much of the Palestinian cinema highlights the many obstacles in producing meaning, specifically those obstacles particular to a Palestinian history of dispossession, thereby locating resistance in terms of the obstacles. Said describes this mode of meaning-making when he writes that Palestinian creativity “expresses itself in crossings-over, in clearing hurdles, activities that do not lessen the alienation, discontinuity, and dispossession, but that dramatize and clarify them instead.” (Said, 1986: 41).

Azza el Hassan captures this in her non-fiction film *Kings & Extras: Digging for a Palestinian Archive*, which includes several meta-reflective moments on the project's own making and rationale. As director and primary investigator, el Hassan searches for the notorious and perhaps apocryphal lost Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) film archive, which went missing after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. At one point in the film, el Hassan asks an old woman on the street, likely a Palestinian refugee, what she thinks of el Hassan's film project. The woman responds by asking “what good can cinema do for us?” With this question she undoubtedly calls into question the intent and purpose of el Hassan's film. Moments such as this suggest a willingness to question one's own legitimacy, to undermine one's narrative authority, and to lay bear a tenuous and contingent relationship to Palestine. What, then, does it mean to make films *for* people who might largely question the very practice of film making? What does it mean to make a film for an absent audience, an audience who neither could, nor would, be particularly interested in watching it? These questions point to a much broader question: why, how, and in what forms does and/or might cinema become a locus of struggle and protest in the global cinema context? El-Hassan's playful approach to the documentary subverts conventional observational documentary modes not only by El-Hassan's inclusion of her own voice and image in the non-fiction film, but by placing a variety of expert and everyday voices alongside one another in the construction of her investigation. She includes “talking head” style interviews with noted historians, yet similarly allows them to question her project's potential for success. A tongue-in-cheek framing for these scenes underscores that these experts should not be taken any more or less seriously than the other voices in the film, which include her childhood friend who is also the daughter of one of the PLO filmmakers. De-centering a conventional, hierarchical, and masculinist approach, El-Hassan does not instead only prioritize women's voices and expertise; rather, she undermines conventions that determine who counts as an expert and what passes as truth. Somewhat different from the notion of desire which feminist film scholarship typically ascribes to women's films, El-Hassan describes Palestinian cinema's motivating desire as undergirded by the experience of exile:

When you come from a nation that has experienced a national tragedy and found no means to resolve its aftermath you find yourself caged inside public pain...whatever the story of exile is, it always comes down to one desire: the desire for a home that you have once lost. (2002: 64)

Thus, she creates a new style and a story for the lost archive, not mourning its loss but excavating its potential to bring together a diversity of Palestinian voices. This pluralism marks the majority of Palestinian cinema, as described by Helga Tawil-Souri who writes: “Palestinian film-makers are asserting a pluralistic sense of ‘Palestinianness’ through various approaches and filmic styles, from the experimental exilic films to the national ones” (2005: 118). Although she gives an uncommon focus to (non-“expert”) women’s voices in the film, one would likely not expect to find El-Hassan’s film on a list of contemporary women’s cinema. As Patty White suggests in her discussion of trends in contemporary global women’s cinema, this may have more to do with the difficulty of marketing Palestinian cinema in general than with El-Hassan’s status as a woman filmmaker (White, 2006). In any case, El-Hassan’s film undermines documentary authority at every turn of her ostensibly investigative piece, ultimately emphasizing again and again the woman’s question about what cinema can do for Palestinians. Of course, compounding the limitations of cinematic conventions for articulating Palestinian stories are the broader historical and contemporary forces shaping Palestinian belonging.

UNSETTLING UNBELONGING

If (normatively ideal) Jewish-Israeli identity defines a settled people (or, more romantically, the settling of an unsettled people), Palestinians are both *unsettled by* and *unsettling to* Zionism. Largely refusing to concede their right to the land of their ancestors, Palestinians have had to construct ever-new ways to articulate their attachment to Palestine as home and their understanding of what it means to belong to such a home. In a sense, Jewish national homemaking produces Palestinians as a ghostly presence (or as “absent-presentee,” the Israeli state’s terminology for some Palestinians who refused to leave their villages after 1948). This proliferation of meaning of Palestinianness occurs in part through the discourse of exclusion (a discourse that borders and frequently crosses into ethnic cleansing) through the often repeated notion that Palestinians have never existed, no longer exist, are not who they say they are (i.e., they are Arabs with no special relation to the land of Palestine), and/or are an ancient uncivilized people of the past (as in Israel’s state discourse about

Bedouin communities, whereby they are seen as needing to assimilate and join modern society). Like other indigenous peoples, such as the Native Americans in Renee L. Bergland's study of North America's "national uncanny," Palestinian and Bedouin populations represent the uncanny for Zionist Jewish nationalism through their mere presence as indigenous people still inhabiting the landscape of Israel and Palestine. This presence implies that their historic and continued claims to Palestine as a homeland even as the most concrete claims, bolstered by proofs of former or present ownership, are frequently ignored and denied by the state. In this light, given that Zionism was and continues to be a project of Jewish settlement in Palestine, a definite colonial sense of this uncanniness emerges. As Bergland explains:

The sense of unsettledness in the word *unheimlich* is important, because it evokes the colonialist paradigm that opposes civilization to the dark and mysterious world of the irrational and savage. Quite literally, the uncanny is the unsettled, the not-yet-colonized, the unsuccessfully colonized, or the decolonized. (Bergland, 2000: 11)

In the case of Palestine/Israel, and from the perspective of Jewish nationalism the indigenous and non-Jewish populations are unsettling not only because their presence disrupts the complete success of the Zionist settler-colonial project, but also in part because of their seemingly unstable relationships to a particular and idealized concept of national home. Bedouins, for example, continue to present a threat as a people somewhat defined by their flexible and borderless sense of home. The Israeli Foreign Ministry website, for example, characterizes the Bedouin population as an Israeli "minority community": "formerly nomadic shepherds, the Bedouin are currently in transition from a tribal social framework to a permanently settled society and are gradually entering Israel's labor force." This description conceals the ongoing destruction of Bedouin encampments and demolitions of houses, especially in the Negev, where Bedouin communities continue to be forcibly "relocated" since they live near the largest Israeli settlement Maale Adumim (Knell, 2011). A longer article from 1999 that still appears on the Israeli Foreign Ministry website, explains that "the Bedouin to some extent fail to distinguish between objective difficulties and those connected with their changing sub-culture and thus feel an exaggerated sense of deprivation." The state's self-serving description of Bedouin as irrational and "formerly nomadic" people emphasizes the state's discourse of modernity and democracy for all, while blaming the Bedouin for their own "sense of deprivation." At the same time, these descriptions suggest that the state is threatened by the existence of populations that

refuse to adhere to state-sanctioned forms of settlement and national life; the article goes on to describe Bedouin “land offenses,” including “illegal building,” and “grazing in protected areas” (Ben-David, 1999).

The ever-increasing Arab minority in Israel also serves to continually complicate and challenge the state’s concept of itself and what a Jewish democracy entails, and this of course is what is meant by Israeli discourse of an Arab “demographic threat.” These fantasies cast Palestinians and the visible evidence of present and past Palestinian livelihood in the ruins of demolished villages in national parks, for example, as ghostly and impossible absent-presences co-habiting in a relatively small geographical region.³ In this way, the notion of the strictly Jewish-Israeli homeland, although it repeatedly posits itself in exaggerated security terms, produces a continually disavowed figure of insecurity at its core, haunting every new proclamation of belonging with figures of unbelonging. Even the potential of a competing non-Jewish indigenous *national* attachment to the land exposes a structural contradiction of the Zionist claim to a Jewish natural and holy right to Palestine, since it at the same time imposes and articulates the concepts of the holy and the natural through relatively recent European Enlightenment concepts of the nation and through British colonial rule.

According to dominant Zionist narratives, Israel provided a place for Jews to physically and ontologically *settle*. Zionist settlement in Palestine was also an opportunity to re-configure perceptions of Jewishness and the meaning of Jewish belonging, which took on a distinctly national imperative during the early part of the twentieth-century. Distancing their vision of the new nation from the rather literally unsettled figures of the wandering Jew, the *shtetl*, and the ghetto, Zionist leaders sought to establish Palestine as a place where Jews would make a home that conformed to the same contemporary European norms that deemed Jewish communities unfit or undesirable. Thus, Zionist leader Theodor Herzl described his dream for a Jewish national homemaking in terms of the components of an ideal city: “we shall build houses, palaces, workers’ dwellings, schools, theatres, museums, government houses, hospitals, lunatic asylums – in brief, cities.” (1917 [1896]: 11) While these places suggest a particular kind of social stratification associated with a diverse secular and modern society, Herzl recognized that a Jewish state should also establish some unique attributes:

We shall not only copy Paris, Florence, etc., but look for a Jewish style also, expressing relief and freedom. Open cheerful hallways, borne on columns. Make

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³ See especially Khalidi, 1992.

air zones between cities. Every city like a large house situated in a garden. (Herzl 1917 [1896]:13)

The “relief and freedom” of the architecture Herzl imagined would emphasize a clear distinction between the *style* of living made possible by a Jewish state, a kind of unconstrained expressive Jewish homemaking, and the mode of living associated with survival under conditions of increasing repression in Europe and the former Soviet Union. The “open” hallways and “airzones” stand in opposition to the stereotype of the cramped and overcrowded urban Jewish ghetto or the isolated *shtetl*. Writing in a speculative mode, Herzl imagined Palestine and the figure of the new Jewish pioneer as blank slates onto which certain “homing desires” could be projected on and enacted through.⁴

Today, whereas every new Jewish settlement demands Israeli recognition as a part of the ever-expanding Jewish national home, the continued destruction of Palestinian homes demonstrates the endurance of Palestinian claims to belonging (nationalist and otherwise) beyond such settled or idealized concepts of house and home (Lis, 2012). This is not to say that Palestinian nationalism refrains from an idealization of Palestine as national homeland, indeed there are many examples, including in cinema, that offer such an idealization. In this respect, whether Palestinian filmmakers consider themselves diasporic or exilic also matters to some degree. According to Tawil-Souri, “although their films may be similar, it is still important to recognize the differences between exile and diaspora. Exile suggests longing for home, dreaming of a return to an organic connection” whereas “diaspora often lacks the misery of exile, as it suggests real or imagined relationships among scattered members, whose sense of community is sustained by forms of communication and contact” (2005: 131). Furthermore, although exile and diaspora are often used interchangeably, Tawil-Souri describes the similarities between diaspora and nomadism. However,

nomadism differs extensively from the exilic first and foremost because it dispenses altogether with the idea of a fixed home or center. Instead home is always mobile, suggesting a kind of doubleness: being at home everywhere, but lacking any fixed ground. Although this may seem similar to the exilic, in the nomadic perspective there is no hope or dream of homeland, there is no sense of forced banishment from (and hence longing for) one’s ‘original’ place. (*ibidem*: 135)

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⁴ See Brah, 1996.

