THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

Cinema Regarding Nations

Re-imagining Armenian, Kurdish, and Palestinian national identity in film

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Declaration of original authorship

Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged

T C S Kennedy

Abstract

This thesis examines how film contributes to the collection of visual images and narratives that enable a community to imagine itself as a nation. It focuses on three such communities, the Armenians, the Kurds, and the Palestinians, who have been, or remain, stateless. It argues that, in the face of external threats, stateless nations and their diasporas require repeated re-imagining to ensure their continued existence. A starting point for the study is that cinema is an important site for this re-imagining in the way that it continually highlights concerns with national identity.

Using a diverse collection of film in each case, the analysis identifies national themes, key symbols, and formal structures employed by film-makers to depict these nations. The films are categorised by means of the concept of "cinema regarding nations", that is they are specifically about the respective nations. Through this categorisation, the thesis contributes to national cinema studies by facilitating the critical examination of a body of work which otherwise is fragmented.

The study is comparative and uses a combination of textual and contextual analysis that enables the films from each case to be related to their political and social circumstances. The cases represent nations with arguably widely different origins, from the "historic" Armenians to the more "modern" Palestinians. Thus, the thesis also contributes to the debate in studies of national identity and nationalism between those who argue the nation is a modern political invention and those who argue that cultural roots are essential for the formation and persistence of nations. It reveals the relationship of the historical processes of nation formation and the persistence of national identity over time to their representation in film.

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years. Finally, I would like to thank Rosemary Foot whose delight in the subject and unflagging support and encouragement have made it a great pleasure to undertake this study.

Notes on transliteration

In general, I have kept to the standards used by the majority of my sources for transliteration from Armenian, Kurdish, and Arabic into English. Armenian is complicated by the two different dialects and I have used the standard Eastern dialect which appears in most sources from Armenia (thus *Nahapet* rather than *Nahabet*). For Kurdish and Turkish words and proper names that appear in different forms in different texts, I have adopted the most common English form (thus Ahmed-i Khani rather than Ehmedê Khanî). Finally, for Arabic words and names I have used familiar English spelling where possible and omitted most diacritics for ease of readability.

Book and article titles, film titles, and personal names that begin a sentence are capitalised but not elsewhere if they are not in the original. In direct quotes, I have retained capitalisation and spelling used in the original sources. Film titles are given in the form most familiar to English speakers, irrespective of the language of the original version. For example, I have used *Yol* rather than *The Way*, and *Otobüs* rather than *The Bus*. However the Filmography includes the alternative/original title wherever possible.

Chapter 1
Cinema, State, and Nation

Armenian flag　　　　　　*Kurdish flag*　　　　　　*Palestinian flag*

Two of the most common images of a state are its flag and a map.[1] However, some national communities are not represented by symbols of the state or states in which they live and yet are unable to parade their own. The flags shown here, standing for three such communities, have at various times been deemed illegal: the Armenian flag in the Soviet Union; the Kurdish flag in Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq; and the Palestinian flag in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.[2]

The continued existence of these peoples as separate collective entities has been, or remains, under threat. Their struggles for survival have been conducted by political means and violence but, crucially, also through cultural resistance. My interest is in the latter; particularly the role that film plays as a cultural artefact, articulating the identity of these communities through narrative and symbols, as well as its contribution to the discourse and practice of resistance. As we shall see, flags and the territory defined by the maps are a recurrent feature of this discourse.

The scope of my research is, first, to examine the ways that cinema represents the identity of stateless and marginalised peoples as "national" by exploring the themes, symbols, and formal structures of a diverse collection of film in three case studies. In so doing, I connect my analysis to current debates on the cinematic production of national identity. Secondly, I contextualise these expressions of identity by relating them to the social, political, and historical forces that have shaped the different communities. Thus, I engage with theoretical arguments on the processes behind the formation of nations and their survival without a state. Finally, I

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[1] I make this assertion not from a scientific survey but from an observation of the images returned by a search of the web using 'country name' as the search term for *Google Images* at http://www.google.co.uk in January 2007.

[2] In this thesis I follow the United Nations designation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank territories occupied by Israel since 1967 as "Occupied Palestinian Territory".

position representations of "the nation" in a thematic framework that supports my analysis at a time of increasingly unstable notions of what constitutes the national. In this way I also firmly link my study to developments in national cinema scholarship.

The state, nation, and identity

Many contemporary investigations into the representation of national identity commence with Benedict Anderson's now commonplace idea of the nation as an 'imagined political community': a community fashioned by its dispersed members believing, by virtue of various means of communication, that they share an identity and a willingness to live together (1983:6). The *nation* that Anderson describes is the *community formed by the citizens of a state*, and the term national identity is used to express the condition of such a community *identifying with a state*. This formulation implicitly excludes the possibility of there being other groups of people that also would describe themselves as, or that could objectively be, described as, nations.[3] However, those such as the Armenians, Kurds, and Palestinians, have come to be recognised as nations though their members may be stateless, or inhabit multiple states, or be citizens of a state they do not readily acknowledge. In this thesis I make a distinction between the nation in the sense of a socially and culturally bounded people, and the nation (in Anderson's sense) which is territorially bounded.

In Chapter 2, I go beyond this simplified account of Anderson's concepts to consider the long line of intellectual inquiry into what constitutes the nation and the processes by which national identities are formed and sustained over time. Without oversimplifying, it is safe to say that a debate emerged in the 1980s in which the nation is regarded as either a wholly modern fabrication or as derived from pre-existing ties and traditions that have always bound communities together.[4] I do not try to arbitrate between these positions, and it seems probable that they apply in distinct ways to different cases – arguably there are nations, such as the Armenians, with "ancient" or "historic" roots and nations, such as the Palestinians, which have a more modern origin. In this study, I examine whether we can distinguish how the three nations have been "constructed" through an analysis of their representation in film. Can we detect how each has developed through the way it is re-imagined in the

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[3] Anderson's definition is not *essentially* exclusionary since it does allow for people to be "invited" into the imagined community, but only within the bounds of a 'limited and sovereign' state (ibid.).

[4] See, for example, the exchange between Ernest Gellner (1996) and Anthony Smith (1996a; 1996b).

cinema? Is there any correlation between the representation of each nation and the stability of its claims to a specific territory and the resilience of its culture? I thread such comparisons through later chapters to argue that some such distinctions can, indeed, be made.

Despite differences of opinion about origins, there is general agreement that social communication binds a people into a community (Schlesinger, 2000). The insight that film is a powerful medium of such communication, taken together with the congruent premises that both the nation and film are "constructs", inform numerous explorations of the way cinema is implicated in developing the abstract idea of the nation. Such studies habitually have been embedded in research on national cinema which, prior to the 1980s, tended to focus almost exclusively on the relationship between cinema and the state (Kuhn, 2006:3).

Cinema and the state

Almost since its inception, cinema has been intimately involved in 'the cultural articulation of the nation-building and sustaining projects of states' (Shapiro, 2004:142). It assumed the important roles of projecting the ideals of the state (chiefly in times of crisis), delivering propaganda, and serving as a focus of cultural patriotism. Robert Burgoyne's study of American cinema, for example, notes the 'central position occupied by film in the articulation of national identity' (1997:6). And, although Alan Williams casts doubt on the effectiveness of film (especially fiction) as a means of promoting specific ideologies, he acknowledges its ability to '*reflect* and *keep in circulation* values and behaviour associated with a particular [state]' (2002:6-8). Thus, for nation-building (as well as economic) purposes, many states have enthusiastically sponsored their cinema industries.

The concept of national cinema grew out of this for reasons that Philip Rosen usefully itemises as the '*pragmatics* of filmmaking' and the '*heuristics* of scholarship' (1996:386-391). Simply put, many film-makers base their search for funding and institutional support on the precept of making film that can be categorised as belonging to a specific national (i.e. state) cinema. For film scholarship, the concept provides an explanatory and organising principle for bodies of work that may otherwise be resistant to analysis. And, logically, it brings together 'a large number of agents, institutions, and/or textuality as some kind of unity, which [may then be]

aligned with a nation for descriptive assertions and/or explanatory reasoning' (ibid.:388).

The national cinema model, however, is problematic as an analytic tool since it embodies two politically entwined but not well related issues: the economics of a state-based film industry, and the aesthetics of the "national image" constructed by the texts. With the increasingly international nature of film production, distribution, and consumption, questions of definition emerged. *Wedding in Galilee* (Khleifi, 1987), discussed later in this thesis, is a pertinent example. It has been classified as an Israeli film though it is about a Palestinian village in Israel, made by a Palestinian living and working in Belgium, with mainly Palestinian actors, and with Belgian and French funding. Thus, on grounds of attribution alone, the state-centred categorisation of film has lost much of its rationale.

At the same time that the provenance of films has become progressively more ambiguous, so have what Stephen Crofts calls their 'expressions of a putative national spirit' (2000:386). In many instances the image of the nation that a film is attempting to project has become more problematic. For example, the Turkish film, *Journey to the Sun* (Ustaoğlu, 1999), challenges the very notion of a homogenous Turkish state.

A general fragmentation of the national image coincides with growing instability in the idea of the nation itself. National identity has become even more of a slippery term in the modern era – an individual's willingness to identify with a state or nation often is conditional and changeable, and may have to compete with other intense ways of belonging, such as to a religious, social, or ethnic group. A Kurdish woman may see herself, at different times, as a woman, a Sunni Muslim, a Turkish citizen, a Kurd, or a member of a particular clan. Furthermore, as the cultural boundaries of states and nations have become more fluid and permeable, identification has become less dependent even on living within a specific territory. Many of the strongest forms of national association occur in practice among diasporic communities such as the Kurdish population in Germany or the Armenian populations in France and North America.[5]

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[5] My use of the term 'diaspora' in this thesis follows Sheffer's definition which may be paraphrased as a recognisable people (ethno-community) who as a result of voluntary or forced migration live outside their traditional homeland (2002:9).

Tracking this instability of identity, the primacy of a state-centred approach to the study of film has come under increasing pressure. There have been many contributions to the debate about its direction, here I will simply refer to the main threads that situate my research in its theoretical context.

National cinema studies

Andrew Higson, in an influential article in *Screen* (1989), was one of the first to suggest that the term national cinema is not the most appropriate to describe the products of a state. His position was reinforced by Rosen, who convincingly makes the case that there has always been a predilection to ignore the latent geographical and historical fissures of a state in the attempt to find unity in its production of film. Rosen diagnoses these lacunae as being rooted in the needs of 19th century nation-building to assign validity to the state only when it is grounded in a nation:

> Not only is the political geography designated by state borders divisible into different regions and even "nations" … but also … "national" characteristics spill across state borders both culturally and economically. [S]uch instabilities are also fundamentally "temporal," insofar as the nation realizes itself within state borders only at certain times. This is why the attribution of nationality to a cinema tends towards periodization. (1996:390)

Rosen's final point is echoed by Susan Hayward who concludes that '[j]ust as the cultural specificity of a nation changes over the course of its history, so too do its artefacts, including cinema' (1999:106).

To address these concerns, Stephen Crofts proposed a taxonomy for national cinema which offers a set of narrower and more specific categories (1993; 2000). Close scrutiny of his classification reveals its inadequacy in dealing with widely diverse cinema such as that produced in India or China, yet it is helpful in a number of ways. It warns of the tendency to see films listed under the rubric of a state as wholly representative of its people, and argues against the homogenising effects of such national cinema discourse which 'crowd[s] out more complex articulations of national identity' including the hybrid and diasporic (1993:62). It also problematises the study of marginal film given the limited availability of texts due to unreliable funding and poor production conditions. And, finally, it enables Crofts to highlight the issue of 'cross-cultural reception'. He cautions that many of these texts may remain 'impervious to outside readings' or are susceptible to 'misreadings' (ibid.:61), a point I will return to later.

These, and many other scholars, have re-positioned national cinema theory to accommodate the more complex and less homogenous vision of the nation and the state emerging from the debates on nationalism and national identity that I outlined earlier. However, there remains a certain tension in the study of national cinema as it strains to deal with notions of national identity in diasporas, post-colonial states, and stateless or multi-state nations.[6] It is here that the analysis of oppositional cinema, largely associated with Third World film production, has proved valuable.

Oppositional cinema

Forms of cinema practice concerned with the expression of cultural identity and resistance to oppression reached an apogee in Latin America in the early 1970s. Film was an instrument for the practical expression of a political theory that espoused militant reaction to specific social and economic circumstances (Burton, 1985:3-4). Though never a single, homogenous movement, it became reified in the 1980s by a number of Western critics as 'Third Cinema', a label that was extended to cover film-making practices throughout the Third World.

Teshome Gabriel originated the analysis of Third World film production in terms of a theoretical structure of cinema. However, his definition that 'Third Cinema includes an infinity of subjects and styles', and that its 'principal characteristic is really not so much where it is made, or even who makes it, but, rather the ideology it espouses and the consciousness it displays' (1982:2-3), lacks precision. It also takes it some distance from the original *activist* intent of the film-makers, namely, that of proclaiming the 'centrality of the projection circumstances and the use value of the film for militant *political* organizations' (Buchsbaum, 2001:156).

Rather than attempting yet another definition, I prefer, like Julianne Burton, to use the terms marginal and oppositional cinema since they can be applied to the work of film-makers from any part of the world that address issues relevant to communities that believe themselves to be unrepresented by the state (1985:10). The efforts of Burton and others in analysing such cinema offer a number of valuable observations. First is Paul Willemen's assertion that it includes film that is in the realms of research and experimentation; it is 'forever in need of adaptation to the shifting dynamics at work in social struggles' (1989:10). Thus, we should read into the experimentation of

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[6] For recent examples see Dennison (2006:1-12) and Vitali (2006:1-8).

film-makers such as Palestinian Elia Suleiman and Armenian Artavadz Pelechian, not just a resistance to dominant forms of cinema, but also a means of dealing with the social conditions they are trying to expose.

Secondly, as Burton reminds us, most oppositional film-makers are socially committed. Unlike traditional cinema, which presupposes

> an anonymous, passive and socially fragmented audience who did their viewing in the impersonal and ritualised space of the conventional movie theatre, oppositional film-makers sought physical spaces and organisational formats which emphasised communality in order to encourage audience participation and feedback (1985:12)

An adjunct to this is the understanding that oppositional cinema stresses its *use value* – it returns to its activist roots. Commitment to the struggle for recognition of their rights to self-determination is one of the common features of many of the film-makers in this study. Certainly the funding of film units by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) during the 1960s and 1970s is a prime example of film being produced principally for its use value (see Chapter 7). Another instance is the more recent work of Rashid Masharawi in the refugee camps of Palestine (see Chapter 8). Partly born out of necessity, but also as an act of resistance, Masharawi created a travelling cinema and a viewing experience that emphasises the communal over the individual. I maintain that most cinema about my case studies is similarly activist in that it exposes the precarious nature of the culture of these nations and calls for resistance to their erasure.

Finally, there is Gabriel's attempt to define an aesthetics for oppositional cinema as an alternative to Western classical norms (1989). His 'Third Aesthetics' includes forms of historical narrative distinguished by a 'collective' subject instead of an individual protagonist; a 'non-hierarchical order' as opposed to an implicit hierarchy of subjects; and an 'emphasis on collective social space rather than on transcendental individual space' (ibid.:58-9). While these are useful insights, his claim that they 'resonate the cultural expression indigenous to most of the Third World today' (ibid.) is problematic. It homogenises a vast array of film-making practices and, by setting his aesthetics in opposition to a 'Western' norm, it also homogenises what it critiques. Furthermore, we should distinguish general opposition to cultural hegemony from the specific needs of marginal or minority groups within society to challenge a reductive view of their identity.

I would argue that any endeavour to impose a unifying aesthetic on such a broad range of work is misguided since it ignores ambiguity not only within a single text but also between different film-makers from the same tradition. Such ambiguities are revealed in relation to several of the films and film-makers in this study. For example, the aesthetics of Ustaoğlu's critique of the treatment by the Turkish state of its Kurdish minority in *Journey to the Sun* are significantly different to those in *Sürü* (Güney, 1978), as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. Therefore, I refrain from attributing a singular mode of address to the oppositional cinema included in my investigation. I maintain there is not one 'cinema of opposition' but multiple forms of opposition that depend on the social and political context in which the film-makers are working.

My film-makers come from different countries, ethnicities, and religious, social, and cultural backgrounds. Many live (or lived) under occupation, in exile, or in a diaspora. They work within different traditions and in different styles. Their films may be seen in commercial cinemas, art-house cinemas, at specialised film-festivals, in archives, on late-night television, or only on DVD and video.[7] But one of their common features is that (with some exceptions) they are marginal, or in terms that Hamid Naficy proposes, they work 'in the interstices of social formations and cinematic practices' (2001:10). It is among such displaced and de-territorialised film-makers that Naficy theorises the existence of an 'accented style' and an 'accented cinema'.

Accents and key symbols

Naficy positions his accented cinema as 'one of the offshoots of Third Cinema' but defines it more precisely as

> necessarily made by (and often for) specific displaced subjects and diasporized communities. Less polemical than the Third Cinema, it is nonetheless a political cinema that stands opposed to authoritarianism and oppression. If Third Cinema films generally advocated class struggle and armed struggle, accented films favor discursive and semiotic struggles (ibid.:30-31)

For him, it also is an '*engagé* cinema', but engaged less with the 'masses' and more with 'specific individuals, ethnicities, nationalities, and identities' (ibid.). Naficy's theory of style thus deals expressly with exilic and diasporic film-makers and

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[7] The provenance and original language of each of the films discussed in this thesis is shown in the Filmography.

'transnational' (cross-border) cultural issues, and includes feature films, documentaries, and experimental film.

This wide-ranging and thought-provoking text, is influential in current cinema studies, but is Naficy's categorisation helpful for this research? Certainly, he focuses on many of my film-makers, and provides some constructive insights into their work. Perhaps more important though is his application of Bakhtin's notion of the 'chronotope'[8] as a method of analysing how the condition of exile or statelessness is expressed in film. His illustrations of the way various film-makers use space and time to construct imaginary homelands gives valuable prominence to the idea of "border consciousness", one of the central themes that runs through my analysis of films in this study. It also provides a lead into Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of time and narrative disruption that I discuss in Chapter 2.

However, while I subscribe to Naficy's notion of liminal film-makers being accented by virtue of their marginalisation and displacement, perhaps he goes too far when he suggests this constitutes a 'mammoth, emergent, transnational *film movement* and film style' (ibid.:18-19, emphasis added). Though the majority of my film-makers would be considered liminal, they are too diverse and concerned with a different range of problems to be characterised as a movement.

It is constructive at this point to remind ourselves of one of the main purposes of the theoretical frameworks I have been reviewing. Naficy puts it succinctly when he maintains that '[h]ow films are conceived and received has a lot to do with how they are framed discursively' (ibid.:19). The debate on national cinema has informed my research by suggesting more useful categorisations than the state-based one; by cautioning against homogenising the nation or what it is contrasted with; and by highlighting the attention that must be given to the historical and political context. But it is the 'received' part of Naficy's statement that remains troubling.

If there is no unifying aesthetic (and Naficy is careful not to suggest a homogenous Accented Cinema) what tools can those scholars conditioned to think in Western academic terms use to interpret marginal, liminal, "foreign" film? In particular, can such film be received in the way it was conceived? Willemen is

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[8] Naficy follows Bakhtin in taking the chronotope ("time-space") as a unit of analysis for films made in the margins of society and the cultural forces that produce them (ibid.:152-5).

certainly doubtful about this, pointing out that Third Cinema – often regarded as an *auteur*'s cinema – frequently has its politics elided in favour of its 'authorial artistry' (1989:9). He also problematises two kinds of interpretation: 'projective appropriation', that is when a critical theory from one culture is projected onto the 'signifying practices' of another; and 'ventriloquist identification', when critics imagine themselves to be sufficiently steeped in another culture to be able to speak for it. He offers a third, and what he regards as a more appropriate response, 'creative understanding', which requires critical distance not only from another culture but also from one's own (1995:28-30).

The outsider position

Willemen's rigour is daunting. His argument suggests that from an "outsider" position our interpretation of cinematic elements may be based on false assumptions or mis-readings; we may simply overlook important cues due to translation issues or lack of familiarity with the culture; or we may fail to see diversity within a text because of the homogenising effect of its "foreignness". I have tried to mitigate the problem of language by using the services of native language speaking interpreters in a number of cases. While not totally satisfactory, I draw comfort from the similar problems encountered by Naficy when viewing the work of his 'accented' film-makers (2001:3-4).

Shohat and Stam raise the equally problematic issue of 'unthinking' European assumptions about the meaning of certain cinematic techniques such as point-of-view, framing, and movement (1994). And, of course, Edward Said's influential *Orientalism* (2003) describes major, self-imposed barriers to Western understanding of Middle Eastern cultures. Does this mean there is no room for the outsider in such studies?

I think an opening can be found in Willemen's extended description of the 'creative understanding' approach which, he argues, 'concentrates on the need to understand the dynamics of a particular cultural practice' (1995:33). I have interpreted this to mean analysing a given film text while engaging, as far as possible, with the cultural and political context in which it operates. To deconstruct the cultural elements crucial to the distinctive identity of a community I have adapted a methodology suggested by anthropologist Sherry Ortner (1973). In brief, the initial task is to uncover key 'symbolic units', such as words or phrases, patterns of

behaviour, artefacts, rituals, myths, and so on. Then it is necessary to isolate those that make a frequent appearance, those that a film-maker focuses on, those that appear in several different contexts, and those that are elaborated in different ways. Finally, applying these techniques to a study of the representation of national identity in cinema, requires that the key symbols and metaphors contained in film texts are associated with corresponding social, political, and historical accounts of the community.

Key symbols, which are discussed more fully in Chapter 2, are related in some respects to Naficy's accents, though they are distinct. "The border" and "border crossings", for example, are specific key symbols in film about the Kurds, but a general awareness of borders is an accent that inflects the work of many marginal film-makers. Taken together, locating accents and key symbols in a body of film, provide, as I show in this study, a cogent way of interpreting the work of such film-makers.

This brings me to Willemen's concern about maintaining a 'double outsidedness', that is, of maintaining a critical distance both from another culture and one's own when interpreting "foreign" cultures (1995:33). I am not entirely convinced that it is possible to achieve the necessary detachment, but in order to minimise this affect on my interpretation of the representations of other cultures I have chosen to apply a comparative approach using as case studies the three nations to which I have already referred.

In selecting the Armenians, Kurds, and Palestinians as subjects for study I have taken account of their similarities, such as disputes over territory and major historical traumatic events, and distinguishing features, such as the way national consciousness has been developed and sustained and their success or failure in achieving autonomy. These factors, which are elaborated in Chapter 2, make them most apt for a comparative study that addresses some of Willemen's concerns over the outsider position. Comparisons of the social and political context, and the way film contributes to representation of each nation, occur throughout subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Organising principles

The state-centred approach cannot, however, simply be ignored when analysing national identity in film. States frequently set the agenda by defining such things as the language and themes of their cinema. They try to enforce homogenisation through propaganda and suppress through censorship that which they consider subversive. As I show later, Soviet cinema has had a powerful impact on the cinematic representation of Armenians; Turkish cinema on the Kurds; and Israeli cinema (and Hollywood) on the Palestinians. My point of departure from much previous scholarship is that I wish to avoid being constrained by the artificial boundaries of national cinema studies. Thus, I have included film from a variety of sources as well as those that emanate from existing state cinemas. For example, I argue that certain Turkish and Iranian films contribute significantly to the re-imagining of Kurdish identity.

Similarly, I resist Naficy's concentration on grouping films according to stylistic elements that express liminality, especially the condition of exile or being in a diaspora. While many of my film-makers do exhibit some of his characteristics, I reason that the "national" element in their work has at least as strong a binding force as stylistic categorisations. My analysis shows that, for example, the liminality expressed in films by Palestinians such as Michel Khleifi and Elia Suleiman is qualitatively different to that of Armenians such as Atom Egoyan and Henri Verneuil. These differences are, I claim, due to the different social, political and historical contexts of the Palestinians and Armenians.

Despite criticism of the national cinema concept, I recognise the need for an organising principle to provide coherence to this study. I have reviewed the literature on cinema and identity in order to draw lessons for my research and also to seek a framework in which to set the output of a variety of film-makers from different backgrounds, working in different contexts, and with complex forms of cinematic representation. But it is not my intention to develop a new theory of national cinema. Instead, I offer a more modest proposal which is to categorise these works by means of the rubric of "cinema regarding nations".

Cinema regarding nations

I use the term "regarding" in the title of this thesis for its multiple meanings that encapsulate the aims of my study. First, and perhaps most obviously, because it

positions cinema as *observing* the nation. Film observes a nation not through "reflection" of society, but rather in the way it re-imagines and re-presents a reality using the traditions, myths, symbols, and so on, of its culture, as well as the formal repertoire of the medium. Even where film-makers shun convention and deploy new formal methods, such as Egoyan in *Ararat* (2002), or Suleiman in *Homage by Assassination* (1991), these have to operate within the meaning systems of the culture they are addressing. In this respect film is not passive, rather it is 'the ideological construct of an active observer' (Erdoğan, 2001:533). And here, Naficy's schematics help uncover the ideological positions from which these nations are being observed. For example, *A Song for Beko* (Ariç, 1992) represents the myth of an idyllic rural Kurdistan from the position of an exile's longing and nostalgia for a lost homeland.[9]

Secondly, it is cinema that is *concerned with* the nation, that is it does not simply represent a nation but is part of the discourse on nationhood. Thus, the films under consideration fit with the concepts of oppositional or activist cinema, discussed earlier, that are directly involved in the construction and maintenance of national identity. For example, the Palestinian films previously cited are intended not only to support Palestinians in Palestine or the diaspora, but also to influence world opinion in favour of their cause. This cinema represents social and political conflicts that remain for the most part unresolved. And so the films highlight the issue of temporality, that is, the development of national consciousness and its variation over time, which is a central part of my analysis. I argue that, when addressing queries about the extent to which cinema represents the nation, it is necessary to take account of the historical context and the forces shaping the nation over any specific period.

Finally, it is cinema that is *about* the nation, that is, it is anchored in symbols and themes that are national. I have already touched on the concept of key symbols and how they may be used to interpret which elements of a film are significant to a particular community. In the next chapter I examine how symbols, ranging from the simple (like flags that summarise or synthesise experience) to the complex (that elaborate or help to organize experience), are used to develop themes in the cinema. But the question remains, how do we identify *national themes*? And, following on

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[9] In this thesis, I use the term, Kurdistan, to refer to those areas of Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, that have a majority population of Kurds and that notionally could be considered the territory of the Kurdish people (see map in Chapter 5).

from that, how do we qualify what a film is actually about? How do we determine whether the nation is a primary theme or merely tangential?

Themes of the nation

In many cases, cinema acts as an unconscious means of re-affirming national identity by, for example, use of the "national" language and common speech patterns, casual glimpses of a familiar *mise-en-scène*, appearance of the characters, and so on. Even specific national symbols, such as the flag which is routinely flown on public buildings and at official ceremonies, frequently go unnoticed. However, habitual though such symbols are, they contribute to what Michael Billig calls 'banal nationalism', a means by which the idea of the nation is constantly reinforced by the state (1995:93).

At first glance, none of these elements would stir much interest and it would be difficult to claim that their presence in a film *necessarily* constitutes an explicit national theme. Indeed, Mette Hjort, in her informative essay on a thematic approach to national cinema, is properly doubtful that the mere presence of banal images is sufficient to constitute a theme, noting that they may be a part of the film-maker's attempt at realism (2000:108-9). But, I suggest, however banal a set of symbols may appear to be, in certain circumstances their use constitutes a subtle form of power, not only by what they make seem "normal" but also by what they elide. It is no coincidence that much Turkish and Israeli cinema engages in what Edward Said calls 'the dialectic of the visible and the invisible' (2006:1) which makes the "absence" of the Kurdish or Palestinian people appear part of the fabric of life in those states.

Hjort, on the other hand, rightly claims that for a film to be *about* the nation, the nation must be 'explicitly thematised': that attention must be focused on such elements (ibid.:110-11). In subsequent chapters, I show how various film-makers emphasise national elements such as the homeland through cinematography and creating heightened emotional responses. Nonetheless, I also maintain that where state power is exercised against a national community, as in the cases on which this study is based, even everyday images of the nation may come to the forefront as weapons in the struggle for recognition or survival.

Research design

In summary, this study brings together a body of work, from various sources, in which "the national" is an element that is either dominant or significant. The principles behind the selection of films are, first, that they contain narratives, key symbols, and examples of accent or stress that inflect them with types of national consciousness that, taken together, constitute national themes. The films in which these themes are prominent and are repeated elsewhere, by different film-makers, form the basis of a collection for deeper analysis. The key films in the Armenian case are divided equally between Soviet Armenia and the diaspora; in the Kurdish case films from Turkey are balanced by those from Iraq, Iran, and the diaspora; and in the Palestinian case, while a large part of the material studied is from three film-makers active since the 1980s – Khleifi, Suleiman, and Masharawi – a representative sample is included of films from earlier periods and from the new generation of young film-makers.

The second principle is that the selection embraces a range of film-making modes and genres; it includes fiction, documentary, short-films, 'art' film, and 'film art'. I have had to exclude most "popular" film, musicals, comedy, and animation, some of which could also claim to provide valid representations of national identity. However, the diversity of films is sufficient to show the complexity of identity in each case by presenting different perspectives of various sectors of society, as we will see in the work of, for example, Güney and Khleifi. Similarly, the wide range of film-makers reveals issues of power relationships that are often masked by a single (and sometimes nationalist) point-of-view. For example, though historically these are all deeply patriarchal societies, the variety of perspectives exposes numerous ambiguities among the different film-makers on the role of women in constructing national identity.

I have indicated my preference for a taxonomy of films "regarding nations" and, in limiting the scope of this study to a consideration of films as texts to be viewed for ideological content, I de-emphasise modes of production, the economics of distribution, and analysis of audience reception. I recognise that film texts are only part of a discourse, and that audiences play a significant part in making meaning from films. However, I would argue that an analysis that relates a text to its political, historical, and social context adds significantly to that discourse.

The study is comparative, contrasting different representations of each nation, and tracing changes to these that have resulted from historical events. It addresses four central questions:

- In the cinema regarding each of my cases, what are the major symbols, themes, and stylistic elements that can be uncovered? How has each nation been represented by different film-makers?
- For each case is there any coherence, or unifying aesthetic, to these representations that might be understood as "defining" that nation?
- Are the representations for each nation distinctive from the others? And, if so, can these distinctions be related to their different social and political contexts?
- Do the representations show change over time that may be related to the historical process of formation and maintenance of a distinctive identity?

Thus, I try to find unity in the representation of a nation while acknowledging that nations are heterogeneous. I also try to withstand being drawn into each nation's illusion of its own uniqueness and difference from its neighbours and to avoid locking the study into what Willemen calls an 'ethnographic notion of authenticity' (1994:208).

My research supports a critical analysis of the work of groups of film-makers which is otherwise fragmented, mainly as a result of the situation in which they have to function. While I would not claim the framework is a major theoretical contribution to national cinema studies, I make the case that it provides a valuable means of bringing together film about nationalism and national identity. By removing artificial barriers between such classes as poor, marginal, and diasporan cinema, and bringing them into juxtaposition with art cinema, commercial cinema, and experimental cinema, I have taken an approach that is, I believe, distinct from most current studies and one that may constructively be applied to other cases.

I have also deepened the relationship between film studies and studies of national identity and nationalism by linking the "constructedness" of nations more clearly to the way film-makers construct a notion of identity. The issues that I have focused on are the *processes* of nation formation, that is the way in which national consciousness is raised, and the way identity is sustained. Thus, I map scholarly literature on the development of national consciousness in each nation to symbols and themes present in the films under consideration. This mapping is uncommon and, I believe, provides an important adjunct to both streams of scholarship.

Finally, although I have drawn on extant analyses of individual films and film-makers, I have developed my own interpretations according to the principles I outlined earlier. In this, I have elaborated a connection between the exploration of key accents, symbols, and themes in film, that extends current critical practice.

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This chapter has introduced the main strands of my research. Chapter 2 begins with a more detailed investigation of the meaning of the nation and national identity when applied to stateless nations and diasporas, pulling out the debates that can be explored productively through film. It draws on the texts referred to previously, but specifically connects their arguments to cinema. Using these ideas, I elaborate the case outlined above for an analysis of film based on isolating key symbols embedded in the texts, and conclude with the definition of a set of themes that frame my subsequent examination of groups of films.

The body of the thesis consists of six chapters, two for each case study, which include detailed textual analysis of a number of key films, relating them to the social and political context of each nation. Chapter 3 examines the work of the most prominent film-makers in the period when Armenia was a Republic of the USSR. Over this time, several distinct phases of film-making are identified that reflect changes of the political mood in Moscow: from an attempt to re-vitalise national culture while at the same time modernising, through repression, to a new national awakening. Chapter 4, on the other hand, is concerned with cinema from the Armenian diaspora, again splitting the work into phases: a period characterised by suppression and concealment, followed by a national cultural resurgence in the 1970s and 80s, and then a period of deep introspection on the meaning of Armenian identity.

Chapter 5 focuses on Turkey the only country (of the four that are principally home to the Kurds) where important cinematic activity regarding the Kurdish community occurred before the 1980s. Much of the analysis centres on the work of Yilmaz Güney and the struggle of the Kurds for recognition. Chapter 6 is more wide-ranging, looking at oppositional Turkish cinema since the early 1980s as well as the growing interest in cinema about the Kurds from Iraq and Iran, and the diaspora. It reveals the development of a Kurdish identity that transcends the notion of borders.

Chapter 7 begins with an analysis of the effects of Zionist[10] propaganda film and anti-Arab Hollywood films on the articulation of Palestinian identity. It discusses the beginnings of a counter-narrative in the Palestinian "revolutionary cinema" of the 1960s and 70s which created a space in which Palestinian identity could be re-asserted. It concludes by identifying tensions within Palestinian society revealed in the work of a new generation of film-makers from the early 1980s. Chapter 8 focuses on the period after the first Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation since when film-makers have contributed significantly to the discourse of resistance.

Throughout these chapters, I compare and contrast the way the development and survival of each nation has been represented and relate this to the historical context. The conclusion, Chapter 9, brings together various threads of the arguments to address the questions laid out earlier.

This thesis does not attempt to give an exhaustive account of the totality of film about each of the case study nations. Similarly, I have not attempted to analyse all the possible interpretive frameworks that might be used to dissect national identity in film. However, I have avoided restrictive conventional approaches that concentrate, for example, only on the work of *auteurs*, "movements", genres, or "great works", relying instead on my broad category of cinema regarding nations. With my comparative view I have tried to mitigate the outsider position as far as possible but I would not claim to have achieved a native understanding of all the works involved. The study suggests there is scope for further work on the representation of national identity in the cinema, especially the cinema regarding stateless nations and diasporas.

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[10] I have used the term Zionism in this thesis strictly in its dictionary definition as a political movement, originating in late 19th century Europe, that champions a Jewish homeland in the whole of Palestine. A Zionist person or entity is a supporter of that movement.

Chapter 2
Perspectives on the Nation

The flags of three stateless nations[1] with which I introduced this thesis, have been used variously as a metonym for the nation, as a form of resistance to oppression, and as a way of expressing solidarity among the people. For example, Yasser Arafat invoked the flag in his premature hope for the establishment of a state for the Palestinian nation (quoted in Billig, 1995:41):

> The Palestine state is within our grasp. Soon the Palestine flag will fly on the walls, the minarets and the cathedrals of Jerusalem (*Guardian*, 3 September 1993)

States even more determinedly summon the flag to bind their communities together. Predictably, then, flags with their strong symbolism and immediate recognition value, are a common feature of national discourse in the cinema. The Turkish state is "announced" by the flag flown at the official opening of the customs post in *Propaganda* (Çetin, 1999) and in that waved in *Drejan* (Gök, 1997) at a wedding ceremony (both discussed in Chapter 6). Flags are a symbol of Kurdish resistance in *Kilometre Zero* (Saleem, 2005), and Palestinian resistance in *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (Suleiman, 1996). Such cinematic images are representative of the battles for legitimacy and the survival of national identity among these nations.

However, in contrast to stateless nations, for whom nationalism must be continuously active if the nation is to survive, states have only to invoke the nation openly at times of crisis such as incipient war, national celebrations, or mourning. At other times state nationalism may be dormant and go unnoticed even though it always remains near the surface. Michael Billig's important insight is that such banal nationalism is also exclusive and very powerful; it insists on a single nation within a state. The shots in *Sürü* that introduce Ankara – the commonplace symbols of monuments and flags hanging unnoticed on state buildings – proclaim this as the capital of the Turkish nation. But from the perspective of the band of Kurdish shepherds arriving to deliver their sheep, these symbols assert that they are outsiders (see Chapter 5).

I have focused initially on these symbols not just because they may play an important role in the cinematic expression of national identity, but also as a reminder

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[1] The Armenians were a semi-autonomous republic in the Soviet era and have only achieved statehood since 1991.

of the power of nationalism, overt or banal, even in the most cosmopolitan societies. In this chapter, I probe more deeply into the intricate debate about the formation of nations, and the position of marginalised peoples and diasporas in their struggle to sustain cultural and national identity. I maintain that there is sufficient difference between two main lines of reasoning – one that emphasises the effects of modernity and the other that stresses the importance of origins – to suggest that different nations may be characterised in distinct ways. I examine my three cases to draw out how they are characterised, and continue by discussing the narratives, symbols, and themes with which they are represented in the cinema. First, however, I want to revisit two questions: what is the nation that nationalism tries to forge? And, how does it come into being?

What is the nation?

I pointed out in Chapter 1 that one of the difficulties besetting this area of study is that some of the key terms are used interchangeably or inconsistently.[2] The "nation", in particular, is a troubled term having acquired two distinct meanings. On the one hand, it is taken to mean *all* the inhabitants of a state, irrespective of the mix of its population. Since the vast majority of modern states contain a number of constituent communities (whether due to the way they were formed, to territorial acquisitions, or because of subsequent waves of inward migration) this definition is not without its problems. It suggests that all states consist entirely of people with a sense of common identity, whereas frequently 'the state reflects only the culture of the dominant national group' (Roberts, 1999:79).

Alternatively, the nation refers to any group of people having a significant number of the following characteristics: common myths of ancestry; common history; attachment to a territory or homeland; common public culture; consciousness of forming a community; and with aspirations for a common future.[3] Under this explanation there is no prerequisite that the nation must exist within a single independent state nor that the members of the nation necessarily have a desire to form their own state.

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[2] See, for example, Walker Connor (1978:83).

[3] These definitions appear in various forms in Smith (1991), Hutchinson (1994), Miller (1995), and Guibernau (1996) among others.

In the pre-modern world few rulers unambiguously controlled a territory or the people within it. As their authority waxed and waned territories altered shape accordingly; the fixed borders characteristic of modern states were virtually unknown. This situation changed in Europe in the 18th century when states began to be formed and borders were enshrined. But, as Billig demonstrates, there are no objective reasons for many of these borders – neither language, religion, ethnicity, nor geography can fully explain them. Rather, the state emerged from a battle for supremacy over territory and set about forging a nation in which 'a part claims to speak for the whole […] and to represent the national essence' (op.cit.:27).

Thus, states define themselves by their physical or geographical *borders*, whereas nations are defined by their cultural *boundaries*. State nationalism patrols its borders and tries by either absorbing or purging its culture of "foreign" influences to make its cultural boundary coterminous with its border. Stateless nationalism, on the other hand, can only patrol its cultural boundaries in an attempt to ensure the survival of a distinct identity.

Debate over origins

The debate over the mechanism by which the transition from pre-modern communities to the modern nation took place has two competing threads. In one, a nation is a specifically modern invention that depends on such things as the growing ease of communication among its individuals (Deutsch, 1966); advances in print-capitalism (Anderson, 1983); the spread of mass higher education (Gellner, 1983); uneven economic development and trade (Nairn, 1977); or politically induced cultural changes (Brass, 1991) and (Breuilly, 1993). These scholars largely adhere to Hobsbawm's notion that the myths and beliefs contributing to a people's sense of cohesion with and obligation to their compatriots are, at best, an 'invention' (1983).

In a counter line of argument, John Armstrong, working forward from a study of medieval civilisations (1982), and Anthony Smith, working backwards from recent times (1986), favour accounts that emphasise the importance of early collective cultures in the development of nations. While still recognising the importance of state institutions, they demonstrate that nationalism rarely creates nations from a blank sheet. Or, as David Miller puts it, national communities are held together 'by a dense web of customs, practices, implicit understandings, and so forth', where 'even the physical landscape bears the imprint of the historical development of the community'

(1995:41-42). For these scholars, nationalism reproduces or reinforces group affinities whose roots lie in a common culture and common experience.

There is a tendency to treat these two models as mutually exclusive, whereas they actually have much in common, in particular the persuasive idea that the *ability* to communicate the imaginings of belonging to the same nation provides the basis for forging nationality. And both models presuppose that positive action by an elite is required to raise national consciousness. Action that is neatly described by Miroslav Hroch as a three stage process: formulation of the idea of a nation by intellectuals; followed by the generation of a mass movement in support; and finally translation of the idea into the reality of a state (1985).

However, there are crucial differences between the two broad theories. While the former, *modernist*, strand provides convincing arguments for the formation of a nation within a state, these models fail to explain the persistence of identity where the nation is stateless or is colonised by another state. The latter, *perennialist*, theory addresses this issue when it claims that a further necessary condition is a set of core values on which the nation is founded. I find the claim that an ancient or "ethnic" nation would be likely to display a more deeply grounded sense of its history compelling. It would lead us to expect such a nation to appear qualitatively different in cinema from one that has a less certain view of its origins.

Case studies
The Armenians, Kurds, and Palestinians have all struggled for recognition as independent nations with the right to self-determination. They have some similarities, such as their disputes with one or more states over territory, a history of repression, and recent major traumatic events. And, the cinematic representation of issues concerning the construction and preservation of national identity are ubiquitous in each case. This, in part, is what makes them excellent subjects for this study of cinema regarding nations.

However, they also have important distinguishing features that reveal much about their origins. It is these differences, which I will now outline, that provide an insight into theoretical arguments about the way political consciousness has been formed and sustained.

The Armenians

The Armenians have a long recorded history, with a unique language, script, and religion, and significant associations with a broad sweep of territory in what is now Turkey and parts of the Caucasus (see map on page 40). They were recognisable as a national community by the 5th century with distinct characteristics that separated them from their neighbours (Suny, 1993a:8; Panossian, 2000:52-60; Gavakian, 1997:11-12). The Armenian diaspora is equally ancient, with large urban communities located throughout Europe and the Middle East since at least the 7th century (Sheffer, 2002:59). Though, at different times various Armenian leaders were able to exercise control over some areas of territory, they were unable to consolidate power and, after the end of the 14th century, 'Armenia ceased to be a political, economic, intellectual or cultural centre of any significance' (Panossian, 2000:83).

Strong nationalist movements were responsible for the resurgence of Armenian national consciousness in the mid 19th century, especially in urban areas of the Ottoman Empire and Tsarist Russia. Armenians could certainly be described as a nation by this time, but a nation divided geographically, culturally, socially, and economically. As the great empires collapsed, a series of clashes with the emergent Turkish regime culminated in the devastating genocide of 1915-23.[4] At the end of World War I (WWI), while the victorious Allies were deciding the future of the former Ottoman territories, Armenian nationalists unilaterally declared an independent republic. However, due to the disarray of the Allies and the determination of Kemal Atatürk[5] to establish a Turkish state, the Armenians were abandoned (MacMillan, 2001:375-80). By 1921, half the remaining population was scattered in a new diaspora and the rest survived as a republic of the Soviet Union, cut off geographically and politically from the rest of the nation.

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[4] The massacre of Armenians in various centres commenced in the 1870s but accelerated from 1915 in what has been described as genocide. The figures are disputed (and successive Turkish governments refuse to acknowledge that genocide took place) but best estimates suggest 1.2-1.5 million Armenians were killed and another 200-350,000 were driven out over the period 1915-23. For further details on these events, see for example Hovannisian (1987), Walker (2004), Bloxham (2005), and Dadrian (1999).

[5] Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was leader of the Turkish independence movement from 1919 until becoming the first President of the Turkish state in 1923.

Soviet Armenia,[6] initially characterised by patriarchal family structures based on large extended families, was slow to modernise (Matossian, 1962:5-9). From the mid-1930s, despite Russian dominance and sporadic attempts at the suppression of Armenian culture, a separate identity was maintained through these family associations, the exercise of traditions, the influence of the church, a resurgent language and literature, and a close relationship to the land. In the large and widely dispersed diaspora, identity has been more elusive and variable particularly over the last half-century. In several centres, nationalist groups actively supported the preservation of the nation: promoting myths of origin, claiming that Armenians were the first to adopt Christianity (in 301 CE), and that the Armenian alphabet was developed as early as 406 CE by 'divine inspiration' (Gavakian, 1997:25). However, there were significant disputes between Middle Eastern communities and those in North America (Pattie, 1994:188-90). Furthermore, family ties tended to break down in the West, loosening the association between later generations and their 'nation' (ibid.:195). The preservation of identity in the diaspora has become something of a struggle in which *symbols* of being Armenian, such as the language, script, and monuments, and the *idea* of the church, play a major role.

Thus, Armenians most closely exemplify the perennialist model of development. But, modern Armenian national identity emerged in more than one centre and is correspondingly varied in its cultural composition. It is, as Panossian argues, 'multilocal, multifaceted, and heterogeneous' (op. cit.:50). What unites them as a nation, even if different parts of the community have little in common objectively, are their ancient culture and history, their collective memory, and their sense of loss due to the genocide and subsequent dispersal.

The Kurds

The Kurds have a less clearly defined cultural history though they too have occupied large areas of territory in the Ottoman, Russian and Persian Empires for thousands of years (see map on page 109). They have a notable oral tradition but not an extensive written literature or history. Their distinct language has two major variants and several different scripts (Hassanpour, 1989). Largely rural, and with

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[6] I have used the term Soviet Armenia throughout this thesis, rather than the more correct but long-winded Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic.

different religious affiliations and social structures, they had failed to develop a unified identity by the beginning of the 20th century (Barkey, 1998; O'Shea, 2004).

In the post-WWI settlement, the majority of Kurds were separated by the newly established borders of four states: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. They have a history of being repressed in their respective states, and, like the Armenians, have suffered massacres and ethnic cleansing.[7] Each state has tried to break down Kurdish social structures and to isolate one group from another. At different times, they have banned use of the Kurdish language and traditional dress, denied their right to use Kurdish names, closed Kurdish schools, and declared Kurdish associations and publications illegal (van Bruinessen, 1998:40).

Armed resistance movements developed in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran in the 1970s, and support for some forms of Kurdish autonomy emerged among Kurdish communities scattered around the world, particularly in Western Turkey, Germany, and Britain and various Arab states (Strohmeier, 2003). However, these have largely been contained with the connivance of major states which share the fear that a successful claim to Kurdish autonomy in one region will galvanise the irredentist hopes of Kurds in other regions.

Throughout the 20th century, a sense of Kurdish identity has been maintained in rural areas through language, music, traditions, festivals, and tribal allegiances. This has been reinforced by the economic inequality that has become evident to Kurds as they have migrated to urban centres or abroad. In the diaspora and in the semi-autonomous region of Iraq, there has been a rapid expansion of interest in early Kurdish culture, especially the subtle language of their 17th century poet Ahmed-i Khani and their vibrant folklore and musical forms (Shakely, 1992). And this interest has been disseminated to a wider population through books, newspapers, radio, television, and film (Natali, 2004b).

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[7] The wholesale massacre of civilians in Iraq in 1988, with up to 250,000 Kurdish deaths, amounted to genocide according to McDowall (2004:359). In Syria, it is estimated that about 300,000 Kurds have been declared stateless since the 1960s and so are denied passports, voting rights, ownership of property or land, and other basic rights (Lowe, 2006:3). Figures for Turkey vary widely, but it is estimated that several thousands of villages and hamlets in the Kurdish areas were destroyed or emptied in the period from 1984-1999, and 2.5-3.0 million villagers displaced (Ahmed, 2002:1-8; van Bruinessen, 1999).

Thus, the Kurds fit a modified modernist model of development where communications, unequal economic development, and migration have raised national consciousness, but where traditional elements of folklore, song, and oral storytelling play a significant part. Though no single Kurdish state seems likely to emerge in the near future, a fragile national unity has been achieved by emphasis on their unique way of life, myths of an idyllic homeland in a notional Kurdistan, and resistance to oppression.

The Palestinians

Arabs have inhabited the territory now controlled by the state of Israel for thousands of years. However, the emergence of a distinct Palestinian nation, that is, with the consciousness of an identity separate from the surrounding Arab nations, is of more recent origin. While Kimmerling and Migdal argue that the revolt in 1834 against Egyptian rule created the *conditions* that would enable the Arab population of Palestine later to develop into 'a self-identified people' (2003:xvi), Rashid Khalidi convincingly shows that the process of development of a mass Palestinian national consciousness only commenced early in the 20th century (1997:28). That this process intensified as a result of ineluctable Zionist settlement in Palestine, beginning towards the end of the 19th century, and accelerating thereafter, is without doubt. That reaction to Zionism was the main cause is more in dispute, with Khalidi drawing attention to the parallel rise of nationalism in the surrounding states after de-colonisation (ibid.:20).

Following dissolution of the British mandate over Palestine, war broke out in 1948 between joint Arab forces and the newly declared Israeli state. A large number of Palestinians were killed or evicted from their lands and homes in what became known as *al-Nakba* or 'The Disaster'.[8] Further loss of life and territory, resulting from the humiliating Arab defeat in the war of 1967, shifted the initiative from a pan-Arab nationalist struggle to a more specifically Palestinian one with the rise to prominence of the PLO (Jung, 2000:11). Attempts by Palestinians to create their own state and to recover territory lost to the Israelis has continued, with increasing violence by both sides. At the time of writing, Palestinians live under military rule in

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[8] Different sources provide widely differing statistics of the population transfers and deaths that took place at this time but the consensus seems to be that between 700,000 and 1 million Palestinian Arabs were forced to flee Israel. See, for example, Kimmerling (2003:156-66).

the Occupied Palestinian Territory, restricted by the separation Wall;[9] under attack in the Gaza Strip; and as a disenfranchised minority in the state of Israel (see maps on page 179 and 180). Many have remained within refugee camps for close on 60 years, others form a widespread diaspora in Middle Eastern states, Europe and North America.

Though the existence of a Palestinian people was repeatedly denied by Israel and though no Palestinian state has come into being and the people are under constant threat of dispersal, the Palestinian nation is now widely recognised by the international community. Critical to this has been the Palestinian claim to their land. Consequently the element of identity that is most prominent is the sense of place – the home, the village and the specific surrounding countryside with its landmarks, trees, fields and so on, rather than the overall historic lands of Palestine. Their Arab heritage and its cultural and intellectual strengths are a source of great pride, but Palestinians have developed a unique sense of identity through their love of the land, and their determination to resist erasure (Elmessiri, 1982). Thus, the Palestinians fit more closely the modernist model of development with additional cohesiveness engendered by the ever-present memory of the *Nakba* and their resistance to repression, dispossession, and fragmentation (Anderson, 2002:229).

The diasporas

In each of my cases, the diaspora plays a significant part in the development of national identity. As Gavakian argues, 'diasporan nationalism is characterised by a unique intensity' (1997:24) not least due to the vulnerability of such communities to assimilation. Thus territory and the longing to return and re-possess the homeland are particularly important. For many Armenians, "return" has looked towards restoration of "historic" territory in Turkey which carries strong religious and atavistic significance. For Kurds, on the other hand, it is a rather abstract "Kurdistan" that is viewed as the cradle of the nation and as a future homeland. And for the Palestinians, there are those displaced from present-day Israel who yearn to go back to their former homes, and those in exile who conceive of a unified Palestinian homeland. That the hope of return in each of these cases is no longer plausible often gives the diasporan communities:

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[9] In this thesis, I refer to the illegal barrier being built by Israel on Palestinian land as the Wall.

> a rather nostalgic and romantic character [in which] the institutions of the "old world" are idealised, and the geography of the homeland sentimentalised and compared to heaven, or to a beautiful woman, or to a mother (ibid.:26).

As we shall see, intensity of expression and nostalgia for the past are much in evidence in the films analysed in the following chapters.

This much abridged introduction to my case study nations suggests that their origins span a spectrum ranging from the "historic" Armenians, through the Kurds with their looser connections to ancient myths, to the "modern" Palestinians. I will argue that the way these differences are enunciated in cinema provides a valuable understanding of the process of development of national identity. But, whatever the processes involved, there is more or less general agreement among scholars that it relies on the conscious construction of a national narrative and the use of symbols, myths, fables and allegories of sufficient strength to bind the nation together. I will come back to a discussion of the symbolic representation of nations in the cinema, but first, I want to examine what are the stories told about each nation and how they differ.

Narratives of the nation

In a seminal lecture, delivered in 1882, Ernest Renan argued that the nation consists of two parts:

> One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is current consent, the desire to live together, the willingness to continue to maintain the value of the heritage that one has received as a common possession (reproduced in Eley, 1996)

Renan's 'legacy of memories' is actually a story of the past told by people who consent to form a nation. As Kwame Appiah asserts, this story is constructed by 'holding on to some events and by letting go of others. It may also include a certain amount of unacknowledged invention' (2003:35). Narratives of the nation (whether fabricated or not) are rarely orderly and rarely continuous; they are woven together from those scattered elements of their history that people prefer to remember, omitting those that may be best forgotten, and including many that are fictional.

In pre-modern ethnic societies, memories of the past were kept alive most often by oral and other forms of popular culture and, exceptionally, by written histories and religious texts. In the transition to a modern nation, these ancient memories were reinforced by institutions such as schools, universities, museums, and archives, and in such physical entities as memorials and the names of streets.

Collectively, they make up the national narrative told to the people through literature, the media and visual arts, and the histories of monuments, anthems, and flags. In this study it is the film narratives that are of primary concern.

In Soviet Armenia, though restricted by censorship, these tell of a scattered people, the loss of much of the homeland, and the trauma of the genocide. They expose divisions in Armenian society between rich and poor, and the stultifying effects of patriarchal power and an outdated honour code. And they convey continuity of the nation over a long period through frequent invocation of the church, ancient culture and history, traditions, the family, and the close relationship of the people to the land.

Kurdish narratives also reveal the economic and social repression of the people, their separation by state borders, and their solidarity through resistance. They expose deep divisions in society, not only between the sexes but also at a tribal level. They relate bleak stories of migration between country and city, across the borders that divide different parts of Kurdistan, and to foreign lands. There are some references to an ancient, independent Kurdish kingdom, but above all the stories articulate the nation by affirming its cultural boundaries and through the association of the people with their rugged mountainous territory.

With a more contemporary focus than the other cases, Palestinian stories are of invasion and oppression. They tell of armed soldiers patrolling the land, the creeping spread of Israeli occupation, incessant checkpoints, inhumane clearances, and brutal evictions. They show an outdated patriarchal structure impotent in the face of defeat. Their stories also are of lands lost, but not just impersonal lands, rather particular things like olive trees, stone houses, and villages. They convey the love of these things and set them against the sterile confinement of refugee camps and threatened homes in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. These accounts communicate a stubborn resistance, a determination to stay put and wait for their rights as a nation to be recognised.

Extensive examples of these narratives are included in subsequent chapters and reflect much of the unique historical and social context of each nation. But it is their characteristically cinematic aspects that I now want to address.

Form and visual style

Many films concerning my case study nations exhibit 'accents' that Naficy relates to the film-makers' liminal existence in exile. They focus on disturbing places of transition that suggest rupture and displacement, for example in *Next of Kin* (Egoyan, 1983) and *Canticle of the Stones* (Khleifi, 1990); frightening border crossings in *A Time for Drunken Horses* (Ghobadi, 2000) and *Divine Intervention* (Suleiman, 2002); and tortuous journeys of migration and exile in *Sürü* and *Otobüs* (Okan, 1976).

Naficy asserts that exilic film-makers have a deep concern with territory, 'a preoccupation with place' (2001:5) that is expressed in what he terms "open" and "closed" chronotopes. In my cases, these are manifested in idealised visions of the homeland in *Wedding in Galilee*, as a pastoral idyll in *We Are, Our Mountains* (Malyan, 1970) and *A Song for Beko*, or as wide, open landscapes in *At* (Özgentürk, 1982). Alternatively life in exile is expressed by characters who are trapped in claustrophobic spaces of confinement, as in *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Yol* (Güney, 1982); and where an attempted return takes the form of endless striving in *Yearning* (Dovlatyan, 1990), or as melancholia in *Haifa* (Masharawi, 1996).

At the heart of Naficy's thesis is the idea that the condition of exile induces forms of creativity bound up with extremes of loss or lack. And his view that exilic film-makers operate 'in the interstices of social formations and cinematic practices' (ibid.:10) provides a useful insight into the way many of them represent their identity. But, while such anxieties are manifestly evident in the films I analyse, I maintain that among my film-makers there is an altogether deeper concern with the nation.

Returning to Renan, his claim that the national narrative is a form of "collective memory" suggests we should scrutinize closely instances where these film-makers from their position of liminality distort and fragment the narrative. Are they questioning an established version of the collective memory? Does their work challenge the way a history of the nation has been constructed?

It is here that Gilles Deleuze's examination of film is helpful. First, as interpreted by Laura Marks, Deleuze shows that the visual and the verbal may present different forms of "truth" about events that reflect different aspects of the way we remember (1994:247-9). In film, gaps between what we experience visually and what

a film "tells" us are not uncommon, but they acquire a particular meaning in diasporan film. It seems as if they represent an indeterminate space in which we are asked to arbitrate between two different versions of events. The Armenian national narrative, for example, is questioned and challenged in this way in *Family Viewing* (Egoyan, 1987), *Jagadakeer .... between the near and east* (Bastajian, 2001), and *The Girl From Moush* (Torossian, 1993), as I discuss in Chapter 4.

Secondly, Deleuze's study of the 'time-image',[10] shows how disruptions (for example, the taking of a photograph or making of a video) may be used to create the notion of bifurcation of time. At the moment such images are made, time splits. Reality (that is, the film we are watching) continues, but the images (photographs, still frames, or inserts of different media, such as video) remain an 'institutionalized representation of the moment' (ibid.:251). Broken narratives with irregular time schemes as in *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, frozen images from *Ma'loul Celebrates Its Destruction* (Khleifi, 1985), the disjuncture between image and sound of *Calendar* (Egoyan, 1993), suggest moments of transition when a choice is made by the protagonists or the *possibility* of different versions of the narrative.

In summary, disruptions to narrative space and time are amenable to different theoretical analyses. Naficy sees the concentration on issues of territory and space deriving principally from the stressed condition of exile and marginality. Deleuze, on the other hand, sees the fragmentation and convolution of time as an expression of the multiplicity of available historical narratives. Both interpretations inform the study of formal methods employed by my film-makers. However, as I indicated in Chapter 1, images are also important for isolating cultural elements that are distinct to a community. I now turn to an examination of some of the key symbols, as they appear in the cinema, and to consider how they differentiate the three nations.

Images and symbols

Key symbols, as defined by Ortner, range across a spectrum from 'summarising' to 'elaborating'. The former, like flags and maps, 'synthesise a

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[10] Deleuze, drawing on Bergson's philosophy, distinguishes two methods of image-making in the cinema: the linear, 'movement-image' in which a viewer is led through disjointed spaces by the actions of a protagonist, and the non-linear and usually discontinuous 'time-image' in which the passage of time itself becomes the focus (2005a; 2005b).

complex system of ideas [into] a unitary form [which] "stands for" the system as a whole' (1973:1340). Thus, as we have seen, the Turkish flag, required to be flown over all public buildings and at official ceremonies, is a powerful summarising symbol of the Turkish state. The flag and the map are generic summarising symbols, but there are more complex images to be found, such as those below, which contain intricate metaphors specific to each nation and its history.

The first shows the twin snow-covered peaks of Mount Ararat hovering in the background above a line of apricot trees in blossom. Images of the mountain appear in one form or another in a high proportion of films about Armenians, from the logo of the Soviet Armenian film studios in the early films of Hamo Bek-Nazarov to the real and the false Mt. Ararat in *Ararat* and *What's All the Noise of the River About* (Melik-Avagyan, 1958), as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

One of the founding myths of the Armenian nation is that of Haik who slew the evil god Bel and established Armenia around Mt. Ararat. Thus the people are known as Hai and their land as Haiastan – a linguistic turn that Egoyan makes use of in *Family Viewing*. This story has a number of powerful symbolic components: it sets up Armenia as the cradle of all civilisations (Noah's Ark was supposed to have landed on the slopes of Ararat after the Flood); it establishes the Armenian nation through a rebellion against tyranny; it centres the nation's origins in freedom, independence and justice; and it enshrines Mt. Ararat as the national icon of all Armenians.

The second image is of lush spring pastures high up in rural Kurdistan, cradled by a ring of rugged mountains. Though the rural experience is increasingly atypical in Kurdish society – the majority now live in cities – the mountainous rural idyll is an intrinsic part of the culture.

The summer pasture where sheep are taken to graze is a recurrent symbol of Kurdistan. For many Kurds the mountain defines the geography of their lands; 'the idea of Kurdistan … is characterised by an almost mystical view of the mountain, as imaginary as well as a real place' (McDowall, 2004:3). These Kurdish pasturelands are the focus of attention in *A Song for Beko* and *Sürü*, as shown in Chapters 5 and 6.

The final image shows an ancient Palestinian olive tree set in a field of scattered stones. Olive trees are an essential part of the Palestinian landscape. They are the second major crop of the country; used to produce olive oil, olive wood furniture and olive based soap.

Olive trees represent the Palestinian nation and people's ties to the land, their communal rootedness and identity. They are a 'potent symbol of Palestinian nationalism and resistance' (Parmenter, 1994:23). Palestine, thus, is characterised as 'a mothering earth of soil, trees, and stone' (ibid.:44), exemplified by the olive trees and the stone ruins of Palestinian villages in *Fertile Memory* (Khleifi, 1980) and *Ma'loul Celebrates Its Destruction*, as described in Chapters 7 and 8.

At the other end of Ortner's spectrum are elaborating symbols which contribute to the ordering or 'sorting out [of] complex and undifferentiated feelings

and ideas' (ibid.). That is, they organise experience through static images that act as metaphors and key scenarios, including rituals, that suggest action.

In films about my case studies they take the form of *metaphors*, such as the border fences of *A Song for Beko* and *Propaganda* that signify division of the Kurdish people; the family as in *Father* (Malyan, 1972) and *Curfew* (Masharawi, 1994) that constructs the nation as a collective individual demanding loyalty; a woman's body as in *Wedding in Galilee* representing the motherland that must be defended against invasion; pomegranate seeds (*Marooned in Iraq* (Ghobadi, 2002)), apples (*Nahapet* (Malyan, 1977)), and scattered beads (*Tale of Three Jewels* (Khleifi, 1994)) that stand for the fragility and instability of the nation in the face of dispersal; and the "empty land", used by several Israeli film-makers to counterfeit the absence of indigenous Palestinian inhabitants.

They also appear in the form of *key scenarios*, including the Palestinian wedding rituals of *Wedding in Galilee* and *Rana's Wedding* (Abu-Assad, 2002) that try to make sense of existence in the shadow of Israeli occupation; border crossings as in *A Time for Drunken Horses* and *A Song for Beko* that show resistance to the physical division of the nation; and the transition across a threshold in *Nahapet* and *Next of Kin* that mark the action of crossing the cultural boundary of the nation.

My study of the cinematic construction of national identity includes detailed examination of such symbols and the narratives and forms characteristic of oppositional film-makers that I touched on earlier. But, now, as a way of introducing my analysis of films in the subsequent chapters, I want to anticipate some of the themes that have emerged.

Themes of a nation

In Chapter 1, I introduced my organising principle for this investigation as being "cinema regarding nations", and discussed Hjort's view that for a film to be counted as being *about* a nation it has to be explicitly thematised. While I agree with her premise that a national theme needs to be purposeful and not just part of a film-maker's attempt at realism, I argue that less obvious themes also play an important part in defining national identity and should be included in any analysis. Thus, the films I selected for my research exhibit one or more national themes, both overt and veiled, as revealed through their use of particular narratives, symbols, and forms.

Here, I set out very briefly the more important of these themes, ranging from those such as geography, culture, and social structures, with "objective" attributes, through to "subjective" ones that express the consciousness of belonging to a specific nation.

Territorialising the nation

Among the objective elements of national identity, territory is one of the most important. Smith, for example considers that its role is critical to the formation of nations: 'nationalism always involves an assertion of, or struggle for, control of land … a landless nation is a contradiction in terms' (1999:149). Given its significance, how, then, is national territory characterised?

First is the notion of territory as a homeland. As Kaiser points out, the homeland is usually presented as something 'natural' and 'eternal', and the nation is depicted as rooted to a distinct place by means of images, myths, and symbols (2002:230-1). This homeland is defined by maps and borders, and by names given to distinctive features, such as rivers, villages, mountains, and border posts. For my stateless nations, maps and borders are something to be challenged for a homeland to be claimed and identity to be asserted. Thus border crossing is a frequent trope in these films.

Secondly, the homeland is usually represented by specific, symbolic landscapes in which stories of the nation unfold. These national landscapes not only try to promote love of the land through their intrinsic beauty, they also attempt to differentiate the homeland from that of other nations. The placement of monuments (statues, ruined temples, mosques, and commemorative sites, for example) and flags within a landscape associates territory with a particular nation, helping, as Kaiser maintains, 'to project an image of permanence onto the nation and its relationship to the land' (ibid.:235). Thus, landscape is more than a natural setting; it plays an active part in asserting national identity.

Finally, the homeland is routinely gendered; personified in motherland figures that constitute the land as a fecund source of the national family,[11] or in fatherland images that lay active claim to territory (ibid.). Love of the land is displaced onto the

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[11] See for example the discussion of the way women are imaged in Palestinian national discourse in (Sherwell, 2003a), and Lina Khatib's more specific studies of women in Egyptian and Palestinian film (2004; 2006:91-5).

female body – something that is to be protected against violation – and, as Gilroy argues, '[t]he integrity of the nation becomes the integrity of its masculinity' (2002:333). However, loss of land fundamentally changes the nationalist discourse in two major ways. As we shall see, it engenders symptoms of emasculation that, in some cases shifts responsibility for protecting the nation from adult males to women and children. And it creates an intensification of desire for the lost object and for return. Like the dream woman described by de Lauretis, the homeland is fetishised as the 'ultimate unattainable goal' (1984:13).

Nationalising culture

Culture is intrinsically bound up with the nation, it is 'an entity associated with place and owned by a people' (Wilson, 1998). Each culture is constructed in opposition to other cultures, allowing a nation to see itself as unique and enduring. But, how is a culture nationalised? How is it differentiated from other cultures?

The first, and often most powerful element is language (and in many cases the script in which it is written). Though in each of my cases language is problematic in practice, it remains a fundamental part of national identity, and makes its mark in film as dialogue, in sub-titles, and in signs and symbols.

Nations habitually claim to have a distinct way of life: that is, unique traditions and ceremonies, costumes, artefacts, habitation, modes of sustaining the community, music, dance, and song. These feature as important parts of the culture and, though often neglected, rarely exclusive, and losing much of their power in the modern world, they remain deeply ingrained as markers of identity.

Diverse social structures are encountered in my cases – nomads, settled farmers, traders, city dwellers, tribes, and patriarchal families. Again, though these are not unique they are regularly cited as differentiators that identify a nation. These structures are also explored as part of a continuing dialectic between modernity and tradition, where modernity is seen as a movement towards a brighter, more progressive and enlightened future, and archaic social structures are seen as inhibiting the development of the nation.

Religion is a major element of the identity of these nations. Notoriously a difficult subject to address in film (Wright, 2007:11-32), and circumscribed by taboos,

it nonetheless makes significant (if sometimes subdued) contributions to the representation in film of each nation's culture.

How culture is differentiated from one nation to another determines the cultural boundaries of the nation. Nationalists attempt to reinforce such cultural boundaries by a variety of means – cleansing the language, institutionalising music, or reifying traditions – to enclose the nation. They try to separate it from the Other and to preserve its integrity. Attempted transitions across boundaries are thus common themes of my cases and are often positioned as insurmountable or as a betrayal of the nation.

Politicising the nation

At the subjective end of the spectrum of national attributes is the development of political consciousness – a sense of belonging to a specific nation. Earlier, I rehearsed some theories of how a national community develops consciousness and showed that, for my case studies, the political space available for the expression of national identity has been severely limited. I would argue that film provides a significant means for such space to be "separated out" of the dense mesh of competing national discourses.

Here, I would like to make a distinction between "place" which is a physical location and "space" which is a collection of places linked together within and across societies. In contrast to the way an impression of geographical space is created in the cinema through editing, political space is constructed from *special places*, something Tuan characterises as 'centre[s] of felt value' (1977:4). The latter, marked by moments of pause, such as held shots, stills, repetitions, or panoramas, emphasise the importance attached to those places for the protagonist or film-maker. Movement between these special places – in the migratory journeys so common for Kurds, the putative journeys of Palestinians frustrated by roadblocks and checkpoints, the Armenian journeys of return – stitches them into a political space characteristic of each nation.

However, the struggle by stateless nations to create political space leaves little room for diversity, and the expression of national identity in film tends to be homogenised, representing only one section of society, most often the males who exercise patriarchal power. Thus, as Alison Butler points out, for women in many

societies 'the sense of belonging [to the nation] is usually mediated via a familial imaginary' (2002:91). Gender issues, specifically, are 'relegated to the bottom of the agenda, a detail to be addressed after the more pressing issue of establishing the nation' (ibid.:100). However, as I illustrate in my examples, some male film-makers, such as Henryk Malyan (see Chapter 3) and Michel Khleifi (see Chapter 8) attempt to expose these deficiencies though their efforts are sometimes ambiguous. And some female film-makers, such as Tina Bastajian and Gariné Torossian (see Chapter 4) and Mona Hatoum and Annemarie Jacir (see Chapter 8), not only engage strongly with resistance to the erasure of the nation but also challenge the homogenised view of their national identity.

Sustaining the nation

Renan's concept of the nation can be summarised by saying that 'national memory is at the heart of national identity'. And, earlier, I referred to Billig's notion of the way states remind citizens of their nationality on a daily basis. They sustain the national memory through banal symbols and rituals that may go unnoticed. But what is this national memory?

Appiah suggests that it is a fund of stories held in common for a people and which function to articulate the nation (2003). Referred to as collective memory, these stories are rarely objective facts – they are re-created through various means to suit a particular purpose and a particular historical context – yet they frequently are the foundation of the identity of nations. All nations, especially if they are denied a state, need to be narrated in order to survive. And they need to go on being narrated, for, as Edward Said remarks with respect to the Palestinians, 'there seems to be nothing in the world which sustains the story; unless you go on telling it, it will just drop and disappear' (1995a:118). Thus, a repertoire of stories and myths is an essential element of sustaining the nation. George Schöpflin's taxonomy of myths (1997:28-35) includes many that regularly appear in my case studies: for example, *myths of redemption and suffering* as in the Kurdish film *A Song for Beko*; *myths of unjust treatment* in the Palestinian film *Palestine - A People's Record* (Al-Zobaidi, 1984); and *myths of foundation* in the Armenian film *Where Are My People?* (Hagopian, 1967).

Finally, each of my three nations suffers a sense of powerlessness which is a concomitant problem of statelessness. They are each subject to the will of other

states. Thus, power relationships between these nations and their host states is a prominent theme in these films, expressed mostly through active resistance in the form of physical conflict, but also through passive resistance that appears as a refusal to be forgotten or erased.

<p style="text-align:center">෨෬</p>

Key symbols, national narratives, and oppositional cinematic forms, all contribute to the expression of these themes of the nation. In the following chapters I have adopted a generally chronological approach to my analyses of film about each of the cases which enables me to associate the process of forming and sustaining each nation to its historical, social and political context. But, by also comparing and contrasting the way that national themes are handled, I am able to address the research questions I laid out in Chapter 1: What are the differences and commonalities between different representations of each nation? Can these be related to their different social and political contexts? And, can they be related to the historical process of formation and maintenance of each nation?

Armenia

1. Historical Armenia

Map 1: Armenia at different historical periods. (Hewsen, 2001:13)

Chapter 3
Looking Back From *Ararat* – Soviet Armenia

Surrounded by mountainous terrain, a ragged band of soldiers with ancient-looking rifles is ranged against superior well-armed forces. As shells explode and bodies are torn apart, the setting changes seamlessly to the courtyard of a hospital where American missionary, Dr. Clarence Ussher, is treating the wounded. The action continues with Ussher giving a letter appealing for help to the assembled children of the town in the hope that one of them will be able to deliver it to the outside world. The camera then pulls back to reveal the set and the film crew, as a "cut" is called. This sequence, which concerns the defence of Van in 1915,[1] is taken from the film *Ararat* directed by Canadian-Armenian Atom Egoyan.

The following scene joins the actor Charles Aznavour, playing the "director" of the film-within-the-film, in conversation with an art historian he has hired to give legitimacy to the screenplay. He claims that 'everything you see here is based on what my mother told me', but, as they walk out onto the balcony of the mission house, we see the painted flat of Mt. Ararat which is being used by the film-makers as a backdrop.

The conversation continues:

> Historian: You wouldn't be able to see Mt. Ararat from Van
> Director: Well yes, but I felt it would be important

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[1] Under the Ottoman regime Van was a major city, capital of the district, with a population of about 25,000. The attack by Turkish troops in 1915 is regarded as signalling the beginning of the genocide.

> Historian: But it's not true
> Director: It's true in spirit

The film's screenwriter, who appears a little later in the courtyard below, adds:

> Screenwriter: We thought we could stretch things a bit – it's such an identifiable symbol

In these few scenes, Egoyan reveals his engagement with questions about the nature of historical narrative, the manipulation of powerful national symbols, and the fabrication of identity. He exposes how boundaries between peoples can be defined through unobtrusive editing; in this case by personalising the Armenian soldiers; constructing them as brave *resistance fighters* set against an anonymous, impersonal *other* – the Turkish soldiers. He shows how film can confer "authenticity": Clarence Ussher's spotless white suit, despite all the bloodshed and carnage around him, suggests an "unimpeachable" witness; the claim of Aznavour's character to truthfulness is authenticated by knowledge that the actor's parents *did* flee Armenia in 1915. And, he reveals the extent to which a summarising symbol like Mt. Ararat can be used to evoke a history of persecution and devastation stretching from the mythical biblical Flood to the genocide.

Deliberately blurring the distinction between real events and their representation, Egoyan thus signals that this film is not so much a fictionalised account of the Armenian genocide, as an exploration of the way such history is, or could be, told. Furthermore, by shunning a straightforward historical narrative, he has tried to express in this film, the *spirit* of survival embedded in Armenian identity.

The deep trauma of the genocide, the corrosive effect of its suppression and denial on survivors and their descendants, together with the fragmentation of the nation, resulted in political and cultural cleavages between Soviet Armenia and the diaspora. With the loss of so many people, much of their historic territory, and some of their centres of spiritual and intellectual life, Armenians had to struggle to maintain and assert an identity that, after 1921, developed separately. Those in Soviet Armenia were sometimes encouraged to assert their cultural distinctiveness and sometimes discouraged from doing so, while those in the diaspora were faced with dilution of their identity through assimilation into the respective host cultures. I will return to Egoyan's *Ararat* in the next chapter where I consider the part played by diasporan cinema in the general discourse on Armenian identity. But first, I want to examine how cinema reveals the difficulty experienced by Soviet Armenians both in

responding to the genocide and in steering a path between "being Armenian" and becoming citizens of a Republic of the Soviet Union.

The road to genocide

Ararat looks back to 1915, just after the first film studios were established in the urban centres of Tbilisi (Georgia) and Baku (Azerbaijan) and a number of cinemas opened in the territory of present-day Armenia.[2] Several film-makers had been active in the Caucasus for some time by then, however they gave almost no attention to the pogroms and massacres that were taking place in the region between 1894-1909 (Hovannisian, 2004:chapter 7). An exception was a Russian feature film *Under the Kurdish Yoke* (Minervine, 1915) which was the first to touch on the subject of the plight of the Armenians (Zakoïan, 1993b:121). Fragments of the film, preserved in the Armenian Film Archive in Yerevan, contain sequences that explicitly denote the rape and massacre of Armenians by Ottoman Turkish and Kurdish soldiers. However the film was never distributed, apparently because of the sensitivity of Russian-Ottoman relations at the time (Zakoïan, 2005).

Similarly absent was any sustained treatment of the culmination of Turkish action against Armenians: the genocide of 1915-23. A few early Russian films, shot in studios close to Moscow, are said to 'evoke the genocide' (Radvanyi, 1993a:47), and a Hollywood film called *Ravished Armenia* (Apfel), released in 1919, makes it the central subject. The latter, based on the autobiographical story of a survivor, Aurora Mardiganian, appears to have been designed to take advantage of widespread Western anti-Muslim sentiment. Despite its apparently sensational rendering of events, critical and media opinion in the US and UK was generally supportive of its effect in bringing the genocide to public

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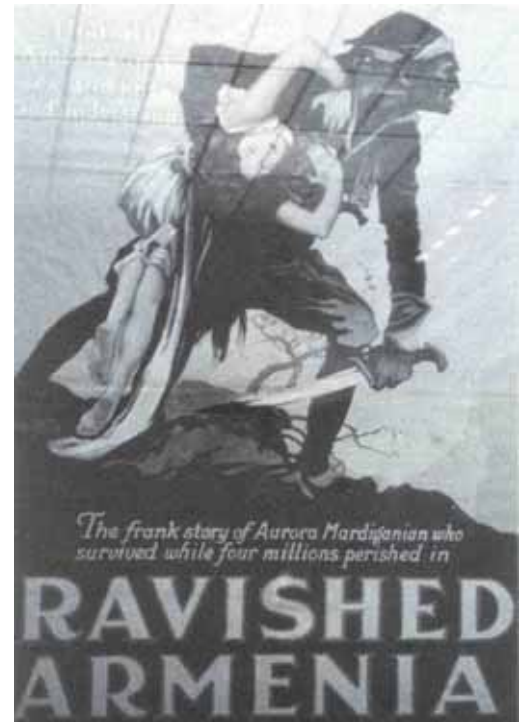
[2] Zakoïan dates the opening of the first cinemas to 1909 (interview in Yerevan, April 2005).

attention in the West (ibid.:13-15).[3]

If, as Razmik Panossian asserts, the genocide remains 'the key to understanding Armenian identity in the twentieth century' (2000:218), the absence of a measured cinematic response to it in Soviet Armenia is notable. One factor accountable for this was the general cultural trauma which also affected writers, artists, and poets in the immediate aftermath, and rendered it too difficult an event for film-makers to confront. Other factors at this time undoubtedly were Soviet control over film production, and censorship which suppressed references to Turkish atrocities and to the existence of Armenian territories other than those of Soviet Armenia. Yet, a number of film-makers were able to engage indirectly with the discourse on identity and to make films regarding the Armenian nation. For example, Hamo Bek-Nazarov and Henryk Malyan reflect, in different ways, a vibrant Armenian way of life while grappling with the drive to modernity as a socialist republic, while Frunze Dovlatyan addresses more overtly nationalist themes. And two figures, Artavazd Pelechian with his alternative, poetic forms, and Sergei Paradjanov who puts himself in the position of a traditional storyteller, stand apart – their evocation of Armenian identity directly challenging Soviet authority. As we shall see, film-makers also found ways to allude to the genocide, especially after the 1960s, though this catastrophe for the nation has been treated only patchily in both Soviet Armenia and in the diaspora.

Soviet Armenia

By 1921 much of the Armenian engagement with modernity over the previous century had been shattered by massacres, war, migration, genocide, and civil war. The population remaining in what became Soviet Armenia was predominantly homogenous and predominantly rural,[4] and though an intellectual urban elite revived, in part as a result of immigration, patriarchal social structures controlled large sections of Armenian life.

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[3] All prints have apparently been lost, but Anthony Slide has reproduced the original autobiography with details of its production, screenplay and reception (1997).

[4] Panossian estimates that by 1921, 150,000 Armenians were left in Turkey, about half a million in other parts of the USSR, and half a million in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. One million Armenians lived in Soviet Armenia, of whom less than 20% were urbanised (2000).

A new era of Armenian history began, which Suny divides into three phases: 1921-28, when a mixed economy and 'fairly tolerant political practices' were accommodated; 1928-53, the totalitarian Stalinist period of 'radical socioeconomic transformation'; and the post-Stalin period, 'marked by a relaxation of total state control and a more moderate pattern of social change' (1993a:136).

Cinema in Armenia broadly reflects these changes of political mood under Soviet control. The silent period from 1923-35 was associated with a general "cultural renaissance" during which some freedom of expression was permitted. Under Stalin, censorship increased, and from 1935 there was a dramatic decline in film production. The post-Stalin "thaw" that started in 1956 witnessed the emergence of a "new wave" of film directors who were able to tackle sensitive issues once again. In each period, film-makers never strayed far from the conventions of their time. In common with cinema elsewhere, the early silent melodramas mostly derive from the theatre; Soviet influence is apparent in the dramatic reconstruction of documentary events and the emphasis on realism; and the early sound films are deeply expressionist in form. After WWII, the work of Malyan and Dovlatyan owes something to contemporaneous neo-realist movements in world cinema, even though their development was restricted by the demands of Soviet inspired Socialist Realism.

Given such shifts in Soviet colonial practices, how did film-makers in these different periods sustain Armenian identity? How did they resist the hegemony of Russian culture?

Cultural renaissance (1923-35)

During the 1920s, the Communist leadership sought to modernise Armenian society: to weaken family and village ties; to encourage greater equality between the sexes; and to reduce the influence of the church and ancient customs (Matossian, 1962:59-60). But the traditional family remained 'one of the greatest potential foci for conservative resistance to the new Communist regime' (ibid.:63). And the church, though it had already lost much of its influence in Armenian intellectual society, was still enormously popular among the peasant population (ibid.:90-95). In part to overcome such resistance and to bring modern ideology to the villages, state cultural institutions were established, including a national broadcasting company and a film

studio, set up in the capital Yerevan in 1923.[5] The Soviet leadership, recognising the importance of film in bringing the communist message to the people,[6] installed cinemas – both fixed and mobile – in rural communities (Kepley, 1996).

Film-making in Armenia was always under the patronage of the Soviet state, and it is scarcely surprising that at least half of the documentary films produced between 1923 and 1935 are dedicated to praising the achievements of communism in modernising the country. A survey of the catalogues produced by the AAFCJ,[7] reveals nine on agricultural achievements; three on the economy and culture; five on industrial successes; two on advances in science; and two on education and the elimination of illiteracy. Similarly, about a quarter of the feature films made over this period recount stories of the victory of Bolshevism and the benefits it brought to the country (Gulyan, 2001).

However, modernisation went hand in hand with re-nationalisation. While Soviet protection fixed the borders of the new republic and influenced a general Westernisation of dress and secularisation of education, at the same time there was an attempt to revitalise the national culture. Lenin's 'nativisation' policy (*korenizatsiia*) encouraged use of the Armenian language and supported national literature, music, arts, and folk dancing (Matossian, 1962:62). As Suny notes, the expectation seemed to be that 'Armenians could change traditional ways into modern ways, yet remain Armenian' or become 'even more Armenian' (1993a:142). The newly established institutions not only served as propaganda outlets but also as a means of reaffirming the Armenian language and culture. Film-makers were encouraged, therefore, also to make documentary and feature films that celebrated famous national cultural figures such as composers and actors.

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[5] Initially called Gosfotokino of Armenia (1923), the studio was renamed Armenkino or Haykino (1924), Yerevan Studio (1938) and Armenfilm or Haifilm (1957) (Ovanessian, 1995:451).

[6] Lenin famously stated, 'of all the arts for us the most important is cinema', and Stalin believed cinema to be 'the most important means of mass agitation' (Bayadyan, 2002:4).

[7] The Armenian Association of Film Critics and Journalists. Their catalogues are also published on the internet at http://www.arm-cinema.am/

Tradition and modernity

These conflicting influences are evident in the work of the most prominent early Armenian film-maker, Hamo Bek-Nazarov. For his first film, *Namous* (1925), Bek-Nazarov drew on a text by novelist and playwright Aleksandr Shirvanzade.

Set in the 1890s, the melodrama concerns two families whose lives are devastated by an unspecified disaster. In an extended opening sequence, the baby Susanna is rescued from the surrounding chaos and rubble of a town. She is the 'gift from God', implicitly associated with the Armenian nation saved from destruction. In gratitude, Susanna's father pledges her in marriage to Seyran, the son of his friend.

As the young couple grows up, Seyran's impetuosity drives him to meet Susanna alone before they are married. Her traditionalist father, obsessed with honour, breaks his pledge and marries Susanna off to another man, Rustam. Seyran in a fit of jealous rage, declares that he has already been intimate with Susanna. Rustam kills Susanna to save his own honour when he sees "proof" of her infidelity. Seyran, too late to undo his harm, kills himself when he realises what he has done. Honour must be preserved at all costs: the honour of Susanna's family, disrupted by Seyran; the honour of Rustam which must be avenged; and the honour of Seyran who must kill himself.

Feminist scholars are rightly critical of early silent cinema's betrayal of modernity, especially its frequent use of theatrical melodrama and the positioning of women as objects of the male gaze (Butler, 2002:7). Certainly, Bek-Nazarov is not immune from this criticism, yet in this film he develops a critique of the restrictive and often harsh nature of this archetypal community. In particular, Susanna is represented as a passive victim of the violence of her father, the impetuosity of Seyran and the revenge of Rustam. Her head usually bowed in submission, gaze averted, she appears incapable of action. Her frightened movements and deep-set eyes express terror or melancholy. She is literally walled in to the family home to prevent Seyran reaching her again, and, once she is married, she is taken off to be "guarded" by Rustam's mother. Susanna, subservient first to father and then to husband, embodies the confinement of women.

Seyran is one aspect of the romantic male hero: lithe, active, impulsive, and wild. Often shown in profile, hair tousled, and half shadowed, his broad, sweeping gestures seemingly show him wrought by unfulfilled passion. Seyran appears to fight

against tradition, but it is his actions that cause the death of Susanna. Rustam, the other hero, is upright and honest. Usually seen well-lit in full face, his movements are slow, stolid, and deliberate, speaking of integrity. Yet it is he who kills Susanna to preserve his own honour.

Seyran   *Susanna*   *Rustam*

The call to modernise embedded in Bek-Nazarov's criticism of patriarchy and the destructive male honour code, is, however, tempered by the enormous life and vitality of this community expressed through comic sequences and in the wedding scenes, dancing, and folk music.[8] Contemporary Armenian audiences (and also many present day spectators) responded positively to these enactments of traditional ceremonies. The Russian view of the film, as reported by *Pravda*, was harsher. Noting that Armenian spectators were delighted and charmed by the 'exact representation of the near past', it questioned the lack of criticism of these 'outdated and destructive customs'.[9] In this way, Bek-Nazarov reveals the ambivalence of a people coming to terms with the loss of their momentary freedom and independence, finding themselves once again under colonial rule. Susanna expresses this in a vision where her two lovers appear, one either side of her – Rustam the traditionalist and Seyran the young man fighting against the restrictions of the old ways.

Such duality was further compounded by the legacy of tsarist colonial attitudes in communist Russia that continued to assert a hierarchy of cultures in which the Eastern, predominantly Muslim, peoples were placed at the bottom. As Michael Smith argues, Soviet film-makers reflected their 'condescending ethnic prejudices' in films made about the minority republics, stereotyping Easterners not merely as backward and uncivilised but also as exotic (1997:647).

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[8] Though this is a silent film, the form of the music is evident in the instruments being played and the rhythm of the dances. On the video version, the dubbed music almost certainly reflects the type of musical accompaniment at the film's original showing (Bakhchinyan, 2005).

[9] The comments by the *Pravda*, critic, B.M., dated 9th November 1926, are reported in Zakoïan (1993b:122).

Christian Armenia was partially exempt from this anti-Islamic, "orientalist", exoticism, as illustrated by the realism of *Namous*. With its details of everyday life in the rural population, from the sequences of baking of bread, tea drinking, game playing, and gossiping in the streets, to the lengthy tavern and wedding scenes, it was regarded as depicting 'the East without make-up' (Zakoïan, 1993c:64). However, in associating the passive figure of Susanna with the Armenian nation, always acted upon and never taking action to change her situation, Bek-Nazarov, perhaps inadvertently, reinforces ethnic prejudices and sexual stereotypes. Indeed, other contemporary Russian newspaper reports, while acknowledging the 'clarity' (that is, the realism) of the film, still focus on its depiction of 'the inner world of the Orient' and its 'ethnic subject matter' (Pilikian, 1981:41).

Patriarchy and power

This initial phase of cinema in Soviet Armenia is reasonably prolific for such a small population and includes historical dramas, civil war films, and comedies. Many of these exhibit similar themes of doubling and choice that seem to express the search for an identity, torn between the future as a modern Soviet Republic and the rich set of Armenian national traditions and characteristics. It is rounded off by the first narrative sound film, *Pepo* (Bek-Nazarov, 1935). Based on a play of the same name by Gabriel Sundukian, the film is set in the vigorous Armenian community of 1870s Tbilisi. The plot relates the story of Pepo, a poor fisherman, cheated by an unscrupulous money-lender of the dowry he has saved to ensure the marriage of his sister, Kekel. But, by superimposing the opening and closing titles on an image of Mt. Ararat (not visible from Tbilisi) Bek-Nazarov, like Egoyan in *Ararat*, seeks to generalise the story. He extends Sundukian's play, essentially a class critique, into an indictment of the repression of women in Armenian society, and, I would argue, the subjugation of the Armenian people as a whole.[10]

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[10] See Parlakian (2001) for the script of the play *Pepo* and for notes on the author.

The film packs the town with a lively, open and fun-loving peasant population. Their work-songs, market cries, and street songs fill the air. Bek-Nazarov, by his framing of the crowd scenes, the fluid movement and gestures of the characters, traditional costumes and dancing, broad humour, "spontaneous" love songs, and the use of a static camera, emphasises the solidity and authenticity of these ordinary folk.

Pepo, though ostensibly the hero, is frequently de-centred in the frame, reduced in scale (especially in the opening shots), and often given the same weight as his friend, Kakuli. Even his last speech, which censures the perniciousness of capitalism, is partially obscured by prison bars. And the film closes, not with Pepo's speech, but with a rousing "peasant chorus". Pepo is scarcely individualised, he is Everyman, a representative of the working people.

By contrast, Bek-Nazarov shows the bourgeoisie to be false and corrupt. Zimzimov, the money-lender, is treated expressionistically: his huge shadow hovers over images of the main characters in the title sequence; he vainly rehearses before a mirror the praise given to him by a state official; his massive shape, cloaked in black, lumbers through the crowd in the market; and, when he is denounced at the end of the film, his shadow, now reduced, is cast on the ground. Shadows and reflections designate his dishonesty and unreliability.