As Tawil-Souri also notes, few Palestinians think of themselves as nomads, as their exile is not by choice. Indeed, Tawil-Souri associates nomadism with postmodern, post-structural, liberal ideologies, and distinct from critical race, multiculturalist, and nationalist theories. Exilic and/or diasporic, the concept of Palestine as homeland is a central and driving concern of Palestinian cultural production and resistance. Furthermore, the centrality of the right to return for Palestinian refugees in the Palestinian national struggle, particularly in widely popular Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement,⁵ underscores the importance of Palestine/Israel as home and frequently as a national home for Palestinians (although notably BDS does not prescribe any particular “state solution,” aiming to first end the occupation and restore justice). Still, Palestinian society today is largely dispersed, dispossessed, and/or besieged, with few instances of recognized and/or respected sovereign land rights. The cinematic focus on home and house emphasize the desire for *Palestinian belonging*; the collective desire of a diasporic/exiled or a becoming-diasporic/exiled people.

Given the ghostly, absent-present condition for Palestinians living under occupation, the problem for filmmakers and visual artists would seem to be primarily one of insisting on visibility. To counter Palestinian conditions of invisibility (and the related condition of hypervisibility), such an approach might at first appear tempting and politically efficacious.⁶ Indeed, some models of women’s and particularly feminist cinema argue for the political necessity of positive representation to counteract misrepresentations and stereotypes.⁷ One might further expect Palestinian filmmaking to reject Hollywood and Israeli cinematic tropes (particularly given U.S. complicity in Israel’s occupation and in Palestinian dispossession) and constitute a counter-cinema marked by avant-garde negative aesthetics. Indeed, the films of various Palestinian political factions in the wake of the 1967 war adopted some of the political aesthetics of Third Cinema, as evidenced by the 1972 “First Manifesto of a Palestinian Cinema.” Continuing the legacy of what Tawil-Souri characterizes as Third Cinema’s most “lasting and global value” (“the insistence on flexibility as research and experimentation, as a cinema forever in need of adaptation according to the dynamics of social struggle, and its attempt to speak a socially pertinent discourse absent in mainstream and authorial cinemas”), it is through a diversity of styles and genres, as well as funding and production models, that Palestinian filmmakers have continued working. These diverse styles address various local and international audiences—from

⁵ PACBI, BNC, PQBDS all include the right of return in the three major goals that the strategy of BDS hopes to achieve.

⁶ On the problem of Palestinian visibility, see Edward Said’s preface to *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema* (Said, 2006).

⁷ For an overview and critique of several different feminist models of women’s cinema, including the positive representation model, see Butler, 2002.

the global audiences (including a special UN screening) of Hany Abu-Assad's Oscar-nominated *Omar* (2012), to the art critic and gallery audiences of Mona Hatoum's museum-installed video work, to the remote Palestinian audiences of Shashat Women's Filmmaking NGO's festivals, which works under the conditions of Israeli occupation to bring women's and girl's films (such as *The Clothesline*, which was made by Shashat's director Alia Arasoughly) to multiple locations in the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel.

Indeed, *The Clothesline's* uninhabitability theme, combined with the sense of resilience in the face of siege and the immobility that it implies, is echoed in the film's mode of production and distribution. This includes director Arasoughly's involvement in promoting the production and distribution of new Palestinian women and girl's cinema, which occurs in a manner similar to what White describes as a seemingly outdated model: the "concrete, material practices and spaces of 1970s 'cinefeminism,' the women's films and festivals, as well as the publications and distribution and activist organizations" that emerged in multiple locations across the globe (Arasoughly, 2012: 146). Based in the West Bank, Shashat women's filmmaking organization funds and supports Palestinian women's filmmaking, including educational workshops, an annual multi-location festival, and DVD releases. Shashat's 9th festival in 2013 included 100 screenings in 20 cities, 7 refugee camps, and 22 organizational and university spaces. These popular screenings of 14 women filmmakers' work reinforce the fact that there are local audiences for Palestinian films. According to the organization's mission, Shashat films challenge patriarchal Palestinian society from within; in this way, they not only make space for a supposedly non-existent audience, they also aim to expand the parameters of that audience, or rather the kind of society that can be fostered and envisioned via that spectatorial space. Shashat films challenge masculinist assumptions about the parameters and concerns for Palestinian cinema, particularly in its often-stated urgency to intervene in the political situation. At the same time, Shashat films lay claim to particularly Palestinian stories and cinematic practices, and while they focus on women and girls as main characters, narrators, and filmic subjects, they frequently foreground political and social issues affecting Palestinian society-at-large and not the prescriptively and presumptuous feminist issues frequently imposed on the Palestinian context by Western NGOs and politicians. In this way, Shashat offers a unique form of political agency to women and girls by supporting their personal and political expression. Yet this political agency challenges the national cinema model and/or expands its boundaries, as well as it pushes against any expectation that political unity (i.e., a notion of unity that regards gender and sexual politics as post-revolutionary concerns) is more important than societal transformation in the wake of

an anti-occupation and anti-Apartheid political struggle. As Tawil-Souri argues, in “national cinema” there is not much room for contestation: “In the case of film being overly nationalistic and patriotic in one’s representation of one’s ‘nationalness’ forces one to maintain a static image/idea of the nation, and therefore forbids one to make any changes which would improve the ‘status’ of one’s nation” (2005: 121).