The merchant Darcho, who is initially betrothed to Kekel, is handled more lightly. Though also venal and corrupt, he is the comic counterpart to Zimzimov. He adopts European costume and manners in company and rejects "peasant" Armenian

dancing. He even employs a French dancing master to teach him the steps but falls over when he tries out the polka.

Bek-Nazarov was hampered by the censors who at this time wanted to reinforce the notion of happy interaction among the peoples of the Caucasus within the Union and also to demonstrate that the corrupt merchant class had been eliminated. Accordingly, he tends to reinforce stereotypes of vigorous peasants set in opposition to an effete bourgeoisie that has pretensions to foreign sophistication, and conspiratorial and untrustworthy merchants and money-lenders. However, by establishing the merry peasants as comprehensive winners of the class war, Bek-Nazarov made space in which to situate Kekel, in a number of key scenes significantly absent from the play, as an elaborating symbol of Armenian society.

First, at the market which she is permitted to visit but where, as an unmarried woman, she is not allowed to speak, she is positioned alongside silks and satins as one of the goods on display. She is openly appraised by possible suitors and the town gossips discuss the value of her dowry. Then, in a scene set in a communal women's bath-house, the importance of which is emphasised by the repeated but thwarted attempts of a young male voyeur to watch, Kekel is revealed naked. As in Michel Khleifi's *Wedding in Galilee*, the purified body of a woman, emerging from the rituals of cleansing, is surely meant as a representation of the nation (see Chapter 7). But here, the extent of the female body as a commodity is underscored by the women who surround Kekel, repeatedly, sensuously, stroking her face and remarking on the beauty of her body. A mournful close-up is followed by a point-of-view shot in which her victimisation is expressed in her gaze, sweeping rapidly around the full circle of watching women. While openly criticising the commodification of women in this society, Bek-Nazarov thus relates it to the repression of the Armenian nation.

A sequence at a cathedral service follows, where a series of shots, composed to emphasise the soaring spaces, heavily robed priests, incense clouds, and the singing of the liturgy, infuse the scene with Armenian national and religious symbolism. Specific framing and editing – a close-up showing her as a supplicant, hands raised to God, followed immediately by a point-of-view shot of a "bride" in front of a portrait of the Madonna and child – closely link Kekel to the Christian iconography of birth and crucifixion. But then news arrives that Darcho has jilted her in favour of a richer woman. In a second view of the portrait, the bride is now ominously absent, an

indicator of Kekel's terrible loss – her future is destroyed. Here, Bek-Nazarov
indicates the failure of the church to provide comfort for her personal catastrophe. A
long, close-up tracking shot, the only one in the film, follows Kekel as she slowly
leaves the cathedral. The service continues, uncaring, while the congregation gossips.
Once outside, another point-of-view shot, this time a panorama of the town, reinforces
her helplessness. If we accept Kekel is a representative of the nation, Bek-Nazarov
seems not only to reflect on her individual repression – on her lack of choice in the
matter of her body being used as an object of trade – but he also seems to hint at the
nation's lack of self-determination under colonial rule.

Kekel and the portrait of the Madonna

Symbols of Armenian identity

In this earliest sound film, Bek-Nazarov brings together several key symbols
of Armenian identity: language, traditional music and song, costume, ceremony and
dancing, and religion. The spoken Armenian language makes its first appearance in
the cinema,[11] and is set against the pretensions of some of the bourgeoisie to speak
French or Russian. Scenes are linked together by Armenian church music, folk
music, street sounds, popular songs of the "national" poet, Sayat Nova, and a
specially composed anthem to accompany the final uprising of the peasants. As a

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[11] In contrast to films of this period from most of the other Republics, Armenian films were made or
dubbed in Armenian (Smith, 1997:672).

consequence, Bek-Nazarov succeeded in creating a film that satisfied the demands of the Soviet censors, yet was truly popular among the Armenian population not just as a melodrama, but as an expression of their historical identity.[12]

References to the lost lands and the ancient kingdom of Armenia, though muted, are also abundant. Consider the symbolism of the Armenkino logo (admittedly with Russian script), used extensively, and unique among the Soviet Republics in its nationalist content. Set in a mountainous landscape, it depicts a figure, holding a reel of film, the ends of which are curled around the twin peaks of Mt. Ararat, binding them into Armenia. The iconic double mountain, prominent in the opening and closing

sequences of *Pepo*, makes regular appearances in films from this period.

After catastrophic events, such as the genocide, there is frequently a latency period during which time it is difficult, if not impossible, for people to cope with the resulting trauma. As Elsaesser argues, this often leads to the repression of memory of the events or a failure adequately to represent them (Elsaesser, 2001:195). Though *allusions* to the Armenian catastrophe are never entirely absent from films of this period, it is not directly referenced. For example, the opening sequence of *Namous*, evokes the genocide although it ostensibly refers to an earthquake. Furthermore, it is arguable that a general explanation for the prevalence of comedies during this period,[13] lies in their ability to relieve the trauma for survivors of devastation. The incoherence of slapstick comedy may be interpreted as a manifestation of repression – indicated by the loss of language. Such a loss, common in extreme forms of grief, is often sublimated in wordless lamentation.[14] These films seem to fulfil the role of expressing the deep emotions surrounding the nation's suffering that could not be

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[12] Pilikian quotes favourable reviews of the film both from Armenian critics and the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* (1981:49-50).

[13] For example, *Shor and Shorshor* (Bek-Nazarov, 1927), *Kikos* (Barkhudaryan, 1931), and *Mexican Diplomats* (Martirossian, 1931).

[14] See, for example, Rubina Peroomian, who, following Lacan, notes the strong relationship between loss of language and lamentation (Peroomian, 1993:90-94).

articulated in any other way. The genocide and its aftermath may have been forbidden subjects for cinema in Armenia at this time, but they surely lurk beneath the surface. A similar effect may be seen in the films of Palestinians Elia Suleiman and Rashid Masharawi (see Chapter 8). In their case, however, silence and incoherence seem to derive from their extreme frustration over the difficulty of making their voices heard.

Overall, the period is characterised by uncertainty and division. The fledgling regime steadily consolidated its hold and demanded expressions of solidarity. In the cinema this resulted in prominence being given to the class war, satire directed at the opposition, and plaudits for the benefits of communism. But, though the communists gradually gained command of mass communications, instituted censorship, and made extensive use of the media for propaganda purposes, their controls were somewhat uneven. They were forced to compete with traditionalists in their efforts to transform society. The modernising tendency that criticised life before the revolution vied with traditional values in the struggle for expression of national identity. The resulting ambivalence is evident in many of the films discussed. The glories of Armenian religious iconography, its architecture, and its liturgical music are prominently displayed, yet the church is frequently mocked as in *Namous*, with its scenes of drunken priests; *Shor and Shorshor*, where the priest is terrified by demons; and in *Pepo* where the ceremonies in the cathedral are used to exchange gossip. Traditional family structures, the honour code, and the suppression of women are exposed, while at the same time women's passivity and their lack of influence in society are often depicted as "natural". Peasant dress, folk music and ceremony, and the vitality of traditional dances, are lovingly represented, but criticism of backwardness, lack of social mobility, and poor education appear to be absent. As Derobert rightly argues, cinema in Armenia was caught between the pull of the tradition and culture of the "ancient nation", and 'propaganda imperatives of the Soviet state' (1986:36).

Stalinist repression (1935-56)

From the early 1930s more extensive aspects of modernisation were forced through and Armenia became more urban and industrial. The policy of *korenizatsiia* was reversed and Russian nationalism re-asserted itself. Centralised Soviet control intensified, and the small freedoms available in the previous period to express in film an individual national identity were submerged under communist propaganda and

censorship (Smith, 1997:664). By 1934 "Socialist Realism", declared to be the 'USSR's official artistic practice', infused the cinema of Russia and, by necessity, the smaller republics (Kenez, 1997:390-1). The impact of these elements of Stalinism on cinema in Armenia were immediate and long-lasting – narrative film production dried up to an average of about one a year over the period from 1935-56.

In small gestures to the glorious past, Armenian film-makers celebrated, in two documentaries, *David of Sasun* (Martirossian, 1939) and *Millenium* (Balasanyan, 1939), the mythical 1000th anniversary of the national epic tale, David of Sassoun, the "saviour" of Armenia. And the logo of Yerevan Studio (now in Armenian script), while still including the twin peaks of Ararat in the background, has the foreground figure of David riding on his charger in defence of Armenia.

Exceptionally, following the German invasion of Russia in 1941, the Soviet regime recognised the need to mobilise *all* the resources of the Union, and the power of Russian and minority nationalisms was exploited for the greater benefit of the state. Each republic was encouraged to produce at least one major film that praised its own achievements, especially where this was framed in terms of a historic national hero (Kenez, 1997:396). In this spirit, Bek-Nazarov made the epic of national resistance, *Davit-Bek* (1944). Ostensibly, this film, like those made by the other republics of the Soviet Union, was intended to project the notion of the 'friendship of the people' onto the past – demonstrating that the safety and happiness of the Armenians had *always* depended on their alliance with the Russians (Kenez, 2001:202). It concerns the uprising of Armenians in the 18th century against occupation of Eastern Armenia by the Persians. Under the leadership of David Bek, and with the help of Russian forces, a decisive battle is won, cementing Armenian-Russian ties. The film, which includes an ancient Armenian hymn on the soundtrack, was regarded by contemporary accounts as nationally inspiring (Pilikian, 1981:51).

Thus, in the period 1935-56 Soviet policy remained mixed – attempting to Russify Armenia but at the same time encouraging limited Armenian nationalist sentiment, especially during the war years. However, after 1947, there remained little room for the expression of national identity other than that permitted by the Soviet regime. In this period, '[a]ny expression of national pride or unique Armenian achievement was strictly prohibited. The leading role of the Russian people had to be recognised' (Suny, 1993a:161). Nonetheless, Bek-Nazarov, who was in charge of Yerevan Studios by this time, seems to have managed a few gestures of defiance. While he continued to promote the making of documentaries which celebrated the achievements of the Armenian people under communism, he also supported those that praised Armenian artists, writers, and musicians; recorded major events in the Armenian church; and described the beauties of ancient architecture and monuments. Furthermore, in agreeing to make *Davit-Bek* he would have been aware of the propaganda purposes of the film. He would also have known that the full history was one of betrayal by the Russians who refused to support David Bek against resurgent Ottoman forces in 1725. Small gestures, perhaps, but they helped to keep alive Armenian national aspirations in this dismal period of their history.

Cultural reform and the "New Wave" (1956-1990)

After the death of Stalin in 1953 there was some loosening of centralised control over the Caucasian republics. However, the process of communist inspired modernisation in Armenia quickened: the economy changed from being predominantly rural to predominantly industrial and the population became increasingly urbanised, better educated, more secular, and more mobile than ever before (Suny, 1993a:189). Yet the breakdown of traditional rural social structures did not lead, as might be expected, to a lessening of the cohesiveness of the nation but rather to its opposite, a resurgence of national consciousness.

I have already touched on some of the socio-political factors that contributed to the persistence and strengthening of Armenian nationalist sentiment: the Soviet policy of *korenizatsiia* established in the 1920s and 1930s; the surge of patriotic nationalism encouraged during the war years; the re-establishment of the church hierarchy; and the large-scale repatriation that was encouraged immediately after the war and which resulted in an ever more homogenous population (over 90% Armenian by 1960). Even moves by the Soviet Union to attempt restoration to Armenia of the

former provinces of Kars and Ardahan, though never realised, were instrumental in keeping alive Armenian claims to territory lost in 1920 (Suny, 1993a:159).

The political and artistic "thaw" instigated by Khrushchev also allowed for greater freedom in the cultural expression of national consciousness. In a symbolic example, the statue of Stalin in Yerevan was pulled down in the early 1960s, to be replaced by a statue representing "Mother Armenia" (Suny, 1993a:181). The Armenian language became an ever more important marker of identity and writers and poets, previously condemned, were rehabilitated and reinstated as national figures. The state encouraged the erection of monuments to ancient heroes and anniversary celebrations for events such as the creation of the Armenian alphabet, many of which were duly recorded in widely distributed documentary films.

Cinema also benefited from the return to Armenia of a number of young film-makers trained in Moscow. Narrative film production increased to three or four a year, though, because of continuing censorship, direct expressions of Armenian nationalism initially, at least, were kept in check. Films continued to convey national sentiment through music, image, symbols, and performance, and as a love of rural traditions. But now yearning for the lost lands became more evident. In one of the earliest films of this period, for example, *What's All the Noise of the River About* (Melik-Avagyan, 1958), the opening credits are superimposed on a shot of Mt. Ararat, viewed from across the river of the title. The country across the border remains unnamed, though the use of a recurring leitmotif of "oriental" music for the "foreigners" seen on the opposite bank, signifies the river as the Araxes – the border separating Armenians from their former lands in Turkey.

The film seems to presage sentiments expressed by the poet Gevorg Emin:

> What are we, after all,
> we and our land?
> Even if we try to mince the truth
> We are tourists in our own land.
> Guests in our own homes.
> A river with only one bank,
> A mountain which we only view from afar,
> An unpeopled land,
> a landless people,
> and scattered beads which cannot be restrung.[15]

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[15] The poem is translated and quoted in Panossian (1998:149).

Though they have a homeland, the insecurity and rootlessness of the people – 'tourists' who have suffered forced migration – are coupled with loss, contained in the key symbols of distant Mt. Ararat, the river with 'only one bank', and the 'scattered beads' of the diaspora.

The Araxes carries great resonance, first as an indication of the divide between Europe and Asia, then as the border between Soviet Armenia and Eastern Anatolia. Crossing the river is a frequent literary and cinematic trope, not only marking the shift from 'backwardness and poverty to potential material well-being, and from ignorance and darkness to easier access to the benefits of European civilization' (Suny, 1993a:63), but also as an important signifier of nostalgia for lost lands, lands emptied of Armenians, and the desire to reclaim them.

But Melik-Avagyan takes this idea further by also denoting the water as something shared between the communities on either side of the river, something that unites Soviet Armenia with the former Armenian territories. To placate the censor, he inverts the yearning expressed by the exiled character Artashes.

Arriving on the Turkish bank of the river, he is observed in close-up, staring longingly across to his "homeland" in Soviet Armenia. But, his hunger for home is transposed into a longing for the *ancient* homeland, first by framing him against a backdrop of Mt. Ararat, and then with an insert of flying storks – the bird that represents home – thus bringing together home and homeland.

Malyan and the expression of communal identity

This film is a relatively explicit expression of national yearnings, though clearly constrained by censorship. But, from the 1960s, especially after unofficial demonstrations in Yerevan commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the genocide,[16] other new film-makers began more openly to engage in the discourse on Armenian

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[16] Suny identifies the first major outbreak of dissident nationalism, that is protest against 'official limits' on the expression of nationalist sentiment, as the demonstrations on April 24th 1965, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the genocide (1993a:186).

identity. Henryk Malyan, in particular, created more subtle visions of what it means to be Armenian. In each of his early films, by focusing on the relationship of small, self-contained groups of individuals to the collective, he enunciates a separate identity within the confines of the Soviet Union.

Malyan's communities are held together by the everyday rhythm of their lives: literally and most obviously in the brass band of *Boys From the Band* (1960), but also the blacksmiths in *Triangle* (1967), the shepherds in *We Are, Our Mountains* (1970), and a family in *Father* (1972). They nurture subjective feelings of being Armenian, shown for example by the band playing an anthem together in harmony; or the team of shepherds cradled in the confining space of mountain slopes, steadily cutting grass with scythes, their arms and bodies moving in unison; or the atavistic thread that links the family to its "bandit" past.

He creates soundscapes, such as the music the band learns to play, a recurrent shepherd's flute, the amplified humming of bees around the village, and the sound of blades slicing through grass, which act as strong signifiers of unity. Together with the rhythms of work (also encountered in the films of Artavazd Pelechian discussed below), they serve to emphasise the cohesion of these communities.

Precise framing, or group photographs inserted into the films as "stills", delineate the boundaries of his communities. In this example taken from *Boys From the Band* members of the unruly band are grouped closely around their leader; and in *We Are, Our Mountains* the shepherds work as a team on the hills.

While Malyan expresses the strength and unity of the nation in this way, at the same time he exposes a dichotomy. Not simply as we have seen before, between tradition and modernity, now it is the ambivalent relationship of these tightly knit

communities to the outside world. He creates space in which they can express their identity, by distancing them, often in the framing of his shots, from an outsider. In the above example, Tsolak, the interloper, is placed at the extreme edge of the image, his gaze directed disconcertingly at the audience; and the lieutenant of police in *We Are, Our Mountains* is most often an isolated figure set against the group. Consequently, there is always a sense of incipient loss in Malyan's films. For Radvanyi, the films 'speak metaphorically of an essential loss, a broken harmony' (1997:654). The community is always destroyed at the end by an outside force – the band is dispersed because of Tsolak, the shepherds are sent to prison by the lieutenant. However, the symbolic loss evident in these films only becomes explicit in *Nahapet* (1977), Malyan's most complete statement on the trauma suffered by the Armenian people sixty years previously.

This film looks back to the early 1920s, and, in a long pre-title sequence, introduces the character, Nahapet, making his way slowly across barren hills. The soundscape speaks of desolation – silent, except for the sound of his feet and stick pushing through stones and dry bushes. Coming to a clearly defined fork in the path, he hesitates before walking on while bird-calls, like human screams, echo around him. The camera keeps its distance, observing, until he arrives at a half-ruined hut in a village. From inside, we view him as, again, he momentarily hesitates before crossing the threshold into the inner space. Through the open doorway we see the village band bizarrely playing a discordant march. These hesitations and the accompanying sounds denote important transitions – he has crossed a cultural boundary, becoming, however peripherally, part of this rural society.

Thus, Malyan introduces the notion of loss. This man, with his wary and self-contained demeanour, has had to leave some unspecified place, cross an unidentified land, and suffer extremes of hardship. Parallels with the forced exile of the Armenian people from Turkey are reinforced in a subsequent dream sequence where he is walking with a large group of people who, again, have to choose which path to take. Some go one way and some another; perhaps encountering death in the desert or life in exile. Only then do the titles appear, accompanied by a funereal march on the soundtrack.

Having emphatically, but indirectly, set the context Malyan begins to explore the effects of trauma on Nahapet and, by extension, on the Armenian people. Again

he makes extensive use of stills. Young village children repeatedly congregate round the open doorway – framed as in a photograph – to stare at Nahapet. This induces him to recall group photographs which we gradually come to learn are of his family that has been lost in a massacre.

Silenced by his ordeal, he retreats to the refuge of his hut where he sings softly, almost inaudibly, to himself as he stares into the distance. Visions of catastrophe and death are introduced by a persistent, slow drum-beat in his head. They become increasingly more explicit and are authenticated by a shift of perspective that privileges the viewer, watching Nahapet, tied up in ropes, seeing his family being slaughtered. His internalisation of these painful memories come to a climax when he meets his sister. Wordlessly they cling to each other, then softly sing a prayer together. The camera circles them, moving closer, narrowing the focus, to centre on their anguish.

One of Nahapet's visions is less personal, dramatically encapsulating a metaphor for the destruction of the nation. An apple tree covered in ripe fruit sways and shakes violently as it is buffeted by strong winds. The red apples fall to the ground where they roll, in increasing numbers towards the shore of a river, much like lemmings rushing to their death. They float away, staining the water red (as the blood of murdered Armenians is said to have turned the waters of the Araxes red). The camera lingers on the final image – a solitary apple floating on its own – relating to Nahapet, who, like a defeated man, withdraws defensively into silence and solitude, refusing to take decisions or to accept responsibility for his life.

From these depths of despair, Malyan charts Nahapet's recovery, step by step, through labour and his response to renewal in nature. He re-marries and together with his wife plants a field of apple seedlings. With the first tender shoots his human feelings are re-kindled and Malyan re-visits the vision of the apple trees. This time he does not focus on a single apple, but on the groups of apples that float off together – a symbol of the people, not like Emin's 'scattered beads which cannot be restrung' but as a community.

Though by the end of the 1970s, film-makers were permitted to be more explicit about the genocide, as with Avetisyan's *Dzori Miro* (1980), censorship played a large role in construction of *Nahapet*. There could be no direct criticism of Turkey,

no claim to lost lands, and no mention of an Armenia other than Soviet Armenia (Asmekian, 1993). The film had to highlight the beneficence of the communist party in bringing land reforms, rationality and enlightenment (represented by electric light) to the backward village; and, it had to have a socialist realist ending – the now elderly Nahapet striding through the village, accompanied by the communist leaders, carrying an apple tree ready to plant outside a house where a child has been born.

Malyan, however, subverts many of the censor's restrictions. By holding images of his absent family, linking them with the metaphor of the apple tree and the insertion of flashbacks, he creates a political space in which to tell a powerful story of the genocide that challenges the ostensible message of the film. Overall, he succeeds in evoking the resilience of the Armenian people and their determination to survive and preserve a separate identity through their own labours.

Resurgent Armenian nationalism

Where Malyan examines how small groups of people continually recreate a common identity as the result of everyday events, Frounze Dovlatyan, the other major film-maker of this period, uses larger themes to explore different ways in which collective memory is constructed and preserved. His characters, such as the brothers caught on opposite sides in the civil war in *Brothers Saroyan* (1968), a disgraced government official in *Chronicle of Yerevan Days* (1972), and a retired teacher in *A Lonely Nut Tree* (1986), face a crisis, a break in their narratives, which forces them to reconsider their past, and by extension the past of the nation.

Chronicle of Yerevan Days focuses on the meaning of written historical records. In a key scene shot at the genocide memorial in Yerevan by the everlasting flame, the official, Armen, exclaims: '[Paper] always remembers. The whole world can forget, but paper never forgets'. The setting of this speech and the passion with which it is delivered, express anger at the world's lack of response to the genocide and to the rupture it caused in Armenian history.

The film concludes in the archives where Armen ponders the question 'who will remember us when we have gone?' before a dream sequence in which the archive starts to burn and is destroyed in a series of explosions. He searches frantically through charred papers and ashes blowing in the wind for the one piece of information that will tell him who he is, what his life has been for. His personal crisis is projected

onto the Armenian one of being a forgotten nation whose recent history has been negated by denial.

The critical event that affects a retired teacher, Kamsaryan, in *A Lonely Nut Tree*, is his discovery of an ancient dedication stone that dates the origins of his village to 1000 years previously. The village is dying gradually as all the young people leave, and the regional authorities want to close it down. Kamsaryan tries to revive interest in the place by organising celebrations to mark its anniversary. He invites everyone who has left to return, but they all make excuses and in the end no one comes.

The film is filled with symbols of the foundation myths of this people on their land – the dedication stone itself with its inscription; a repeated vision of the horseman Orhan from the legend of David of Sassoun; and a field of ancient *khachkars*[17] lit with candles. The lonely walnut tree of the title represents 'longevity and productivity, a long history and connections' (Pattie, 2005:52), and functions in a similar way to the Palestinian olive tree we will encounter later. But none of this is sufficient to keep the village together. As one character remarks, 'why teach all this history? What the younger generation needs is to know about machines and technology, about the modern world'. Dovlatyan's metaphors project the fear that the collective memory of this ancient nation, uncertain of its position in the modern world, is losing its power and relevance in defining its identity.

Dovlatyan dedicated his last film, *Yearning* (1990), to Malyan who wrote the script some years earlier. Set in the 1930s, it is the most explicit criticism of the Stalinist period made in the cinema of Soviet Armenia. Not only does it mock petty communist officials at village level who iterate slogans about the magnificent achievements of the new socialist regime, it unequivocally lays blame on the Soviet Union for the loss of Armenian territories a few years earlier, and exposes the horrors of the purges that destroyed many communities.

The film tells the story of Arakel, a poor illiterate peasant, now living in Soviet Armenia, who is consumed by hatred of the Turks. His visions of Turkish soldiers destroying his former village, burning houses, raping and murdering women and children, and taking over Armenian territory, are one of the most direct references

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[17] The *khachkar* (literally cross-stone) is a memorial stone unique to Armenia.

to the genocide in cinema of Soviet Armenia. Arakel cannot go on living without seeing his home again, and, in a tribute to the journey that opens Malyan's *Nahapet* he crosses the Araxes and the barren mountains until he comes close to his village. From a cave, he retrieves a dagger, hidden at the time of the Turkish attacks, and comes across a young woman lamenting over the dead body of a hermit-priest. Arakel silently watches as first she buries the priest and then takes all his books, wraps them in her shirt, soaks this with melted candle wax, and places the bundle in the grave. The sequence is a reference to the determination of the Armenian people to preserve their religion and its written texts at times of greatest danger.

Arakel at last reaches his ruined house. Here, Dovlatyan enumerates the vivid sources of memory as Arakel first visits his parent's graves, collects some soil, smells the herbs growing wild around the village, and weighs in his hand the fallen fruit from trees. He caresses the stones of the chapel where he was married, and sits by the hearth of an oven where he has a memory of his mother making bread. Dovlatyan floods these scenes with colours, smells, and sounds, and the feel of stone surfaces, that are inherent to memory. This intense and very personal evocation of a lost home is similar to that of Khleifi's Palestinians in *Ma'loul Celebrates Its Destruction* (see Chapter 8). And it contrasts strikingly with *Calendar* in which the Egoyan character seems to resist being drawn by memories to a homeland that is, for him, just an abstraction (see Chapter 4).

Dovlatyan ends with three images that summarise this film and, perhaps, the philosophy embedded in all his work. The first is the young woman who we have learnt is an Armenian, left behind as a girl when the village was attacked, and brought up by a group of Kurdish nomads. She cannot speak, but in extreme close-up we see her silently screaming in anguish for the Armenian people. As in his earlier films, Dovlatyan reminds his audience that the world would not hear the Armenian story.

Secondly, Arakel walks through a barren, stony valley, as white-shrouded figures silently look on, reminding his audience of the multitude who died and the few who remain. And finally the fire, still burning in his mother's oven, keep alive the hopes of his people with its eternal flames.

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The chronological order I have adopted so far illustrates the effects of capricious regimes of Soviet control over the expression of Armenian identity. The uncertainty of the first decade, which nonetheless allowed some cultural freedom, was followed by Stalinist repression and the stifling of artistic endeavour (relaxed slightly in 1944-5), and then, from the 1960s, the gradual loosening of state influence up to the breakdown exemplified by the criticism of the regime in *Yearning*. However, two film-makers, Artavazd Pelechian and Sergei Paradjanov, stand apart, proposing radical alternatives to the conventions and restrictions of the Soviet regime,. In different ways, they experimented with form and symbolism to create unique representations of Armenian identity.

Experimental forms

Pelechian's work cannot easily be categorized. His films are not documentary in the usual sense – they do not claim to represent reality though they include much "found" documentary footage – nor are they narrative though they are open to interpretation as some sort of story. They are non-linear, wordless but not silent, without protagonists but with action. In both image and sound, Pelechian uses rhythm, changes of pace, repetition, variation of texture, and inversion, to create a strong subjective association between the various elements. He called his method 'distance montage', a mechanism of separating visual and aural elements and braiding different sequences together. The effect is almost musical, where the interplay of these different parts creates harmony and thus a form of tangible reality.[18] The other

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[18] Pelechian has somewhat mystical explanations for the effect of his methods: see for example Niney (1991) and (1993), Pigoullié (Pigoullié, 1992), Péléchian (1997), and MacDonald (2004).

essential element of his technique is movement, frequently embedded in a circular or repeated structure, which acts as a *leitmotif* or emotional device. *The Beginning* (1967), for example, provides shocks through the abrupt insertion of a still into a moving sequence or through suddenly freezing a short section of movement. This Deleuzian rupture and folding of time, to which I referred in Chapter 2, seems to challenge the very notion of a singular beginning and so a singular history.

Though Pelechian lays claim to universality and asserts that he has 'never talked about a specific nationality' (MacDonald, 2004:97), two of his films, *We* (1969) and *The Seasons* (1975), can hardly be disentangled from Armenians and their history. The former, opening with primeval fingers of rock thrust up into the sky, as if squeezed out by immense forces, volcanoes exploding in showers of rock and flame, and unstable cliffs collapsing, speaks of the instability of mountainous Armenia and the tribulations of its people. The movement of crowds, surging, swaying, ebbing and repeating, is like the movement of history in territory that has often served as the battlefield between its more powerful neighbours.

It is an imagery also reflected in Armenian culture more generally. I have already noted the importance of landscape in poetry and literature, and this applies even more to the visual arts.[19] For example, in the 1920s the painter Martiros Saryan embarked on a series of landscape paintings. The triptych from which this panel is taken, represents his homeland as a rural idyll in which mountains, rivers, and fertile valleys predominate. A monastery nestles on a hill in the middle-distance while women dance in a circle on

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[19] A sample of the work of several artists may be seen at http://www.armsite.com/painters/ (viewed January 2007).

the flat-roofed house in the foreground. In another panel men harvest fruit and grapes, and begin to plough the fields with oxen. Over everything looms the twin peaks of Mt. Ararat.

Yet, unlike cinema about Kurdistan, in which the landscape frequently plays an important role, it is relatively absent from film about Soviet Armenia. Malyan reproduces some of Saryan's idyllic visions in *We Are, Our Mountains*, but his imagery of mountains, shepherds and their sheep, and the collective action of cutting of grass for hay, denotes a way of life that is threatened from outside. And Malyan, again, in *Nahapet* and Dovlatyan in *A Lonely Nut Tree*, appropriate Pelechian's stark images of a stony landscape and carved stones to signify a barren Armenia, "the land of stones".[20]

Pelechian himself creates the most strongly evocative essay on life in rural Armenia in *The Seasons*. Here he draws a mountainous landscape from clouds swirling behind ridges, raging torrents of white water, steep slopes of snow and scree. In this, he expresses the strong bonds between man, his beasts, and the land, with sequences of shepherds rescuing their sheep from floods, or bringing them down from winter slopes, man and animal embracing in their recurring struggle against the forces of nature. Naficy interprets the film as a 'family idyll' and an 'agricultural idyll', an accented product of 'antiquarian imagining' (2001:159) deriving from Pelechian's 'intense longing for Armenian nature, bucolic life, and tradition' (ibid.:307 n. 5). Though the use of mesmeric repetition, slow-motion, and spectacular photography can give the film a romantic gloss, closer viewing suggests a deeper purpose. Through the everyday rhythms of work, and the annual celebrations

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[20] Recalling the legend that stone was all that was left when it was Armenia's turn for a gift from God (Avdoyan, 1998:6).

of life, which include dancing, a wedding, and the ritual dressing of a ram (a symbol of Armenia), he articulates the far from bucolic idea of a people desperately clinging to their identity. And his final image of mountains, now peaceful, pastoral, and eternal, strongly evoke their resilience after extremes of hardship.

Pelechian and Paradjanov were close intellectually, and both professed to reject nationalism. Paradjanov, in fact, was fascinated with the multi-ethnic nature of the Transcaucasus region (Abrahamian, 2001; Niney, 1991; Rosenbaum, 2002). His four major works, *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors* (1964), *The Colour of Pomegranates* (1969), *Secret of Suram Fortress* (1985), and *Ashik Kerib* (1988), were a reflection of this. They are not intent on defining cultural boundaries, respectively those between Ukrainians, Armenians, Georgians and Azerbaijanis, but on exploring the fluidity of these boundaries.

Though Paradjanov seems to have shared with Pelechian a belief in the impossibility of translating identity into words, they developed quite distinct modes of expression. In contrast to Pelechian, Paradjanov uses vivid colours and avoids naturalism. His images are full of strong references to the language, religion, and art of the different national groups, and, while many of his "authentic" rituals were invented, they still succeed in creating a strong sense of the enduring nature of their culture (Abrahamian, 2001:74).

Pelechian's films were essentially suppressed in the Soviet Union which had control over distribution, and have rarely been exhibited in Armenia or elsewhere.[21] *The Colour of Pomegranates* also had a problematical production history. It was regarded by the Soviet authorities as 'difficult' because of its divergence from the norms of Soviet cinema and was only released after Paradjanov accepted that it be re-edited and cut (Marshall, 1992:190). It takes formalism further, being a mosaic of symbols and metaphors that describe the life and work of the 18th century poet and troubadour, Sayat Nova.[22] With a static camera and still figures, he creates flat

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[21] The film prints remained for a long time in the archives in Moscow and were screened only infrequently in the USSR and Europe during the Brezhnev era. Some of the films were exhibited in the first Armenian Film Festival in London in 1981, in North America in the 1990s and again in London in February 2005. The prints have only been placed in the Armenian archives in Yerevan since independence (Voskeritchian, 1991).

[22] The original title of the film was *Sayat-Nova*, but the authorities insisted that all references to the poet's name be removed. For details of the production process see Steffen (2001).

images that imitate the ancient Armenian illuminated manuscripts and frescoes that first bring enlightenment to the poet as a boy. Paradjanov's expressed preference for painting is evident in his use of tableaux and the arrangement of symbols, such as the pomegranate, a dagger, books, musical instruments, and a skull, in a manner which replicates allegorical still-life paintings.

Unlike Pelechian, for whom movement is the key driving force, Paradjanov uses action and gestures sparingly. In the majority of his shots, figures remain static and are allowed only stylised movements: the poet, held in profile, turns slowly to look at the camera; the princess breaks a thread of the lace she is holding; figures slowly move from one pose to another. Paradjanov's vision is almost at the opposite extreme to Pelechian – he has no interest in the banal and uses motion as a way of infusing his scenes with some kind of mystery. Where Pelechian (and also Dovlatyan and Malyan) include scenes of shepherds rhythmically scything hay on mountain slopes as part of their daily work, Paradjanov's half-clothed young men cut grass on the roof and dome of a monastery, in a ritual celebration of the arrival of spring. Paradjanov's articulation of Armenian national identity encompasses the long history of its culture: the language, expressed in written and spoken texts; religion in chanted liturgy and bas-relief sculptures of *khachkars*; the poetry and music of Sayat Nova; weaving of richly coloured carpets and garments; and the dense mythical traditions of Armenia.

The Colour of Pomegranates ends with a stone-mason sealing resonating jars high up in a wall of the cathedral.[23] He calls twice to the dying poet: '*yerkir*' (sing), so that he can adjust the position of the jars. Finally, he calls again '*merir*' (die), and draws the black mask of death over his face as Sayat Nova dies. The vessels repeat the echo of the poet's voice – his words and songs have become immortal. Thus, Paradjanov has put himself in the position of a "visual troubadour", recounting and transmitting his culture forever. But what is it that his images transmit? Perhaps it is the 'blood-drenched history' of Armenia seen in the bitter-sweet red juice of the pomegranate that spreads over a white cloth in the opening sequence. Or Armenians as "keepers of the book", expressed in the scene of rain drenched books being squeezed in a press and then dried in the wind on the roof of the monastery. Or the

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[23] Armenian medieval architects placed clay jars, opening inwards, in the walls of churches to improve the acoustics (Abrahamian and Sweezy, 2001:115).

special relationship between Armenians and God embodied in the depiction of Sayat Nova as Christ, first suggested by an array of thorns at the beginning and then by his crucifix-like death on the floor of the cathedral. Or the passivity of Armenians in the face of suffering, denoted by the flock of sheep that crowd into the cathedral and tumble into a grave.

These and other interpretations have been offered for the visions contained in *The Colour of Pomegranates* and the film is rich in possibilities for critical analysis.[24] It has been rightly praised as a masterpiece of Armenian cinema for its imaginative rendering of the poetry of Sayat Nova and its depiction of Armenia's distinctive identity.

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Grigor Suny's call for an 'open understanding of nationality, one determined equally by historical experiences and traditions and by the subjective will to be a member of a nation' (1993a:5), provides a key to unravelling some of the complexity of cinema in Soviet Armenia. This is a cinema that in its early years, especially in the work of Bek-Nazarov, was filled with ambivalence about the conflicting influences of the modernising drive of the Soviet Union and the national traditions of its people. It is also a cinema that, initially, was unable to reflect the recent history of the nation. The trauma engendered by events in the region, and rigorous censorship under Soviet rule, sanctioned only tangential references to the genocide and questions of territorial rights. And even the tricolour flag of the First Armenian Republic (1918-21) was forbidden during the whole of the Soviet era.

Though direct evocation of the ancient history and culture of the Armenian nation was also restricted, historical figures and events, ancient heroes, medieval churches, ruins, *khachkars*, and the Armenian language, made some appearances. Thus, at this time, and especially during the Stalinist years, the expression of a separate Armenian identity was relatively shallow, limited to music, dancing, language, subdued references to the religious tradition, and glimpses of a cheerful, vibrant peasant life.

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[24] See, for example, Rosenbaum (2002), Calonne (1999), Alekseychuk (1990-91), Sakojian (1995) and various authors in the special issue of *Armenian Review* (2001-2002).

Armenian society and identity remained bound up with the patriarchal family, and even by the 1960s, though women were much freer, attitudes towards them were 'still in transition' (Matossian, 1962:187). This is revealed by the notable absence of women filling central roles in film about the Armenians. They are objects and not agents; they serve the men and stand on the sidelines. Something of this attitude may be explicable by the history of the Armenian people – *Nahapet,* for example, is a powerful statement of the difficulty experienced by many men and women in forming relationships as a result of the trauma of the genocide. But this way of thinking is also the result of a continuation and adaptation of the traditional family hierarchy. The family, which formerly was the basis of the organisation of Armenian communities, becomes instead a site of the regulation of sexuality and sexual behaviour. Apparently free women, such as Maya in Malyan's *Father*, are punished for their transgressions, and women continue to play a minor part throughout.

From the 1960s Malyan and Pelechian found ways of representing identity through images of daily life. Their cinema remains rooted in simple rural traditions and ceremonies, the regular rhythms of work, and in the cohesive power of the family. It records the *habitual* events that help to ensure the survival of a nation and that turns the *background* of our lives into a "national" space. This cinema constructs a community recognisable to its audience; something of which they want to be part – corresponding to Suny's 'subjective will' to be part of the nation.

However, as I suggested in Chapter 1, banal nationalism works most effectively in stable states where the population is confident of its distinctiveness. In such states, people may assert their identity easily and without fear. Less fortunate communities, especially those deprived of their history or their territory, need in addition the recognition of an *otar*, an Other, different from themselves. Depiction of the Other, and therefore definition of the cultural boundaries of the nation, is very evident in cinema about the Kurds and Palestinians but has been restricted in Armenia. Perhaps one reason why the overwhelming, immutable symbol of Ararat hovers over these films – a reminder of loss and of the Other (the Turks) that obliterated Armenians from their land – is an indicator of the instability felt by Armenians, torn between their heritage and their Soviet reality. It is only with the later films of Malyan and those of Dovlatyan that the sense of loss in Armenian society begins to be enunciated more fully. In Malyan's case it is society's loss of the

ability to retain its identity when confronted with the wider world, in Dovlatyan's case it is the loss of historical memory through indifference.

National memory is, of course, a construction as well as a recollection. And all of these film-makers construct memory not just through narrative but more significantly through the senses which Gevorg Emin describes as the 'most powerful weapon[s] in the eternal struggle for existence' (1981:150). Taste is evoked in the frequent consumption of traditional foods at feasts; smell in the fruit, herbs, and berries that surround the villages; hearing in the language, music, poetry and song of the celebrations; and touch in the sensuousness of stone, wood, and musical instruments. Certainly sight and its corollary, movement, are foremost in cinema, and we have seen how Paradjanov, with colour, form, and composition, and Pelechian, with movement, powerfully reproduce memory in their films.

Cinema in Soviet Armenia, despite the restrictions imposed on it, perpetuates national identity by means of symbols of continuity, narratives of suffering and redemption, and the evocation of historical memory. In this way it was able to contribute to the survival of Armenia national identity. Unlike Kurdish and Palestinian film where the oppressor is all too obvious, the enemies of the Armenian nation are mostly absent from these films. The Turks, as perpetrators of the genocide are referred to only indirectly, and the colonial power of the Soviet Union is depicted as largely beneficent. It is only as the influence of the Soviet Union waned that film-makers, Dovlatyan in particular, were able to push the boundaries of censorship and introduce more nationalist themes.

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In the newly independent Republic of Armenia (since 1991), and in the diaspora, Suny argues 'a new concept of nationhood [is] being invented' (1993a:1). But what constitutes being Armenian in this new nation, and how is it revealed? To paraphrase Suny: is this a people defined by its language (that many can no longer use); by its unique religion (that few practice); by its sense of history (of which many are unaware); by a shared national consciousness (which is actually fragmented), or simply by a way of life? (ibid.:3). In this chapter, I have argued that cinema in Soviet Armenia has been a "cinema of survival", largely concerned with representing and preserving an Armenian way of life in the *homeland*. The next chapter examines the

cinema of the Armenian diaspora which by its nature is fragmented. Its concerns with national identity are torn between survival in the *hostland* and memory of an imagined homeland.

Chapter 4
Return to *Ararat* – The Armenian Diaspora

A sequence from Egoyan's first feature film, *Next of Kin* (1983), offers an insight into a number of the profound tensions inherent in diasporan identity; something that occupies him variously over the next two decades. It starts at an airport baggage carousel where Peter, the son of a wealthy Anglo-Saxon Canadian couple, is waiting to collect his suitcase. Peter's voice-over explains that for the last year or so, in order to escape from his parents' constant arguments, he has assumed a split personality; fantasised being two people. We already know from earlier scenes that these fantasies have led to sessions at a family therapist, and that while reviewing videotapes of their sessions, Peter also watches those of an immigrant Armenian family, the Deryans, who gave away their baby son to foster parents.

The voice-over, continuing into the next scene, a hotel bedroom, describes Peter's fascination with therapy. He tells us how excited he would be to get involved with another family – 'to give direction to their lives' – and how he has decided to leave home and take control of his own life. In a slow pan round the room the camera discovers Peter recording these thoughts onto tape, as instructed by the therapist, 'as if … talking to a stranger'. Having previously stolen a file on the Deryans, Peter now telephones them claiming to be their son. His conversation continues over a cut to the next scene which shows him riding an escalator up into the lobby of a hotel.

Egoyan, to this point has given us two transitions: Peter's emphatic exit from the airport, through a double set of glass doors, which signalled leaving his previous life, and the nervous meeting in the hotel lobby which starts his new one. Both settings are archetypal places of transition in the cinema (Naficy, 2001:chapter 7), but now Egoyan also introduces stylistic changes to heighten the sense of transformation. From the conventional tripod-mounted camera of the previous scenes he moves to a hand-held camera that tracks in with Peter as he meets his "parents". The following scenes are tightly-framed continuous shots where the camera, like the voice recorder, has become an intimate third-party, watching and listening to Peter as he takes on the role of Bedros, the missing son.

A solo violin, playing an elusive Armenian tune, counterpoints the framing of Peter in close-up, squeezed between Sonia and George, pushing himself into their lives. The slight, insinuating melody suggests that Peter is "recalling", perhaps experiencing internally, a fantasy recovered memory, of being Armenian, of being Bedros. For their part, as they drive him to their home, the couple easily convince themselves Peter is their son (though quite evidently he is not). To complete the sequence, Armenian music seeps into the next scene at the Deryans' family home, as they sit down to an expansive Armenian meal.

These episodes provide an illustration of the way Egoyan imaginatively addresses the existential question of identity which commonly troubles people living as a diaspora.[1] In this chapter, I examine the extensive cinematic response to this question and to the legacy of the genocide, regarded as the defining episode of Armenia's recent history. First, I consider the crisis of identity experienced by many in the diaspora and how the concept of a "diasporan nation" emerges. Then, I discuss how the expression of Armenian identity in the cinema ranged from denial for much of the first half century, through a resurgence of national consciousness from the mid-1960s, to deep introspection on the nature of that identity since the 1980s. Finally, I analyse the approach by some contemporary film-makers to representing the psychological impact of the genocide and its place in the collective memory of the Armenian diaspora.

A crisis of identity

In the sequence discussed above, Egoyan introduces ideas of displacement and cultural demarcation, not only through the narrative (Peter leaving home), or by employing typical sites of transition (airports, exit doors and hotel lobbies), but also through formal means. The knee-height opening shot, taken from the moving baggage conveyor belt, is followed by interleaved scenes from Peter's home life,

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[1] See, for example, discussion in Susan Pattie (1994), Pamela Smith (1986), and Ella Shohat (1995).

sessions at the therapy clinic, and more activity in the baggage hall, all accompanied by Peter's voice-over. The logical and temporal order of these scenes is not revealed until finally he collects his bags and we can piece together the story leading up to his departure from home. The enigmatic, fragmented style is then replaced with a linear series of scenes filmed with a hand-held camera and close framing. Egoyan thus employs a formal transition to denote displacement (in this case displacement from a disintegrating and "battle-scarred" home, but with the wider implication of displacement from a homeland) and the sharp cultural boundary between the Armenian community and their hosts. In his later films, and in those of Gariné Torossian and Tina Bastajian (discussed below), textural disjunctions of a more radical type achieve the quality of a signature.