The Clothesline also suggests the need for alternative cinematic and visual strategies that avoid the pitfalls of reproducing the conditions of illegitimacy offered by conventional modes of expository documentary.⁸ Rather, the film interferes with the objective status of the documentary footage by framing it with the interior, subjective perspective represented by the woman in her house. The perspective from inside the house is framed precisely as an internal, subjective, and psychically violated one, rather than an objective and contextualized documentary. Furthering the metaphor of the house as the camera frame, architecture theorist Beatriz Colomina relates the house itself to a camera producing views and classifying landscapes, explaining “the house is no more than a series of views choreographed by the visitor, the way a filmmaker affects the montage of a film” (1996: 312). In *The Clothesline* the viewer is aware that the “choreographed” views comprise documentary footage, whereas the frame narrative (framed and delineated quite literally by the house) is either fictional or re-creational. This spectator meta-awareness, which Vivian Sobchack might describe in terms of the simultaneously intersubjective and interobjective experience of cinema, implies that Arasoughly wants viewers to sense the claustrophobic impatience ushered in by a context where it is no longer enough, if it ever was, to simply document the atrocity of Israeli occupation.⁹ The line between the subjective inside and the objective outside are blurred through this visual framing, as well as through a narrative that emphasizes the projection of the siege into the internal space of the home and of the woman’s psyche. That the footage of the tanks in the streets of Ramallah has a visual quality different from that of the interior of the house scenes highlights and makes visible that this blurring is taking place: that it is both a strategy of the filmmaker and a technique of the Israeli occupation, which uses the logic of objectivity and documentary evidence to achieve its own ends.¹⁰ By appropriating the documentary style and combining it with the subjective experience of the besieged woman, *The Clothesline*’s formal strategy demonstrates a kind of persistent belonging-in-unbelonging.

⁸ Film scholar Terri Ginsberg critiques North American Palestine solidarity film and video on similar grounds, arguing that their reliance on cinema verité conventions to document the violence of occupation serves to “offer little more than generic compilations of albeit damning footage juxtaposed with albeit revolutionary testimonials, which [...], in their relative aesthetic alienation from larger explanatory contexts, [supply] limited and sometimes ironically self-contradictory counterproof.” (2011: 92-93).

⁹ See Sobchack, 1992.

¹⁰ Cite Stein and Kuntsman’s work on Israeli military use of social media.

NEVER FULLY ARRIVED-AT HOME

Recent work in diaspora studies thoroughly challenges and destabilizes previously dominant notions of nation, diaspora, home, and belonging. Avtar Brah's notion of diasporic "homing desires," for instance, construes diaspora as a fruitful orientation that actively creates particular ideas of home and is not simply or necessarily a condition of displacement from a clearly defined and original home.¹¹ Similarly, Gayatri Gopinath queerly counter-theorizes diaspora, refusing to understand it as a failed or partial nationalism elsewhere and thereby rejecting the binaries of nation/diaspora, authentic/inauthentic, and grounded/groundless.¹² In a book on queer migrant narratives, A.M. Fortier suggests that narratives which do not assume home as a secure, heteronormative, homophobic, or non-queer space in fact productively complicate the notion of "home." In other words, Fortier suggests that home needs to be conceptualized differently, and not as always-already-stable, hetero-normative, and original, nor as the "quasi-mythical" and de-contextualized queer home often invoked in mainstream "coming out" discourse. Fortier suggests that home is often conceived of as a space from the past:

the childhood home is more effectively rethought not by refusing 'home' and leaving it behind – which merely reinstates the authority of the heteronormative model of 'home' – but, rather, by conceiving it as a contingent product of historical circumstances and discursive formations—of class, religion, ethnicity, nation—that individuals negotiate in the process of creating home. In this sense, home is never fully achieved, never fully arrived-at, even when we are in it. (Fortier, 2003: 131)

In other words, the imagined future queer home is posited as the ideal space that the childhood home never provided. Through this model, "'home' remains widely sentimentalized as a space of comfort and seamless belonging, indeed fetishized through the movement away from the familial home toward an imagined other space to be called 'home'" (*ibidem*: 119).

If we understand home as already constituted through certain kinds of un-belonging, and not just through similarity, security and community, then the possibilities for understanding belonging and its relation to home and identity expand, and queer can no longer serve as a too easy metaphor for "not-home," nor in the service of an idealized future "queer" home, which is again posited only in terms of security and

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¹¹ See Brah, 1996.

¹² See Gopinath, 2005.

sameness.¹³ Fortier explains how the notion of the diasporic home can accommodate a multiplicity of spaces of belonging and unbelonging and “encounters with estrangement and familiarity” (Fortier, 2003: 121):

the diasporic home is already queer because it is always somehow located in a space of betweenness: that it is a site of struggle with multiple injunctions of being and ‘fitting in’ that come from ‘here’ and ‘there.’ In this respect, ‘home’ is *intensely queer, and queer, utterly familiar.* (*ibidem*: 125)

With this emphasis on the proximity between queerness and familiarity, as well as Fortier’s reference to home as a “contingent product of historical circumstances and discursive formations” formed through a process of negotiation, we get the sense of belonging as processural, contingent and unstable. Considered together, these models suggest ways to think about both queer and home in unsettled terms.

The sense that the diasporic home is “never fully achieved, never fully arrived-at” is a driving concern in Ghada Terawi’s short film *The Last Station* (2007), which was included in Shashat’s 3rd Women’s Film Festival and DVD on the theme *Palestinian Portraits*. Terawi narrates, through first-person inter-titles, the story of her parents, driven out of Palestine and forced to live in diaspora where no place (Beirut, Tunisia) could be home for long. Terawi only first sees Palestine herself in 1995 – she describes checkpoints, the Separation Barrier, soldiers, tanks – a homeland under siege. At the end of the film the narrator explains that “the road back home was more beautiful than home itself. But this was not the end of my journey.” In *The Last Station*, home is unstable, particularly when the ideal home that Terawi imagined does not match the reality of the homeland under siege. This diasporic experience of home is similar to how David Eng describes Asian American experience as “suspended between departure and arrival...permanently disenfranchised from home, relegated to a nostalgic sense of loss or to an optative sense of its unattainability.” (Eng, 2010: 110). *The Last Station* emphasizes a sense of suspension between departure and arrival, and between the home of her parent’s memory and the home she encountered in 1995, through the use of both still photographs and video. The still photographs emphasize the kind of stasis the idealized notions of Palestine took on in her parent’s stories, while archival footage of Palestinians forced to leave their homes, combined with Terawi’s footage of contemporary military occupation, underscore the ongoing processes of the unmaking of the Palestinian homeland. Terawi’s film simultaneously contends with and maintains the sense of unattainability that a Palestinian homeland

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¹³ On the violence involved in claims to belonging in racialized queer Israeli contexts, see Kuntsman, 2009.

has for many Palestinians, without attempting to solve or settle the desire to finally arrive at home, presumably the home waiting at “the last station.”

Similarly, for David Eng, “queer diasporas” is “not only an object of knowledge” but “also a critical methodology,” one that explores movements and migrations “through the lens of queerness, affiliation, and social contingency” as well as “declines the normative impulse to recuperate lost origins, to recapture the mother or motherland, and to valorize dominant notions of social belonging and racial exclusion that the nation-state would seek to naturalize and legitimate.” (2010: 13-14). Eng’s methodology of “queer diasporas” “denaturalizes race precisely by contesting and rethinking the pervading rhetoric that ‘situates the terms ‘queer’ and ‘diaspora’ as dependent on the originality of ‘heterosexuality’ and ‘nation.’” (*ibidem*: 14). In Terawi’s film, a similar “decline” to recover the lost origin of the idealized Palestinian homeland allows for a less linear and more open-ended exploration of Palestinian dispossession. A sense of unbelonging, in other words, is not countered with uncomplicated claims of belonging. Rather, the concept of home remains unsettled, mirroring the sense that Palestinian sovereignty is itself unsettled.

This is not to say that certain notions of home are not regulatory and idealized, compelling certain routes over others towards home and restricting, in some very concrete and violent ways, access to detours toward any recognizable version of home in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Since home is frequently an idealized concept, it perhaps makes sense to analyze how it functions as a regulatory norm via Judith Butler’s theorization of binary gender and compulsive heterosexuality. Butler describes:

When the disorganization and disaggregation of the field of bodies disrupt the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence, it seems that the expressive model loses its descriptive force. That regulatory ideal is then exposed as a norm and a fiction that disguises itself as a developmental law regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe. (Butler, 1990: 185)

In other words, idealized notions of home (and national home), act, like gender, to regulate lived experience, while at the same time appearing to merely describe it. It is also in this way and for this reason that Butler describes gender as “a project with cultural survival as its end,” whereby “the term *strategy* better suggests the situation of duress under which gender performance always and variously occurs.” (*ibidem*: 190). In Israel, duress and regulation take on a specifically legal aspect through the enactment of a loyalty oath bill, which first applied to non-Jews and was extended to include Jewish immigrants, that compels patriotic commitment to the *concept* of Israel as a

“Jewish democracy,” even, or especially, for those who are excluded by those terms.¹⁴ In other words, the master narrative of an idealized national home, a safe haven for all Jews (and, in Brand Israel pinkwashing discourse, all queers), is quite literally a compulsory narrative. The criminalization of the *Nakba* through the 2011 bill that “calls on the government to deny funding to any organization, institution or municipality that commemorates the founding of the Israeli state as a day of mourning” seems in this context aimed at willfully ignoring the ruins and remains (many visible on the Israeli landscape) of other instantiations of the landscape as “home”.¹⁵ National identity and subjectivity, as it becomes bound to particular idealized notions of home for Jewish-Israeli society, requires repetition that, like gender, “is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation.” (Butler, 1990: 191). The idealization of home in this context confirms the extent to which Zionism involves rigid protection of certain ethnic and conceptual borders of belonging.