Egoyan goes on to denote an instability of identity by the way Peter creates a dual personality, a fantasy of being two people. As his voice-over tells us, 'one part of you would always be the same like an audience – the other part would take on different roles – like an actor'. When he sloughs off one identity to assume another, the camera takes on the position of Peter watching himself, and the soundtrack becomes Peter listening to himself. But Egoyan takes the idea of instability further by showing the camera constantly in search of an authentic image, one that will pin Peter's identity. We see Peter through the lens of an omniscient observer, through a television camera in the family therapy studio, on monitors as the therapy session is edited, and in the uncertain hand-held camera that closely follows him into his new life. These varying views serve to demonstrate Peter's ambivalence. He withholds and reveals himself, but always *performs* his identity: variously that of "submissive son" to his real parents; confident "doctor" in the clinic where he views the Deryan tapes; the "lost Armenian child", Bedros; and "brother" to Azah, the Deryan's daughter. The instability of identity that Peter exhibits gradually shifts from what might be characterised as a condition of modernity to something that is more specifically associated with exilic dislocation in the Armenian diaspora.

Additionally, Egoyan expresses a diasporan fear of the erosion of ethnic identity by assimilation, through the tense relationship between George Deryan and Azah, which results in her leaving home. Azah, who is at least partially assimilated, refuses to conform to the patriarchal control exercised by George. By contrast, George, who is a carpet-seller, and Sonia, who is constantly preparing elaborate food,

are over-determinedly Armenian. Their home is filled with Armenian artefacts, rugs, symbolic alphabets, religious symbols, and music. They are part of a passionate and lively Armenian community, contrasted cruelly with Peter's anaemic Canadian home in two, parallel, birthday party sequences. In the first, a distant camera observes the empty and formal setting, casting a cold eye on Peter's embarrassment. The second is taken from Peter's point-of-view and is crowded, close-up, and noisy – the Deryans are presented as actively displaying their identity and trying to take Peter (and Azah) "back" into their world.

Concerns over displacement, instability, and assimilation, may manifest themselves in any community of exiles. But Egoyan also touches on a more specifically Armenian issue; the absence of one or more family members, especially a son, caused by some rupture in the past, and the effect that has on those who remain.

Lorne Shirinian has noted the frequent expressions of anxiety over continuity of the family and by extension of the race in Armenian literature. For example, he cites the image of a poppy used by poet Peter Balakian to represent Armenia. Seemingly fertile, full of pollen for the next generation, in fact it is sterile; it has lost its reproductive power.[2]   The traumatic effect of the

genocide on the Armenian diaspora thus appears as a figurative emasculation. In *Next of Kin*, Bedros was given up for adoption because the Deryans could not afford to

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[2] Balakian 'Reply From Wilderness Island' (1988) cited in Shirinian (1999:79-80).

look after him when they migrated, but he takes on a more general meaning. By taking in Peter, George retrieves his masculinity and can pass on his culture in the male line.

Shirinian also argues that because Armenians had been treated as an undifferentiated collective, one that would be eradicated to solve the "Armenian Question" in Turkey, survivors 'saw themselves as one large family in which [they] became brothers and sisters' (ibid.:80). We have already seen a manifestation of this in *Nahapet* denoted by the difficulty for Nahapet of forming relationships. A further surfacing of the phenomenon appears in the tension regarding putative incest (a recurring theme in Egoyan's films) between Peter and Azah. This tangential treatment of the trope of emasculation contrasts starkly with film about the Palestinians where, as we shall see, it assumes a more central role in the breakdown of the community under Israeli oppression (see Chapter 8).

Next of Kin was partly born out of the insecurity Egoyan himself felt on arrival in Toronto at the age of eighteen and his need to explore the Armenian identity which he had previously endeavoured to suppress (Naficy, 1997:190). He creates in Peter a palimpsest, seemingly devoid of identity, able to assume whatever role people project onto him. Though Peter is not Armenian, he is a diasporan "figure", re-creating the diasporan condition. He answers the question, 'Who am I?', with, 'I am what other people see of me'. He experiences displacement from home and makes the difficult transition across a cultural boundary. Uncertain of his identity, conflicted between the past and the future, he can only begin to feel at ease when, at the end of the film, he relinquishes his past.

The diasporan nation[3]

The rupture of dispersal is not new to the Armenian people; they have endured centuries of forced and voluntary migration. However, the greatest dispersals, occurring around the period of the genocide in Turkey, resulted in significant communities being formed in the Middle East, France, and North America.[4] These

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[3] My contextual discussion on the Armenian diaspora is mainly drawn from Panossian (1998) and (2000); Bournoutian (1994); Suny (1993a:chapter 13); and Hovannisian (2004:chapters 12 and 13).

[4] By the 1990s, there were approximately 3-3.5 million Armenians in the diaspora: 1.7 million in North America and Western Europe; 0.5 million in the Middle East; and 1.2 million in the former Soviet Union (Panossian, 1998:162 and note 26).

diverse and complex populations have held differing views, which have also changed over time, of what it means to be Armenian. Even within a single community, Armenians have seen themselves in a variety of ways: as 'immigrants, exiles, expatriates, refugees, part of an ethnic minority' or as citizens of their host country (Shirinian, 1992:3).

Thus, for the Armenian diaspora, questions about cultural identity are doubly difficult, not just because of the issues of assimilation raised by Suny and summarised in my conclusion to the previous chapter, but also because of the well recorded political, cultural, and religious divisions between the many different communities, and the intricate relationships with their respective hostlands, and Soviet Armenia. Given such dissonance, what is it that allows Panossian to argue that the different communities developed 'a collective consciousness', sufficient to form 'a *diasporic nation*' – a trans-state entity with a will to maintain and project its identity (1998:156-7 original emphasis)?

In any society, tensions frequently arise between conservative and progressive elements, but in the Armenian diaspora these have been exacerbated. Conservatives, concerned with preserving language and traditions, rehearsing collective memories of the homeland, and keeping alive the notion of return, have tended to keep separate from their hosts. Progressives, on the other hand, have worked to create cultural institutions, such as schools and community centres, and to construct a sense of identity within the wider host culture; to become "hyphenated Armenians". Panossian observes that these tensions in the Western diaspora, have caused the notion of 'Armenianness' to change, and that a 'unique diasporan identity' is being developed, based on a 'hybrid and hyphenated identity and on dual loyalties' encompassing both the hostland and the homeland (1998:162). He argues that, despite the differences, there is a powerful thread, a *subjective feeling* of being Armenian, that persists and binds the fragmented communities into a nation. Can we, then, detect Panossian's subjective feeling of being Armenian in the cinema of the diaspora? Does this cinema support the notion of an Armenian diasporan nation? And does it reflect changes in national consciousness that have occurred over time?

I will address these questions by considering three broad phases of film-making in the Armenian diaspora. The first period, which lasted some 50 years from the onset of the genocide, is characterised by virtual silence and suppression similar to

that in Soviet Armenia. The second, coincident with the commemoration in Yerevan in 1965 of the 50th anniversary, saw the release of a series of documentary and feature films that tried with varying degrees of success to re-awaken Armenian national consciousness and to confront denial of the genocide. Egoyan's *Next of Kin* in 1983 marks the beginning of a transition between these conventional cinematic treatments and a more considered and challenging approach to the question of Armenian identity and its survival in the diaspora that distinguishes the third period.

Repression and concealment (1915-65)

A common malaise in intellectual life at the beginning of the 20th century, brought on by a reaction to modernisation, is distinctively overlaid in the Armenian diaspora by the sense of abandonment, loss, and despair resulting from the Turkish attempt to exterminate the nation (Bedrosian, 1990/91:125). Among writers in English, this appears as a disposition towards mourning and an overriding sense of futility about the future, and for those writing in Armenian (most often first generation immigrants), as nostalgia for the lost homeland combined with a strong feeling of obligation to preserve language, culture, and traditions (Oshagan, 1981). Yet, despite its major influence, directly confronting the genocide appears to be extremely difficult; a state of mind summed up thus by poet Leonardo Alishan:

> We are caught in a yesterday that devours our today and denounces our tomorrow (quoted in Siraganian, 1997:133).

Many artists, faced with a similar paralysing effect, also seem to distance themselves from their recent history in nostalgia and symbolism (Nercessian, 1981:222-4). A few, however, attempted to make sense of the genocide – something Kristin Platt suggests is 'painting as a process of loss' (1995:440-43). Of these, Arshile Gorky, who became one of the most influential Armenian artists in North America, provides an important insight into the artistic response. His most significant early painting, *The Artist and His Mother* (1926-36), refers beyond the genocide to the

ancient art of Armenia in its simplified forms.[5] Yet it also carries memories of the trauma forward to the present day, as we shall see in Egoyan's *Ararat* and Torossian's *Garden in Khorkhom* (2004).

Furthermore, the fragmented forms of his later style, floating freely in space, seem to suggest the breakdown of boundaries – cultural, historical, and geographical. In this, they epitomise the diasporan condition and influenced a number of Armenian film-makers. For example, his painting, *How My Mother's Embroidered Apron Unfolds in My Life* (1944), inspired a film of the same name by Arby Ovanessian (1985), and his abstract, overlapping structures are discernible in the forms adopted by Torossian and Egoyan.

Gorky's abstraction provides an elusive vision of the past. But he also withheld critical information about himself, changed his name on arriving in New York in the 1920s, frequently misdated his paintings, and repeatedly lied to his friends about his life (Rand, 1981:1). It is as if he wished for his Armenian identity and his experiences as a survivor of the siege of Van to remain veiled.[6]

Cinematic response to the tragic history of the Armenian people by diasporan film-makers seems similarly to have been repressed at this time. For example, one of the most accomplished Armenian directors, Reuben Mamoulian, 'avoided revealing anything of his private life' (Spergel, 1993:1). Throughout his Hollywood career, typically in such films as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), *Song of Songs* (1933), and *Queen Christina* (1933), he seems obsessed with the idea of double identities; of his characters living a double life. Time after time he employs the mirror as a device to

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[5] For discussion of Gorky's life and work see Seitz (1972); Golding (1975); Rand (1981); Nercessian (1981); Jordan and Goldwater (1982); and Matossian (2001).

[6] Gorky was a child in Van at the time of the Turkish attacks in 1915. He survived and escaped to exile with his sister.

avoid a direct view of his ambiguous characters; offering tantalising glimpses of their internal thoughts (ibid.:139). This evasiveness seems to reflect Mamoulian's desire to hide any Armenian identity in his work.

However, Mamoulian's interest in Armenia and in Armenian culture was intense. He certainly saw a number of the early films from Soviet Armenia, including *Namous* and *Pepo* which he viewed in 1936. He apparently watched the latter 'with surprise and great joy', delighted 'to see the face of my country and hear its voice … the melody of the Armenian language, as sweet as honey' (Bakhchinyan, 2004:5). Mamoulian also considered making a film about David of Sassoun in Armenia but was prevented from entering the country by the authorities.[7] With such strong ties to his homeland, it is even more remarkable that he concealed all references to his identity in his work.

In France, a survivor of the massacres in Turkey, Henri Verneuil, began his directorial career in 1951 and went on to make many successful mainstream, commercial films over the next two to three decades. Like Gorky, Verneuil changed his name[8] and, in his work over this long period, he seems to have suppressed his Armenian identity and all references to the troubles faced by the Armenian people. It was not until 1991, at the end of his career, that he made two films, *Mayrig* and *588 rue Paradis* (discussed below), in which his Armenian identity is revealed.

In a parallel with Bek-Nazarov's attempts to preserve Armenian culture in Soviet Armenia, a few films were made in Armenian for the Armenian community in the U.S. The principal film-maker was another immigrant to America, Sétrag Vartian, who also started in the theatre, but, unlike Mamoulian and Verneuil, he made no secret of his origins (Kouymjian, 1989:2). His first film, a musical, *Archin Mal Alan* (1937), was based on one of his stage productions. He later completed a full-length film of the opera, *Anoush* (1945), and the drama-documentary, *The Life and Songs of Gomidas Vartabed* (1946). It appears these films were not distributed outside the Armenian community.

Though there were many significant literary and artistic contributions to the discourse on Armenian identity in the diaspora over the first half of the 20th century,

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[7] Interview with Artsvi Bakhchinyan, Yerevan, April 2005.

[8] Verneuil was born Achod Malakian in 1920 in Turkey.

the prevailing reaction to the horrors of the genocide was suppression (Alishan, 1985:48-50). Film-makers mirror the trauma and self-inflicted amnesia that affected Soviet Armenia, resulting in the absence not only of most references to the genocide but also of virtually all expression of Armenian political consciousness at this time.

A new awakening (1965-1980s)

Each diasporan community, of course, has its own history and particular characteristics ranging from the highly fragmented to the cohesive. At one extreme assimilation is widespread, at the other, motivation to retain national identity remains strong. In the U.S., first generation Armenian immigrants began conservatively, re-creating a cultural life complete with churches, newspapers, schools, cultural institutions, and political parties. But changes occurred quite quickly. The spoken language succumbed to pressure, especially among the children, and the written language also disappeared rapidly (Mirak, 2004:406-7). Thus, the second generation found themselves half-way between being Armenian and American. They faced a problem of identity. As Peroomian notes, they became ethnically schizophrenic – 'American 6 days a week and Armenian for a few hours on Sunday' (1993:139). Similar assimilation also occurred in other Western diaspora communities, whereas those in the Middle East largely retained strong links to their ethnic and religious origins. In this way, divisions arose between different Armenian communities.

The nationalist demonstrations in Yerevan in 1965 (see Chapter 3) inspired a resurgence of Armenian national feeling in the worldwide diaspora and a growing effort to force recognition of the genocide to the top of the agenda. The revival of national consciousness began to have some effect on film-makers in the diaspora. Documentaries and commercial feature films concerned with Armenian identity all became more evident. The story of the genocide, told from an Armenian perspective, resurfaced, and the existence of an Armenian people again started to register more distinctly with Western media.

Documenting history

One strand of diasporan film is plainly polemical and campaigning. It is exemplified by *Where Are My People?* (1967): the first in a series of documentaries produced by genocide survivor Michael J. Hagopian in the U.S. This opens with a "grand tour" of Armenian history that includes the legend of Noah's Ark beaching on

Mt. Ararat; the conversion to Christianity in 301 CE; the 'golden centuries' which saw the development of the written language and when literature, art, and architecture flourished; the hero Vartan losing the battle of Avarayr (15th century) but 'preserving the faith'; and the desperate decline under Moslem rule, until the 'final martyrdom' of the genocide.

Illustrated with maps of Armenia, extending from the Caspian to the Mediterranean, it re-constructs the myth of Armenia as an ancient territorial nation-state. Hagopian represents Armenians as a peaceful, rural people: happy 'maidens' dance, collect apricots, harvest grapes and produce wine – they are a people with a

'zest for life and happiness'. He then evokes affecting images of the perfidious, cruel, and vicious Turks. The beautiful maidens are swept off to serve in harems, and images of mutilated victims and sounds of human pain and violence are used to elicit emotional response to the massacres. The film, made in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the genocide, for the 'survivors of the great martyrdom', pleads with the older generation not to remain silent 'as new crimes are committed against humanity'.

In their analysis of this and other documentaries, Kassabian and Kazanjian (following Freud) make a useful distinction between *mourning*, which is a normal response to the trauma of loss of a loved one or object, something that may be overcome in time, and *melancholia* which is a pathological response. The latter, the result of ambivalence about the loved object, does not allow its loss to be resolved (1999:207-210). Taking the example of Theodore Bogosian's, *An Armenian Journey* (1988), they argue that it is the mythic nature of the Armenian homeland – the loved one in this case – that induces ambivalence and hence the melancholic response of

this film. This interpretation is supported by examination of *Where Are My People?* and several other Hagopian films, most of which display evidence of melancholia. By contrast, his last and most autobiographical film *Voices From the Lake: The Secret Genocide* (2000), could be classified as a work of mourning. In this, the lost object of love is no longer the abstract Armenian nation or the mythical homeland, it is his family and the people of his birthplace, Kharpert, and the surrounding area, who were massacred on the shores of Lake Goeljuk.[9] Here, Hagopian touches on the issue of how to relate private memories (the family mulberry tree) with abstract material such as diaries and photographs. In this there is a similarity with the very personal nature of loss we will encounter in Palestinian films such as *Ma'loul Celebrates Its Destruction* and *Haifa* (Masharawi, 1996), discussed in Chapter 8.

A number of other documentarists are also preoccupied with the genocide.[10] They often endorse a nationalist discourse on identity: affirming ancient Armenian ethnic origins, and evoking the unique language and religion, a glorious past, and a rich culture. Most of them are also historically reductive. They construct a generalized and idealized lost past, and at the same time homogenise the diaspora in an identity to be shared by all Armenians world-wide. Though it would be wrong to dismiss any of this work lightly, it may be faulted on two counts. First, many of the films make use of archival footage and stills that are often un-accredited and are open to interpretation; they offer a single point-of-view; they use witness stories affectively and without interrogation; and they provide only a partial narrative, one that often results in the creation of new myths. Thus, by presenting events selectively and emotionally they fail to give an entirely convincing historical account.

Secondly, in trying to construct a normative nation, the film-makers gloss over the complexity of diasporan society and effectively exclude many sectors of the population (Kassabian, 1998). For example, *Back to Ararat* (Holmquist, 1988), though applauded by one critic for 'validating' her existence as an Armenian in the diaspora, ultimately failed to answer her question, 'who is us?' (Avakian, 1998:62).

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[9] In 1915, Kharpert was a holding point for the deportation of Armenians from the surrounding towns and cities.

[10] These include *The Armenian Genocide 1894-1896, 1915-1919* (Ohanian, 1982); *An Armenian Journey* (Bogosian, 1988); *Back to Ararat* (Holmquist, 1988); *I Will Not Be Sad in This World* (Epperlein, 2002); *The Genocide in Me* (Artinian, 2006); *The Armenian Genocide* (Goldberg, 2006); and a series of other films by Hagopian.

More devastating, is the criticism of the territorial nationalism in these films. For Veeser, Armenians are a 'non-territorial nation', at home wherever they are and in no need of such nationalist propaganda (1998:55).

Though these documentaries contributed to keeping alive the story of the Armenian nation over this period, the majority are essentialising. They perpetuate a mythical account of ancient Armenian history that supports the notion of a territorial nation encompassing lands that were only periodically under Armenian control (Hewsen, 2001:7-12). At the same time they exploit the genocide and the need for restitution as unifying forces with which to construct a homogenous diasporan nation. If these films failed both to represent the complexity of Armenian identity in the diaspora and to relate the genocide authentically, has the dramatic form been more successful?

Dramatising history

There have been a few attempts by commercial feature film-makers to engage with the issue of Armenian identity and the recent history of the people. The earliest of these was the plan by MGM to make a major film of Franz Werfel's novel, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* (1934). This is a sweeping dramatisation of the history of Armenian communities in an area of southern Anatolia who resist the Turkish clearances on the mountains of Musa Dagh, and are put under siege for fifty-three days before being rescued by the French navy. The screen rights were acquired in 1934 and Mamoulian was approached to be the director (Minasian, 1985-6:69). The novel contains many scenes of Turkish atrocities and, apparently under intense diplomatic pressure from the Turkish government, MGM abandoned the project soon after (Welky, 2006). Thus, it was not until nearly 50 years later that an independent film-maker, Sarky Mouradian, who had previously directed a series of films in Armenian, completed the film, now called *Forty Days of Musa Dagh* (1982). Though his earlier work enjoyed popular success, this film falls well short of articulating the ideas of sacrifice and the national determination to survive that are embedded in the novel. It was generally regarded as a critical failure (Kouymjian, 1993:5).

Another film, made in the U.S., *Assignment Berlin* (Toukhanian, 1982), tells the story of the assassination in 1921 of Talaat Pasha, the Ottoman minister of the interior, accused with other Turkish leaders of planning and carrying out the genocide, and the subsequent trial and acquittal of the assassin. Again, it is a crude

representation of events and lacks any dramatic tension, even in the assassination sequence.

The collapse of Soviet power in the 1980s lessened the constraints on cinema in Armenia and seems to have provided the release necessary for film-makers elsewhere to open up the issue of the genocide. For example, Verneuil made two films in France, based on his autobiography, that attempt to articulate the Armenian experience. The first of these, *Mayrig*, covers familiar ground: ancient Armenian history, the genocide, and the plight of the exile. In contrast to the other feature films mentioned, Verneuil's evocation of history is poetic and symbolic: a sequence of iconic images of Armenia – Mt. Ararat, an ancient church, shepherds and their sheep, the grottoes of Christian ancestors, *khachkars*, and the sounds of a flute. With the absence of maps and references to specific territory, it is as if Verneuil is explaining the myths and memories that allowed him, 'for a long-time' to call himself Armenian 'without knowing where to find that land'.

He then continues with a compact description of the 'agony of a people': first, by a taut dramatisation of the assassination in Berlin of Talaat Pasha and the courtroom scenes that follow; and then by the story told by Apkar, one of the immigrants, of his survival of a massacre. Unlike Hagopian, it is difficult to detect any authorial commentary on these scenes. Filmed efficiently, and graphically rendering the cruelty and heartlessness of the perpetrators, Verneuil maintains a distance that seems to invite his audience to decide for themselves on the authenticity of the events. In this way, *Mayrig* avoids the pitfalls of an over-emotional nationalist discourse.

After Apkar tells his story, he is seen to limp away down an empty, cobbled street, following tramlines which converge into the distance – an image I read as suggesting that, however badly they have been mutilated, the future of the Armenian people is assured. This scene marks an important transition. From this point on Verneuil does not refer to the genocide again, concentrating instead on the classical immigrant story centred on the boy child,

Azad Zakarian. The penniless family suffers hardship and persecution after arriving in Marseille, but through sacrifice the second generation "makes good".

588 rue Paradis continues the story of the Zakarian family but now engages with tensions between the forces of assimilation and the desire to maintain a distinct identity. The obvious similarities between the character Azad and Verneuil – both trained as engineers and both changed their Armenian names to a more acceptable French name (Azad becomes Pierre Zakar) – is deliberately obscured. Azad is now a theatre director with a string of successful productions carrying such titles as 'The Stateless Person', referring to episodes in his past, whereas Verneuil became a film-director with an equally successful series of popular comedies and thrillers that ignored his past. The urge towards concealment is underscored in a flashback to Azad as a child, seeing a cinema hoarding for Mamoulian's *Queen Christina*. He proudly proclaims to his friend that Mamoulian is Armenian, but goes on to say he has not seen the film because he never goes to the cinema.

In a complex opening, Verneuil focuses on these tensions. Pierre (Azad) has just completed rehearsing a scene in the theatre that mirrors one from the film *Mayrig* where he (or Verneuil) dances with his mother. Pierre is then interviewed for television, sitting in the stalls of the theatre. During the course of the interview, filmed images and television images repeatedly displace each other. Verneuil uses this sequence – images of Pierre shifting from the centre to the margins and back – not only to suggest displacement but also the crossing of a cultural boundary between his Armenian and French identities.

The condition of being Armenian in the diaspora has elicited cinematic responses ranging over repression; a tendency to celebrate assimilation; or to celebrate Armenian identity through repetition of myths and traditions and, perhaps above all, by memorialising the genocide. Verneuil, who would appear to epitomize each of these responses, begins, however, to touch on the deeper question of what sustains identity in the diaspora. It is true that in his last two films he displays his

immeasurable pride in being Armenian, recalls memories of rupture and displacement from an idealised homeland, and recounts the sacrifice by one generation for the next and the fight for survival in an alien culture. But, in Pierre Zakar, Verneuil also appears to argue that one can be intensely Armenian and yet not a nationalist. The character seems to confirm Veeser's view of diasporan Armenians as being beyond nationalism: that while they see themselves as a nation or 'tribe', it is in 'a worldly, cosmopolitan, sophisticated way' (op.cit.:55).

For Veeser, the process of identifying with the nation is *merely* a reaction to the condition of being an otherwise anonymous part of international society. Does this imply that Panossian's 'subjective feeling' of being Armenian is nothing more than the need for a people to articulate their uniqueness in the face of globalisation? If so, why does the boundary between Armenian communities and their hosts often appear so sharply defined?

Pink Elephant (Madzounian and Babaian, 1988) provides one possible explanation. Set in Beirut in 1982, it uses the seemingly absurd premise of an Armenian theatre group rehearsing a play during the height of the Israeli bombardment, to debate the position of the diaspora in Lebanon. The actors argue it is the 'meaningless rituals of remembrance' that are responsible for reinforcing their identity and separating them from their hosts. Though not resolving this issue, *Pink Elephant* warns of the danger of isolation; reminding his audience of the fate of the Armenians with images of Mt. Ararat, and the Araxes streaming with blood.

Chickpeas (Bezjian, 1992) and *After Freedom* (Babaian, 2002), which follow these Lebanese Armenians as they migrate to California, furnish other explanations: the never-ending power of the church to evoke historical associations; racial

discrimination which reinforces their sense of alienation; and, above all, the stifling confines of the family which forces them to turn in on themselves. Here, there are strong echoes of the strong family ties observable in film from Soviet Armenia.

While all of these film-makers expose the instability and insecurity of identity induced by the diasporan condition, the underlying fears seem to require a more detailed exploration of the psychology of belonging and displacement.

Introspection and analysis (1980s to the present)

I started this chapter with Egoyan's *Next of Kin* which, I argue, marks a turning point between the literal and often polemical treatment of Armenian history and a more challenging approach to exploring Armenian identity. As we have seen, documentary and commercial feature films, with few exceptions, are selective: highlighting the dramatic, appealing to emotion rather than logic, and inventing that which they cannot reliably demonstrate. The artist, though, has an obligation not to be easily persuaded by nationalist rhetoric but to find a genuine "voice" in which to contribute to the memories that articulate the nation. Gorky, for example, believed 'man speaks most authentically when he does so *in his own speech*' (Rand, 1986-87:188). A number of Armenian film-makers, working in the diaspora over the last 20 years, have accepted this obligation, employing specific formal elements to examine the meaning of diasporan identity more systematically.

Recording and erasure

In his second film, *Family Viewing* (1987), Egoyan focuses on the formalism of recording and erasure, the fragility of the image, and its authenticity. It consists of a web of stories centred on a young man, Van, who lives with his non-Armenian father, Stan, and his father's lover, Sandra, in a modern block of flats in Toronto. Van's Armenian mother has disappeared some time in the past, and her mother, Armen, has been confined by Stan in a nursing home.

For sexual stimulation, Stan videos himself making love with Sandra while engaging in telephone sex with a young woman Aline. Van discovers these activities and also that Stan is recording over old tapes he made of Van as a child, playing with his mother and grandmother. The Armenian language, such a critical marker of identity in the diaspora, which these three use together, is challenged by Stan. Erasure

of these sounds and images seems to be necessary for Stan's sexual potency. Van replaces the tapes with blanks to preserve the only record of his Armenian childhood.

Hence, one undercurrent is the story of Armen who epitomises the first generation refugee, separated from her family by the callous Stan, and placed in a home. Van moves her to Aline's flat, then to a hotel, then disguises her and moves her to a women's hostel. In Armen's frequent displacement, she embodies the diasporan condition induced by rupture from her family and home. Armen also is constructed as an individual traumatised by the past: she is passive, unable to communicate, and has apparently repressed all her memories. She lives in a cocoon of television images of the natural world which affect her behaviour and which are her only "reality". Van tries to cure her trauma by showing her the family videos he has saved, but her reactions are ambiguous. At first she responds positively, but then she is tortured by her memories (illustrated in flashbacks taken from the videos). Later still, she cannot or will not watch further images of Van's mother literally in bondage to Stan's sexual desires. In this oblique but powerful way (with many similarities to *Nahapet*), Egoyan shows the difficulty for the survivor to come to terms with trauma or to give an account of her history.

Van's unnamed and silent mother represents the second generation immigrant in the diaspora, invisible and subject to, but part of, the dominant host culture. She is also displaced formally, only appearing on Stan's home movies. Van, himself, is the third generation whose links to his Armenian identity, in the form of family and language, have been severed by Stan. Like Peter in *Next of Kin*, Van has lived seemingly without concern for the past, a carelessness expressed by Egoyan shooting scenes of his home life with television cameras, and allowing Van to manipulate his own story, using a remote control to "rewind" and "replay" earlier scenes.

It is only through visiting his grandmother and his discovery of the video tapes, that Van begins to question his real identity. He starts to resist the assimilation forced on him by Stan. He tries to recover his past by "saving" Armen and preserving his heritage in the form of the videos he salvages from his father's destruction. Van's quest for self-discovery and recovery of his identity seems to be fulfilled by the end of the film.

However, Van is also guilty of creating false images of the past. In Aline's absence her mother dies. Van arranges for her burial, with a full graveyard ceremony by an Armenian priest, which he records on video. But the record is flawed – the sound does not quite work – and the burial is counterfeit.[11] When Van shows Aline the video, ironically filmed by Egoyan in a video store surrounded by boxes of the most lurid fiction films, she rejects this artefact of memory. She has no wish to preserve a false vision of the past. Instead, she clings to the real symbol, her mother's grave with its stone left unmarked, unmediated, by Van.

Stan's role is primarily to raise the spectre of assimilation and consequent erasure of Armenian identity. In the early videos he is positioned as trying to remove Van from the grasp of his mother and grandmother and to suppress his use of the language. In a later sequence, filmed through a window, where the pane acts as a barrier, Stan on one side and Van and his mother on the other, Stan insists Van comes over to his "side".

Aline and Van, in different ways, recover their individual identity and resist assimilation. In the final sequence, they come together with Armen and Van's mother in a women's refuge. Egoyan groups the four together in a master shot, cutting in clips from the videos, which in a sense may be taken as memories constructing the Armenian collective identity. But the question remains, can they maintain this fragile identity, set as they are on the fringes of the host society? This is a question Egoyan leaves unanswered, and to which he returns in his later films, especially *Calendar* (1993).

Partial disclosure

The difficulty of complete disclosure that seems to have infected Mamoulian, Verneuil, and Gorky, appears also to be a factor in the work of several contemporary

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[11] Van pretends it is Armen who died and was buried, so that he can secretly spirit her away from the home and out of Stan's clutches.

Armenian film-makers. For example, there is always something hidden or only partially revealed in Egoyan's films. The photographs of Bedros in the family album – images that contain the Deryan family's memories – are never seen; in *Family Viewing*, the opening sequence that uncovers Van and the television screen that will be the mediator of all his memories, is gradual and incomplete; the Photographer in *Calendar* is never visible in the landscape of his homeland.

In other instances of Egoyan's work critical scenes are absent altogether; scenes that by his own admission become more "visible" by virtue of their absence (Harcourt, 1995:11). For example, an explanation for the disappearance of Van's mother in *Family Viewing* is avoided, and in *Calendar*, the point at which the Translator discovers her affinity with the Driver (and thus with her homeland) is carefully elided.

This reticence is not confined to Egoyan. Tina Bastajian uses a mirror propped on a table to confine the image we see in *Pinched Cheeks and Slurs in a Language That Avoids Her* (1994).[12] A small white girl skips in and out of view; a black woman (perhaps an Ethiopian-Armenian) appears and disappears, seated at the table; and a group of chattering Armenians is never visible. Above the sounds of conversation in the background, the girl and the woman tell stories of exclusion from the community: the girl because she does not speak the language and the woman, who because of her colour, is an *otar*, an outsider.

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[12] The composition is based on photographer Florence Henri's *Self Portrait* (1928) in a mirror. http://dsc.gc.cuny.edu/part/part8/articles/davis.html (viewed December 2005).

Torossian's films, *The Girl From Moush* (1993) and *My Own Obsession* (1996), play with the idea of the elusiveness of memory. Torossian herself appears mysteriously against a background of iconic Armenian images, sometimes as a shadowy face superimposed like a ghost, sometimes as a disembodied figure moving across the frame. Her partial self-exposure seems to suggest an exploration of her relationship to her Armenian heritage, a way of imagining how she fits into this culture.

These film-makers represent the instability of Armenian identity in the diaspora through fragments of memory, hidden and partially revealed. This trope of incomplete disclosure results in a representation of memory that, like Gorky's later work, is abstract and expressionist.

Following Freud, Laura Marks notes that 'the most powerful memory fragments are those that encode an incident that remains inaccessible to conscious memory' (2000:86). Shocking or frightening personal events are often repeatedly recalled in a fragmentary fashion with suppression of the most painful experiences. Clearly the genocide remains the dominant episode in recent Armenian history and it is not unreasonable for Lisa Siraganian to relate this to Egoyan's fascination with partial disclosure (1997:127-8). However, unlike earlier directors such as Malyan in Soviet Armenia or Mamoulian in the diaspora, most recent Armenian film-makers, including Egoyan, have no direct experience of the genocide. Though undoubtedly they are greatly affected by the catastrophe, perhaps it is necessary to look for additional explanations for these frequently disjointed narratives.

Fissures in the record

It is here that Deleuze's analysis of the disjuncture between the visual and the verbal in cinema, which I introduced in Chapter 2, is helpful. As he argues, such breaks in the narrative open up an indeterminate state; a space between two worlds that suggest the possibility of different interpretations of reality. In Egoyan's work this has become a structural device: the dream form of *Next of Kin* where Peter's audio diary is frequently unrelated to the images we see, where a phrase is repeated in

a different context, or where the voice-over may anticipate an event from another sequence; the abstract form, such as the photographs of Bedros in *Next of Kin* or the inside of a chapel in *Calendar*, where images are discussed but never revealed; or the partial or damaged form embodied in the use of untranslated foreign language in *Calendar* or the silent grandmother in *Family Viewing*.

Similarly in Torossian's work visual and verbal elements rarely intersect. She creates a multi-layered narrative in *The Girl From Moush* where images that may be associated with Armenian identity – churches, architecture, the Armenian script and religious artefacts – are structured in a series of 'chapters' denoted by different musical forms, and are set against a soundtrack of untranslated Armenian poetry which then metamorphoses into an English text. Torossian also explores an archetypical interstice in *My Own Obsession* by having a set of cameras triggered by movement. As she tries to step from one "space" to another, she disappears and re-appears, evoking the notion of an existence between exile and "home".

An even more comprehensive set of disjunctions occurs in Bastajian's *Jagadakeer .... between the near and east* (2001). Several different, disembodied speech tracks weave in and out of the soundtrack: an oral history account of an Armenian woman survivor of the genocide; competitors in a radio quiz show devoted to 'Near East Trivia'; an Armenian voice-over, sometimes translated in sub-titles and sometimes not; and a Turkish voice-over translated in sub-titles. The material on the soundtrack is usually set in opposition to images that range from shots of the desert, a family group photograph, women in traditional Armenian costume, to belly dancers, and home movie footage of children playing games. Bastajian moves between different oral and visual representations of recent Armenian history, exposing the complex emotions of a people existing with the knowledge of loss. In a simple but effective sequence of children playing musical chairs, she expresses this fear of living in a world that, for them, is unstable.

Time past and time future

Just as the visual/verbal separation is prevalent in Armenian cinema from the diaspora, so too is the fragmentation and convolution of time. For example, there is the noticeable effect of denoting a separation between the continuous present (the life lived in the hostland) and a frozen past. As in Henryk Maylan's work, these diasporan film-makers frequently use the still image or photograph to represent the

past. In *Next of Kin*, photographs play a prominent part: not just the images of Bedros that constitute the family's memory of the past, but also the instant pictures of events involving Peter, taken to create a new set of memories.

Bastajian uses a group photograph of her family as a central element of *Jagadakeer ....* She animates the image by scanning it and focusing on individual faces, and re-constructs on the sound-track the moment at which it was made. Then, she "updates" the history contained in the photograph, projecting an image in negative to indicate that most of the family members were lost in the genocide. Finally, in a repeated sequence (sometimes shown in reverse), a woman in traditional Armenian costume receives the picture and passes it on to someone else out of the frame. She appears to be the custodian of this history, passing it from one generation to the next.

With *Family Viewing* and *Calendar*, Egoyan continues to develop the notion of the division of time, now with videotape representing a preserved past. The videos taken by Stan are a family history, and the separation of past and present is rather obvious. However, by *Calendar* this formal trope has become more complex. Video now represents the fragmented memories of a trip to the Armenian

homeland by an assimilated Canadian-Armenian. Images and sounds loaded with significance to a diasporan Armenian are pervasive: Mt Ararat, churches, the Armenian script, shepherds, a flock of sheep, voices on a radio, bells and songs. But personal memory constantly intrudes. The video is fast-forwarded or reversed as if the Photographer is searching for a particular image. Sometimes he questions the image, sometimes he lingers on the body of his wife, sometimes he painfully re-constructs her gradual estrangement from him. But always, the film suggests that time past is not permanent, memory is not immutable. Naficy likens this scrutiny of the image to a lover's scrutiny of letters, looking for a clue to the loved one's state of mind (2001:137).

While a concrete national history seems to be embedded in the stones of churches and temples that the Photographer is precisely recording for a calendar, their "meaning" has to be explained by the Armenian Driver, and "interpreted" by the Translator. Shepherds on the hills and a flock of sheep that endlessly passes by the car window seem to be an evocation of unchanging rural Armenian life, traditions that stretch back into the historical past, yet in the Photographer's memory these images denote the points at which he is alienated from his wife and from his "homeland". If collective memory defines a nation, the projection of canonical images of that nation, such as those of a calendar, can have, as Egoyan acknowledges, an 'overwhelming effect on the intensity of nationalism' (director's commentary on the DVD). But, by juxtaposing points at which these images are captured with the more immediate and personal memories recorded on video, Egoyan questions the relationship between the historical nation that is recalled by the images and modern diasporan Armenians represented by the Photographer.

Secondly, there is the "intrusion" of the past into the present: still or video images of events or people replace their actual "presence" in the film, and this has the effect of emphasising their "absence". Naficy observes a common feature of accented film-makers is the way one medium seems to '[take] up residence within another', just as the past haunts the present (2001:4).

We can see the development of this idea in Egoyan's work from its earliest manifestation as a photograph album in *Next of Kin*, through the videos in *Family*

Viewing, where Van's past directly confronts him. Here, a repeated sequence that also concludes the film, shows Van looking intently at a television screen where an image of Van, as a young boy, approaches him and stares uncertainly into his unknown future. Van present and Van past are joined by this impossible connection.

The past, captured on video, assumes even greater importance in *Calendar*. It nearly overwhelms the Photographer with its potent images as he tries to exorcise the trauma of his loss. By *Ararat*, the subject seems to require an even more definitive separation of the past from the present; the historical story of the defence of the city of Van and the genocide is told as a film-within-a-film. The actual, the story of a diasporan Armenian community living in Canada, is separated from but intimately bound up with the virtual, to an extent that, at times, they almost merge, as in the sequence cited at the beginning of Chapter 3.

Bastajian not only embeds photographs and still images in *Jagadakeer …*, which she animates to give them a new history, she also includes projected "home movies". The latter have the effect of "sediments", like grounds left in a cup of Armenian coffee, that have to be "read". The present in her film is subjugated to the past in a melancholic response to Armenian history. But this trope of weaving the past into the present is, perhaps, taken to its limit by Torossian in *The Girl From Moush*, where she pastes 8mm strips of film over a 16mm master. Here, the effect is complex. At first the stills provide routine images of Armenia: the landscape, a peasant, Mt. Ararat, a woman in traditional costume, portraits, a carpet design, and an ancient manuscript. Then, as if trying to relate herself to the culture of Armenia and to peer into the past, Torossian manipulates strips of the 8mm film that contain

architectural images, portraits of Paradjanov, musical instruments. Sometimes these slip out of synchronisation with the master frame, sometimes they dance in time to the music, sometimes they are filtered expressively.

Thus, we have seen in diasporan film the fragility of identity inflected by a fear of assimilation; disjointed narratives that may be related to the genocide; fissures and gaps that suggest an unstable relationship to the spaces of the host- and home-lands; and the division of time that indicates a questioning of memory. Indeed, the approach to memory in the works by Bastajian and Torossian is almost obsessive. The virtual and the actual merge. In Torossian's words 'wherever I go … I am always an Armenian'. By contrast, I would argue, however fascinated Egoyan is with representations of the past, he emphasises the importance of living in the present; of rejecting "frozen images" of the past. And, as we shall see, he questions the integrity of this type of imagery in his later films.

Remembering and forgetting

I have already referred to Renan's idea of the nation as a set of memories that constitute a narrative of the past, held somehow in common, and perpetuated into the present by various means – the "collective memory". If we admit this concept, then we must be aware that these memories may be contested; people may see things in different ways deliberately or unconsciously. And, since the collective memory has to be preserved over time, maybe over long spans of time, who do we entrust to decide what is retained and what is left out as memory is passed forward? Which memories do we take as representing the nation?

Thus far, I have shown how some diasporan Armenian film-makers instinctively propagate only certain aspects of the national narrative. The majority of documentarists and many feature film-makers fall into this category. Others challenge the truthfulness of the collective memory and question how it is transmitted. For example, we have seen the process of selective recollection revealed in *588 rue Paradis*, an ambiguous and partial disclosure of truth in *Family Viewing*, and the different truths contained in the same event, according to the manner of its viewing, in *Pinched Cheeks* …. The mutability of memory and the distorting effects of its mediation are central concerns of Egoyan's early works. He, in particular, is

concerned with the problems of 'transmission errors'; how memories may be deformed as they are passed on from one generation to the next (Porton, 1997:8).

However, there is also an ethical and moral dimension to the preservation of memory. Margalit recalls his parents' argument about how the Holocaust should be remembered. His mother suggested the remaining Jews should form 'communities of memory' in honour of the dead, whereas his father insisted that this would repeat the 'terrible mistake' of the Armenians – to live 'just for the sake of retaining the memory of the dead'. Better, he said, to think about the future and not become a community 'governed from mass graves' (2002:viii-ix). Margalit goes on to argue that those who are involved in the transmission of memory, who tell stories of the past, have a moral duty to consider what they do and how they do it (ibid.:104-6).

Those who have been traumatised – who exhibit a pathological response to trauma – seem incapable of separating the need to preserve memories of the past from the need for renewal and healing. Some though, such as Malyan with *Nahapet*, Verneuil in his last films, and Bastajian with *Jagadakeer ...*, find ways of using film to show how to work through trauma to a resolution. Malyan's explicit shots of murder and rape, shown in flash-back, and the image of the assassination of Armenians, symbolised by apple-trees, perpetuate the story of the genocide. But rather than calling for retribution, he suggests a new beginning is possible. Verneuil's final images of his mother installed in '588 rue Paradis', the house and garden replicating her former life in Armenia, seem to argue for a kind of acceptance. His Armenians will survive and their culture will be maintained even though forced into exile. Bastajian has a more mixed message. *Jagadakeer ...* keeps the trauma in the present through the quiz show and oral histories that talk of extermination, forced exile, and the denial of genocide. Her metaphor of musical chairs, with its accompanying text 'if you see an empty chair in your dream you will never be content wherever you are', seems to preclude healing. Even the pre-genocide family photograph, with its implication of inestimable loss, is the memory she seems to want passed from one generation to the next. Yet, there is a form of apology for 'this calamity, this crime', delivered in Turkish, that hints at potential reconciliation.

However, Egoyan remains the Armenian film-maker most troubled by the ethics of the representation of memory. In his second decade of film-making, that includes *Calendar* and *Ararat*, he deals with the diasporan condition, identity, the

trauma of loss, and our access to the past. It has been noted elsewhere that the three main characters of *Calendar* represent three aspects of Armenian identity: the Driver, an Armenian living in Armenia; the Photographer, a second-generation, assimilated Canadian-Armenian; and the Translator, his wife, a first-generation, Armenian-speaking Canadian-Armenian. The couple are both visiting the country for the first time after the end of Soviet rule. Through the central character of the Photographer – it is his point-of-view that we most often see – Egoyan explores the relationship of a diasporan Armenian to the newly available homeland. This relationship is uncertain: the Photographer lacks understanding about what he observes; he has no 'natural' feeling for the land and its history; he is alienated and retreats behind the comforting barrier of his camera. We are given to understand that he suffers the loss of his wife, not only to the other man but also to this foreign country.

Told retrospectively, *Calendar* proceeds programmatically to show how, by working through his personal memories in a series of meetings with women from an escort agency, piecing together the events that led to this rupture, the Photographer comes to comprehend his grief. Fixed photographic images from a calendar that punctuate the scenes correspond not only to real places and real things in Armenian history, but also to places where events occur in the lives of the fictional characters. The film of the Photographer, making images of real places that are part of Armenian historical memory, is interleaved with film of "false" events, denoted by the different escorts (false relationships), performing an erotic service (the falsity of pornography), in languages he doesn't understand. As he creates the true images, the Driver provides him with a history, a set of stories about each place, mediated through the Translator. These stories intrude upon the simple reality of the place and the Photographer is always trying to suppress them.

The false events are also interspersed with "memories", captured on video tape, that may or may not be true. Some are typical diasporan views of the homeland – churches, Mt. Ararat, *khachkars*, the rural idyll – some are more personal reactions

to what he observes. He focuses on the body of his wife in the countryside, notes how she becomes closer to the Driver (their shadows cross, they sing together), and shows her becoming more distant and torn between himself and the Driver. The Photographer is able to relinquish his need for myths and lies when he finally uncovers the truth of his own complicity in the loss of his wife and their eventual separation.

Margalit argues that the personal use of 'remember' is akin to 'know', whereas the collective use is closer to 'believe' (op.cit.:59). Egoyan shows that personal memories can be manipulated, reversed, replayed, and suppressed: in *Calendar* it is only when the Photographer confronts his loss, that the memories fall into place and he can be reconciled; it is only then that he 'knows' what really happened. But Egoyan also demonstrates that collective memories may also be unreliable. The images of historical ruins set in their physical context, which should gain additional authenticity by being displayed in a calendar, one of the canonical forms for conveying belief in a common history, are also carefully constructed, lit, and framed. Thus, Egoyan argues, 'all that's bound to protect us', (that is, all that's bound to protect Armenian identity in the diaspora) is 'bound to isolate' Armenians and is 'bound to hurt'. These explorations of the nature of memory seem to be a call, not to relinquish Armenian identity, but neither to let it become a barrier to their future.