Following the logic of some world film critics, one might assume that NGO and European-funded films like *Private* and *The Clothesline* cater, at least to some extent, to the non-profit industrial complex’s neo-liberal rights and recognition framework, which focuses on enacting social change often without changing the political conditions on the ground, and thus excludes more direct forms of resistance (such as through social protest or cultural boycott). Such recognized funders do provide a certain sense of legitimacy to Palestinian films, even though such films are still often subject to controversy if they are seen as criticizing Israeli policies, military occupation, and society. Furthermore, in attempting to account for resistant sites, subject positions, and/or acts, certain normative values risk being reinforced through liberal progressive politics. For example, Sara Ahmed succinctly describes the terms through which freedom may be construed, whereby

the positing of an ideal of being free from scripts that define what counts as a legitimate life seems to presume a negative model of freedom; defined here as *freedom from norms*. Such a negative model of freedom idealises movement and detachment, constructing a mobile form of subjectivity that could escape from the norms that constrain what it is that bodies can do. (Ahmed, 2004: 151)

¹⁴ The law is also known as the “Preserving the Values of the State of Israel Bill” or the “Jewish and Democratic State Bill.” See <http://adalah.org/newsletter/eng/nov10/docs/MK%20Ariel%20Jewish%20and%20democratic%20state%20NGOs%20bill%20English.pdf>. See also Levinson and Lis, 2010.

¹⁵ Kestler-D’Amours, 2011.

Ahmed expands on this sense of freedom as one that privileges movement and mobility, which fails to account for the experiences of occupied, refugee, and diasporic communities, who, in spite of their predicament, manage to articulate and experience modes of belonging and community. This critique of how freedom and resistance are construed is similar to Saba Mahmood's question regarding whether "the category of resistance imposes a teleology of progressive politics on the analytics of power – a teleology that makes it hard for us to see and understand forms of being and action that are not necessarily encapsulated by the narrative of subversion and re-inscription of norms." (Mahmood, 2005: 9). Lisa Marie Cacho, in a powerful essay on her mourning of a brother's death, looks to Cathy Cohen and Robin D.G. Kelley to suggest a different model, a "politics of deviance" through which "we would read nonnormative activities and attitudes as forms of 'definitional power' that have the potential to help us rethink how value is defined, parceled out, and withheld." (Cacho, 2011: 48). For Cacho, "the act of ascribing legible, intelligible and normative value is inherently violent and relationally devaluing," and so we ought to be cautious that politics of possibility are careful not to re-inscribe the same terms of value often implied by resistance and freedom, particularly in a context increasingly influenced by neo-liberalism (*ibidem*: 27).

Although Terawi's film does not meet any expectation that, as a film by a woman, it will approach these issues in specifically feminist terms (that is, that it will focus on gender as a regulatory norm), it does provide a way to understand diasporic notions of home akin to the director's own experience as a second generation Palestinian refugee and that align with recent queer (and especially queer of color and women of color feminist) re-conceptualizations of diaspora, belonging, and nation. The alternative modes and routes of belonging in queer diaspora studies and in Palestinian women's films suggest neither a clear politics of resistance nor a hopeful vision of future possibilities, rather they compel a persistent internal critique of community-building, "homing desires", and, as I argue in this last section, solidarity.

THE GROUNDS OF SOLIDARITY

In light of these insights into notions of resistance, freedom, political possibility and value, constrained modes of Palestinian sociality cannot simply be explained as subversive. Said explains a Palestinian mode of living as a sense of partiality, where meanings attach to events and objects in seemingly accidentally ways, which perhaps better explains the relation between the politics of possibility:

For where no straight line leads from home to birthplace to school to maturity, all events are accidents, all progress is a digression, all residence is exile. We linger

in nondescript places, neither here nor there; we peer through windows without glass, ride conveyances without movement or power. (Said, 1986: 21)

Said's point is as much about spatiality as it is about temporality, since he speaks both of "nondescript places, neither here nor there" as well as of a kind of suspended time; "digression," "we linger," and the image of a conveyance without power. Here Said describes a mode of being in the world that marks exilic or diasporic experience, but which also shares a kind of damaged (insofar as it fails in normative terms) life itinerary with notions of queer temporality. As Jack/Judith Halberstam points out:

all kinds of people, especially in postmodernity, will and do opt to live outside of reproductive and familiar time as well as on the edges of logics of labor and production [...] here we could consider ravers, club kids, HIV-positive barebackers, rent boys, sex workers, homeless people, drug dealers, and the unemployed. (Halberstam, 2005: 10)

Palestinian existence, in its general contours as mapped by Said, similarly cannot follow normative, and by extension hetero-normative time; a linear and progressive narrative that marks a "normal" life as following a "straight line [...] from home to birthplace to school to maturity" and which marks those who fail as immature, backward, and inconsequential. For Said, Palestinian communal identity is similarly already fostered through unstable routes that indicate the insurmountable instability of Palestinian identity:

How rich our mutability, how easily we change (and are changed) from one thing to another, how unstable our place – and all because of the missing foundation of our existence, the lost ground of our origin, the broken link with our land and our past. There are no Palestinians. Who are the Palestinians? 'The inhabitants of Judea and Samaria.' Non-Jews. Terrorists. Troublemakers. DPs. *el pueblo palestino, il popolo palestino, le peuple palestinien* – but treated as interruptions, intermittent presences. (Said, 1986: 26)

With the sense that queer diasporic temporalities and spatialities are non-aligned, damaged, and follow non-normative itineraries toward unhome-like ends, a more malleable and contingent notion of alliance emerges. This includes the sense that alliance is a particular kind of orientation associated with "homing desires" that posit desire as a direction (toward a home never fully arrived) rather than a fixed identity.

Since queer and diasporic positions generate their own kinds of sociality and possibility, this suggests they persist regardless of unstable foundations and unfixed meaning. This in turn suggests a compelling model of solidarity, similar to Ahmed's definition:

Solidarity does not assume that our struggles are the same struggles, or that our pain is the same pain, or that our hope is for the same future. Solidarity involves commitment, and work, as well as the recognition that even if we do not have the same feelings, or the same lives, or the same bodies, we do live on common ground. (2004: 189)

For Ahmed, the "ground" of solidarity is not identity, but the physical grounding of bodies on the grounds of the planet.

Such a model of grounded yet unsettled solidarity emerges in Annemarie Jacir's 2008 feature *Salt of This Sea*, in which themes of mobility and belonging are immediately associated with the bodily invasion of Soraya (Suheir Hammad), the Palestinian-American protagonist, as she makes her way through Ben Gurion Airport security and the extra scrutiny focused on travelers with Palestinian heritage. Soraya is visiting Palestine for the first time, but after she is unable to retrieve her grandfather's money from the bank where it was held prior to 1948, she begins an adventure with two West Bank men. The film thus addresses the uncertainty and complexity of return in relation to differing Palestinian experiences – the Palestinian-American Soraya, our protagonist from Brooklyn, wants to remain in Palestine but is restricted by Israel, whereas her new friend Emad would like to leave the West Bank, but Israel denies his visa. Soraya's desire to settle in Palestine is thwarted at every turn by the Israeli military occupation, by the historical legacy of 1948, and by her own resistance to traveling under Israeli imposed restrictions. Together with Emad's friend and filmmaker Marwan they risk arrest and travel through checkpoints, past the Separation Barrier, and (under disguise) via settler-only roads to visit Soraya's grandfather's house in Jaffa where a liberal anti-occupation Jewish-Israeli woman now lives. The woman, who uses anti-occupation mugs for her coffee, welcomes them inside, but Soraya insists they drop the polite behavior. The camera departs from the main characters to slowly pan over the details of the house – the colorful tiles, the doorframe – physical, textural proof of her grandfather's presence there. To Soraya's frustration, the young Jewish-Israeli woman stops short of Soraya's demand on her to "recognize" that the house belongs to Soraya's family, not hers. After this explosive scene Soraya and Emad leave Jaffa and travel to Emad's ancestral village Dawayima, which was depopulated and razed in

1948, where only crumbling foundations and a few surviving, yet ruined structures remain.

Disguising themselves as Israeli settlers, the couple purchases a few home furnishings, including a “home sweet home” sign written in English, to make the space more livable, acting as if they will stay there indefinitely. Soraya wakes up and pretends they are Jewish campers when a history teacher (played ironically by the late Juliano Mer Khamis) happens upon them while leading his students on a tour of the land, ignoring the Palestinian Arab history of the place and discussing only its Jewish and Biblical history. Emad criticizes Soraya for her seeming naiveté and idealism as an urban Palestinian-American hoping to connect with the Palestinian countryside.

In part, Emad and Soraya’s journey models a strained but productive alliance, not to mention romance, between diasporic and non-diasporic Palestinians, suggesting how solidarity and collective belonging need not arise from a settled position or place. They find “home sweet home” in a ruined house, imagining a future family in the cave-like home on land appropriated to build an Israeli national park. While via the interior shots of the ruined house Soraya and Emad construct the possibility of home, belonging and future, an exterior shot emphasizes the Zionist view of the landscape. Outside the makeshift home, the Israeli tour guide tells them he takes his students here to remind how the Jews reclaimed a ruined landscape, again underscoring the constrained context for Palestinian home-making under occupation. As anthropologists Irus Braverman and Rebecca Stein have demonstrated, even though “abundant material evidence of pre-1948 Palestinian life,” such as the Emad’s ancestral village’s remains, is “highly visible in the landscape” of Israeli national parks,¹⁶ these ruins remain largely unnoticed, or they are only described in terms of beauty and ancient history and not as evidence of a recent dispossession and destruction, part and parcel of the state’s formation.¹⁷ The Jewish-Israeli students’ idealized view of the landscape is thus contrasted with Soraya’s naïve one, and their sudden appearance unsettles Soraya and Emad’s fleeting homemaking fantasy. Shortly after this scene Soraya and Emad are discovered, captured, and forcibly separated by Israeli security forces.