Nearly a decade later, Egoyan released *Ararat* (2002), a film that also has excited much critical and academic attention,[13] and in which he has continued to elaborate his formal and thematic concerns with identity and memory (Egoyan, 2002:vii-xii). The fragmented stories, disjointed image and sound, non-linear time sequences, and variety of media, that are characteristic of his previous essays, serve their purpose in depicting the main protagonists' search for truth about themselves and their pasts. But, central to this work is an exploration of the *ethical* issue of the transmission of collective memory, in particular memory of massacres and the genocide, which Egoyan chooses to do through two artfully linked stories: "his" film, and a film-within-the-film, both called *Ararat*.

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[13] See, for example, Ciment (2002) Masson (2002), Laçiner (2002), Kristensen (2003), Romney (2002), Mazierska-Kerr (2000), and Afeyan (2002)

The elements of his method are carefully laid out in the opening sequence. The camera focuses, and lingers, on a coat button hanging by a thread from a pin on a wall, then tracks slowly across an old, torn, black-and-white photograph of a boy standing next to a seated woman, and on to an image of the photo, transferred in pencil onto squared paper. The title in Armenian flows into the English *Ararat* (a hint at the "interpretations" we will witness). Still tracking, the lens picks out a model carved *khachkar*, brushes, oils and paints, before settling momentarily on different painted versions of the sketch.

Finally, we see the back of a man's head, to the right of the frame, staring out of a misted window. A blur of moving shapes resolves slowly into people walking through an airport lobby and then a matching shot of the character, Edward Saroyan, in full face to the left of the frame. The two could be staring at each other across time.

The meaning of the sequence is only slowly revealed, though we learn quite quickly that the artist is Gorky and the photograph is the basis of *The Artist and His*

Mother. However, the notion of transfer and multiple mediations of memory is deeply embedded in the opening.

An event (the photographic sitting in Van around 1912) has been transformed into an image on paper by a camera, then into a large sketch using squared paper and pencil, then into different representations with brushes and paint, and finally into the recreation of Gorky's studio in Egoyan's film. The collage, behind the artist as he stares out of the window, is a complex representation of his memory of loss transformed into art. On the other hand, Saroyan, whom we learn later is a film-director visiting Canada to make an epic film about the defence of Van, is framed by highly symbolic representations of Armenia – Mt. Ararat and the pomegranate. Thus, we are introduced to Egoyan's way of representing memory and Saroyan's; linked not only by the suture across the opening scenes, but also by the figure of Gorky, and the button that appears prominently in both films, and ends the latter.

Saroyan and Rouben, his writer, make much of the 'truth' of their story. Perhaps in a reference to *Mayrig*, Saroyan claims the film is his mother's story and reproduces everything she told him, while Rouben asserts that his script is the result of 'five years research'; that every scene is based on the contemporary journals of Clarence Ussher. Yet, they are both unashamed to distort the truth, to use 'poetic licence', to exaggerate young Gorky's role in the defence of Van, and to imply at least that he took part in the death march after withdrawal. Saroyan's motivation becomes clear halfway through shooting, when he explains:

> Do you know what causes so much pain? Not the people we lost, not the land, but to know we could be so hated. Who *are* these people who could hate us so much? How can they still deny their hatred … and so hate us even more?

For him, it is not so much truth that matters as a representation of this hatred and a challenge to the denial of the genocide. His version of the truth, rendered in vivid colour and appalling detail, leaves no room for doubt, no space for detachment, and no scope for reconciliation.

Where Saroyan's film is a one-dimensional recreation (as far as we are allowed to view it) of events at Van and the massacre of refugees, Egoyan's is a multi-layered inquiry into the transmission of memory, told mainly through the historic character of the adult Gorky, and the fictional characters of an Armenian art-

historian, Ani,[14] her son, Raffi, and her step-daughter (and Raffi's lover) Celia. A series of scenes links Gorky and his painting to the fictional characters and to Saroyan's film.

First, Egoyan creates a highly-charged vision of Gorky's studio through close framing and misty filtering. As the artist reverently paints the face of his mother, Armenia is recalled on the soundtrack, and the camera tracks in to the photograph that is his model. There is a cut to Saroyan's film, where young Gorky and his mother walk through what is plainly a studio set of Van and pose together for a photographer. Another cut takes us to a hall where Ani is giving a lecture, next to the projected image of the photograph. This sequence, containing three changes of time and space, from 1930s New York, to 1912 Van, to the present day in Toronto, raises questions of interpretation. Egoyan interprets Gorky interpreting the photograph, the taking of which is interpreted by Saroyan. Finally, the photograph is interpreted by the art historian: the flowers the young Gorky holds are 'a fragrant gift to his absent father'; he is 'prematurely solemn'; and his mother, Shushan, 'looks bravely at the camera, challenging her absent husband'.

Celia, in the audience, contests Ani's speculative explanation, arguing she is confusing history with her personal story. After a pause for thought, Ani continues her lecture with a slide of the painting which she emphasises is not just a reproduction but a 'work of art' with which 'Gorky had saved his mother from oblivion – snatching her out of a pile of corpses to place her on a pedestal of life'. Back in his studio, Gorky stands back from his painting and picks up the button, an action that takes us back to the photographer. The button missing from young Gorky's coat causes them to pose for a second photo.

Egoyan presents us with an animation of the circumstances of the taking of a photograph, something we have seen earlier in Bastajian's *Jagadakeer* …. In that film, it is designed to give a new "history" to an evocative artefact. Here, it stands in as a critique of the type of film Saroyan is making – heartfelt, but "crippled" by memories passed on to him by his mother. Egoyan contrasts this with "his own" animation of the circumstances of making the painting, which he continues in a

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[14] The character Ani, and the film *Ararat*, take some inspiration from Nouritza Matossian and her book *Black Angel* (2001).

subsequent scene where Gorky, in a highly emotional state, erases the hands of his mother. Though this is also a speculative interpretation,[15] by its very indirection, it says more about the pain of loss and the horror of the genocide than all of Saroyan's film. Egoyan seems to argue that this work of art, like the genocide memorial in Yerevan, is a way of remembering *and* forgetting.

Torossian uses the Gorky studio scenes from *Ararat* in her film, *Garden in Khorkhom*, together with readings from his letters and Matossian's book, to recreate this 'sinew of identity' between his painting and ancient Armenian history. A similar form of resolution is achieved by Raffi, returning from a secret visit to film in Eastern Anatolia. He tries to explain his confused feelings over the fate of the Armenian people:

> When I see these places, I realise how much we've lost, not just the land, and the lives, but the loss of any way to remember it – there is nothing here to prove that anything ever happened.

It is then he discovers, among the images he has brought back, carvings from the monastery at Aghtamar of a Madonna and child and makes a link to Gorky's painting. Finally, he understands the lineage from ancient Armenian religious carvings, to the photograph, to the sketch, to the painting. The truth embodied in Gorky's art is revealed, apparently allowing Raffi to put aside the painful history knowing it will never be forgotten. Egoyan seems to suggest there is a way to remember the past without being incapacitated by those memories.

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[15] Gorky frequently left the hands unfinished or unresolved in his paintings (including a self-portrait, c.1937). Some art historians argue this was an indirect reference to his uncertainty as an artist, others to his desire not to finish a painting completely. I have not found any references to deliberate erasure as suggested by this film.

Conclusions

When Renan argued that national memory – the collective memory – is at the heart of national identity, he was, of course, writing in the context of the nation-state. He had in mind a canonical memorialisation of the past embedded in monuments, flags, national heroes, histories, and so on. Contemporary Armenian diaspora communities have organised themselves similarly in a trans-state context, that is, they try to preserve common language, religion, and traditions, but separate from those of their respective hosts. They have idealised the homeland as a 'paradise', and their 'ancient kingdom' (Pattie, 2005:54-61). In these circumstances it is more appropriate to think in terms of what Margalit calls, 'communities of memory' (akin to Panossian's 'diasporan nation') rather than nation-states.

The previous chapter showed that cinema was instrumental in preserving Armenian identity within the Soviet Armenian state, and I argued that it was a "cinema of survival". This chapter has focused on cinema in the Armenian diaspora; a cinema which operates across state boundaries, and which finds an audience wherever there are Armenians. I have concentrated on the way this cinema, by accentuating the glory and importance of ancient Armenian culture, contributes to the formation of an Armenian community of memory. In particular, the use of language, religious symbols, and architecture attest to the long duration of Armenian identity. However, film-makers remain vaguely uneasy in the knowledge that the ancient culture is essentially irretrievable and unsustainable; the identity they are searching for has increasingly become symbolic.

I have also argued that the documentaries and many of the feature films examined tend to convey a homogenous Armenian identity. Their representations of the homeland are flecked with ambiguity given the possibility that homeland might have different meanings for different parts of the community. The question, Where is my homeland?, is never addressed satisfactorily. Much of contemporary art cinema, on the other hand, challenges the concept of a fixed, unchangeable Armenian identity. It has tried to avoid the calcification of old ideas and old symbols in addressing the question, Who am I? Instead, the work of Egoyan, and to a lesser extent, Bastajian and Torossian, is filled with notions of rupture and displacement, instability, and fear of the erosion of identity. They have all exploited the use of different media to explore the relationship between false and true representations of events. Egoyan

features video as a mutable and fragile record of the past, something that can be altered or overlaid with false images as in *Family Viewing*, or that exposes what he calls 'the selective process of memory', as in *Calendar* (Desbarats, 1993:22). Torossian and Bastajian, in addition to Egoyan, highlight mediation of the narrative. Film-within-film, superimposed film, video, home movies, and still images provide a questioning counterpoint to their examinations of memory and identity.

Above all these concerns, however, the genocide and its associated repression and denial, shape much of the diasporan cinema. There is a sense of timelessness, almost the paralysis of trauma, where past events continue to infect the present. The psychological problems induced by the attempted extermination of the Armenian people reinforces cultural boundaries with outside communities, and the difficulty of crossing these boundaries is a repeated trope. But Egoyan, in concluding, seems to have noted the danger raised by Margalit of living always in memory of the dead. Tentatively, in *Calendar* and then more forcefully in *Ararat*, he advocates constructing a memorial to take the burden of remembering. Not to forget, but to forgive, is the way to create a new national narrative that avoids always looking to the past.

The autobiographical element of cinema in the Armenian diaspora would seem to confirm Naficy's claim that this is a natural outcome of displacement (2001:34). As we have seen, it is a thread that connects Verneuil, Mamoulian, and Hagopian with Egoyan, Torossian, and Bastajian. However, his attribution of Egoyan's accented style to exile and liminality, and his determination to seek commonality with a number of Kurdish and Palestinian film-makers is, perhaps, stretching the concept too far. In my analysis, the majority of these Armenian works are textured more by the continuing scar of the genocide, and the needs of film-makers to explore and understand their identity in a post-national context, than by the condition of 'exile'. Whereas, in the Palestinian case, the accent is on the real and present issue of continued existence in the face of ethnic cleansing and cultural erasure. And the focus in the Kurdish case, which is the subject of the next two chapters, is the division of the nation and the homeland among different and competing states.

Kurdistan
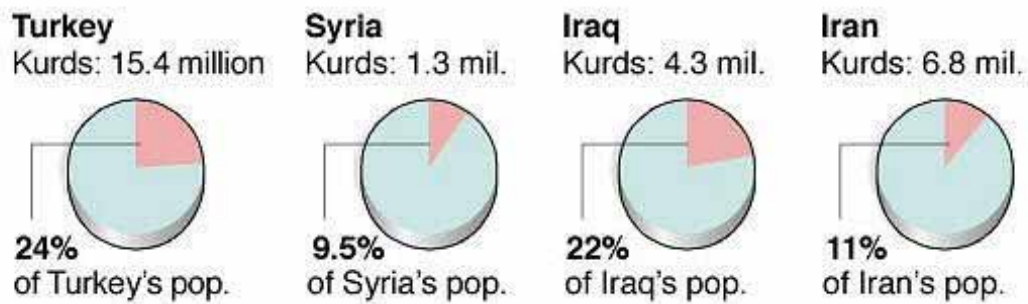
Map 2: The distribution of Kurdish peoples (Izady, 1992)

Anatolia

Map 3: Cinematic journeys through Anatolia

Chapter 5
The Kurds – A Divided People

It is *Newroz*, the spring equinox, when victory of the forces of Light and Good over those of Darkness and Evil is celebrated by Kurds around the world. An old man begins to narrate the fable of Mem, 'a handsome young man', and Zîn, 'the beautiful sister of a great *emir*'. The scene changes to a lively, colourful, market where Mem and his friend Tajdîn meet Zîn and her sister Siti. The couples promptly fall in love – denoted by an exchange of rings – before the women disappear into their palace. Later, in the court, Tajdîn uses his political influence to marry Siti and hopes that Mem will then be able to marry Zîn. But Bakir, an advisor, intervenes, accusing Tajdîn and Mem of wanting to overthrow the *emir*. As proof, he shows that they are trying to arrange for Mem's marriage to Zîn in secret. Mem is thrown in jail where he languishes, becoming weak and sick for love. Zîn, confined to the palace, also suffers and begins to waste away. Under pressure from Tajdîn and his allies, the *emir* relents. But, it is too late, the lovers are dead, only to be symbolically liberated and re-united in death.

The film, *Mem û Zîn* (Elçi, 1991), is stylised and over-wrought – full of longing and tender glances, passionate gestures, the strong colours of traditional costumes, and ethnic Kurdish music. Though unexceptional cinematically, its significance lies in the fact that it is based on the epic poem of the 17th century Kurdish poet Ahmed-i Khani,[1] which remains crucial for present-day Kurdish nationalists (Koivunen, 2002:125).

Certainly *Mem û Zîn* asserts the valour and honour of the Kurdish people through the performances of Mem and Tajdîn, and refers in the narrative, gestures, and dances, to a "golden age" of chivalry. As in early Armenian films, the nation is depicted as founded on a healthy, vigorous folk-culture. And Zîn may be interpreted as another manifestation of the familiar trope of the female form representing the

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[1] Commentary on the poem and the later extracts are derived principally from Shakely (1992), van Bruinessen (2003), Stroheimer (2003), and Özoğlu (2004).

nation (though not as obviously as Susanna and Kekel discussed in Chapter 3). But more than this, the separation of Mem and Zîn is an allegory for the division of the Kurds. A division that is caused, moreover, by the "enemy within" – Bakir is also a Kurd. It implicates such rivalries and internal differences for the failure of the nation to cohere and for its continued subjugation.

I have started with *Mem û Zîn* since it is frequently cited as being the first wholly Kurdish film. *Siyabend û Xecê* (Gök, 1993), which appeared shortly afterwards, and is based on a folk-tale (also centred on internal rivalries), is referred to as the first film to be shot in Kurdistan.[2] Both films have appeared at international film festivals and, despite many technical faults, have been well received by audiences in the Kurdish diaspora.[3] The remainder of this chapter examines the beginnings of the enunciation of a separate Kurdish identity in the cinema, leading up to the 1980s and *Mem û Zîn*. The majority of the films concern the Kurdish community in Turkey since that is principally where important cinematic activity occurred in this period. The next chapter analyses films since the 1980s both within the states that host a Kurdish minority, as well as those emerging from the diaspora in which the issue of a trans-state or unified identity is questioned. But first, I want to reflect on the development of Kurdish national consciousness within the modern system of states.

Kurdish national consciousness

Khani laments the condition of his people and appears to call for the formation of a Kurdish kingdom, united under a single leader:

> If we had a king …
> These Turks would not defeat us …
> We would not become doomed, homeless,
> Defeated and subjugated …

In Khani's time, while most Kurds certainly would have possessed an awareness of their identity as separate from surrounding Turks, Persians, and Arabs, the concept of a Kurdish national consciousness would not have been understood. Kurds were divided not only between Empires, but also by the mountainous geography of their region, their language (in two major variants, *Kurmanji* and

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[2] It was shot in Iraqi Kurdistan whereas *Mem û Zîn* was shot in Turkey.

[3] Personal communication with Mustafa Gundogdu, curator of the Kurdish Film Festival in London, February 2006.

Sorani), written scripts, religion, and social structures, all of which naturally run counter to the formation of a unified identity.[4] Thus, though some nationalists argue that Khani was the first to advocate the principle of Kurdish self-determination, his work would have circulated only among a few intellectuals and his influence would have been quite limited (van Bruinessen, 2003:46-50). Religious affiliations and allegiances to tribal dynasties would almost certainly have assumed much greater significance for the mass of the people. Nonetheless, *Mem û Zîn*, in its printed and other forms, has played an important role as a national symbol at critical periods in the modern history of the Kurds throughout the region (Shakely, 1992:89-94).

Kurdish claims to be a nation started in earnest with the decline of the Ottoman empire in the late 19th century (Barkey and Fuller, 1998:8). Bearing out Benedict Anderson's analysis, printed media were crucial to the articulation of a Kurdish identity among the intelligentsia (Strohmeier, 2003:200). Various printings of *Mem û Zîn* over the first decades of the 20th century, turned it into a symbol of historical significance for the Kurdish people (Gerdi, 1997). They also contributed to the effort to demonstrate to the world that the Kurdish language was capable of becoming a national language and that the Kurds were a distinct nation deserving of a state (Klein, 2000:11). This process of awakening interest among an elite in an identity based on a purported "common" language and culture, as opposed to religious and tribal allegiances, corresponds with the first stage of Hroch's model, discussed earlier, of the successful development of a national movement.

However, if Khani was confident about Kurdish identity, the situation was not so encouraging at the beginning of the 20th century.

The Kurdish "problem"

The Lausanne Treaty of 1923 dashed nationalist hopes and led to an even more fundamental division of the Kurds that persists to this day (see map on page 109). The bulk of the population was divided between Iran and the newly formed states of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, and smaller populations were included in southern Republics of the USSR. The map also shows the approximate distribution of the main

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[4] For a discussion on language and scripts see Hassanpour (1989), for religious divisions see Barkey and Fuller (1998:69), and for social structures see O'Shea (2004).

Kurdish communities as at 1992,[5] and illustrates the extent of the "problem" that Kurdish minorities represents for the cultural homogeneity of each state.

A detailed description of the complex geo-political events of the region since the 1920s is available from many sources,[6] and will not be repeated here. It is sufficient to note that as each state has accrued power to its centre, it has sought to resolve the issue of its Kurdish minority in a largely similar way through denial of their existence and suppression of their culture. Other policies, such as 'compulsive general education [in the language of the state], general conscription into the army … and state-controlled radio and press' also have been employed in the process of "nation-building" (van Bruinessen, 1998:40).

In the face of such extreme pressures, what has been the role of cultural products –particularly the cinema – in conveying and sustaining Kurdish identity? I have divided this discussion into three sections which broadly correspond with major stages in Kurdish political and cultural development in the last century. The first period (1920s to the 1960s) may be categorised as one of revolt followed by severe repression. The isolation of the majority of Kurds living in mountainous areas enabled some cohesion to be maintained among the rural population, but the continued existence of a distinct Kurdish literary culture came under serious threat. That it managed to survive is due in part to the printing and publishing efforts of a number of intellectuals in urban centres.[7] Cinema, however, was almost non-existent in the Kurdish regions over this time and had negligible influence on these urban nationalist movements.

The second period, from the 1960s, saw increased urbanisation and mobility among rural Kurds. Kurdish cultural activity developed only fitfully in Iran and Iraq, and remained strictly limited in Syria. However, in Turkey there were two crucial developments. With migration from the country to the cities, it became more difficult for the state to ignore ethnic diversity. Rural life intruded on the urban first in the

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[5] Population statistics on the Kurds are notoriously difficult to obtain and are disputed by the major states. McDowall's figures for 1996 (2004:3-4) correspond quite closely with Izady's on the map.

[6] The most comprehensive general source is McDowall (2004). On Iran, see Houston (2001), Olson (1998) and Vali (1995); on Iraq, Olson (2004); and on Syria, Lowe (2005) and Montgomery (2005).

[7] For reflections on the development of Kurdish literature over these periods see (Blau, 1984) and (Hassanpour, 1996), and for a wider discussion of cultural development see (van Bruinessen, 1998:39).

shape of *arabesk*, a music and dance form that became immensely popular in Turkish cities and whose foundation was in Arab and Kurdish culture. Then, the poverty, illiteracy, and poor health of the migrants came sharply to the attention of intellectuals and activists in the 1960s and 1970s. Influenced by Marxist ideology, many began to see 'the roots of the Kurdish problem in class conflict' (Özoğlu, 2004:127). Among these were film-makers Lütfi Akad, Metin Erksan, and, most importantly, Yilmaz Güney.

A turning-point occurred in Turkey in the 1980s as it became apparent that the Kurdish problem was not just a manifestation of class conflict (ibid.:157 n10). This third period also signalled a more fundamental change in worldwide perception of the Kurds. The news media carried more stories of events affecting the Kurds in each state. There was a rapid development of Kurdish language radio broadcasting and some television broadcasting. Turkish and Iranian film-makers became more aware of the Kurds and dealt with Kurdish issues in their films. A number of Kurdish film-makers in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey made films specifically on Kurdish themes. Various international documentary film-makers addressed events such as attacks on Kurdish communities in Iraq and Iran, forced migration, and refugee problems. And a strong diasporan community of Kurds began to assert their identity, using film as an important weapon in their cultural armoury.

In Chapter 6, I examine these wider developments in cinema; here I want to consider the initial suppression and the subsequent resurgence of national consciousness among the Kurds up to the 1980s.

Suppression (1920s-1960s)

Sporadic revolts by various Kurdish tribal leaders between the two World Wars failed to cohere into a movement capable of articulating the larger aims of the nation (van Bruinessen, 1998:39). In part, this was due to the effectiveness of the assimilationist strategies of each state, and in part to manipulation of Kurdish groups by those states (and the Great Powers) as they wrestled for control in the region (Barkey and Fuller, 1998; Olson, 1998). Other factors at work were religious divisions which crucially weakened Kurdish identity, and the continuing lack of political unity among Kurds that Khani recognized centuries earlier when he wrote:

> If only there were harmony among us,
> If we were to obey a single one of us,

> He would reduce to vassalage
> Turks, Arabs and Persians, all of them …

Porous state boundaries failed to prevent intermingling among the Kurdish populations, however they began to drift away from each other over the next few decades. Opportunities for work, reading materials, education, and popular entertainment, mostly came from their respective states, ensuring that a proportion more closely identified with their Turkish, Persian, or Arab "hosts" (van Bruinessen, 1998:40).

Paradoxically, the policy of assimilation had a converse effect on some Kurds in that it sharpened their sense of Kurdish identity. Though the suppression of language (at least in urban areas) was almost completely successful in Turkey and Iran, a reasonably flourishing Kurdish literature developed in Syria (up to the mid-1940s) and Iraq (Blau, 1996:22-24). For example, a *Sorani* translation of *Mem û Zîn* had an 'enormous impact' on the development of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq (van Bruinessen, 2003:53), while also spreading the influence of the sentiments to the largely *Sorani* speaking Kurds of Iran (Ghassemlou, 1993:98).

However, for wide swathes of the Kurdish population there was little access to Kurdish-language mass media. Even when the publication of newspapers and journals was possible, their circulation was restricted mainly to urban areas; Kurdish radio broadcasting was forbidden in Iran and Turkey, and only a very limited amount was allowed in Iraq and Syria (Chaliand and Pallis, 1993:71-79); and Kurdish-language cinema was non-existent in this period (Hassanpour, 1996:79).

Russian and Armenian film-makers produced a few mainly anthropological films including *Zare* (Bek-Nazarov, 1926), *Kurds-Yezidis* (Martirossian, 1932), *Kurds of Soviet Armenia* (Kocharyan, 1947), and *Armenian Kurds* (Zhamharyan, 1959) about the way of life among the isolated Kurdish communities of Soviet Caucasia. Though referred to by some nationalists as further proof of the existence of a distinct Kurdish identity at this time, I have found no evidence that they were ever distributed outside the Soviet Union.

Overall, the development of political movements encompassing the mass of the Kurdish population had to wait until the revolutionary decade of the 1960s.

Politicisation (1960s-1980s)

In the early 20th century, in addition to the educated elite, there were already large numbers of Kurds of peasant origin living in the more sizeable cities of the region. But the increased mechanisation of agriculture after WWII and the destruction of traditional village life created many more economic migrants (van Bruinessen, 1990:34). Neglect of rural areas led to greater divisions between urban centres and the rural periphery, and around urban centres themselves where the Kurds concentrated in squatter settlements.

For each state, then, the Kurds represented a challenge: forming an increasingly visible, ethnically different underclass; a separate national group which the states were at pains to deny. Again, this denial opened up a wider 'discursive space' in which a Kurdish identity could be constructed (Houston, 2001:103). But how was this discourse communicated? In particular, how did cultural products contribute to the increasing politicisation of the Kurds and the beginning of their transition from a marginalised minority to gaining recognition as a nation?

While printing and publishing in Kurdish 'virtually ceased' in Syria from the early 1960s when the Ba'ath party came to power (Hassanpour, 1996:70), and was very restricted in Iran, there were greater freedoms in Iraq and Turkey. For example, the distribution of Kurdish literature, including new editions of *Mem û Zîn* in Latinized *Kurmanji* and in a Turkish translation, were significant for the re-emergence of the Kurdish political movement in Turkey (Kendal, 1993:40). However, by the late 1960s there was a renewed and vicious clamp-down on the distribution of Kurdish materials as the military re-asserted itself (Meiselas, 1997:234).

Broadcasting was also closely controlled. The Iranian government employed it 'for the promotion of Persian culture and national unity' (Hassanpour, 1996:74). In Turkey, where the state maintained a nearly total 'hegemony over cultural forms' (Aksoy, 1997:80), Kurdish culture was excluded from broadcasts. The Iraqi government at first used radio Baghdad as a 'powerful instrument of [unifying] politics' (ibid.:77), broadcasting several programs in Kurdish, but after 1961, these were radically scaled back. In essence, all the states continued their policy of using Kurds against each other through the broadcast media – radio stations in Iran and Iraq, for example, inciting Kurds to rebellion in each other's state. However, after 1975, clandestine Kurdish-language broadcasting, particularly important for autonomist

movements, grew rapidly in number, and broadcasts in Kurdish from Cairo were received in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq.

Kurdish culture was largely absent from the cinema over this period in Iran, Iraq, and Syria.[8] A survey of the literature on these countries shows that in their limited film production there was nothing of relevance to the Kurdish communities.[9]

In Turkey, fissures began to appear in the homogenising myth of the nation. The drive to become a modern, Western-oriented, secular state created fractures between the urban centre and the rural periphery into which questions of Kurdish identity inserted themselves. Kurds became associated with Islam, tradition (tribal resistance and banditry), the periphery (regional backwardness, and smuggling), and resistance (to taxation and military service), and therefore different – an Other in Turkish society (Houston, 2001:103).

Nothing exemplified this Otherness more than the migrant settlements, the *gecekondu*, which appeared around most cities in Turkey. Though these were sometimes well organised and provided with services, their image of disorder and chaos 'remains deeply entrenched in the language of political and cultural critique' (Stokes, 1994:27-8). Rural issues and the "chaos" of the settlements first made their appearance in arabesk music and films and then in the work of several film-makers.

The arabesk

On assuming power in Turkey in 1923, the Kemalist regime began its attempt to eradicate Ottoman cultural influences in its drive to fashion a modern state.[10] This suppression of what Aksoy and Robins call the 'real' culture of the people was also intended to create a homogenous Turkish nation (1997:76-7). Through various means, the government imposed an "official" culture centred on Western forms. Music conservatories were tasked with producing a new 'pure Turkish musical culture' (Stokes, 1994:25), and Egyptian musical films, which had been very popular

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[8] A few foreign films were shown in Iraq with Kurdish sub-titles (Hassanpour, 1996:79).

[9] For Iraq, see Nouri (1986) and Chébli (1964); on Iran, Issari (1989), Haghighat (1999), Issa and Whitaker (1999), Key (1999), Dabashi (2001), and Tapper (2002); and on Syria, Salti (2006). For discussion of the region in general histories of world cinema see Nowell-Smith (1997) and Chapman (2003).

[10] Many elements of identity were reformed at the same time – the language, written script, dress, music, and architecture – to remove Arab influences and to promote a Western-orientation (Robins, 2000:206-7).

throughout the 1930s and 40s, were banned in 1948, ostensibly to allow the Turkish cinema industry grow, but also to encourage it to absorb Western-influences (Stokes, 1992a:93-4).

However, the repressed elements of Turkish cultural life did not disappear, rather they were displaced to the margins, where they flourished. In particular, a new musical genre, the arabesk, emerged in the 1950s.[11] A lively synthesis of Turkish classical music, rural folk, western pop, and Arab (primarily Egyptian) dance music, it was 'pre-eminently the culture of the margins and marginals' (Aksoy and Robins, 1997:85). Many of the composers and performers were associated with the southern and south-eastern border regions of Turkey and, though not specifically Kurdish, the music contained strong Kurdish influences. Arabesk was claimed by nationalists and, later, had a '[prominent] role to play in the resistance movement often referred to as the Kurdish intifada' (Stokes, 1994:35). Thus, from the outset, arabesk was interpreted as an attack on Turkish identity and excluded from being broadcast on state-run radio. However, the music was readily available on radio stations broadcasting from Egypt and Syria and its popularity steadily increased through the 1950s and 1960s.

At the same time, several film production companies, known collectively as *Yeşilçam*, emerged in Istanbul. These were able to by-pass some government controls because of their ability to produce a stream of popular melodramas, comedies, and musicals, all at relatively low-cost.[12] Often featuring arabesk music, the combination of film and music was instrumental in the rapid growth in popularity of both. The confluence of a popular musical form with the technology for its widespread distribution – first the cinema and later the audio and video cassette – ensured that arabesk quickly became a mass phenomenon in Turkey's rapidly expanding metropolitan areas (Aksoy and Robins, 1997:96).

Many arabesk films, despite their musical base, are "realist" in their depiction of village life in the rural south-east, and have affinities with the early Armenian films discussed in Chapter 3. *Kanun Namina* (Akad, 1952), for example, with its narrative

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[11] For detailed discussion on the development of the arabesk, see Özbek (1997), Stokes (1992a; 1994), and Aksoy and Robins (1997).

[12] See Erdoğan and Göktürk (2001:535-7) and Ilal (1987:122-3) for summaries of *Yeşilçam* history and productions.

of tribal disputes and honour killings (echoing *Namous*), was a model for the arabesk cinema of the next three decades (Stokes, 1992a:95). Also concerned with internal migration to the cities, they evoke strong feelings of transience and liminality. Typical settings include the *gecekondu,* bus stations where migrants arrive from the south-eastern region of Anatolia, or aboard communal buses (*dolmuş*) that ferry them to work. Central characters are, as Stokes remarks, 'representatives of a society in the grip of cultural and economic transformation' (1992b:213-4). The *gecekondu*, itself, is a transitional, unstable place, situated 'between rural and urban, tradition and modernity […] the periphery and the centre' (Stokes, 1994:28), and represents a highly visible cultural boundary between communities.

The popularity of arabesk had the effect of exposing the uncomfortable truth that Turkish society was far from homogenous, that it had significant elements excluded from the state's vision of itself. The presence of large Kurdish populations in and around the major cities, especially Istanbul, could no longer be ignored and it appeared that the "Kurdish reality" would sometime have to be acknowledged. But, if arabesk is about "outsiders" or the Other in Turkish society, it is also about power relations – not only those between the state and its minorities, but also those between men and women – and unstable boundaries, which are often expressed through gender ambiguities.[13] Male protagonists in arabesk film frequently occupy an overdetermined "macho" position – a violent and cruel masculinity – but their lives are destroyed by poverty, moral weakness, or their inability to abandon an obsolete honour code. And females are, in some way, broken or deprived of their 'femininity' (Stokes, 1994:29). Themes of emasculation and damaged women are visible in the work of successive, politically committed, film-makers. Unlike the emasculation displayed in Armenian film, which is associated with the genocide, here it is an expression of economic and political powerlessness, as we will see in the films of Yilmaz Güney and those discussed in Chapter 6.

Social realism

Arabesk music and film tells of rural migration to the city, hardship, exploitation, and its associated sense of alienation and helplessness. Allied with its

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[13] Note that many of the most popular arabesk singers, such as Bülent Ersoy, are transvestites or transsexuals. Examples of his work may be seen in *Bitter Bread* (Duru, 1984), and on the internet at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_dNjyW0SkRM (viewed February 2007)

realist mode, it provoked feelings of social unease in Turkish society. At the same time, the spread of Marxist ideas among the left in Turkey, following the 1960 military coup, led to a debate on the role of film-makers in responding to social issues resulting from rapid economic development and the inequalities it created (Dorsay, 1986:119). On one side were film-makers who argued that Turkish cinema was neither obliged to represent a class analysis of the problems of society nor to be overly political (Giles, 1982:2-3). This conviction was opposed by those who strongly believed it had to engage actively in the battle for social change – to become a militant cinema (Erdoğan, 1998:261-3). The latter view surfaced initially in the work of Metin Erksan with, for example, *Susuz Yaz* (1963) and *Kuyu* (1968), and Lütfi Akad with his trilogy *Gelin* (1973), *Düğün* (1973), and *Diyet* (1974), which deal with feudalism in rural Anatolia and the experience of peasants who migrate to the city.[14]

However, state control could not be entirely by-passed; it was still 'a decisive factor in Turkish cinema' (Ilal, 1987:122; Loretan, 2001). As a consequence, references to minority peoples and the use of minority languages were forbidden, for fear of inciting secessionist claims. This censorship (or self-censorship) still extends to the literature on Turkish cinema where neither the ethnic identity of film-makers nor their subjects is revealed. For example, Dorsay never uses the word Kurd, instead he dismisses films about 'peasants in eastern Turkey' with the criticism: 'decidedly a subject and a milieu quite favoured by young Turkish film-makers' (1986:125). Similarly, Ilal (1987), and Özgüç (2001) write only of 'nomads' and 'Anatolian peasants' when they invariably mean Kurds.[15] Kurdish issues thus permeate only gradually into the cinematic discourse in Turkey, gaining most recognition in the works of Yilmaz Güney which are the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

Güney and Kurdish identity

Güney was phenomenally successful in his early career, appearing as a virile "action hero" in a large-number of low-budget *Yeşilçam* films in the 1950s and

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[14] For details of these and other film-makers whose work focuses on social issues see Ilal (1987) and Dorsay (1986:119-20).

[15] This lacuna also extends to writing about Turkish cinema in other languages, see for example the papers in Basutçu (1996) and Scognamillo (1987).

1960s.[16] Regarded as 'the most popular actor in Turkish film history' (Ilal, 1987:124), he was able to use his popularity to embark on a second career as film-maker, beginning with his collaboration with Akad in 1964.[17] Only after 1982, when he escaped from prison in Turkey and renounced his Turkish citizenship, was it possible for him openly to acknowledge his Kurdish origins and reveal his support for the Kurdish movement for autonomy (Kutschera, 1983). However, we can see how Güney progressively articulates aspects of Kurdish identity in three films from his most important period, *Umut* (1970), *Sürü* (1978), and *Yol* (1982).[18]

Economic marginalisation

Umut was an innovative film in that, for the first time in Turkey, it dealt directly with the massive social and economic divide between rural immigrants and city dwellers. It tells the story of Cabbar (played by Güney), an impoverished migrant with a large family to support, eking out an existence as a carriage-driver in the southern city of Adana. Realist and neo-realist influences, such as the use of non-actors, actual locations, and simple, naturalistic lighting set-ups, are evident throughout.

It opens in the early morning on a scene of empty city streets being washed by a municipal street-cleaner – an indirect statement of the way the film's protagonists, the underclass, have been "cleansed" from society. Cabbar is revealed, asleep on his decrepit horse-drawn cab waiting by the railway station for a fare. Though a willing worker, he is cast as an anachronism, illiterate and ignorant, with no place in the modern city. His only 'hope' is the lottery whose odds are indicative of the un-bridgeable divide between rich and poor.

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[16] The extensive literature on Güney includes biographies in Wakeman (1988:405-9), and Leaman (2001), and gave numerous interviews towards the end of his life, of which the following are the most pertinent: Basutçu (1980), Kazan (1980), Ciment (1982), and Kutschera (1983).

[17] Güney set up his own production company in 1968 that allowed him to make films that the commercial film industry would not support.

[18] Though commonly regarded as Güney's films, there is some dispute about the provenance of *Sürü* and *Yol*. Tony Rayns, for example, suggests Güney specified the composition of individual shots and much of the editing in addition to writing the scripts (1983:91), whereas Ali Özgentürk gives far more credit to the directors, Zeki Ökten for *Sürü* and to Şerif Gören for *Yol* (Dönmez-Colin, 2006:114).

Bad luck in the form of a careless car driver who kills one of his horses, and the complicit authorities who refuse to help him gain reparation, further conspire to squeeze him to the margins of the economic system. Cabbar's attempts to escape his predicament prove futile. He tries to borrow money but is turned away; he sells his possessions in order to buy another horse only to find creditors have sold his cart; and he takes part in a near farcical robbery that fails, leaving him battered and bruised. Eventually, he loses all hold on reality and embarks on a fool's chase after mythical buried treasure.

Though there are many signals that Cabbar and his friends are Kurds, *Umut* is not obviously a film about Kurdish issues. Indeed, a Marxist reading situates Cabbar simply as 'a fictional representative of the marginal masses' (Giles and Sahin, 1982:5), victim of technological revolution and the new capitalist class it spawned; powerless to change his situation. He has no access to capital, he cannot extend his debt, and he has no human resources to fall back on. In such a reading, Güney would also seem to fault Cabbar for lacking "political consciousness", for example, by rejecting participation in a street demonstration by his fellow cab drivers, relying instead on his false hopes. Cabbar's quest ends in failure, of course. The distant camera emphasising his isolation as he blindly turns in a circle alongside the unproductive pit he has dug: blind because he can see no means of escape, circling because he is doomed to an endless cycle of poverty.

On a closer reading arabesk influences are readily apparent in the film's realism, its setting in a *gecekondu*, and its concern with marginalised people. *Umut* articulates the relationship between order and power in Turkish society and, more dangerously, shows how the state fails the powerless, specifically the Kurdish community.

The disordered and chaotic space Cabbar and his family inhabit is repeatedly contrasted with urban order. As we have seen, the opening sequence sets clean, wide, straight boulevards against the cramped, unkempt figure of Cabbar. A montage of shots of the family hovel, with its broken corrugated-iron fence, dilapidated gates, roaming animals, water-well, and tin bath, are juxtaposed with long, slow panning shots of the sleek, horizontal facades of modern multi-story apartment blocks. And Cabbar, driving his ancient cab, is caught amidst the bustle of traffic in the modern city.

In addition, echoing the ambiguities of arabesk, Cabbar oscillates between aggression and resignation. In a startlingly realist manner, he viciously beats his wife and child when they disobey him. And, in a self-referential sequence which begins as Cabbar strolls past posters of Güney in the macho persona of his *Yeşilçam* films, he brutally punches and kicks a pickpocket; the violence intensified by a closely circling camera. Yet, otherwise, he seems to accept his fate without complaint. This fatalism is exemplified by a scene, silent except for the noise of the wind, in which a cart carries the horse across an empty field, while he follows on foot. The driver tips the body out and drives away. A powerful image of solitude and hopelessness, Cabbar squats at a distance, epitomising what Stokes argues is the dominant image of the arabesk, namely 'a peculiarly emasculated manhood' (1992a:13).

Güney's performance as Cabbar is in marked contrast to his earlier films. No longer the action hero who can correct wrongs single-handedly, he appears to acknowledge what Armes calls the 'limits of individual action' (1981:9-11). In addressing the imbalance of power between the state and its marginalised people, he seems to argue that significant social change will only come about through collective action.

Umut reveals the increasing economic divide in Turkey in the 1960s; typical of the uneven development that Tom Nairn, for example, argues is a root cause of the growth of national consciousness (see Chapter 2). And the film constructs a political space in which Güney begins to expose the presence of an underprivileged Other in the midst of Turkish urban society. This Other could not be enunciated as a separate national group at that time, but Güney begins to suggest a critical approach to the representation of cultural difference. His next film, *Sürü*, takes these ideas further by examining conditions in one rural community and the deep social and political divisions within and between rural and urban Kurdish communities.

Cultural transformation

After the heady political freedoms of the period in which Güney could produce *Umut*, a reaction set in that was both anti-communist and anti-Kurdish. Though the Kurds supposedly did not exist, many Turks openly denounced them, one journal going so far as to 'threaten' them with the same fate as the Armenians (McDowall, 2004:409). This unrest deepened in the late 1960s, during which time there were calls by some politicians of Kurdish descent for recognition of their rights as a distinct ethnic group in Turkey. By 1971 the political situation had deteriorated to such an extent that another military coup was engineered and martial law declared soon after (ibid.). Among the thousands arrested, Güney was sentenced to two years

in prison for sheltering militant students wanted by the government. *Umut* and seven of his earlier films were banned and the prints confiscated (Rayns, 1983:93).

The military embarked on a crack-down, especially in rural Kurdish areas, that continued until the restoration of civil authority in 1973 when a mildly leftist government was returned to power. Under an amnesty, Güney was freed in 1974 but shortly thereafter he was accused of murder and this time given an extended jail sentence.[19] Perhaps surprisingly, he was able to continue his work in prison where he wrote the script for *Sürü* (1978), subsequently directed by Zeki Ökten.

Sürü is a complex film that examines the destruction of traditional peasant and nomadic ways of life in Turkey by the land reforms of the 1950s and 1960s; the immense fissure between the rural East and urban West; and, as in *Umut*, the economic divide in the cities. But, above all, the film is a powerful account of the processes of historical change among rural Kurds who have always been associated in the minds of many Turks with ignorance, violence, superstition, and backwardness. At the time Güney was working on *Sürü*, they were additionally blamed for holding back Turkey from becoming a fully-fledged Western nation, by their failure to modernise. Of course, Kurds who had modernised – that is, who had successfully integrated – were unable or unwilling to call themselves Kurds for fear of reprisal. In this film, Güney addresses the contradiction that Kurds can only become modern by denying their Kurdishness and becoming assimilated Turks. Indirectly, he asks whether there can be such a thing as a modern Kurd – whether space even exists in Turkey for a Kurdish identity.

The flock of the title and its shepherds – members of a fictional Veysikan tribe – are metonyms for the Kurdish nation.[20] Their long journey from the pasture lands of Kurdistan to market in the western city of Ankara symbolises the hurdles they face in meeting the challenges of modernity. This journey, with its connotations of rupture and transformation, allows Güney to engage with the discourse on the survival of

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[19] Different versions of the case against Güney are given by different authors: see, for example, (Armes, 1987), (Dorsay, 1986), (Ilal, 1987) and (Suner, 1998:286:86). Güney's version is in (Rayns, 1983:93).

[20] Güney claimed that the film 'is the history of the Kurdish people' and the story of his mother's tribe from Muş, in south-eastern Anatolia (Kutschera, 1983).

identity, and is the first instance of a trope common to many films exploring the Kurdish question that we will encounter later.

The film opens with a leisurely series of long shots in deep focus that follows the progress of three horsemen as they skilfully pick their way across wide mountain pastures accompanied by the soundscape of a wordless Kurdish lament. We quickly learn that the horsemen belong to the rival Halillans. They have come to speak to their sister Berivan who married Şivan, the eldest son of Hamo, patriarch of the Veysikans, in a gesture of reconciliation between the tribes.

What follows is the depiction of an almost prelapsarian tented community in which women churn milk in cured sheep-skins, spin wool by hand, bake flat bread on oven stones, and collect firewood and fodder in enormous bundles on their backs, while their children run free, almost wild.

Vast, open landscapes, haunting music, brightly-coloured traditional costumes, and, most of all, the horses, unmistakably establish the setting as rural Kurdistan. These elements of identity are, according to O'Shea, 'considered to be somehow inherently Kurdish' (2004:159). Yet, though the images are often beautiful, they are rarely romanticised. Almost every scene is designed to make a political point about the harsh life of these people: the vendettas and hostility between tribes, rigid

patriarchal social structure, violence, superstition, and ignorance. And, in a number of ways, Güney foreshadows its imminent destruction.

First, we observe that the patriarchal structure is broken. Berivan is ill after losing several babies in childbirth. Hamo is furiously angry with her, not only because she is from the hated Halillans, but also because she apparently cannot bear children and so threatens the continuity of "his" tribe. He sees his authority ebbing away and beats the unresisting Şivan for failing to drive away the Halillans; screaming:

> Berivan is the reason for your weakness. You were like a falcon. Now you're no different than an old jackal

Constituents of the arabesk – Hamo's insane violence, his humiliation of Şivan, and his fear of women's role in destroying masculinity – also serve to confirm stereotypes regarding these communities.

Next, in repeated scenes, tractors ploughing in the valley encroach on the image denoting the obliteration of pasturelands and the intrusion of modern farming methods. This conceit is repeated with more emphasis later, when Hamo leads his flock on the start of their journey to town. Close-up shots, juxtaposed with ever closer images of steel plough blades, breaking open virgin soil, suggest a lack of comprehension over the imminent changes to the tribal way of life, but also an innate fear.

Then Güney introduces his most important element; the transforming effect on his four main characters of the journey to the modern city, which occupies the long middle section of *Sürü*. It starts badly as the corrupt and malicious rail authorities demand bribes and provide contaminated carriages for transportation of the sheep. The train drivers deliberately jolt the sheep off their legs because the bribes they were given were too small. Some sheep are injured, others die from poison, and some are killed and stolen by a marauding gang of thieves. If the Kurds are represented by the flock, these incidents can be interpreted as indirect statements about their treatment, as a people, by the state.