Salt of This Sea suggests the necessity of constrained alliances amongst Palestinians, whether living and desiring to live in Palestine or abroad, and implies a subtle critique of the place of cinema in relation to such precarious solidarities. Marwan, a filmmaker, remains in Jaffa in Soraya’s family’s home, seemingly having hit it off with the Jewish Israeli girl living there. His breaking off from the group is not so

¹⁶ Legal scholar, geographer and anthropologist Irus Braverman points out that “only 15 percent of the [park] signposts include names of these villages (2009: 101).

¹⁷ Stein, 2010.

much characterized as a betrayal as much as it suggests that there is no single, viable position for Palestinians living under occupation. Though Emad criticizes Soraya's itinerary, he stays with her as they move from the occupied house in Jaffa to his family's destroyed former village. Their journey models a kind of alliance between diasporic and non-diasporic Palestinians, suggesting how their solidarity need not arise from a settled position or place. They find "home sweet home" in a ruined house, imagining a future family in a de-populated village on what has been appropriated as Israeli state park lands.

Narratives about Palestinian un/belonging and in/habitability such as *Salt of This Sea* clarify how belonging functions both affectively and materially in relation to its most dominant and powerful structures, including the nation, family, and community. As the frequent grounds for imagining national and regional ties, collective identity, and familial belonging, the house can be a reminder of how discourses of identity and belonging often rely on a presumptive rigidity. If the house serves to some extent as the proof of stable identity, literally grounded in place, then various kinds of unhousings bear a significant relation to both the question of identity and of proof. There are many ways in which we can be made to feel we do not belong – through restricted access to citizenship and cultural discourses about race, gender, sexuality to name only a few. Yet, there are also ways to still articulate and feel a sense of belonging – to some place or some group – even in those cases when it is denied or constrained. It is tempting to expose the house, like the nation or family, as only a seemingly solid foundation that is in fact unstable, contested and always under construction, and yet this can lead to an unproductive and problematic dichotomy between perceived rigidity and flexibility. In other words, keeping in mind that the house is a literal space of identity-formation and belonging discourses *as well as* a site of destruction, loss and occupation – as a location of intersecting power relations – mitigates a tempting tendency to locate de-facto spaces of possibility and resistance. How, in other words, do Palestinians articulate belonging under various states of unsettled duress?

Furthermore, if all coalitions are in some sense temporary and contingent, and only gain a sense of stability through repetition, it seems possible that some coalitions can form without requiring the kind of identification and mutual benefit that seems to define the notion. In light of this, queer diaspora and a broader notion of queer solidarity suggests a kind of alliance that, through sustained critique of identity, need not be mutually beneficial, and may be at times about risking the self for the other. A queer alliance would not compel proper positioning or straight lines, but attention to constant change, to the re-ordering of priorities and positions (perhaps what Ahmed means by

commitment and work), to letting what one is aligned with change and remain somewhat uncontrollable, unfixed, and unknowable.

I have characterized the Palestinian cinematic theme of resiliently taking up residence in seemingly unlivable spaces as a kind of anti-foundational persistence, which, like queer strategies of identity critique, marks a Palestinian cinematic strategy. I explored this through the rather literal example of anti-foundational forms of belonging and community forged in spite of, or rather through, houses in various conditions of destruction, occupation, and apparent unlivability. Creative reconfigurations of home and belonging such as those in the Palestinian women's films discussed here are, I argue, ways that Palestinian society has been able to persist in a struggle for recognition and rights from positions that are seemingly impossible, unlivable, or inexpressible. These reconstitutions of home "dramatize and clarify" the modes of violence that constitute belongings, rather than conceal them only through reference to belonging's more overtly positive associations through terms like inclusion and tolerance. Furthermore, queer critique offers a way to think differently about the various strategies within Palestinian cinema that reject conventions of representation and assumptions about visibility, appearance, and recognition.

Arasoughly, Terawi, and Jacir's films posit versions of Palestinian belonging that are constituted through an unstable and/or unreachable home (or archive/origin in el Hassan's case), embracing a defiant claim to sovereignty and community that persists with or without any claim on normative national structure, a definite place, or citizenship. Alternative visions of home in Palestinian women's films, marked as they are by modes of persistence that occur under damaged conditions and without fixed meaning, can serve as a model, then, for precarious orientations to the notion of national home, which subvert or simply decline masculinist and patriarchal nationalisms and resistance models. These alternative modes of aligning with a never-arrived-at home suggest the possibility of forming alliances and building coalitions that counter colonial and neo-liberal notions of home, belonging, and identity. Following in the literary and cultural practice of *sumud*, or steadfastness, they compel Palestinian society to continue to imagine ever decreasingly idealized or normative concepts of home that, even without foundations, compel a persistent critique and express a refusal to concede material or immaterial attachments to Palestine, whatever its meaning for diverse and dispersed Palestinian communities.

This persistence of Palestinian modes of sociality, which are posited even through conditions of un-belonging, represent more than a resilient expression of nationalism against all odds, or a complement to a revolutionary struggle, or even simply an artistic instantiation of resistance. Following a sentiment described by Said, I see this approach

in Palestinian cinema as a kind of persistence in living under supposedly unlivable conditions: “in any case, we keep going.”¹⁸ This approach exposes the Palestinian position in the world, rather than denying it, which works to turn that position into a question, to explore the nuances of it, and to use it against those who presume it as a space of non-existence, defeat, or victimhood.

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¹⁸ Said, *After the Last Sky*, 37.

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