The train traces a route from near Muş, through Diyarbakir, across the Euphrates (the unacknowledged "border" between Kurdistan and Turkey), through Sivas and into Ankara (see map on page 110). Along the way, Güney inserts documentary footage to illustrate the emptiness, poverty and destitution of the villages and small towns of eastern Anatolia. Large numbers of unemployed people line the tracks and stare as the train passes. The length of the journey (over one third of the film) conveys the immensity of the gulf between the shepherds and the modern state to which they belong. But the train, and its movement across the landscape of central Turkey, has another significance. Though apparently implying freedom of movement, the *possibility* of development and change, it is constructed also to suggest confinement and imprisonment. The carriages are claustrophobic spaces – emphasised by closed shots, shadowed faces, and dim natural lighting – into which Şivan and Berivan are squeezed.

From their points-of view we observe a world outside in which people have their belongings searched and are harassed by police, and an interior where a prisoner is held for singing a political song. Güney here seems to foretell the near impossibility for his characters to make a transformation under the reality of restrictions imposed on them. This notion of Turkey as a prison is a theme to which he returns more profoundly in *Yol* and his last film *Duvar* (1983).

The approach to Ankara is marked by an accelerated tempo of cutting, alerting us to the different rhythms of urban life. As the train enters the city, banal images of a modern state predominate: a monument to Atatürk, official buildings, and the ever-present flags of state. The juxtaposition of these with shots of the shepherds herding

their flock to market is designed to accentuate the unequal power relationship between the state and these rural peasants.

This final section of *Sürü* has echoes of *Umut* in that it introduces a Marxist critique of the position of "honest working people" and their exploitation by capitalists. Şivan takes Berivan to stay with his cousin, a recent migrant to the city, while he tries to find medical help. Here Güney indicates the political space opening up in Turkey by relating it to the physical space occupied by these migrant workers. The cousin proudly enunciates all the conveniences of modern life where he is staying – bathrooms, where you can have 'as many baths as you like', the kitchen with 'a button to get rid of smells', and multiple bedrooms. But it is quickly revealed that he and his family are living in the unfinished shell of a building, being built for Turks. They have insinuated themselves into these spaces, albeit temporarily.

However, unlike *Umut*, Güney does not discuss the ideology of collective action. Rather, he engages with the dialectical argument concerning the Kurds' place in modern Turkey by examining the prospective transformation of his four main characters as a result of their journey from Kurdistan.

Silo, Hamo's youngest son, who has never left the pastures before, is the first character we meet in the opening sequence. Obliged by tradition to take responsibility for his dead brother's older wife, he is determined to escape the stifling restrictions of family and clan by going with the herd to Ankara. On the journey he embraces newly discovered freedoms. Though he seems vulnerable by virtue of his naivety, he begins to reject ties to his people and their values as he is enticed by the benefits of urban life. It therefore comes as no surprise when in the final scene he breaks loose from Hamo, melting into the background of the busy city. The journey

for Silo ends in complete assimilation; he becomes invisible by giving up his own identity. The implication of Silo's characterisation through the film – his secrecy and avarice – is that this is a selfish act, a betrayal of his community.

Şivan, on the other hand, is presented as an honourable modernising figure, experienced in the outside world. He has already reasoned that the tribal system and the nomad's way of life is destined to pass. He has tried to reconcile the Halillans and the Veysikans by marrying Berivan, even in the face of his father's violent disapproval. And he refuses to continue the vendetta, standing mute, head bowed, unresisting, as Hamo beats and taunts him for not revenging the death of a brother. Şivan also rejects superstition. Though we first encounter him as he waits while a mystic tries to "cure" Berivan of her childlessness, he later insists on taking her to doctors, first in the local town and then in the city. Nor is he ignorant – he is excited by the city, proudly declaring 'this is our capital, Ankara is the heart of Turkey'. Thus, for Şivan, the journey represents the possibility of transformation, from a patriarchal to a modern, democratic society. But, unlike Silo, he will not give up his identity: he is bound by obedience to his father, loyalty to his tribe, and love for Berivan.

Here, Güney's ambivalence towards the position of women is exposed. Şivan insists on taking the silent Berivan to the city to try to find a cure for her illness, expressing a deep tenderness towards her, despite earlier violence. Yet Berivan is his burden, literally, as he carries her on his back through the Ankara streets, and metaphorically as the cause of his ultimate destruction. It is Hamo's callousness after the death of Berivan that causes Şivan finally to revolt – a revolt that leads to the death of a bystander and Şivan's imprisonment. Güney seems to position Şivan as a potential mediator between the Kurds and the state, someone who could bridge the gap, but who fails because he is encumbered by the "millstone" of tradition.

Hamo is a reactionary who resists change and insists on the old ways. He cannot accept peace with the Halillans, preferring to revenge death with death. He

exercises power through violence; beating his son mercilessly and subduing other members of the family by threats. He clings to superstition, believing in the curse brought upon the clan by Şivan's marriage to Berivan.

The intrusion of the outside into Hamo's world takes the form of a telegram that Şivan delivers to his father. Güney constructs an image of Hamo on an open hillside, framed by a backdrop of Kurdish mountains, listening to the instructions from Ankara for them to take the sheep to market. This is the beginning of the destruction of the tribe, something he can scarcely comprehend.

On the train, Hamo becomes more and more incensed as he sees his only hope of survival, the flock, gradually wither away. He loses his son, Şivan, taken away by the police, and then Silo, who disappears. In the final scene, Hamo runs insanely through the streets of the city, calling for Silo. In his peasant costume, with his shepherd's staff, and his ferocious demeanour, he is clearly an anachronism. Hamo has failed to be transformed by the journey, he is incapable of change. He is a representative of the patriarchal tribal chiefs, whose vendettas and backwardness have plagued the Kurdish nation. In Güney's analysis, Hamo's form of tribalism cannot survive and neither can it be integrated into Turkish society.

Lastly, there is Berivan, overloaded with symbolism. She is cast not only as "mother of the nation" but also – in her repeated action of nurturing a small olive tree – as the figure through whom the tribes might be reconciled. However, she fails on both counts: unable to deliver a child, or through her marriage to unify the nation.

She is also emblematic of women's lack of freedom in the patriarchy, expressed by the pair of caged birds, for which she cares. The caged "feminine" birds are contrasted with a brief insert of a falcon, echoing Hamo's earlier reference to Şivan's manliness and freedom. As they leave the camp, Berivan passes the cage on to Silo's wife, and we might expect that the expedition to the city would bring emancipation and liberty. But, she becomes progressively more sick and passive; her sickness linked to that of the sheep – and hence the nation – through cross-cutting on the train journey. Then, in her refusal to be examined by doctors or to explain the cause of her silence and her pain she becomes a metonym for the hidden, unexamined and unacknowledged Other in Turkish society. Eventually dying in the city, she is further degraded by Hamo who refuses to pay for her funeral or transport back to her relatives.

While *Umut* focused on the growing economic divide in Turkey, *Sürü* goes further, illustrating how a particular way of life in some Kurdish areas is being destroyed. Güney does not romanticise that way of life, but seems to confirm the arguments of, for example, Paul Brass and John Breuilly (see Chapter 2) that such politically induced cultural changes can be a major factor in the development of political consciousness. But, the journey of the flock which represents the potential for the ideological transformation of the people, from backwardness to modernity, ends in failure. The paradox of Kurdish identity – the impossibility of transformation without losing identity – remains unresolved.

In the late 1970s, urban and rural violence increased, especially in the Kurdish regions of Turkey. Clashes across many divides – political, ethnic, religious and class – created an unstable political situation which resulted in another military coup in September 1980, and a renewed and brutal crack down on dissidents (McDowall, 2004:414-7). Güney's implied political message in *Sürü*, that the state excludes these rural people, that it fails to provide them with adequate tools to develop, and that it actively hinders their development, was instrumental in this film also being banned shortly afterwards.

Oppression and resistance

Even under the authoritarian regime that came after the coup, Güney was allowed to continue to work on screenplays in prison. He gained permission to make *Yol*, apparently on the pretext of rectifying the negative impression of Turkish prisons

given in *Midnight Express* (Parker, 1978). Filming took place between January and March 1981, this time in collaboration with Şerif Gören (Suner, 1998:282). When it was completed, Güney escaped to Switzerland where he finalised editing in 1982 (Rayns, 1983:92).

Despite his professed intention of making a film praising the liberal regime of Turkey's prison system, Güney uses that system as a metaphor for what he perceived as the state of Turkey following the coup. As he explained in a subsequent interview, 'jail is the subject most appropriate to the present state of Turkey' (Kutschera, 1983). In *Yol*, Güney constructs a disturbing, claustrophobic place, expanding on the imagery of the train journey in *Sürü*. It is a place of confinement and surveillance that seems to leave no space for any form of political expression; a place of pervasive military presence, searches and roadblocks, harassment, curfews, and seemingly arbitrary killings (Suner, 1998:292).

Yol is a reaction to the oppressive military regime that followed the coup, but it is also a radical critique of social conditions in the still patriarchal rural areas of Turkey. It provides parallels between state persecution and local forms of oppression, and Güney develops his examination of the struggle for modernity in a society bound by traditions and prejudice. Again, there is confinement and surveillance by the state, but now patriarchal control and the honour system also ensures everyone is continually watched and their behaviour judged by relatives, neighbours, and even strangers. In this way he exposes the 'interiorised' prison (Akman, 1989:50) that affects his male and female characters, though in strikingly different ways. The men seemingly have "agency", yet they are impotent, they do not revolt against repression, and their actions appear to have no positive effect. The women, on the other hand, do rebel and break the rules, for which they are severely punished.

Sürü ends in Ankara with banal symbols of state power but with an image of citizens living apparently freely in the modern city. The central journey suggests the possibility of transformation to some kind of self-determination within the state. But Güney reveals this to be an illusion, showing that for the Kurds their apparent movement is actually stasis – the train taking them to freedom is also a prison. *Yol* employs the same trope of transformation through a journey – the pathway of the title implying a road to liberty – as it follows five male convicts, given a week's leave from their prison in western Turkey. As a means of indicating the extent of state and

patriarchal repression throughout the south-east of the country, Güney clearly lays out the geography, emphatically announcing the names of each town and village along the way (see map on page 110).

The men are changed by their travels, and, though the problems they face are personal, nonetheless the film has a broader political intent. From the moment they leave prison each journey is a series of encounters with different forms of constraint and the sense of continuing imprisonment. This is manifested by what Naficy calls 'a cinematic regime of control' (2001:182) – the closed chronotopes of confined locations such as railway carriages, minibuses, small waiting rooms, interiors or cells – and accentuated (as in *Sürü*) by the general use of dark colours, ambient lighting, night scenes, and claustrophobic shots. And, here, the men even carry the marks of their prison with them in their cramped movements and subdued speech.

Yusuf makes only a brief appearance since he quickly loses his travel papers and is put in a holding cell by the police for the rest of his leave. His boundless optimism in prison had been signified by a bright, yellow warbler kept in a cage. As he is led away, he asks his friends to take the bird to his wife, and the last image is of him looking out from behind a barred window

This is a search. Your identity papers!

at birds in the sky. It seems he will never be free again.

Mevlut goes to visit his prospective wife in Urfa but is frustrated by her family's conservatism and their constant surveillance of the couple's every action. They are watched closely by her father; shadowed by veiled chaperones wherever they go; and scrutinized by her brothers.

You'll obey my every command.

Güney links surveillance, unequal gender relations, and the overwhelming power of the state in a carefully framed scene where Mevlut lays down the law to his fiancée. As he insists 'You'll obey my every command', he is watched by her sisters and dominated by an equestrian monument. However, Güney partially subverts the rules of the patriarchy. Mevlut's fiancée looks up at him in mock submission, answering: 'You're so good with words. Where do you pick all that up, in jail?'.

Later, Mevlut tries to assert his independence by visiting a brothel. But the sequence is shot so that it has the essence of another prison – customers enter through barred gates, and perform their transactions in small cell-like bedrooms. Though he claimed he would never go back to prison, Mevlut's journey provides no release either from his confinement.

Mehmet is troubled by the knowledge that his cowardice resulted in the death of his wife's brother: something he has not been able to admit before, even to himself. Arriving in Diyarbakir, he finally confronts his wife, Eminê, and her family. He confesses his guilt, looking for atonement, but they spit at him and threaten to kill him. The father says he can take his children but if Eminê leaves with him, the family will disown her. Eminê defies her family and agrees to run away with him. The reconciled couple leave by train with their children, but there is no escaping the controls of society. They are condemned by other passengers and the guards for lewd behaviour as they try to make love on the train. They are held in confinement in the guards' van where one of her brothers who has followed them, kills them both to discharge his family's debt of honour. Eminê's rebellion has been punished catastrophically, and Mehmet's attempt to expiate his "crime" has brought only death.

Arriving in Konya, Seyit learns that his wife, Ziné, has disgraced the family, and he is torn between his obligation to revenge their honour and his love for her. He sets off on a long journey through Diyarbakir to the remote village of Sançak in south-eastern Anatolia where Ziné is being held captive. The journey becomes

increasingly difficult, involving a bus tracking along icy roads, a horseback ride across a snow-covered mountain pass, and finally a laboured trek on foot through deep snow. Each stage slower than the last, each footstep harder, expressing the enormous physical, social, and cultural isolation of this remote Kurdish community.

Finding Ziné, shackled and filthy in a dark cellar, he is uncertain what to do. In the end, his compromise, allowing her to die of exposure on the mountains, is ambiguous, showing at once his inability to revolt against traditions and yet his humanity. He carries her to her death (like Şivan carries Berivan) as a literal burden, and by failing to save her, as a metaphorical burden on his conscience.   Ziné's rebellion against tradition and patriarchy ends in her imprisonment and death. Seyit also cannot escape the constraints of society, and the last image in the film is of his huddled anguished form on the train returning to prison.

Forgive me! I'm guilty... forgive me!

The fifth man, Ömer, is distinguished at the outset by his visions of freedom. On his prison bunk, before the start of the journey, he has a dream of his brother, Abuzer, galloping on a white horse across open fields. This image of liberty is taken up later in a long lyrical sequence as Ömer travels from Gaziantep towards his village on the Syrian border. A group of children sing an arabesk song on the bus, and the song accompanies their journey across sunny fields of bright yellow flowers.

An enormous title announces this is Kurdistan. Long shots of wide open countryside with mountains in the distance, reveal Ömer striding, loose-limbed through the fields. He has lost his prison walk.

As Ankara was overdetermined as a place of freedom and modernity in *Sürü*, so the openness and independence of Kurdistan is overdetermined here. Ömer kneels to kiss the earth, a dog bounds up to greet him joyously, birds fly free in the air, and happy flute music accompanies the sound of sheep. He exchanges long glances with a beautiful, young woman. But, a close-up of his smiling face is suddenly clouded by the sounds of gunfire. Rapidly, images of freedom are replaced by images of repression.

Villagers crouch behind walls, imprisoned in their own homes. Terrified, they peer through tiny windows, gaps in walls, or through cracks in doorways. Soldiers arrive and eventually take away two men. From then on the picture becomes bleaker. The villagers wait in darkness through the night, listening to the sounds of distant firing. Inevitably, Abuzer is killed and Ömer, according to tradition, will have to take on his wife and children. In a final bid for freedom, Ömer decides to join the resistance movement in the mountains. The last image is of him riding a horse, its mane flowing in the wind, across the fields into the mountains of his homeland. Like Seyit's decision, this is ambiguous. Is he escaping political repression or the grip of tradition that means he cannot marry the woman he loves?

Repression versus freedom is the dialectic expressed in *Yol*. In the narrative, the protagonists are in a double bind – prevented from changing by a repressive state and the "dead hand" of tradition. Cinematic expressions of confinement and torment are contrasted with those of freedom and joy: the caged song-bird and the birds flying

freely in the sky; cramped dark spaces and big sunny landscapes full of flowers; heavy lumbering movements and playful frolicking with a dog; an emaciated horse and a galloping stallion; the piercing shriek of a train whistle and the free rhythms of the arabesk. Thus, *Yol* is a political film that represents Turkey as a prison. Though not all the protagonists are Kurdish, it specifically denotes the oppression in the predominantly Kurdish areas of southern and south-eastern Anatolia. As Ömer's father remarks: 'fear reigns in each and every home. What's worse, if you're Kurdish, then you're really done for'.

Like *Umut*, Güney also probes the limits of individual action in *Yol*. His characters seem to resolve something through their journeys, to affect the outcome of events and come to understand their world – or in Marxist terms to achieve "political awareness". Yet, with the exception of Ömer, they accomplish only re-imprisonment, frustration, or death. On the other hand, there is no suggestion that revolutionary action is required to overthrow oppression. Even Ömer's decision to ride into the mountains to join Kurdish rebel fighters seems more of an expression of individual freedom than a call for collective action.

If *Yol* chronicles the repressive hand of the state on its Kurdish minority, its sub-text, as in all Güney's work, is the struggle between the opposing forces of modernity and tradition. Though he focuses on the fate of the male protagonists, one of his recurrent themes, echoing that of the arabesk, is women's lack of freedom to be themselves. His depiction of women throughout this work is uncompromising; they are abused and abandoned, sold, killed, or left to die. And they have no right to be heard – Cabbar silences his wife, Berivan is literally dumb, and Ziné is only allowed voice to admit her "guilt" and plead for mercy. Yet, these three films show an interesting progression in his position on the unequal gender relations in this patriarchal society.

Güney begins, peripherally, in *Umut* to expose the double victimisation of women – Cabbar's wife suffers not only from grinding poverty and violence but also from his delusions. In *Sürü*, Berivan is a victim of Hamo's hatred and, though she "fails" to perform her allotted tasks of producing children and reconciling the tribes, Güney positions her as a sympathetic central character. Yet his ambivalence is still evident in the way she becomes Şivan's "burden" and the cause of his imprisonment. *Yol* is a further critique of the destructive forces of tradition. Here, the women do

have some agency: Eminê escapes her family and runs away with her husband and their children; Mevlut's fiancé rebels against her father and subverts Mevlut's dogmatism; and Ziné defies the honour codes of the patriarchal family. Though they are all punished – Eminê is murdered, Mevlut betrays his fiancé in a brothel, Ziné dies on a frozen mountain pass, and Ömer abandons his brother's wife – Güney seems intent to expose as untenable the total subordination of women in this society.

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Güney's work is often categorised as belonging to Third Cinema because, indirectly at least, it advocates class struggle and opposition to state oppression and social authoritarianism. Suner argues that the preamble to the US video release of *Yol* tries to position Güney as an authentic 'third-world' subject who is therefore entitled and able to present a 'third-world reality' (1998:285-6). Such a reductive categorisation would place Güney's texts as ethnographic studies, tending to support Jameson's argument that third-world texts *necessarily* project a form of national allegory (Jameson, 1992:186-8). However, Güney did not consider himself a nationalist (Akman, 1989:34-5). He stated he was in favour of a pluralist state though he believed that all minorities should have a chance to decide their own fate (Othman, 1984:46). Though his films certainly make use of allegory to explore Kurdish identity, they do not exhibit an outright nationalist message.

Admittedly, his concerns are with nomadic and peasant groups and the rural experience which is a prominent part of the Kurdish national myth. *Umut* contains a brief sequence of an idealised peasant life that preceded the daily grind of the *gecekondu*. *Sürü* underlines the heritage of its protagonists through the use of Kurdish names,[21] brightly coloured Kurdish costumes, vast landscapes, and vibrant (though harsh) images of the encampment. And, in *Yol*, the idyllic beauty of summer pastures, the use of Kurdish music and language, and even the spectacular identification of Ömer's homeland as Kurdistan, are powerful indices of Kurdish authenticity. But Güney is more interested in examining the complex relations between different parts of Kurdish society and between Kurds and Turks, rather than simply using such foundational myths to create an essentialist view of Kurdish identity.

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[21] Şivan meaning shepherd and Berivan milkmaid.

Similarly, in other hands, the landscape, especially the mountains of Kurdistan evident in *Sürü* and *Yol*, could become a nationalist symbol and a site for nostalgia and yearning. But Güney creates a more ambiguous vision, establishing it as a contested space. As in many of the Palestinian films discussed in Chapters 7 and 8, the landscape is invaded by soldiers, presented in the same menacing, impersonalised way. For the encroaching farmers of *Sürü*, Kurdistan is "empty", ready for expansion and territorial claim. And the film ends with the shepherds and their flock disappearing into the busy and uncaring streets of Ankara. Ömer, in *Yol*, kisses the earth, glad to return to his homeland, but is displaced by "invading" soldiers of the Turkish state. These features serve to emphasise the "invisibility" of the Kurds and position the settlers and intruders as outsiders who have no right to be in this land.

Yet Güney does not allow these elements to conceal the inherent social problems of this rural society, their difficulty in embracing modernity, and the increasing artificiality of the rural experience. If Güney was not a Kurdish nationalist, nonetheless he was something of an outsider in Turkish society, however popular he was as an actor. He was a communist in a fervently anti-communist period, he spent much of his life excluded from society (in prison), and above all he was an ethnic Kurd. Though the Kurdish dimension of his identity did not emerge very strongly until after he visited his mother's home region of Muş (apparently the inspiration for *Sürü*) in the mid 1970s, it became a fundamental element of his resistance to the military regime in Turkey.

Thus Naficy regards Güney as another example of an exilic film-maker, one who works in an accented style. While this view provides valuable insights, and is more interesting than a Jamesonian categorisation of his films simply as national allegories, I prefer to consider the broader aspects of Güney's work, placing it in a political context. Güney's perspective from the margins, as Cabbar in *Umut*, exposes the presence of a previously ignored and ethnically different economic underclass in Turkey's cities. *Sürü* dissects different responses to the destruction of a traditional way of life in rural areas. The long and painful journey of the flock reifies the immense social and cultural divide between the Kurdish community and the rest of Turkish society and the difficulty of making the transition to modernity. *Yol* focuses on the deadly dual embrace of tradition and the state: the suffocating effects of

patriarchal structures and the destructive honour code; and the repression that stifles development.

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For some Turkish nationalists any manifestation of Kurdish identity was (and remains) a major threat to the indivisibility of the Republic of Turkey (Özoğlu, 2004:3). Thus, the state continued its attempt to narrate and legislate Kurdish identity out of existence in the 1960s and 1970s (Gunter, 1990:43-7). However, opposition to this repression, coupled with political uncertainty, created a discursive space in which arabesk, the films of such film-makers as Erksan and Akad, and above all Güney, surfaced. The films and music of the former, playing to large audiences in Turkey, had a significant effect in exposing heterogeneous cultural influences which the state had endeavoured to suppress. The association of the music with *gecekondu* communities, largely composed of migrant rural workers from southern and south-eastern Anatolia, was instrumental in drawing attention to the existence of the exuberant voices of other ethnic groups in an officially monocultural and homogenous Turkish society. Furthermore, the idea that some elements of this music represent Kurdish culture, and was something that could only be expressed in secret, gradually took shape. We will see in the next chapter how the oppositional nature of arabesk music becomes a frequent trope in films from the 1980s.

Güney's work, not seen in Turkey at this time,[22] was even more explicit in expressing economic, cultural, and political differences in Turkey. But, unlike the elite nationalism embodied in the poetry and films of *Mem û Zîn* and *Siyabend û Xecê*, Güney was interested in the lower strata – the underprivileged. He explored the possibility of social change, both within Kurdish society which he criticised for its divisions and stultifying traditions, and within Turkish society which he condemned for its repression and its inability to accept pluralism. However, where *Sürü* suggested the possibility of a political space opening up for the Kurds, by the time Güney made *Yol*, these spaces had contracted into prisons.

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[22] Güney's films won critical acclaim in the US and Europe, *Yol* winning the *Palme d'Or* at Cannes in 1982. But, they were banned in Turkey and none were available domestically until the late 1990s. *Yol* was finally released in Turkey in 1999, but even then it was censored to remove references to Kurdistan and the Kurds.

Music, film, and literature, combined with migration from the country to the city, thus began to spread national awareness and pride in Kurdish culture to a wider public, and sowed the seeds of the national movements of the 1980s and 1990s (van Bruinessen, 1990:36). This process corresponds to some extent with Hroch's second stage in the development of nationalism as a mass movement, but seems to exclude those Kurds living in Kurdistan (by far the majority),[23] those who have assimilated or integrated into Turkish society, and those in the diaspora.

Though a sense of political awareness grew among the Kurds within each state, there was no significant collective action at this time to establish an overall Kurdish identity. O'Shea notes that there probably was not a majority of Kurds in favour of autonomy or independence, and goes on to argue that the 'shared memories and histories' of Kurds were nationally based, and that several 'parallel histories' emerged within the different states (O'Shea, 2004:152). Kurdish nationalist movements in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq were largely confined to trying to achieve rights within their respective states. '[T]he formulation of their goals reflected Turkish, Persian, and Arabic debates … more than anything specifically Kurdish' (van Bruinessen, 1998:40).

It took a combination of factors to trigger the next significant development of Kurdish national consciousness. As demonstrated by *Umut* and *Sürü*, changes to farming methods caused large-scale emigration from rural areas. These laid what McDowall calls the 'socio-economic groundwork for the explosion of Kurdish nationalism in the 1980s' affecting Turkey and Iran (McDowall, 2004:401-3). Equally decisive were increased repression in Turkey, highlighted in *Yol*, and the rise of the PKK guerrilla organisation (see Chapter 6); the Islamic revolution in Iran; the civil war between Kurds and Arabs in Iraq; the Iran-Iraq war; and the Gulf War of 1990-91. Massive population flows between Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, as well as migration to western European countries, all contributed to an internationalisation of the Kurdish problem.

In this chapter, I have concentrated on the development of Kurdish national consciousness in Turkey since, over the periods under consideration, I have found no

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[23] van Bruinessen estimates that three-quarters to two-thirds of all Kurds still live in Kurdistan, though many have left (van Bruinessen, 1990:34)

evidence of relevant activity by film-makers in the other states. Even within Turkey, the impact of cinema was limited – as we have seen, many of the most important films were not distributed there, the Kurdish language was forbidden, and no mention could be made of Kurdistan. However, a growing awareness of the presence of large, ethnically distinct, minorities in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran paved the way for later films. Since the beginning of the 1980s there has been a substantial increase in interest in the Kurdish question among film-makers, worldwide, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Chapter 6
Constructing a "Virtual" Kurdish Nation

A Song for Beko (Ariç, 1992) opens in Hamburg on a bitter winter's day. From under an unfinished concrete bridge, the camera tracks down to the lonely figure of Beko, a Kurdish refugee, hunched on a river bank staring into the water. He begins to write a letter to his absent brother, Cemal. It is sleeting and the hostile setting and distant camera serve to accentuate the lonely and marginal condition of exile. The bridge leading nowhere, the constant movement of the river, and the unfinished letter, signal the incomplete, and perhaps impossible, transition for Beko (played by Ariç, himself a Kurdish exile in Germany) to a foreign country.

A flash-back finds Cemal on their farm in Kurdistan telling Beko he plans to join the Kurdish resistance movement (PKK),[1] fighting in Iraq. Before leaving he draws a map showing where he is going and the borders he will have to cross. Soon after, Turkish soldiers storm into the village, humiliate the villagers, ransack every house, beat up Beko and take him away as a prisoner. He escapes and determines to try to join his brother in the resistance. These scenes, shot in a spare style, set up the Kurds as victims not only of the arrogant and brutal Turks but also of the forced division of their nation.

Beko eventually reaches the border with Syria, marked by a wire-mesh fence which he follows until he comes to the Euphrates. He eludes the guards under cover of reeds and crosses to the other side. There, a Kurdish farmer helps him find a group of partisans who agree to take him to Iraq. After another difficult journey he arrives

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[1] The PKK, *Partiya Karkari Kurdistan* (the Kurdistan Workers' Party), was formed in the early 1970s by Abdullah Öcalan and began guerrilla activities in Turkey and Iraq in 1984.

at a nomad camp in the mountains where Kurdish villagers are sheltering from the turmoil of the Iran-Iraq war. He is welcomed, and a long interlude follows during which Beko plays with the children on the high sheep pastures. Each child identifies himself or herself to Beko by a trick, a poem, a song (the song of the title), or in the case of the young girl, Zinê, by a drawing of a tortoise, whose back is divided like Cemal's map of Kurdistan. This lyrical section of the film suggests an idealised vision of Kurdish unity and the homeland through its lovingly filmed landscape, plaintive music and folk-songs, traditional way of life, common language, and supportive social structures.
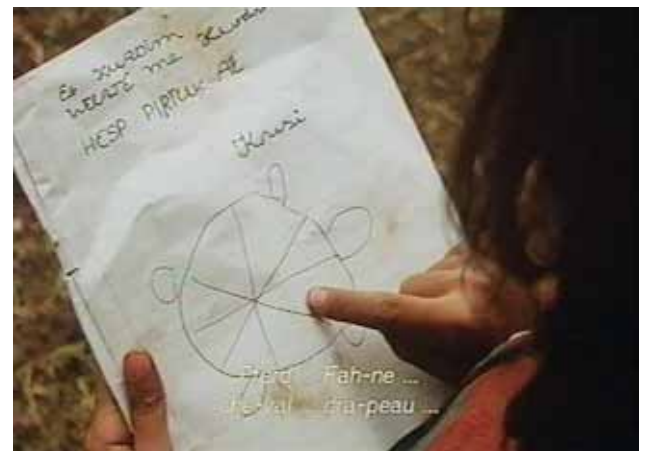
Zinê falls ill and Beko starts to tell and then sing the story of *Mem û Zîn* to comfort her. Beginning with close-up shots, then broadening into a series of medium shots that show the other children and the villagers clustered around, the Kurds are brought together under one "protective tent" to listen to a foundational myth of the nation.

Beko decides to return with the villagers to their home which they find destroyed by bombing. In another attack – this time with chemical weapons – they

are all killed except Beko and Zinê, who is blinded. These two escape and make their way into asylum in Germany. Back in present time, Beko learns that his brother was captured, forcibly conscripted into the Turkish army, and killed in a battle with Kurdish guerrilla fighters. The film ends with Beko, again in the alien environment underneath a knotted mass of road and rail bridges, hearing the voice of Zinê as she showed him her drawing of a tortoise, 'look Beko, we are Kurds, our country is Kurdistan'.

We have already seen expressions of the Kurds' marginality in, and differentiation from Turkish society in the films of Güney and arabesk film and music in the period up to the 1980s. Ariç goes further, demonstrating that repression of the Kurds is not just confined to Turkey but extends into Syria, Iraq, and Iran. He seeks to show that there is a common Kurdish culture and solidarity among the Kurds, doing so from an exilic perspective.

Images from this film are very powerful and reflect the Kurdish oral tradition of story-telling which, according to Allison, is 'employed with great enthusiasm by Kurdish nation-builders' (2001). However, is the vision of a unified Kurdish nation, expressed here simply a rhetorical device? Certainly, the Kurds have, to date, failed to achieve anything other than a fragile form of autonomy in Iraq. They are much further from territorial union than they were in the 1920s, and they seem incapable of political solidarity. Thus, the question remains: is Kurdish identity sufficiently strong to bind the nation together?

In Chapter 2, I introduced the concept of nations being divided by physical borders and cultural boundaries. This chapter examines how cinema regarding the Kurds from the 1980s onwards gives attention to the existence of such frontiers in addressing the issue of national unity. While some film-makers follow Güney in differentiating Kurdish identity within the state, others, like Ariç, have made films that suggest at least the *possibility* of a pan-Kurdish identity. Given the fractured nature of the Kurdish people – the problems of social and political cleavages, widespread migration, and extensive forced and voluntary assimilation – what has prompted the shift in emphasis from thinking of the Kurds as a "problem" in each state to the "question" of Kurdish identity as a whole?

Turning point in Kurdish nationalism

The transition from empires to states in the 1920s altered the way political identity was defined in much of the Middle East. The leaders of each new regime implemented coercive "nation-building" projects designed to construct unified, official identities, emphasising their Arab, Turkish, or Persian ethnicity and cultural heritage. At the same time, they denied identity to their minority populations, in particular the Kurds who found they could only become citizens of the new states, if at all, by renouncing components of their ethnic identity (Natali, 2005:xix-xxi).

In Turkey, though the existence of a "Kurdish people" was finally officially acknowledged in 1995, the government remains vehemently opposed to any form of Kurdish autonomy in any part of Kurdistan or even a discussion of the Kurdish issue. The regime in Teheran continues to be extremely vigilant towards any expression of a separate Kurdish identity, and ruthlessly polices its borders with Iraq and Turkey to restrict or prevent cross-border flows (Editor, 2000:1). Since the Iraq War, though Syria has been under strong international pressure to reform its treatment of minorities, the Kurds lack external support and seem unlikely to achieve recognition as a national community. And in Iraq, where the Kurds have maintained a fragile semi-autonomous status since 1991, they are threatened on all sides by neighbouring states (Yavuz, 2004).

Thus, the period since the 1980s is marked for the Kurds by aggravated cultural and political repression, wilful economic neglect, war, massacres, mass migration, as well as duplicity and in-fighting between different Kurdish factions. However, it has also brought Kurds in various countries into greater contact and widened the gap between many Kurds and their non-Kurdish fellow citizens. Large-scale internal and cross-border population flows have allowed a degree of interaction not previously possible between Kurds in different areas (Wahlbeck, 2002:76). In addition, the globalisation of mass media supported by rapid technological advances has created a serious challenge to the homogenising nationalist images produced by the states. Satellite television, especially Medya-TV beamed into Europe and the Middle East since 1995, promotes Kurdish history, language, and culture, in opposition to state television (Hassanpour, 2003; Houston, 2001:127-30). Several television stations have also been operating in the Kurdish controlled region of Iraq featuring Kurdish-language news, images of the Kurdish parliament, Kurdish music

and dance, and the landscape, as well as the broadcast of films. All of which '[play] an important role in defining and maintaining a Kurdish identity' in the region (Davidson, 1993:8-11).

Similarly, many newspapers and magazines have been published by Kurdish associations in Europe, some of which have become available to large numbers of Kurds, wherever they live, through the Internet (Rigoni, 2002:5-6). Furthermore, the proliferation of visual recording media such as video tape, VCD, and DVD, and dubbing in Kurdish, have broadened take-up of the Kurdish language and facilitated the distribution of Kurdish and other films (Hassanpour, 1996).

Since the 1980s, then, the struggle for the expression of Kurdish national identity has intensified and become internationalised, with the Kurdish diaspora in Europe acquiring great significance for Kurdish movements in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria (Lyon, 2001). However, many commentators argue that the concept of 'a territorially boundless Kurdish nationalism' is still limited to the realm of the imagination – it remains essentially a "virtual" nation that continues to be divided by the frontiers imposed on it (Natali, 2004a:111-2).

The Kurdish frontier

John Armstrong suggests identity is fundamentally defined at the 'frontiers' between national groups 'where group members perceive their distinctiveness from other groups, and differentiate themselves by comparison to others' (1982:xxx). Since the predominant Kurdish struggle is against division and cultural erasure – that is, elimination by assimilation – we should expect to find a surplus of representation of such frontiers in the Kurdish resistance to erasure. I have already argued for the centrality to Güney's late films of the economic, cultural, and political marginalisation of Kurds in Turkish society, and the significance he attaches to the attempted transition across the boundary that separates them. But, how evident is this theme elsewhere in cinema from the 1980s onwards? How important are frontiers in the contemporary representation of Kurdish identity?

The political space in which Kurds may express their ethnic and cultural identity, first divided in the 1920s, has been further sub-divided by new frontiers. These are both "literal" (i.e. physical and geographical) and "abstract" (i.e. metaphorical and cultural). Physical frontiers have been imposed on the Kurds by the

strengthening of borders between states and by forced or voluntary migration to other countries. Abstract frontiers, which are a function of difference or Otherness, have been reinforced for the Kurds by denial of their existence, cultural repression, and economic neglect. Kurds, without a state, are thus divided and confined by a cluster of frontiers that, as we shall see, are central to their representation in the cinema.

Physical frontiers

Physical and geographical frontiers define territorial states. Sometimes, when nations are effectively coterminous with the state, they also define the nation. In the case of the four states that contain the majority of the Kurdish people they serve to divide the nation and are something to be crossed for economic, social, or political purposes. Since the 1980s, each state has shown an obsession with the territorial borders that partition Kurdistan.

Border crossings

In Turkey, in addition to population transfers and village clearances, a wire-mesh fence on the border with Syria was extended in 1985 by several hundred kilometres to restrict movement of Kurdish resistance fighters. This is the frontier that Beko circumvents before crossing the Euphrates. The same fence, begun in 1948, is the subject of the satirical comedy *Propaganda* (Çetin, 1999). Set in a small village on the plains bordering Syria, the film opens with Rahim, the doctor, waiting to greet his old friend Mehdi, returning from Ankara. Mehdi has been away training to become a customs officer. A band serenades and the villagers cheer the arriving train. But ominously, the first images we have of Mehdi are extreme close-ups of parts of his official uniform, his epaulets, his peaked cap, and finally his polished boots – the boots of state power – ponderously descending the steps of the carriage.

Mehdi has brought with him a team of soldiers to set up a border fence and customs post. Unfortunately the route chosen for the fence passes through the village, leaving Rahim, his wife the village teacher, his daughter Feliz, and the village prostitute and madman on the outside. At first, no-one understands the implications of a "border", and Mehdi's explanations that 'barbed-wire is the ornamental rim of the country', and that 'when you look at the map you will see your country', seem mere overblown rhetoric. Sheep easily pass under the barrier and villagers are allowed to move freely in and out. But the next morning rules are imposed; no one is permitted

to cross without a passport, something they cannot obtain. From this simple conceit Çetin creates a series of comic episodes: Mehdi and Rahim sit either side of the barrier smoking water pipes together, but taking care not to let their feet cross the line; the teacher gives lessons to her class from the other side of the fence; Rahim performs circumcisions on the village infants through gaps in the wire; and, as Feliz and her lover try to make love, the barbed-wire cuts her thighs. But there is also a more serious intent to the film.

Long panning shots showing the immense, wide-open plains that dwarf the village and its people, illustrate the arbitrary nature of a border that could have been placed anywhere in this featureless landscape. Then the border is shown to create Others. A shepherd (played by Çetin), perhaps a Bedouin, tries to drive his sheep along their traditional trail, only to be turned back. His complaints, spoken in a parody of a foreign language, now cannot be understood on the "Turkish" side. And the women of the village start to disparage Rahim's wife, simply because she is on the other side of the fence. The border has created a "foreign" country and confined those it excludes to statelessness.

Though Çetin's film is set in a Kurdish region of the country, there is nothing to indicate that any of the villagers are Kurdish. But his reflection on the meaning of the state and how it sets its boundaries contrast with Beko's struggle to cross the same border. For Beko, able to communicate freely with Kurds he meets in Syria and Iraq, the crossing is a dangerous form of resistance to division that suggests coming together and collaboration among the Kurdish communities. In *Propaganda*, the final smashing of the border fence by

Mehdi and Rahim acting together could be taken to represent resistance to the capricious power of states that divide people by the imposition of arbitrary frontiers. But, Çetin tempers such a reading of his conclusion, perhaps as a concession to the censor, by making this an act of patriotic duty. Mehdi prominently carries a Turkish flag and both he and Rahim wear their war medals as they drive through the border, scattering the guards.

Different views of the meaning of the borders dividing Kurdistan occur in a number of films from Iranian film-makers. *Blackboards* (Makhmalbaf, 2000), sited in the ragged mountains of the Iran-Iraq border area, traces parallel stories of two itinerant Kurdish teachers, Reeboir and Saïd, who travel from village to village, blackboards strapped to their backs, in search of pupils. Reeboir encounters a group of boys – smugglers' "mules" carrying enormous loads along tortuous mountain paths into Iraq – and tries to interest them in learning to read and write. But, as they attempt to elude border guards, crawling with their loads among a flock of goats being driven across the frontier, they are spotted and shot dead one-by-one. In the other story, Saïd joins up with a group of villagers who are trying to return to the village in Iraq from which they have been displaced by war. He offers to show them the way and, during the course of the journey, he marries the only woman of the group, Halaleh. In high mountain mists, the ever-present but unseen threat of gunfire, war-planes, and helicopters, forces them to crawl silently along the path towards the frontier. Eventually reaching a barrier of barbed-wire stretched across the path – the other side is their homeland of Iraqi Kurdistan – the villagers kiss the ground and pray. Halaleh divorces Saïd in order to return home and receives his blackboard as compensation. As she disappears into the mist of her part of Kurdistan, we see the words 'I love you' that Saïd had written when teaching her to read.

Blackboards is an important film in that it brings the plight of these Kurds to an international audience, yet its treatment of the meaning of physical frontiers is not always coherent. The boys' encounter with a border – crawling to their deaths among the animals, the close-quarters of the moving, hand-held camera highlighting their desperation – comes out of economic necessity not resistance. The villagers' crossing – also crawling but this time like penitents, irresistible as they head silently towards the camera – epitomises the almost mystical attraction for them of their homeland. Unlike *A Song for Beko*, the film does not express any form of solidarity between the

Iraqi Kurds and Saïd and Reeboir. In fact, these two are regarded as interlopers and are largely ignored. Nonetheless, the symbolic message of love from one Kurd to another, carried across the border by Halaleh, suggests a commonality of identity that the physical division of the nation cannot erase.

Kurdish-Iranian film-maker Bahman Ghobadi, who plays Reeboir in *Blackboards*, extends the smuggling strand of that film to be the core of his first full-length feature, *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000). Ghobadi uses amateur actors and a documentary style, like Makhmalbaf, but creates a more compelling rendition of the border issue by focusing on the plight of a single family of five children. They live in a remote, high mountain village of Iranian Kurdistan, close to the frontier with Iraq, where 'most people make a precarious living in the small markets either side of the border and through smuggling goods in both directions' (Correspondent, 2003:64). It is in one such market that the film opens with the middle daughter, Amaneh, who acts as an occasional narrator, and the eldest boy, Ayoub, wrapping and packing glasses for transportation.

With an unsentimental eye, Ghobadi shows the children hustle and fight for scraps of work, their desperation born of poverty. Abruptly, Madi, their 15-year-old brother, enters the frame, glimpsed through a gap, wearing a bright yellow jacket that distinguishes his presence throughout the film. Madi is afflicted with a disease that has retarded his growth and left him in need of constant care and attention. He is central to the storyline, as it is the family's struggle to make money for his treatment that drives subsequent events.

Frontier crossings punctuate the narrative. The truck taking the children home from the market is impounded, and they are forced to trek across the border through thigh-deep snow. The children's father is killed by a landmine also crossing the border. To support the family, Ayoub takes a job carrying heavy loads on his back over mountain paths. Rojine, the eldest daughter, is "given" by their uncle to a family in Iraq on condition she can take Madi with her to a hospital. The families meet for the marriage ceremony in a snow-field at the border.

The groom's mother rejects Madi, offering a mule as dowry instead. Ayoub uses this mule to join a band of smugglers hauling tractor tyres over the mountain passes. They are attacked and Ayoub is abandoned with Madi. The border crossing these two make together that ends the film is the most significant. The final frames of a white snowy sky and distant mountains are bisected by a horizontal bank of snow topped by a stretch of barbed-wire. Ayoub, carrying Madi on his back and leading his mule, appears from below the horizon. He pauses, looks around, then steps carefully across the border, the cry of wolves on the soundtrack underlining the moment. The shot is held as they disappear off-screen and then fades to black. A Kurdish lament brings out the pain of the dividing border.

As in *Blackboards*, the frontier-crossings of *A Time for Drunken Horses* show the intricate inter-relationships of the villages on either side: work, marriage, death, and a form of harsh solidarity. And Ayoub's final crossing is an act of defiance, a rejection of the artificial borders that cut through the territory of Kurdistan.

Ghobadi has denied any political implications in his work (Hamid, 2005:45). Yet the division by frontiers and the suffering of the Kurdish people is also fundamental to his next film, *Marooned in Iraq* (2002), set on the same border in 1991 just after the Gulf War and the chemical bombing of Halabja in Iraq. Ghobadi again personalises the story, this time by following a trio of Iranian musicians – elderly Mirza and his two sons Barat and Audeh – in their search for Mirza's ex-wife Hanareh. Hanareh left Mirza in 1979, at the time of the Iranian revolution, when women were no longer allowed to perform in public, to go to Iraq where there were no such restrictions. The quest to find Hanareh is a narrative device that takes the trio through several refugee camps, first in Iran and then in Iraq, where they encounter the devastation brought about by the bombardment of villages with chemical and other weapons.

The first border crossing, from Iran to Iraq is done in the company of a band of smugglers, with their mules, carrying tyres across wild snow-clad mountain paths. These scenes are shot from a distance allowing Ghobadi to show the sweep of the

landscape and to express the tiny space occupied by the protagonists. Unlike his previous film, this border crossing is not commented upon though, again, it is punctuated by gunfire and bombs. Reaching Iraq, Audeh and Barat are diverted and Mirza goes on by himself. Eventually he finds Hanareh, but she refuses to see him because she has been disfigured and lost her singing voice in chemical attacks.

She asks him to take her daughter, Sanooreh, back to Iran. In the last scene, an almost exact reprise of *A Time for Drunken Horses*, Mirza, carrying the little girl dressed in a yellow jacket, reaches a bank of snow topped with barbed wire. He hesitates, then steps carefully across. The shot is held as he disappears off-screen, but this time the sound of jet planes provides the ominous background proclaiming danger.

For Ghobadi, then, borders are alien things: 'man's worst enemies are borders. They were imposed on the Kurds by the Great Powers. I hate borders' (Kutschera, 2003). They are something to be by-passed, ignored, but carefully stepped over. These two films assert that the Kurds are one nation across the border: they speak the same language; know each other's stories; they are united by suffering at the hands of outsiders; and, in particular, their music is common. Crossing the border is an act of rebellion against the division of the Kurdish people, an act that Ghobadi infuses with great significance in his concluding scenes. Ayoub carries Madi, representative of a nation whose development has been stunted, while Mirza carries Sanooreh, the girl whose mother was silenced in Iran and had her voice destroyed in Iraq.

I will return to the metaphorical devices employed to represent Kurdish identity in the cinema, but first I want to consider another form of border crossing – that which occurs as a result of migration.

Migration and the diaspora

Crossing physical frontiers into exile, whether as an economic or political refugee, suggests the *possibility* of transition similar to that dissected by Güney in *Sürü* – a transition between oppression and freedom, poverty and riches, even fear of

death and security. For the Kurds such border crossings have been a familiar experience in the last two or three decades as they have migrated in large numbers to several countries in Western Europe. The representation in the cinema of these journeys and life in the new surroundings, has been a recurring element in the construction of the "virtual" Kurdish nation.

The final border crossing for Beko is the crossing into exile in Germany. Though this part of his journey is never shown, the condition of his new existence is deftly enunciated. The opening positions him as an outsider whose transition is incomplete – he exists on the fringes of German society, seemingly unable to communicate except through gestures – and the final scene beneath a mass of bridges he will never cross, suggest he can never make that transition. The migrant themes *A Song for Beko* touches on – those of difference, tension between hope and despair, and exile as a form of prison – are a common feature of much cinema about the Kurds.

Otobüs (Okan, 1976) follows a group of rural migrants from Turkish Kurdistan[2] as they try to enter Sweden illegally. The long coach journey across frozen landscapes evokes the gradual separation of these men from the familiar world they are leaving behind – the peasant songs and dances of their homeland and their idealised memories of women working in sunlit fields. A group photograph taken in front of the bus expresses a symbolic transition, subsequently made concrete as they cross a major bridge into Stockholm.

Like the shepherds in *Sürü*, the journey westward serves now to highlight the gulf between these naive peasants and modern society. Abandoned by their driver, without money or passports, they venture into the city, an alien world they scarcely understand, and whose promises are kept at a distance behind the glass of shop-windows. Their bus, which at first offered

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[2] Ilal calls it 'feudal Anatolia' (1987:127)

the possibility of a new life now becomes both a prison from which they cannot escape and a haven that protects them from a foreign and frightening society.

Reise der Hoffnung (Koller, 1990) is based on the story of a family of poor Kurdish peasant farmers who try to reach the "promised land" of Switzerland by crossing over a dangerous mountain pass. Again, the rewards of a new life in the West are beyond reach, this time behind the glass walls of an expensive spa.

We're closed... closed

In *The Boy Who Stopped Talking* (Sombogaart, 1996), the boy of the title, Memo,[3] refuses to speak when his father takes the family to the Netherlands. He creates a prison for himself in exile, in despair at being removed from his beloved home in Kurdistan. *Aprilkinder* (Yavuz, 1998), relates the story of a Kurdish family in Hamburg and their difficulty in making a new life. Richter in *A Handful of Grass* (1999) tells the story of a boy taken to Germany where he falls into the drugs underworld. In these and other cases, the migrant journey is shown as an attempted transition, but one that fails.

Naficy argues that for many migrants separation from a homeland and difficulty of adjusting to a new society, creates a sense of claustrophobia that is reflected in 'the worldview, *mise-en-scène*, shot composition, and plot development of many transnational [i.e. cross-border] films' (1996:130-1). And, it is true that many such films describe the condition of exile as a form of prison, in a manner similar to Güney's treatment of internal migration discussed in Chapter 5. However, a more subtle effect of exile – of crossing the border into a foreign land – is a heightened sense of attachment to the place of origin. Wahlbeck, for example, argues that its most prominent feature is a reinforcement of 'myths and memories of the homeland, [of] alienation in the host country and the wish to return' (1999:179). This is evident even among economic migrants, where there has been a renaissance of Kurdish language literature among Kurds, 'a literature of exile' (Blau, 1996:25), and a 're-discovery' of their Kurdish identity (Leggewie, 1996:82).

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[3] In a reference to *Mem û Zîn*, the two children in the film are called Memo and Zin.

Thus, I would argue, nostalgia is as strong an 'accent' among exilic film-makers as prison or claustrophobia. Ariç, in the idyllic central section of *A Song for Beko*, set in the mountains; Saleem in *Kilometre Zero* (2005) contrasting the warm sunlit vision of Kurdistan with the bleak desert of Iraq; and Selman with his opening of *A Silent Traveller* (1994) in the bucolic, sun-lit highlands of Kurdistan seem, like many others, to express both a desire to return to a past that is forever inaccessible and a longing for an idealized future. Such re-imagination of an idealised homeland, common in migrant communities, is a factor in the resurgence of ethnic nationalism.

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Physical frontiers, or borders, define the outlines of states within which citizens are entitled to security. From the perspective of many Kurds, such frontiers serve to divide them rather than to provide protection. Thus, border crossing is most often represented in these films as an act of defiance of the state and an assertion of a separate collective identity. But, crossing borders into exile, while perhaps holding out the promise of freedom, simply reveals a new set of abstract frontiers, or *boundaries*. These boundaries – the cultural and social distinctions that separate peoples or ethnic groups and, at the same time, circumscribe them – are the ones that define nations. In the following section I will address two further questions: How are the boundaries that define the Kurdish nation expressed in film? And, what meaning is attached to crossing such abstract frontiers?

Abstract frontiers

In the absence of strongly enunciated myths of origin (as in the Armenian case) or common linguistic and religious ties (as in the Armenian and Palestinian cases), the expression of Kurdish identity emphasises the cultural boundaries that define the nation. Such boundaries, which may take the form of differences of language or physical appearance, frequently appear in cinema in the form of symbol and metaphor. When Güney made *Sürü* for example, he could not explicitly refer to the shepherds as Kurds or their homeland as Kurdistan, but we have a sense as their train journey continues that they have entered another country. The landscape changes; rivers, bridges, and tunnels are negotiated as specific stages on the way; people dress, move, and act differently. Similarly, in *Yol* there is no frontier, but the field of yellow sunflowers against a blue sky that greets Ömer, and his suddenly relaxed appearance, are sufficient to denote that he has arrived "home" in Kurdistan.

Contemporary film-makers have continued to use such symbols and metaphors, as well as taking advantage of a newly-found freedom of expression, to try to preserve Kurdish identity by valorising it. I want to examine some ways in which the abstract boundary to the nation has been buttressed, namely by the articulation of difference from other groups, the elevation of Kurdish culture, the celebration of a unique way of life, and the depiction of emotional claims to a frequently idealised homeland.

Identity expressed through difference

> Kurds have tried to protect their identity by differentiating themselves from the dominant ethnic groups. Kurds are Kurds because they are not Arabs, Persians or Turks (Natali, 2005:xvii).

We have already seen how Güney accentuates economic and social disparity in *Umut* and *Sürü* and so differentiates the Kurdish community in Turkey. The powerless, marginalised, Kurdish migrant is also the central element of *At* (Özgentürk, 1982). Özgentürk, a protégé of Güney's, repeats a number of the latter's tropes: the extended train journey from remote Kurdistan to Istanbul; the contrast between peasants and townspeople; the poverty and hardship; and the indifference of the city. Again, the film demonstrates the vast economic, social and cultural distance between the peasants of Anatolia and modern, urbanised, Turkey. In a final sequence, the horse of the title gallops across an unspoiled mountainous landscape in a none too subtle plea for freedom.

Each of these films wants to show the economic and social differentiation of Kurds in Turkey – how they exist on the edges of society in a restricted political space – and the large gulf between their nation and the state. In some other cases difference is articulated by the isolation of the rural Kurdish communities and their separation from their neighbours.

Separation and isolation

In an inversion of the previous narratives, Erden Kiral's film *A Season in Hakkari* (1983), tells of a teacher sent to a Kurdish village in the mountains of south-eastern Anatolia. He lives through a winter season teaching the local children and observing the rituals and traditions of the villagers. These people are confined, not only by the mountains, which admittedly embody a physical constraint to their existence, but also by the abstract frontier represented by their differences from the modern, educated, Turkish outsider. Kiral subtly denotes the difficulty for the Kurds

of bridging this gap due to the dominance of the landscape; a landscape ingrained into the consciousness of the pupils and, as Cullingworth notes, in the very words they use to express themselves – 'mountain, glacier … snow, dog, death' (1984:209).

The Kurdish community is also isolated from the Turkish state by difficulties of communication, symbolised in two satirical films by Yilmaz Erdoğan, *Vizontele* (2001), and *Vizontele Tuuba* (2004), by the absence of television and books. Erdoğan, a Kurd, sets both films in his native Hakkâri and plays the leading role of Emin, an idiot savant. In the first, Emin is given the task of setting up a television receiver in the community, as, in the words of the mayor, it will 'close the gap between the village and Istanbul'. In the second, a socialist bureaucrat is exiled to the town, as a librarian for a non-existent library. Emin, who falls for his daughter, helps create the library and teach the people to read. The film ends in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup when the librarian and most of the able-bodied men are taken away to jail. Though these films were made for a Turkish audience, like Güney, Özgentürk, and Kiral, Erdoğan represents the Kurdish community living within but isolated from Turkish society.

Iranian Abbas Kiarostami, in a characteristically indirect manner, also expresses the notion of isolation and separation in *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999). The opening sequence shows a car travelling along a winding road, while one of its unseen occupants tells us 'We're

heading nowhere'. Already, the idea of being 'nowhere', that the simple Kurdish village at the centre of the film is on the economic and cultural margins of Iran, is lodged with the viewer.

The narrative follows the trials of Behzad, the leader of a television crew, who has been sent to the region to film an elaborate funeral ceremony that will follow the death of a very old woman. However, the subject of his documentary takes her time dying and Behzad idles away the days wandering around the village and its graveyard set high on the surrounding hills. In an interview, Kiarostami has said a part of his general strategy is to develop the idea of absence, to create 'a type of cinema that shows by not showing' (Sterritt, 2000:25). Here, apart from a young boy who acts

initially as his guide, the villagers are largely hidden from view. The old woman is never seen, though Behzad repeatedly searches out her shuttered window; we have rare long-distance glimpses of other women in their doorways and windows; Behzad on several occasions chats to a man who is always hidden in a trench he is digging. The only people from the community who are visible are an old man and a woman café owner who resents Behzad's intrusion, especially when he tries to photograph her, and the young boy who guides him on his zig-zag path through the village, but who eventually abandons him.

The figure of a film-maker, standing in for Kiarostami, may be read as serving to problematise the relationship between the state and this remote Kurdish community. Hamid Dabashi, for example, suggests that he represents a perpetuation of 'the gaze of the First at the Third World, of the powerful at the powerless, of the centre at the periphery, of the metropolitan at the colonised, of the Tehrani at the Kurd, imitating the Europeans at the height of colonialism' (2001:255). I would argue, however, that throughout the film the villagers remain out of Behzad's reach and largely out of sight. The Kurds are positioned as outside the control of the state, as a people apart.

While these film-makers, through their emphasis on isolation, have developed a sense of the uniqueness of Kurdish identity, others have focused on the boundary that is created by ethnic difference.

Ethnicity

Two films from Turkey, *Işiklar Sönmesin* (Çelik, 1996), released during the height of the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF), and *Fotograf* (Öz, 2001) released after a temporary ceasefire in 1999, examine ethnic boundaries in Turkey. Çelik traces the converging stories of Seydo, the leader of a Kurdish guerrilla band, and Murat the captain of a platoon of the TAF. In the

beautifully filmed snowy mountain wastes of Kurdistan, the two finally meet after they have lost all of their respective fighters in an avalanche and are struggling to survive. During a brief moment of exhausted peace, they discover their common humanity and their common ethnic origins. Murat is also a Kurd but now on the opposite side of the political divide to Seydo. The film is a brave attempt to humanise and give a voice to PKK activists who are anathema to the regime in Turkey. However, it lapses into a sentimental resolution, foreshadowed in the opening shots of a candle flame being sheltered from the wind by two pairs of hands, overly symbolic of a presupposed and fragile multiculturalism of Turkey that must be protected.

Fotograf tells the story of two young men who board a bus in Istanbul headed for south-eastern Anatolia. In the now familiar trope of a journey through the countryside to the mountains of Kurdistan – they become friends, though each withholds the purpose of his journey from the other. Contrasting sequences when they leave the bus position them on opposite political sides. Faruk is mechanically "processed" into a soldier – the camera travels linearly along the outside of a building, accompanied by machine-like noises, suggestive of a factory conveyor-belt – trained to kill deliberately demonised guerrillas. Ali in the meantime has joined an informal network of Kurdish resistance fighters – the camera following his zig-zag path as he is welcomed at house after house – and is positioned as fighting for a truly-held cause. The film ends with Ali being killed on the mountains. Faruk comes across his body and, recognising his putative friend, he is distraught.

Both films raise the question of ethnic difference, but rather than suggesting it is a boundary that cannot be crossed, they argue that it is unimportant; that Kurds and Turks are indistinguishable and could live in harmony if only there were no nationalism.

Journey to the Sun (Ustaoğlu, 1999) is an altogether sharper analysis of the "denial of Otherness" that is integral to the official Turkish model of nationhood. An early-morning opening sequence introduces Berzan, who makes a precarious living

selling music cassettes from a hand-cart. He sets up his stall in a central square in Istanbul and starts to play one of his tapes. Ustaoğlu uses the music as a cue to bring the city to life with images of its colourful and diverse migrant population and the hustle and bustle at the start of a new day. A cross-fade links Berzan, listening to his music, with Mehmet, also listening, but this time listening for leaks from water mains beneath the city streets.


Where Berzan is experienced in city ways, Mehmet, an "innocent" from the Aegean coastal town of Tire, is a recent arrival. The brass listening horn he uses in his work is a metaphor Ustaoğlu exploits to good effect to position Mehmet as someone who will "see" beneath the surface of society in Turkey and reveal its "undercurrents". Unlike Behzad in *The Wind Will Carry Us*, Mehmet does become exposed to the reality of Kurdish existence, and unlike Güney, Ustaoğlu is able to analyse it fairly openly.

Mehmet's introduction to this reality occurs soon after, when a violent mob of football supporters attack a car in the street, shouting insults at the Kurdish driver. Mehmet tries ineffectually to intervene and they turn on him but he is rescued by Berzan who happens on the scene. This initiates a friendship between them. Berzan casually asks where Mehmet is from, beginning a sequence of "questions" about identity that are threaded through the narrative. In this instance, Mehmet's dark skin has suggested he is Kurdish but his origin, Tire, situates him as a western Turk.

Later, in an understated scene the pair sit on a bench looking over the Bosporus, in the early morning, talking. This time Mehmet asks Berzan where he's from. On his reply, 'Zorduç … near the Iraqi border', there is a pause. No explanation is forthcoming, but the implication is that Berzan is Kurdish. The camera

circles around behind them, and the two silent figures silhouetted against the water become indistinguishable. As the camera continues circling, the Bosporus bridge, symbolic of the linkage between East and West, comes into the background establishing a relationship between this Turk who "looks like" a Kurd and the Kurd who can "pass as" a Turk. Ustaoğlu here uncovers the racism in Turkey where Kurds are frequently described as dark-skinned, dirty, and breeding in large numbers (Houston, 2001:103).

So where is this Zorduch?
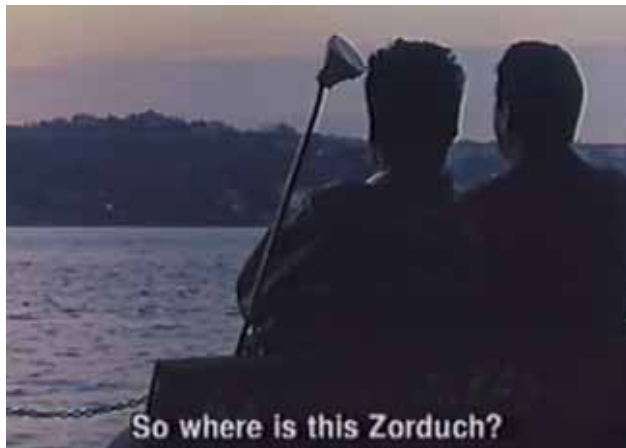
Mehmet's odyssey into the marginal world of many Kurds in Turkey begins. He is picked up by the police on suspicion of being a terrorist. Again, he is asked: Where are you from? Again, they don't accept his answer, insinuating he must be a Kurd because of his looks. They beat him up and hold him in solitary confinement. Released from prison, a striking sequence shows Mehmet make his way "home" to the dormitory he shares with other migrant workers. We first hear the sound of metal on stone before we see him limping along the road, dragging his listening-horn behind him over the cobbles. Having experienced the underside of Turkish society, he no longer needs the horn to hear it. Mehmet passes through a courtyard, where flames from furnaces, the sounds of machinery grinding, and hammers banging, envelop him. This sequence is an indirect visualisation that he has been tortured – his face is bloodied, his clothes torn, and his walk stiff with pain. But, it is also a scene of transformation – he emerges from the smoke and steam as if "awakening" to a new understanding of the position of Kurds in Turkey.

Ustaoğlu continues to probe and question identity based on ethnic difference and origins. But now, as the narrative progresses, she also introduces a series of "doublings". Berzan is killed by police during a demonstration and Mehmet decides to return his body secretly to Zorduç. In the first doubling, Mehmet disguises himself

by dying his hair, staring at his image in a mirror as it changes. Then he loads Berzan's coffin onto the back of a truck, a reprise of an unexplained inverted scene in the film's prologue. Reflection and mirroring, the coinage of duality in the cinema, here denote the insubstantiality and instability of identity.

Later in his journey across Anatolia, Mehmet gets rid of his hair-colouring; his assumed identity left symbolically in a swirl of dyed water. On continuing his trip to Berzan's village, he meets a soldier who claims he is also from Tire. And, in the final act of doubling, Mehmet denies his own origins, saying he is from Zorduç, thus assuming the identity of Berzan. Through this series of identity changes, of appearances and disappearances, Ustaoğlu questions the classification of identity by ethnic difference and origin.

Two films from exiled Iraqi film-makers, *A Silent Traveller* (Selman, 1994), and *Kilometre Zero* (Saleem, 2005), provide a more angry edge to the discourse on Kurdish ethnic identity. Selman's narrative begins by setting the scene in Kurdistan – a slow pan across snow-covered mountains accompanied by mournful Kurdish pipe music – while a voice-over talks of the scattering of the Kurds throughout the world as their country lives 'under the boots of soldiers'. The film focuses on one village near the Turkish border. Selman uses the character Moho, a villager who has become a policeman for the Iraqi government, to emphasise the ethnic nature of Kurdish identity and their difference from Turks and Arabs. The film ends with a call for the 'great people of the Kurds to rise up and liberate Kurdistan'.

Saleem also uses the mountainous landscape to set the scene definitively on the borders of Kurdish Iraq. The main protagonist, Ako, is conscripted into the Iraqi army and suffers under the brutality of Saddam Hussein's regime. The deep division between Kurds and Arabs is illustrated by a scene in which Ako and his taxi driver come to blows, shouting that they hate each other. Ako tries to settle their argument by talking, but they have nothing to say, so they start fighting again.

Thus far, the films I have discussed distinguish the abstract boundary to Kurdish identity by nature of the marginalisation of Kurds by their host states, and by concerns with ethnic difference. I now want to consider other markers of difference in the cinema, the first being the emphasis on cultural specificity.

Preservation of culture

> What can a nation … that is split into territories of several states while being a minority in each of them do to preserve its identity? (Zgusta, 1992:xxxvii).

One of the principal ways in which many states seek to homogenise their minorities is to repress their culture. This has been particularly true for the Kurds as each state has proscribed the Kurdish language and literature. Kurds have been unable to study, publish, speak publicly or write in their own language (Suleiman, 2004:20-26). Kurdish place names have been changed to Turkish, Arabic, or Persian, and it is forbidden for children to be registered with Kurdish names (Lowe, 2006:3; Koivunen, 2002:114).

However, the suppression of language has some unintended consequences: it identifies Kurds as different, and thus becomes a focus for resistance. As a result, the desire to retain and develop Kurdish culture has 'assumed greater importance' (Klein, 2000:10-11). This is evidenced by steady growth in the study and use of the Kurdish language, and the appearance of an increasing body of Kurdish literature in recent years.[4] But, despite the myth of commonality promoted by nationalists, the Kurds do not possess a single language. The two main versions, *Sorani* and *Kurmanji*, are as grammatically different as English and German, and there are also many local and regional dialects (O'Shea, 2004:154). Yet, O'Shea argues, even with its differences, 'the Kurdish language, in all its forms, remains possibly the most powerful recognizable tool of Kurdish identity and self-expression' (ibid.:155).

Given the strict ban on use of the Kurdish language, it is unsurprising that it did not make an appearance until quite recently in the cinema. Güney, working in Turkey in the 1970s, was not able to use the language directly, though he inserted Kurdish songs and used Kurdish names in *Sürü* and *Yol*. The first time Kurdish was used extensively in film was in *A Song for Beko* and *A Silent Traveller*, both made in the diaspora. In Turkey, *Mem û Zîn* and *Siyabend û Xecê*, dubbed in Kurdish, were

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[4] As an example, a new version of *Mem û Zîn* in contemporary *Kurmanji* was produced in 1995 (van Bruinessen, 2003:57).

also released in the early 1990s. But none of these films were distributed in the four states. The first partial appearance of the language in Turkish cinema was in the mid-1990s with *Işiklar Sönmesin*, but in Iranian and Iraqi cinemas Kurdish was not used until the turn of the century. However, the presence of spoken Kurdish in film has since become a significant element in the preservation of cultural identity.

A number of films have touched on the repression of language and the divide between Kurds and Turks, Arabs, and Persians. *A Song for Beko* was the first of these, and it also promotes the idea of a commonality of language, at least among the Kurds of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. *Propaganda* satirically links the physical border of the state to the cultural boundaries of the nation. As soon as the barbed-wire border is erected, the nomad shepherd who previously had freely wandered the countryside can no longer be understood by those on the Turkish side – he speaks a kind of gibberish.

More recently, *Hejar* (Ipekçi, 1996), makes the suppression of language its central theme. The two main protagonists are Rifat, a retired Turkish judge, and Hejar, a small Kurdish country-girl who has been orphaned by war. Hejar has been brought to Istanbul by an elderly relative, Evdo, and left in the care of some cousins. In a police raid, the adults are killed and Hejar is left once more abandoned. She strays into the neighbouring apartment, belonging to Rifat, and he reluctantly takes her in. Thus begins the story of a transformation, as both struggle to cross the cultural boundary between them.

Rifat is set up to symbolise conservative Kemalist ideals. He is stiff, formal, and authoritarian: he reads a conservative newspaper and books; and he drives an old, 1960s-style car. All this is indicative of him being stuck in the past, of having a closed mind, and he represents a closed society. He refuses to understand Hejar when she talks – he shouts at her in Turkish and she shouts back obscenities in Kurdish. His servant, Sakhine, eventually tells him that Hejar is speaking Kurdish. She knows this because she is Kurdish herself, something Rifat has refused to acknowledge. There is an impasse when he forbids Sakhine to speak Kurdish in his apartment.[5]

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[5] The Kurdish actor who plays Sakhine is well-known in Turkey but has never been able to use her native language in film or on stage. In this film, she "speaks her identity" for the first time.

Eventually Rifat, with the help of Sakhine, tries to find Evdo so that he can return Hejar to her family. Ipekçi uses the familiar trope of a journey to symbolise the social and economic "distance" between the middle-class judge and the marginalised Kurds living in a *gecekondu* on the edge of the city. Rifat's obvious discomfort at their poverty – their large families, the subjugation of women, and the squalid conditions in which they live – aptly illustrates the state of denial in Turkish society about its Kurdish underclass.

"Awakened" by his journey, Rifat gives permission for Sakhine to talk to Hejar in Kurdish, and for the first time he acknowledges that it may be he who does not understand Hejar rather than the other way round. Gradually they come to a compromise, as they learn some of each other's language. Ipekçi is not an angry film-maker. Though she highlights the general denial of the Turks about the largest minority in the country, and the Kurds' lack of rights, she uses the issue of language as a call for multiculturalism.

Thus, within the limitations imposed by censorship, language has been employed a number of times in contemporary cinema as a way of stressing the importance of preserving Kurdish culture. Similarly, the concept of the troubadour – the tradition of story-telling with music – has been threaded through Kurdish films. It appears in *A Song for Beko* as Beko sings the story of *Mem û Zîn*, and in *A Silent Traveller* where Silo sings the story of his ancestors to his son. More recently, troubadours predominate in Ghobadi's *Marooned in Iraq* and *Half Moon* (2006) with their energetic Kurdish folk-music. These films also denote the cultural unity of the Kurds across borders – the musicians take their music from Iran to Iraq and are eagerly accepted wherever they go.

A number of film-makers feature traditional dancing as another marker of Kurdish identity. Özgentürk opens *At* with a ritual dance celebrating the horse; Selman inserts a mystical dance sequence in *A Silent Traveller* involving the Kurdish flag; *Drejan* (Gök, 1997) begins with a silent, slow-motion dance as part of a wedding; Saleem has the brutal Arab soldiers force Sami to perform a 'Kurdish dance' in *Kilometre Zero*; Ustaoğlu includes a Kurdish dance sequence in *Journey to the Sun*. Ghobadi highlights wedding ceremonies, with their associated music, dancing, and chanting, tangentially in *A Time for Drunken Horses* but more centrally in *Marooned in Iraq*. Though not as elaborate a trope as in Palestinian cinema, wedding ceremonies, music, and dance are an important element in the cinematic rendering of Kurdish identity.

It is Güney's work, however, that first touches on the *suppression* of music, with the singer in *Sürü* under police guard on the train to Ankara for the crime of 'singing a song'. This idea is taken further in a number of other films from Turkey, including *Yol*, *Fotograf*, *Drejan*, and *Eskiya* (Turgul, 1996), in which arabesk music is played during a bus journey into Kurdistan. I have previously described the association of arabesk with the Kurds – the '*dolmuş* culture' of alienation and oppression (Stokes, 1992a:105-7) – but it is also important to Kurdish resistance. Its subversive nature is a frequent trope in film: cassette tapes playing arabesk are switched to "innocuous" Turkish music whenever a checkpoint is approached; and arabesk "icons" displayed in buses – lines from songs, prayers, evil eyes, pictures of arabesk stars – are covered to avoid detection.[6]

Arabesk is a music that crosses physical frontiers, but it also probes the cultural boundary between modern Turks and the Others that threaten the homogeneity of their society. In this sense, arabesk film and the presence of arabesk music and images in many of the films analysed so far, open up a space for the discussion of difference. As Stokes remarks:

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[6] The playing of music in public transport in Turkey was banned in 1986 for fear of its subversive effect (Stokes, 1992a:107).

The impulse to question those who enforce the observance of borders and boundaries comes from many sources, but Arabesk has undoubtedly played a role (1998:285).

Among the other 'sources' is the cinema, which resists the attempted suppression of Kurdish culture by its valorisation of language and music. In so doing, it rejects the state borders dividing Kurds from each other, and defines the cultural boundaries that unite Kurds. But, perhaps as important has been the way cinema has been used in "spectacular" representation of the unique way of life associated with the Kurds of Kurdistan.

Celebration of a unique way of life

The rural idyll, inherently bound up with the topographical features of Kurdistan, has become the dominant common thread of culture which unites the Kurds (O'Shea, 2004:162).

The rural experience is increasingly atypical in Kurdish society. In reality, rural life has been greatly diminished through economic neglect, the shift from agriculture to industrial production, war, deportations, guerrilla activity, harassment, village clearances, and destruction. As van Bruinessen notes, the iconic image of a Kurd in 1979 would have been 'a peasant working on a stony plot of land with a buffalo-drawn plough … wearing baggy pants and a cap' (1999:1). Such images would be difficult to find today, Kurds are more likely to be found living in a city, their village no longer habitable.

Yet, the tendency remains among film-makers to dwell on the rural idyll when representing Kurdish life. The beauty of the *zozan* (the summer pasture for sheep), the simplicity of subsistence farming (the baking of flat bread, churning of buttermilk and making of cheese), and the distinctive women's costumes (in reality now fairly rare), are seen to express a form of "authenticity" despite their increasing artificiality. These images are considered to be somehow inherently Kurdish and represent 'a powerful concept even for sedentary and urban Kurds' (O'Shea, 2004:158).

The representation of rural habitation varies greatly, from the black nomadic tents of *Sürü* and *A Song for Beko*, through the battered stone ruins of *Marooned in Iraq*, to the "secret", hidden villages of *The Legend of Love* (Mehranfar, 2000) and *The Wind Will Carry Us*. But always the home is a common unifying feature of these films. It is something to be remembered or grieved over, as in the Armenian and Palestinian cases. The women in *Sürü* throw water on the ground after the departing shepherds to urge them to return; Beko longingly recalls his own home in *A Song for*

Beko, and in the same film, the Iraqi villagers see beauty in the bombed-out ruin of their village; Ömer makes the long journey back to his village in *Yol*, and greets it with joy; Silo's grandfather in *A Silent Traveller*, from his youth 'to his dying day' longed to return to his home village. In these and other films, emotional ties are emphasised by flash-back, strong colours, music, and often extreme close-ups of a subject expressing pain at separation.

The village also draws its people back even after death. Ako in *Kilometre Zero* returns the body of his friend Sami to his widow in his home village. Ferhat, the boy in *At*, takes his father's body back to the village he loved and only left to try to educate his son. The manner of leaving the indifferent city, with the sounds of a football crowd cheering a game, contrasts with the reverential homeward movement and the final images of a horse running free. Mehmet, in *Journey to the Sun*, takes

Berzan's body back to his village, only to find at the end of his long journey to the East that it has been submerged under the waters of one of Turkey's hydroelectric systems.[7] Mehmet's action of floating Berzan's coffin on the water seems to suggest resistance to erasure, and reclaiming of this territory for the Kurdish people.

While these films have rendered the Kurdish way of life as something unique, to be celebrated, another group of films from Turkey expose some of the less comfortable aspects of their traditional social structures. The unity of Kurds has its strongest expression in Khani's *Mem û Zîn*, but this epic poem has an alternative sub-text. The separation of Mem and Zîn may be seen to have been motivated by petty revenge and rivalry, reflecting the factionalism and differing political loyalties that have plagued the Kurds throughout their history and inhibited their unity. I will briefly note three films from Turkey that have been criticised for perpetuating stereotypes of Kurdish tribal and clan behaviour that have supposedly disappeared.[8]

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[7] Many of these schemes have displaced large numbers of Kurds and destroyed their villages. Opponents claim they are part of a plan by Turkey to cleanse the area of Kurds

[8] Personal communication with Mustafa Gundogdu (curator, Kurdish Film Festival, London).

Nonetheless, they may reflect the roots of 'neotribalism' that, even today in Iraqi Kurdistan, influence affiliations to the major political parties (Natali, 2005:xx).

Sahin Gök sets *Drejan* in central southern Anatolia, where a revenge killing leads to a vendetta between two tribes. Gani Şavata also address violent tribal rivalries in the Kurdish region bordering Iran in *Sinir* and *Dava*. Ancient Kurdish history is invoked by an image of the palace of Ishaq Pasha, near which lies the grave of Ahmed-i Khani the author of *Mem û Zîn* (Meiselas, 1997:282-3). However, while accentuating traditional aspects of rural Kurdish life – music, dancing, wedding ceremonies, Islam – these films also have pointed political messages, especially *Dava*, supporting the assimilationist ethic of the Turkish state.

Apart from these few films, the good is idealised and the bad is forgotten, as in most instances of nationalism. But, however the nationalist ideology is imagined by Kurds in different countries and from different social and political groupings, it is 'the rural idyll and the imagined topography of Kurdistan [that] are common unifying features in the Kurdish imagined community' (O'Shea, 2004:151).

The idealised homeland

> the locality of Kurdistan remains central in the Kurds' consciousness as the historical land of their people (van Bruinessen, 1999:20).

In this thesis, I have used the term Kurdistan to refer to territory that notionally could be considered to "belong" to the Kurdish people, though it is not recognised internationally and is divided by physical borders between states. I have shown how several film-makers have depicted crossing the border as both an act of defiance and as a way of defining Kurdistan. But there are other ways in which the Kurdish homeland has been outlined and "reclaimed" in the cinema, specifically through the use of landscape, not just as a spectacle or backdrop, but as a central protagonist in the narrative of Kurdish identity. Thus, if Nietschmann's speculation that, 'geographic montage … maintains a people's collective identity as much as do language, religion, history …' (1993:7) applies to the Kurds, what does the representation of the Kurdish homeland indicate about that identity?

First, there is the journey – to or from Kurdistan – which serves two main purposes. It provides a contrast between the beauty of a frequently idealised homeland and harsh cityscapes or the barren landscapes of alien countries. From the Kurdish standpoint the homeland is constructed as the site of birth, nurture and hope,

rather than poverty, and its representation serves to emphasise the separation and isolation of the Kurds from other societies. But the journey also serves a more subtle purpose. Fragments of landscape, given value by moments of pause in the cinema (for example by held shots of a scene or a panning shot to display a panorama), are linked into something larger by a journey. As I argued in Chapter 2, land becomes a national space by the movement of one or more protagonists through these places of value. In *Sürü* and *Yol*, stops on the route are carefully named; pauses for photographs in *Otobüs* are linked with flashbacks to the rural village; and bridges, tunnels and rivers in *Fotograf* and *Journey to the Sun* clearly signal passage to the homeland. These and other examples indicate that the protagonist is not just passing through landscapes but mapping them – that is stitching places together into a narrative stream. The effect is to create a "virtual" landscape or homeland, characteristic of this divided nation.

Then, there are the mountains; mountains which, above all, are synonymous with Kurds. As O'Shea argues: 'To most Kurds, even urbanites or dwellers of the plains, Kurdistan is defined by its mountainous topography' (2004:162). It is scarcely surprising, then, that mountainous scenery is a factor in virtually all films about the Kurds, even some set in an urban environment, such as *Eskiya*, where the mountains insert themselves symbolically into the cityscape. Mountains may suggest ruggedness – the strength, independence, steadfastness, and indestructibility of the Kurds. In *Yol*, for example, the mountains are almost impenetrable – a mountain stronghold, a kingdom. Alternatively, in the case of Ghobadi, the snow-covered passes and peaks of *A Time for Drunken Horses* and *Marooned in Iraq* indicate purity and innocence, perhaps the idealised birthplace of the nation (Akrami, 2002).

However, it is not just the landscape that is important but also the position of characters within it. The distant camera in *A Song for Beko* and *Marooned in Iraq*, situates the protagonists within an "enclosure" – cradling and containing them as a "coherent nation". A young boy in *A Time for Drunken Horses*, sings of being enfolded within 'the mountains and the valleys' and thus closer to his ancestors – the landscape is his history.

Finally, there is landscape as a contested space. Whose land is this? Kurds live in states in which banal nationalism – the flags, statues, photographs, broadcasting, sports events, and so on, do not represent them. In Turkey, the flag and the slogan 'Happy, who calls himself a Turk' (*Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyene*) inscribed onto mountains and buildings, constitute a constant form of oppression (Houston, 2001:106). In the cinema, such reminders of state power are ever-present though they are resisted, as in *Kilometre Zero* where Ako drapes the coffin of his friend in the Kurdish flag.

As in many of the Palestinian films discussed in subsequent chapters, the landscapes of *Yol*, *Sürü*, *A Song for Beko* and others, are "invaded" by soldiers, presented in the same menacing, impersonalised way. Or, they are threatened by the noise of unseen aircraft, the sound of gunfire or bombs, or the hidden landmines that litter the border areas in *Turtles Can Fly* (Ghobadi, 2004) and *The Riverside* (Amini, 2004). The "occupier" of the land is thus contrasted with the indigenous Kurds; a trope that is even more significant for the Palestinians, as we shall see in Chapters 7 and 8.

With the landscape of Kurdistan playing such an important part in the representation of Kurdish identity, it is not unexpected that exile accents, or heightens the attachment of Kurds to their homeland. Thus, Kurdistan as a symbol remains of prime importance to the Kurdish diaspora, whether in the cities, removed from the homeland, or abroad (van Bruinessen, 2000a:4-7). Through its use of landscape, the cinema has created an imagined Kurdish homogeneity over the reality.

Conclusions

> [T]here is no united Kurdish nation, but rather a set of possible Kurdish nations or at least different groups demanding autonomy .. no single Kurdish question .. but rather a set of Kurdish questions specific to time and place (Fawcett, 2001:111).

The Kurds have never been on the brink of achieving a unified state. At the beginning of the 21st century Kurdistan is neither geographically nor politically integrated as a region. It is divided by physical frontiers (the state borders) and, within each state it is not a clearly bounded territory (despite having a core area

generally known as Kurdistan). It has poor communications between its different parts and has no cohesive political leadership. Van Bruinessen asserts that there have been

> no serious attempts … to establish an independent united Kurdistan; all political movements, with the partial exception of the PKK …, have concentrated their efforts on only one part of Kurdistan (2000a:3)

Despite this, O'Shea makes the case that the *idea* of Kurdistan survives the reality 'as a powerful amalgam of myths, fact, and ambitions' (2004:8).

I have argued that the cinema, especially in Turkey and more recently in Iran, Iraq, and the diaspora, has been instrumental in keeping alive this idea. In the previous chapter, I discussed how Güney in the 1970s and early 1980s indirectly raised the issue of Kurdish identity in Turkey in three of his films, *Umut*, *Sürü*, and *Yol*. Working under conditions of severe censorship, he managed to enunciate the economic and social marginalisation of the Kurdish community, and in doing so articulated their plight and began to expose their presence within the Turkish majority. I also discussed how arabesk in music and films provided a form of popular culture that directly challenged the state's monopoly of cultural expression, and so made a space in which Kurdish identity could be conveyed. These were among the first instances of the cinema in any of the states that, however obliquely, acknowledged the existence of a Kurdish minority.

In the 1980s, a series of geo-political events brought about significant change in each state and were instrumental in raising political consciousness among many Kurds. Migration (forced and otherwise) from rural areas to the cities provided opportunities for communication as well as bringing more people into contact with political movements. Migration between states with large Kurdish populations (mostly as a result of war) has further facilitated the growth of a common identity. Migration abroad again has brought many Kurds from different regions together and this diaspora has begun to assert its ideas of national unity more strongly in the last twenty years.

Resistance movements in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, while not universally popular among Kurds, fostered the sense of a separate nation fighting for its right to self-determination. The relative success of the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq since 1991 has provided an example and a hope to Kurds in other states and in the

diaspora. Finally, the development of technologies of mass communication and their wider availability has, to some extent, by-passed the controls of the state and enabled political ideas to be diffused throughout the region.

Expanding Armstrong's general hypothesis that identity is defined at the "frontiers" between national groups, I have evaluated the representation in film of such frontiers and the meaning associated with crossing a frontier. My first observation is that in film about the Kurds there is an excess of journeys, often of great difficulty, and frontier crossings, often involving danger. To further my analysis of the meaning encoded in these films, I distinguish between different types of frontier: the physical frontiers (or borders) that, in the Kurdish case, divide the nation, and the abstract frontiers (or cultural boundaries) that separate Kurds from other national groups.

I have examined a number of films from Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and the diaspora in which borders between the four states make an appearance. These films all depict border crossings, and each represents them as acts of resistance and expressions of a common Kurdish identity. Thus, there is a theme of unity and cohesion (which belies the reality of political and social division between Kurds from different areas). I have also analysed films about migration, that is, the crossing of physical frontiers into other states such as Switzerland, Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands. In these cases the border crossing is not represented as an act of defiance but as a "journey of hope" for better things. However, almost universally, the migrants fail to make a successful transition to the new society resulting in a heightened sense of attachment to the "homeland" and a "re-discovery" of their Kurdish identity.

These migration films also touch on boundaries between migrants and the host nation by accentuating ethnic and cultural differences. Such differences or Otherness are central to my final group of films from Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. I previously argued that Güney was the first to open up new opportunities for consideration of the status of the Kurdish Other in Turkey; a state that resolutely refuses to recognise the existence of its minorities. The journeys in his films provide a metaphor for the transition Kurds are expected to make – the loss of identity they must endure – to become part of Turkish society. Contemporary film-makers, inside and outside Kurdistan have sought ways to outline the abstract frontier around the Kurdish nation. I have explored how this has been achieved through the articulation of difference, the

valorisation of culture, the excessive display of a mythical, idyllic way of life, and the construction of an idealised homeland.

However, with the exception of northern Iraq since 1991, being a Kurd remains a barrier to advancement in the state systems of each country, and the only escape from repression or economic neglect is through assimilation. But assimilation also suggests a journey, a transition, this time across the abstract frontier, from one identity to another. The arduous journeys of *Sürü*, *Yol*, and *At* denote the difficulty of this transition, this giving up of identity, which I interpret as highlighting the illusory nature of assimilation. The journeys of *Fotograf* and *Işiklar Sönmesin* suggest that people might be the same either side of the cultural boundary, whereas *Journey to the Sun* blurs the boundary altogether. The allegorical journey in *The Wind Will Carry Us* sees the boundary as being an unfathomable gulf, while that of *Kilometre Zero* shows it as an antagonistic divide. All these films use the concept of a journey across the abstract frontier to worry at the nature of the cultural boundaries that define the Kurdish nation.
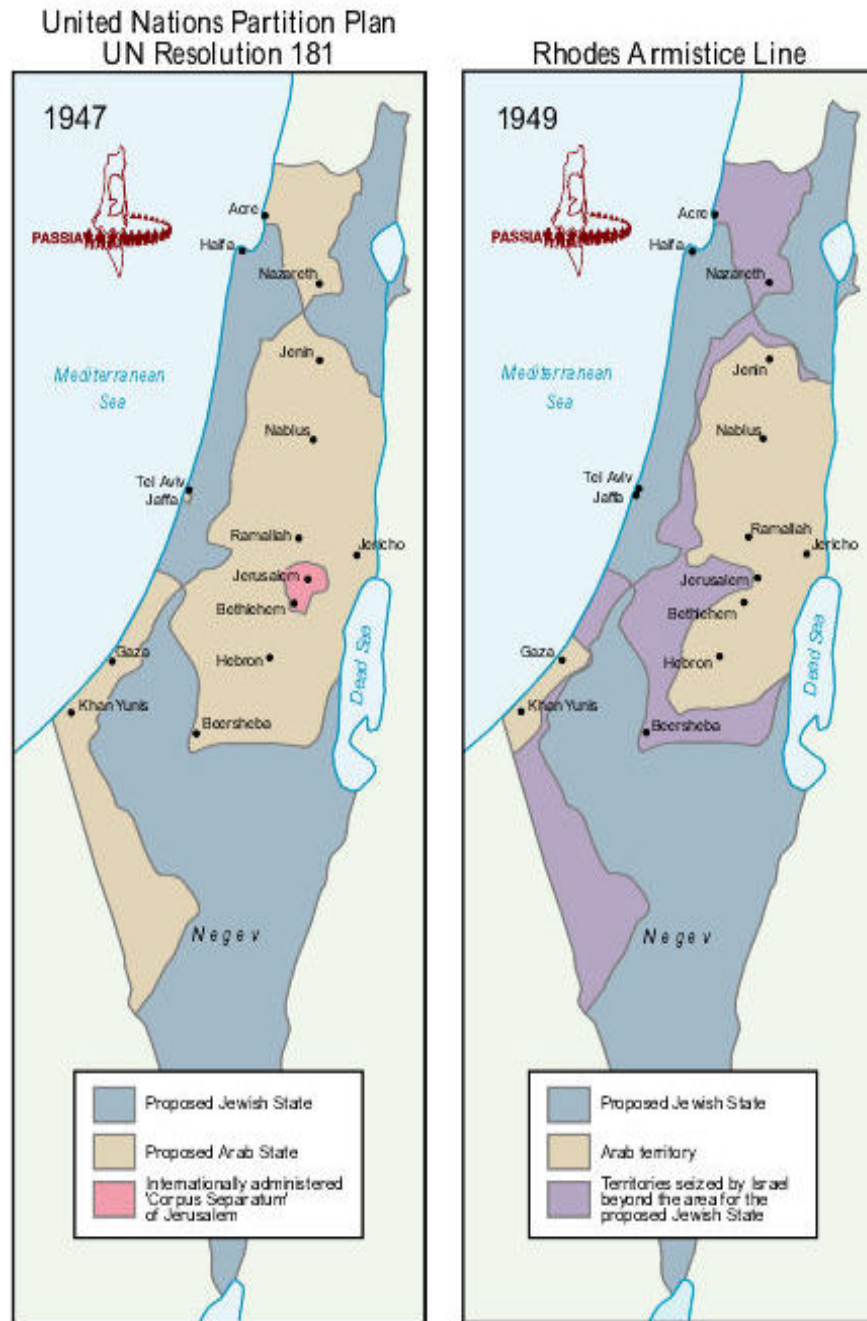
Travellers across Kurdish frontiers frequently carry burdens which metaphorically describe the nation. Şivan in *Sürü* carries his silent wife Berivan to her death in Ankara; Beko in *A Song for Beko* carries the blind Zinê to exile in Germany; Ayoub in *A Time for Drunken Horses* carries the undeveloped Madi across the border; Mirza in *Marooned in Iraq* carries Sanooreh, the girl whose mother was silenced, across the same border; and several films include the return of a coffin to Kurdistan. These burdens, recurrent in so many films about the Kurds, are indicative of the "damaged", incomplete nature of the nation as it tries to survive without a state.

Despite the clear articulation of a unique Kurdish identity, it has been insufficient to support the formation of a state at crucial historical junctures. Perhaps Hroch's notion of national development does not apply to the Kurds. The emergence of political awareness has not passed through his neat stages – it is fluid, overlapping and changeable. Yet, Kurdish identity is sufficiently distinct and valuable for many Kurds to enable them to resist attempts by other states to deprive them of their culture. The Kurdish example thus exposes the limitation of the modernist concept of nation-building, discussed in Chapter 2, which argues that the state creates the nation. Better communications, economic integration, and urbanisation, would, it is claimed, make citizens of a state cohere and feel they belong to one nation. However, the increased

mobility and interaction among different Kurdish groups, the economic and social discrimination against them, and changing social structures, have evoked a new interest in Kurdish culture. This new interest is evident in the cinematic representation of Kurdish identity which suggests the existence of a "virtual nation", one that, like cinema itself, transcends the borders of states and operates wherever Kurds concentrate.

However, given the fissures between different Kurdish political groups, the geographical problem of constructing a Kurdish state in the region, the continued intransigence of the host states towards any form of separatism, and the desire of the international community to contain Kurdish demands, it appears that some form of limited self-government for the Kurds in Northern Iraq may be the only realistic goal.

Palestine

United Nations Partition Plan
UN Resolution 181

1947

Mediterranean Sea

Acre
Haifa
Nazareth
Jenin
Nablus
Tel Aviv
Jaffa
Ramallah
Jericho
Jerusalem
Bethlehem
Gaza
Hebron
Khan Yunis
Beersheba

Dead Sea

Negev

Proposed Jewish State

Proposed Arab State

Internationally administered 'Corpus Separatum' of Jerusalem

Rhodes Armistice Line

1949

Mediterranean Sea

Acre
Haifa
Nazareth
Jenin
Nablus
Tel Aviv
Jaffa
Ramallah
Jericho
Jerusalem
Bethlehem
Gaza
Hebron
Khan Yunis
Beersheba

Dead Sea

Negev

Proposed Jewish State

Arab territory

Territories seized by Israel beyond the area for the proposed Jewish State

Map 4: Proposed and *de facto* partition of Palestine 1947-49 (http://www.passia.org)
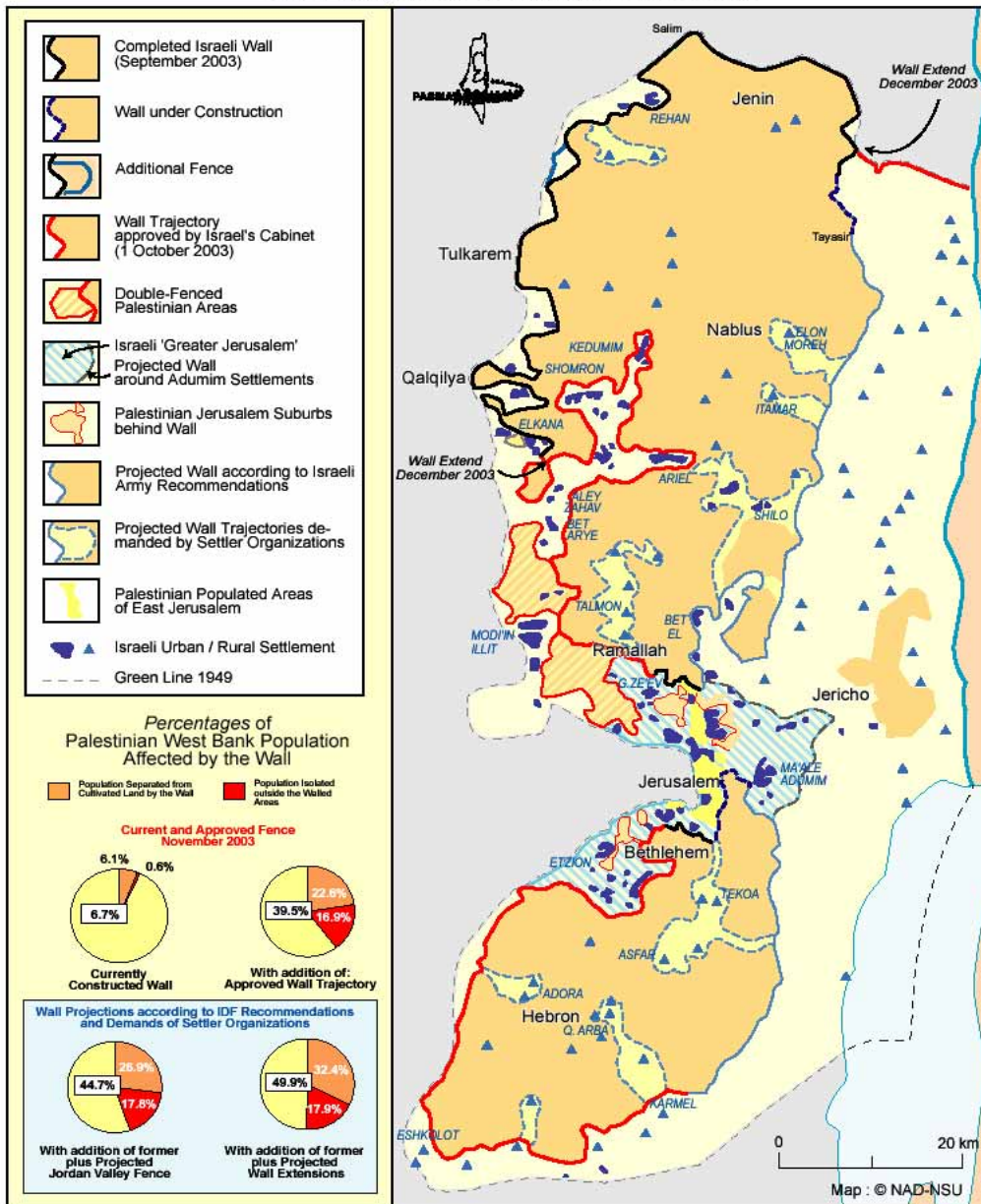
Map 5: Fragmentation of the West Bank (http://www.passia.org)

Chapter 7
Constructing and Sustaining Palestinian Identity

A wretched man in ragged trousers and worn shoes tramps alongside an endless railway track. The close camera focuses on his tiring legs as he continues ever onwards – onto a stony path, through tangled scrub-land, into a sweltering desert, over rocky outcrops – until he reaches the border of British Mandated Palestine. Passing through the barrier, his sun-burned face now visible, he breaks into a smile and his body relaxes: he has reached "the promised land". This dramatised sequence that begins the documentary *The Return* (Lerski, 1935) beckons victimised Jews from all over Europe to make the difficult but ultimately rewarding journey "home" to the "empty" lands of Palestine.

Zionist campaign groups in the 1920s and 1930s produced many documentaries in a similar vein including such titles as *Return to Zion* (Ben-Dov, 1920), *Romance of Palestine* (Ben-Dov, 1922), and *The Dream of My People* (Bloome, 1934).[1] Superficially these seem innocently to construct Palestine as a welcoming place where Jews can make a new life free from oppression. But they also contain a number of deeper narrative elements.

First, there is the uncovering of ancient Jewish historical relics: the 'Jewish city' of Haifa; Bet'aa with its '400 synagogues'; the fortress of Masada which 'defied the Roman siege'; and Jerusalem, whose 'stones scorch the soul' with their memories of the Jewish past. Then there are the modern institutions – libraries, schools, university, hospitals – and the wide streets of Tel-Aviv: 'a city of youth and gaiety, growing out of the sand', built by Jewish philanthropists. Next, they show how, with industriousness and ingenuity, the heroic settlers bring to life land that 'has not been ploughed for a thousand years'; they 'make the desert bloom' and 'rouse [the land] from a long-lasting sleep'. But, above all, these films resolutely suppress the fact of a large and thriving Arab population. They avoid positive representation of urban and intellectual Arab life in Jerusalem and the prosperous ports of Jaffa, Haifa and Acre, or any of the many flourishing rural communities. In an inversion of Güney's positioning of the *gecekondu* of *Umut* in the modern Turkish city, here the clean lines

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[1] For a discussion on Zionist propaganda films from this period see, for example, Tryster (1995).

of modern Jewish developments are contrasted with narrow, winding and dirty streets of 'Arab quarters'.

"Picturesque" scenes of camel trains and tented encampments describe the few Arabs that do appear as 'wandering Bedouin – whence they came and where they go no one knows'. The films claim that the Arabs are backward, uncaring about the land, mere subsistence farmers whom 'progress has overlooked', and depict them as old, primitive, and lethargic.
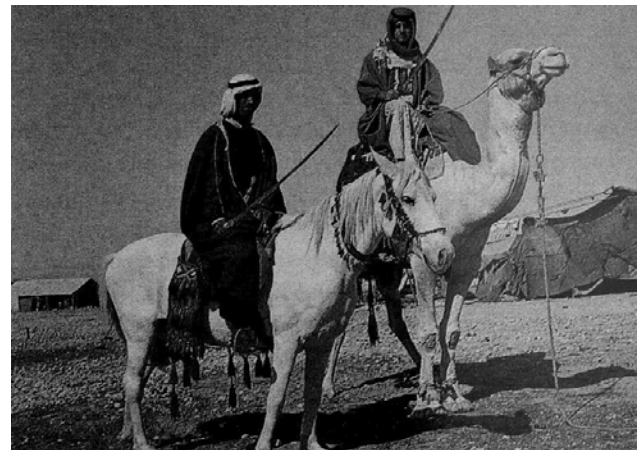
These postcards produced in the 1930s (Semmerling, 2004) are typical of the visual motifs employed in film; contrasting the feeble yet "threatening" Arab nomads with the "new-born" Jew who is mythologised as young, healthy, and vigorous. Crucially, the films also skilfully align the settlers with the West and with the "civilising" mission of the American Frontier.

Such imagery is characteristic of the manner in which Palestine and Palestinians have been represented in cinema from the beginning of the 20th century. Not only is the existence of the majority population in Palestine denied but Arabs in general are treated with contempt and/or fear. I start this chapter by questioning the absence during the British Mandate of an effective Palestinian response, and go on to discuss how the trauma of defeats in the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948-9 and 1967 affected the enunciation of Palestinian identity. Against this background, I trace the emergence of a counter-narrative – the "revolutionary cinema", created in exile from the late 1960s – whose aim was to 'spread awareness of the Palestinian problem throughout the world' (Ibrahim Bashir, quoted in Gertz, 2006:466).

I argue that there was a turning point in the 1980s despite the increasingly virulent barrage of anti-Arab, anti-Palestinian, and anti-Islamic sentiment constructed

by Israeli and U.S. cinema (and media). Space emerged in which the next generation
of Palestinian film-makers, in particular Michel Khleifi, Elia Suleiman, and Rashid
Masharawi, were able to develop a more nuanced, intimate, and personalised narrative
of the nation. The remainder of the chapter considers the way their films represent the
changing dynamics of Palestinian society and national identity under occupation.
Chapter 8 takes a different perspective in order to examine the spatial construction of
a "Palestine" that is increasingly fragmented. It analyses the territorial, cultural, and
formal, "narratives of resistance" that characterise much contemporary film about the
Palestinian people.

The absent narrative of Palestine

The history of Palestine in the 20th century has been one of recurring war and
colonisation. Under Turkish control until the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1917,
British Mandate government to 1948, partition and divided rule by Egypt, Jordan, and
Israel up to 1967, and thereafter military occupation by Israel, the Arab people of this
land have endured continuous foreign domination. From the Balfour declaration of
1917,[2] which referred to the '*existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine*'
(emphasis added), until the late 1980s, there has been a more or less relentless denial
of the existence of a Palestinian nation by those whose interests in the region would
be most affected by the creation of a Palestinian state, namely, Britain and the United
States, some neighbouring Arab states, and most of all, Israel.

How then, given the colonized status of the territory, did the Palestinian nation
come into being? Though there are some who maintain that Palestinian identity only
emerged in the 1960s, Khalidi traces its roots through local Arab revolts against
Egyptian and Ottoman rule in the 19th century. He concedes that Palestinian identity
is multifocal, simultaneously exhibiting Arab, Muslim or Christian, regional, and
national characteristics, according to the context, but convincingly demonstrates the
firm establishment by the mid 1920s of an identifiable Palestinian political
consciousness (1997). This developed further over the next decade, spreading from
the elites to broader sections of the population through daily contact with the colonial
powers, international trade, war, the press, and the expansion of bureaucracy and

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[2] A letter from the British Foreign Secretary, dated November 1917, that declared Britain favoured 'the
  establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people […]'.

education. Thus the Palestinian case appears to fit the modernist model of nation formation that I discussed in Chapter 2. But why did this nascent nation fail to register its demands for autonomy with either the British Mandate authorities or the international community? Though Palestinian communities were shattered by the failure of the Arab revolt from 1936-39 and, after British withdrawal, by the subsequent Arab-Jewish wars, how was the Palestinian narrative so thoroughly stifled?

Between the wars (1918-1948)

During the first half of the century, Zionist movements were extraordinarily successful in constructing a national narrative featuring founding myths of the future Israeli state. This powerful story was projected not only in documentaries but also in feature films, such as *Sabra* (Ford, 1933), and a host of widely distributed historical and other material.

Notably unbalanced reporting in the international media paralleled this propaganda. For example, British and American newsreels in the period up to WWII were generally hostile towards the Arab population of Palestine and, conversely, supportive of Jewish immigration (Downing, 1979). But, other factors were also at work. In pre-WWII American cinema, the initial representation of Arabs as "exotic" and "mysterious" in such films as *The Thief of Bagdad* (Walsh, 1924), progressed to the casual racism of *The Son of the Sheik* (Fitzmaurice, 1926), and then began to equate Arabs with 'lawlessness, violence and rampant sexuality' in a number of films (Michalek, 1989). Equally evident is an Orientalist condescension, similar to the Russian view of Armenians and the Turkish disdain for the arabesk that I noted earlier.

These narratives of Zionism, racism, and Orientalism contributed to the general discourse on Palestine during this period. With the decline of British influence in the region after the war and the corresponding rise of U.S. strategic interests, support in American news media for the Jewish cause strengthened (Downing, 1979:8-11). As details of the horrors of the Holocaust emerged, the argument for the creation in Palestine of a new state for Jewish people was judged to be morally justified. This context helps to explain the inequitable plan for partition of Palestine agreed by the United Nations in November, 1947 (see map on page 179).

Western support for the founding of Israel was fundamental to its realisation, and the international media were undoubtedly influential in this. But, why was there no counter-narrative? Though the Arabic press was active at the beginning of the century, and a heated debate began about the problems of increasing Jewish land purchases and settlement (Khalidi, 1997:chapter 5), why was there no counter to Zionist propaganda and the negative representation of Arabs in Western cinema?

Benvenisti cites some of the explanations given for the absence of a strongly enunciated national narrative including poor leadership, a weak Arab commitment to Palestine, and "backwardness" of the population (2002:chapter 1). And, with respect to film production, Alexander is correct to highlight the dearth of available resources and skills (2001:22). Whatever the reasons, it is evident that the Jewish narrative was stronger and more attuned to Western concepts than the Palestinian one and Zionist political movements were always more aware of the need to promote it in the West.

Detailed information on films made about the Palestinian people in this period is scarce; perhaps the most comprehensive record is a recent anthology in Arabic that contains brief descriptions of film-makers and their films (Al-Zobaidi, 2006).[3] Most of this film was apparently lost in the turmoil of the 1948 Arab-Jewish war (Alexander, 2001:22). Even the fragments that survive and have been incorporated in other films, such as *Histoire d'une terre: Part I, 1880-1950* (Bitton, 1993) and *Palestine - A People's Record* (Al-Zobaidi, 1984), fail to denote the presence of a contemporary Arab civilisation in Palestine, let alone of a more particular Palestinian culture.

The Nakba and occupation (1948-1967)

During and after the 1948 war, many Palestinians fled (or were "encouraged" to leave) their homes, turning the myth of an empty land into a reality (Rogan, 2002). The newly formed state of Israel then set about eliminating evidence of prior Arab habitation (Benvenisti, 2002:16-18). This "catastrophe", or *Nakba*, went almost unnoticed by the Western media until much later. As Downing remarks, the absence of coverage in newsreels of the period 'represents the total victory of Zionism and the defeat of the Palestinians in media terms' (1979:12).

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[3] See also the selected filmographies in Dabashi (2006:179-80) and Halbreich-Euvrard (2005:297-307), and the (forthcoming) book by Gertz and Khleifi (2008).

After 1948, negative propaganda and media bias became more widespread and diverse. As might be expected, Israeli films emphasised the struggle for survival and the historical, religious, and moral claims of Jews over Palestine (Shohat, 1989a:57-114). They had the 'defined and declared goals […] to glorify the Zionist settlement of Israel and the absorption of immigrants' (Gertz, 2005a:80). But Israeli popular culture, the media, and even official historical texts, with few exceptions, also began to depict Arabs as evil, cruel, and stupid, and to deny Palestinians a right to their separate identity (Pappé, 1997b:62-67).

The U.S. media, in general, continued to support Israel and also increasingly vilified Arabs and Palestinians. Political cartoons mythologised Israel as a David facing the Arab Goliath. Newspaper reports unearthed connections between former Arab leaders and Hitler and Nazism (Christison, 1998a:21), and branded the current leadership as communist sympathisers. They invariably characterised the Arabs as aggressive, stubborn, and backward (Damon, 1983), and editorials revealed an 'overwhelming anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian' bias (Hudson, 1980:91). As Shaheen has shown, defamatory images predominated in such cultural artefacts as TV shows, magazines, comic strips, and popular songs and fiction (1983:327-34).

Hollywood also appears to have been infected with an anti-Arab hysteria. Among the many instances identified by Michalek (1989:4-6) and Shaheen (2001), *Exodus* (Preminger, 1960) is a archetypal example. Not only does it systematically deny the existence of the Palestinian nation, it denigrates Arabs in general. In her perceptive analysis, Loshitzky writes:

> Full of intentional historical mistakes and conscious mixing of fact and fiction, the film constructs an idealized cinematic representation of the founding of the state of Israel […] symbolically annihilating "others" [the Palestinian Arabs]' (2001:14).

There were a few attempts during the 1950s and 1960s by film-makers from several Arab states to express solidarity with the Palestinian cause (Shafik, 2001a:518-9; Khatib, 2004:83). However, films such as *A Girl From Palestine* (Zulfikar, 1949) and *Nadia* (Wahhab, 1949) actually stress the common roots and common fate of the Arab peoples (Abdel Fattah, 2000b) and elide any notion of separate Palestinian components of identity. Additionally, popular culture, especially in Egypt, was fundamentally supportive of the idea of pan-Arab identity (Armbrust, 2002).

Unlike the Armenian case discussed in Chapter 3, where there was an almost complete lack of artistic response to the genocide for several decades, the Palestinian literary and poetic reaction to the *Nakba* was relatively swift (Harlow, 1987). Though a cinematic response was largely absent – something that clearly is accountable to the disruption of war, but also to a continuing trauma – I have spent some time on this period of silence since it helps to set the context for what follows. With the emergence, in exile, of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in the mid-1960s, cinema began to assume a more important place in Palestinian nationalism.

The PLO and "revolutionary cinema" (1968-82)

Following failure of the Arab states in the 1967 war, the PLO took the lead in resistance against Israel. The organisation recognised the power of cinema as a political weapon in the "revolutionary" struggle against occupation and founded film units, first in Jordan in 1968 and then, following the expulsion of the PLO in 1971, in Lebanon.[4] A cinematic narrative that gave precedence to Palestinian aspects of identity started to surface. Production figures for this period vary: Shafik argues for a total (up to 1987) of 52 films (2001a:520) whereas Kais al-Zobaidi (2006) lists hundreds. It is generally agreed that much of the film archive disappeared during the invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

The founders of these units were inspired by the Third Cinema movement (discussed in Chapter 1), and manifestos for a "Palestinian Cinema" were published in 1972 and 1973 setting out its revolutionary and pedagogical mission. The latter states

> Our aim is to develop the Palestinian cinema as an art capable of properly supporting the struggle of our people, revealing the reasons for our present condition and reflecting the various stages in the struggle of the Arabs and the Palestinians for liberation of their lands (quoted in Drobashenko, 1982:165).

Thus, this '*cinéma militant*' (Hennebelle, 1976b) set out with an activist intent and was committed to the Palestinian cause.

Though the expressed aim was to develop an art form, in common with other Third Cinema practitioners there was a general refusal to prescribe a single aesthetics for this cinema. And, in part for practical reasons (the lack of resources, trained actors and dramatists) documentary was the main mode (Massad, 2006:35). This is

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[4] Factions of the PLO, including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the arts and culture section (PDFLP), set up independent film units (Tawil, 2005:115).

exemplified by *They Do Not Exist* (Abu Ali, 1974) which begins with images of a peaceful refugee camp, continues with footage of Israeli bombing raids and interviews with defiant survivors of the resulting devastation, and ends in the training camp for resistance fighters. But, aesthetic issues were still considered important and were hotly debated. As Massad describes it, this debate centred on what forms of representation would be most comprehensible to a mass audience (2006:33-34).

With *By Soul and Blood* (Abu Ali, 1971) it appears that realism was preferred to artistic or experimental styles. However, other films that have survived are more than just a documentary testament; exhibiting considerable interest in aesthetics and form. For example, *Far From the Homeland* (Al-Zobaidi, 1969), which consists of a series of interviews with children from a Palestinian refugee camp in Syria, creates a growing sense of tension, through its cutting and music, reaching a climax as the children seem to burst out of the camp, running determinedly towards the camera as if to reclaim their rights.

The Visit (Al-Zobaidi, 1970) is a stylised "art film", incorporating silent actors, poetry, music and modernist painting to dramatise the horrors of the military

The Visit	*Palestinian Visions*

occupation of Palestine, whereas *Palestinian Visions* (Madanat, 1978) concentrating on the paintings and songs of the artist Ibrahim Ghannam, provides a highly romanticised image of traditional rural life.

Even the documentary, *They Do Not Exist*, uses montage to make a political statement accusing Israel of genocide, and juxtaposes Israeli jets being loaded with bombs to the cheerful sounds of Bach with the stunned silence of the survivors as they survey the aftermath of destruction and death.

The problems of finding an aesthetic that would enable the Palestinian cause to be brought to the attention of a mass audience outside Palestine is aptly illustrated by Jean-Luc Godard in *Içi et ailleurs* (1976) where he contrasts his own attempts to film Palestinians fighting for their freedom with a French family passively watching the struggle on TV.

In parallel with the PLO-sponsored revolutionary cinema, some Arab films, including two of the most successful *The Dupes* (Saleh, 1973) and *Kafr Kassem* (Alaouié, 1974), criticised the failure of the Arab world to turn their support for Palestine into positive action (Thoraval, 2002:537-8). The former for example, based on a novel by Ghassan Kanafani, tells of three Palestinian men who leave their homes to work in Kuwait to provide for their families. In the title sequence, a prescient voice-over warns:

> And my father once said,
> a man without a homeland will have no grave in the earth,
> and he forbade me to leave.

The men are smuggled across borders inside a water-truck but, because of delays, they die in the baking sun. Fulfilling the earlier prediction, their bodies are thrown unceremoniously onto a rubbish dump. This political allegory demonstrates the indifference of Arab leaders to the plight of the Palestinians – though they bang on the walls of the truck to attract attention, no one is listening.

Of course, the opposing narratives continued and even intensified over the 1970s. Following a spate of hijackings, hostage taking, and murders by factions within the PLO, the term "Palestinian" became synonymous with "terrorist" in the American media and cinema.[5] While these activities considerably raised the international profile of the Palestinian people, they did little to improve international understanding of their cause.

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[5] Examples of "terrorist films" include *Children of Rage* (Seidelman, 1975) and *Black Sunday* (Frankenheimer, 1977).

"So much for your bankroll . . . now fork over your Israeli policy . . .!"

Furthermore, when the oil-producing states began to assert their power in 1974, Palestinians became associated with the economic threat to U.S. The revolution in Iran in 1979 added another strand to the narrative; equating Islam or Islamic fundamentalism with terrorism (Khatib, 2006). Arabs, and Palestinians in particular, were bracketed together with Iranians into 'a total realm of terrorism, wherein Islam became the new signifier of the region' (Semmerling, 2006:20).

This onslaught of negative media attention had an apparently measurable effect. Surveys of public opinion in the U.S. over the period up to 1982, for example, demonstrate that Palestinians had essentially been 'dehumanized' (Suleiman, 1984:105-6). What, then, can we say about the Palestinian cinematic narrative that emerges in this period? It was intended for a mass audience, but how effective was it in constructing and preserving Palestinian identity?

In an interesting analysis, Gertz and Khleifi note that many of the films adopt a similar pattern (2008:467): images of an idyllic rural paradise, followed by the devastation of an Israeli attack, and then an expression of defiance and resistance. Though rooted in the Third Cinema movement, these film-makers strayed from one of its essential tenets which Willemen describes as 'opposition to a sloganised cinema of emotional manipulation' (1989:6). And, for Gertz and Khleifi, Palestinian revolutionary cinema fails as it is 'based on a forgetting of history rather than on constructing it' (ibid.:466). While *Palestine - A People's Record* tries to address historical causes of the situation in the early 1970s, it also is defensive, it blames all other parties for failure, it attempts to turn defeat into victory, and descends into propaganda.

To the degree that the lost lands of Palestine are idealised while remaining unattainable, the response is similar to the melancholia of the Armenians that I discussed in Chapter 4. However, it is notable that whereas in the Armenian case

ancient history, language, and religion are invoked to represent a deeply rooted identity that survives and transcends the genocide and the loss of territory, there is little in these films that substantiates a historic, legitimising basis for the Palestinian nation. Here, it is Zionist aggression and victimisation of the Palestinians that are used to create cohesion in a society that, like the Kurds, is riven by local allegiances and loyalties.

Shafik is certainly dismissive of these films, arguing that they tend to be 'repetitive, propagandist and of poor technical quality' (2001a:522). And there is little doubt that they added to a general discourse that Khalidi describes as a 'self-serving retelling of Palestinian history' (1997:200). Yet, these film-makers contributed to a rejection of defeatism and despair and they recorded and transmitted 'the voice of the Palestinian people' (Abdel Fattah, 2000a:2). Though they did not reach a wide audience either in the Arab world or in the West, they have achieved an almost mythical status for many Palestinians. A contemporary source, for example, asserts they provide 'a record of Palestinian history full of political cinema, documentation of the struggle, the resistance movements, daily life and precious historical footage' (Jacir, 2007). In a way similar to Güney's exposure of the existence of an unrepresented Kurdish nation in Turkey, the films were instrumental in refuting Israel's denial of Palestinian identity.

A turning point

In 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon. The indiscriminate bombardment of Beirut, and the atrocities committed in the Shatila and Sabra refugee camps with the connivance of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), were extensively reported and filmed. Ghareeb notes that media coverage, '[t]hrough the process of personalizing and humanizing the victims [began] to halt if not to reverse the process of stereotyping and dehumanizing the Arabs' (1983:182). This coverage intensified with the first *intifada* which started in 1987 as a popular uprising against military rule. However, media attention, while bringing increased international solidarity with the Palestinians was at best superficial. It enabled Palestinian leaders to emerge from the shadows – becoming more individualised and acceptable, at least to Europeans (Zaharna, 1995:37-47) – but failed almost entirely to provide an understanding of the underlying issues. Dunsky's survey shows that the American media continued to follow the pro-Israeli bias evident in U.S. foreign policy (2001). And, as detailed in *Peace,*

Propaganda & the Promised Land: U.S. Media & the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
(Ratzkoff and Jhally, 2004), U.S. supporters of Israel embarked on a massive public
relations exercise designed to ensure that this position was maintained.

Over the 1980s and 1990s there was a significant expansion in the number of
popular American films that featured Palestinians as terrorists. Shaheen ascribes this
to Jewish interests in the American film industry and, in particular, to the Israeli
production company Cannon/Golan-Globus which produced over 30 anti-Arab films
in this period (2001:26-7). Michalek, while he acknowledges the latter company
'clearly contributed to the increase in racist portrayals of Arabs in the cinema'
(1989:9), is less certain; arguing that negative stereotyping of the Middle East has
existed at least since the spread of Islam. He also notes that some of the more
nuanced representations of Arabs have occurred in Israeli films.

Shohat, indeed, identifies a 'Palestinian Wave' in Israeli cinema including
such films as *House* (Gitai, 1980), *Hamsin* (Wachsmann, 1982), and *Beyond the Walls*
(Barbash, 1984), with positive representations of Arab-Israelis (1989a:chapter 5).
However, none of these has ever been as widely distributed as the anti-Palestinian
films, and though they are indicative of a liberal strand of Jewish opinion, they tend to
reflect angst about the existential state of Israel rather than calling for political
accommodation with the Palestinians.

Furthermore, as Lina Khatib's analysis of Hollywood films since the 1980s
shows, anti-Islamic sentiment has grown to the point where '[t]here is often no
distinction between the notions Arab, Muslim, and Islamic fundamentalist'
(2006:166). In this view of 'a unified Islamic fundamentalist Arab world' (ibid.:175),
any legitimate claims to alternative ideologies are suppressed. Thus, incorporating
anti-terrorism and anti-fundamentalism, American cinema continued to present a
wholly negative portrayal of Palestinians and to obscure their rights to land and to
autonomy.

I think it is important to note the deep-seated effects of banalisation of this
imagery – its internalisation by audiences (First, 2002:175-6). The de-humanisation
of Arabs, and the resulting lack of empathy with them, are factors that have
influenced the position of successive U.S. administrations towards the Palestinian
cause. As Christison argues, such impressions ensured 'an entire generation of

American policymakers came of age [in the 1960s] not knowing and not thinking it necessary to learn the Palestinian story' (1998a:22). And in Israel, the results of this campaign are evident in the pervasive racism shown, for example, in the interviews of *Route 181* (Khleifi and Sivan, 2003) and recounted in numerous academic studies.[6]

In the 1980s the PLO, now dispersed in Tunisia, Libya, and elsewhere, more or less ceased film production. It is at this time that the portrayal of failure as triumph, which had become 'almost a stock in trade for the PLO' (Khalidi, 1997:197), began to be rejected by many Palestinians. The *intifada* marked a point at which the nationalist movement became centred inside Palestine rather than in the diaspora. This brought about a change of emphasis as a new cohort of younger film-makers, began to search for more expansive and effective ways of representing the Palestinians – or as Michel Khleifi, put it '[w]e had to provide the world with another way of talking about us' (2006:46).

Re-emergence of a Palestinian narrative

Given the fragmentation of Palestinian society, both physically and politically; the attraction of powerful Arab and Islamic elements of identity; competing regional and local loyalties; and the overwhelmingly negative discourse in Israel and the U.S., what has sustained the Palestinian nation in the past two or three decades? With the widely different experiences of being Palestinian, what ways have film-makers found to represent the nation?

Homi Bhabha provides a clue to approaching these questions with his distinction between two types of narration: the "official", or how the nation is represented as a historical presence, and the performative, or how it is recreated in daily practice (1990b:297). Unlike other Arab states and Israel, the Palestinians had no official national narrative and, as we have seen, their representation has been shaped elsewhere and by others. The fact that this flood of negative images and words failed to obliterate Palestinian culture is largely due to the alternative, rich vein of performative narration found in artefacts such as poetry, prose, art, music, cartoons, theatre, and film.[7] Laura Marks may have extended Bhabha's concept too far when

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[6] See, for example, Sara Roy (2007) and Ella Shohat (2006).

[7] For analysis of the role of poetry, literature, and art in sustaining Palestinian national identity see, for example, Hanan Ashrawi (1990), Barbara Parmenter (1994), Barbara Harlow (1987; 1996), Salma

she contends that the *only* way Palestinian identity can be expressed is by enacting 'little performances … collectively to depict a new nation, one that is different from its external representations' (1992:64-5). Omar al-Qattan is, perhaps, nearer the truth when he argues:

> the struggle for Palestinian freedom is often *most successfully conducted* through Palestine's living culture, a peaceful but determined effort to introduce Palestine to the world not as a negative force, but one full of challenges and complexity and beauty (2006:116, emphasis added)

The complexity of Palestinian society, the diverse spaces occupied by the Palestinian people, and the profound changes in their circumstances over the last 90 years, alerts us to the fact that there can be no essentialist view of Palestinian cultural identity. It cannot be reified through a fixed set of symbols, behaviour, and artefacts, nor should we expect to find as culturally grounded a nation as the Armenians. In some respects Palestinian narratives are closer to those of the Kurds – full of internal contradictions and tensions, the pull of different loyalties, and the influence of other cultures.

Since the 1980s, Palestinian identity has been expressed in the cinema as a sense of belonging to a 'living culture' with strong traditions and social structures and distinct history and memories, but, crucially, also with unwavering claims to a specific territory – the homeland. Whether consciously or not, some film-makers returned to the basic doctrines of Third Cinema. As we shall see, their work becomes less directly polemical while it remains socially committed and concerned with the collective social space. And they refuse to let dominant cinema forms dictate their own representation of Palestinian society.

I leave consideration of the aesthetics of representation in film of the Palestinian homeland, the trauma of its loss, and resistance to displacement and erasure, until Chapter 8. Before that, I want to examine how some film-makers have characterised and analysed Palestinian society; how they have delineated the cultural boundaries of the nation and challenged the destructive narratives that continue to deny Palestinian existence.

Jayyusi (1999), Abdelwahab Elmessiri (1982; 1998), Dov Shinar (1984; 1987); and Tina Sherwell (2003a).

Tradition, modernity, and power

The response to the *Nakba*, as expressed in poetry and prose, initially veered towards nostalgia and longing, idealising the "lost paradise" which someday would be recovered in a triumphant return (Parmenter, 1994:42-7). It focused narrowly on what Parmenter calls the 'material minutiae of everyday life' exemplified in a poem by al-Qassem as a way of holding on to something concrete 'in a world that is otherwise slipping away' (ibid.:72-4):

> I speak about a goat not milked
> A morning coffee… not drunk
> A mother's dough not baked
> A mud roof that flowered

With the rise of pan-Arab nationalism in the 1960s such nostalgia was rejected in favour of historical Arab themes articulated in classical language and form. But after 1967 colloquial language, the use of freer forms, and the enunciation of solidarity with peasant life and folk culture, surfaced in the return to rural subjects. At a social level, wedding festivities with their sense of renewal gradually became 'one of the principal means by which [Palestinians] expressed their national sentiments' (Elmessiri, 1982:19).

Michel Khleifi was much influenced by these trends. In his feature, *Wedding in Galilee* (1987), he uses the metaphor of a wedding to create a narrative of considerable complexity and richness. Set in 1966, the film weaves the threads of a village wedding ceremony into the fabric of a society under military occupation. It opens as an Israeli jet roars overhead in a clear sky and the camera tracks down a soaring communications tower to linger on an office block housing the military governor. Inside, the village chief (*Mukhtar*) explains that he needs the curfew they are living under to be lifted so that his eldest son, Adel, can be married in a fitting manner. At one level, the film proceeds as an unexceptional evocation of traditional rituals and customs. Indeed, a near contemporary review calls it 'a portrait of a people, a celebration of their memories' where the village is a 'storehouse of tradition' (Rosen, 1988). While these observations are justifiable, Khleifi's film is, in fact, more concerned with the deeper structure of the community and its inherent tensions.

In the village, Umm Adel, the groom's mother, supervises the preparation by neighbouring women of food for the wedding. The unhurried circling shot, following

her around the courtyard, connects her to each of them and accentuates the communal nature of their activities. Neighbours deliver gifts for the family, accompanied by rhythmic singing and dancing of the *dabke*.[8] Then an intricate sequence begins, showing the ritual preparation of bride and groom for the wedding.

Double doors open onto the women's quarters, and, while the camera remains outside, the village women sing and circle around, bathing the naked bride, Samia. There is a brief insert of an old woman kneading dough for bread, before the scene shifts directly into the men's bath house, where the village men chant as they wash Adel. Alternating between the two scenes of preparation of the bride and groom, the pace quickens in anticipation of their union. A second insert shows the bread being put onto a baking stone at an open hearth. The bride is ready to be dressed, and the doors close again, excluding the audience from this final stage.

Through these sequences, with their elaborating symbols of food preparation, marriage, and fertility, Khleifi establishes themes of unity, regeneration, and permanence. At the same time, by disclosing the camera's voyeuristic view of the bride's nakedness, he alerts the audience to the "double-vision" of the film as it shifts between an external and an internal view of Palestinian society.

Although the village is a fiction, the ceremony an amalgamation of religious customs, the time ambiguous, the wedding dress of doubtful authenticity, and even the accents of the actors inconsistent, the film evokes a sense of living rural traditions.[9] The village and family together stand in for the nation, and through the

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[8] A circular dance, common in Palestine.

[9] Ella Shohat records that the film was shot in five different villages; that the wedding mingles Muslim and Christian traditions; and that various anachronisms in the film place it in post-1967 Israel (1988:45-6). Alexander notes that the 'traditional' wedding dress was actually of fairly recent Italian

evocative power of tradition, invented or not, Khleifi creates the impression of a coherent Palestinian identity.

In this and other films, Khleifi does not valorise tradition nor, on the other hand, reject modernity. Rather, he engages with the dialectic between them, a key to the expression of Palestinian national identity.[10] He has argued that 'one of the great problems of Arab society [is that it] is an archaic one […] incapable of dealing with technology, with modernity' (Fusco, 1988:15). In *Wedding in Galilee* he not only explores the Palestinian response to modernity but also relations with the Israeli colonisers and within the community itself.

Israeli modernity is associated above all with power. This is clear from the opening interview in the governor's office where the camera is placed behind the *Mukhtar*, facing the governor whose aggressive body movements and jabbing fingers forcefully dictate his orders towards the (implied) Palestinian audience. But, Khleifi explores the nature of the governor's authority by contrasting it with that of the *Mukhtar*. In a subsequent sequence, set in the communal village meeting room, the camera gives each speaker equal weight as they express their points of view, suggesting that the *Mukhtar's* power – symbolised only by his shepherd's staff – grows out of consensus.

Elsewhere, Israeli power is evoked through the control of space and their literal domination of the heights – settlements on hilltops look down on Palestinian villages, helicopters hover overhead Palestinian crowds, and Israeli soldiers on watchtowers or outlined against the sky impose their will on the people. This trope is common to a number of Palestinian films, but more significant to my analysis of their construction of identity, is how they represent *internal* power relations, social structures, and the cultural boundaries of the nation.

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origin (1996:33), and points out what she considers to be a jarring mix of accents among the actors, ranging from Moroccan to Armenian (2001:38).

[10] This dichotomy is at the core of most discussions of the Arab defeats of 1948 and 1967 (Hasso, 2000:493).

Patriarchy and power

After the 1948 war a conservative peasant society, structured around the village and the clan, or group of extended families, had become the centre of Palestinian rural life (Abdo, 1994:152-3). As with my other cases, the concept of male honour assumed great importance for maintaining codes of behaviour in these patriarchal communities. Like them it was associated with the "protection" of women, particularly against sexual "impurity", but here it also applied to possession and good husbandry of the land (Warnock, 1990:22-24). Following the defeat in 1967, the economic, political, and social power of the family system weakened. Many intellectuals believed that "traditional", conservative identities, based on the clan and village, and the "backward" honour code had to be abandoned for the Palestinian nation to achieve self-determination. Factors such as a tendency towards nuclear families (Kimmerling, 2003:504 n 60), and the effects of contact with urban societies, also loosened the hold of the clan (Warnock, 1990:50-63).

This is the context for the archetypical patriarchal society of *Wedding in Galilee*. The *Mukhtar* is quickly established as the holder of power in the village and master of his household through Khleifi's subtle geometrical design of circling figures and camera movements (Sabouraud, 1987:111). As he enters the family courtyard, Adel, his daughter Sumaya, and youngest son Hassan are drawn inexorably and perhaps unwillingly into his visual field. The camera slowly tracks forward with him and circles as he greets his wife and family, enfolding them all.

However, the repeated circular motif also creates an "enclosure" signifying the binding (and stifling) force of tradition and the family. Within this, Khleifi places the unsettling, uncontrollable energy of the *Mukhtar's* daughter, Sumaya. Her movements are direct and linear, always threatening to break out of the confines imposed by the circles. She disdains tradition, refuses to be subservient to the male villagers, leaves the wedding ceremony prematurely, and mocks the power of her father.

Throughout the film, the *Mukhtar* displays an obsessive love for his children and tries to impose his notions of honour and his dreams of freedom on them. But, his power is challenged on all sides. At a personal level, Sumaya constantly eludes him, and rebels against his values; the young men of the village reject his political compromise with the Israeli authorities; and Adel, feeling 'destroyed' by the presence

of soldiers at his wedding, violently confronts his father. Even Hassan, who has been the key connection between all the family members throughout the wedding, finally runs off as his father tries again to make him the bearer of his hopes.

The profound destructiveness of the wider honour code on a family is also illustrated in a dialogue from Khleifi's documentary-drama *Canticle of the Stones* (1990). The Woman, sent by her enlightened father to Haifa to study at the age of seventeen, falls in love for the first time and forgets 'land, village and family', learning instead 'rebellion against the village, against power'. She becomes pregnant and has a secret abortion which leaves her gravely ill. On returning home, the family insult and beat her because of their lost honour, and her uncle commands the eldest son to strangle her.

> Woman: My brother was terrified, tears fell on his face. Everybody looked at each other, staring. My mother hid behind my little brother and the silence seemed endless. Then a voice 'Well there is nothing left but to burn her'
>
> Man: How can they burn you when the country is aflame?

Through the course of this sequence, Khleifi threads in allusions to the Israeli occupation and ruin of Palestine, arguing that obsession with honour is not only destructive to the family, but, by extension, is self-defeating for the nation.

Thus, Khleifi exhibits an ambivalence towards traditional power relationships and the ceremonies that sustain them. On the one hand he acknowledges that tradition retains an important role in sustaining national identity, on the other he maintains that it holds back development of the nation. His metaphorical circles may be interpreted as cultural boundaries, defining who is included and who excluded, but they are also a prison. The *Mukhtar* tries to keep his society together through his dreams and plans, but his archaic vision is unable finally to resist the modernising forces of the Israelis and of the younger generation of Palestinians. As Adel in *Wedding in Galilee* fails to consummate the marriage, Samia has to preserve the family honour by "taking" her own virginity. In this striking scene, Khleifi raises the question of where power lies in Palestinian society and how the different sectors are represented.

Women and the nation

As Shohat argues, we cannot easily dismiss Western stereotypes of Arab women – exotic, mysterious, and sexually alluring – simply as an extravagant display for entertainment purposes. They also reflect a colonial fantasy of "saving" the Orient, represented as a woman, from her own "backwardness" and "irrationality", and at the same time suggest that only the West is capable of unveiling her mysteries (1990b:40). By fulfilling these needs, the Arab woman is presented as available to be possessed, she is 'subliminally conceived as fallow land awaiting ploughing, as a resistant virgin coyly eager to be conquered' (1989a:100). However, the representation of women from *within* nationalist discourse is more complex. Though the metaphor of woman-as-nation is more or less a constant – as in the Armenian and Kurdish cases I discussed earlier – here there are subtle distinctions in the way she is characterised.

Khatib's analysis of Arab film explores this complexity through a number of dimensions to the expression of femininity: idealised as the wholesome, pure, and nurturing mother; contrasted with the permissiveness of Western (or Israeli) women; oppressed by the patriarchy and/or strict interpretation of Islamic law; or as a participant in the national struggle (2006:80-101). Palestinian film is certainly amenable to this analysis, as Khatib shows, however I would argue that three forms predominate: women oppressed by the patriarchy, idealised as "container" of national identity, and valorised as central to the struggle against Israeli domination.

Oppressed women

Oppression under the patriarchy is explored and exposed by many film-makers, especially Khleifi. As we have seen, he has been one of the most assiduous film-makers in this respect. Though Umm Adel in *Wedding in Galilee* defends the unity of the family, she has no role in deciding the outcome of events. Sumaya, on the other hand, asserts her freedom, even at one stage assuming the male role by trying on her father's headdress (*kaffiya*). And though Khleifi seems to perpetuate the woman-as-nation idea in the body of Samia, in fact it is she who takes over the male role when faced with her husband's impotence. Khleifi demonstrates that in women's central but difficult role in nation building they frequently have to assume both male and female identities. His films exemplify Shohat's claim that '[o]n their shoulders

rests the burden of the insistent, daily struggle for familial and national preservation'
(1994:277-8).

Yet Khleifi is also responsible for perpetuating the idea of the nation as
female, inhabiting a feminised space. He creates different spaces in *Wedding in
Galilee*: the exterior, masculine world of the political conflict in which all is noise,
action, and movement; the transitional world of the wedding couple in which sexual
tension drains colour and sound and leaves the pair in a sterile, white setting; and,
finally, the mysterious, warmly coloured interior world of the women's quarter. Over
the course of the film, Khleifi cuts between the action in these strikingly contrasting
spaces, exploring the different senses (sound, smell, touch, and colour) for their male
and female attributes. In the "women's space" of flowers, scented oils and rose
petals, of jewellery and soft, embroidered materials, a female Israeli soldier, Tali, is
laid out to rest. Representing the rationality of modern society, she has made silent
appearances from the opening scenes to the conclusion. But, at the wedding feast,
overcome by the heat, the food, and the noise, she faints and is swept off by the
village women to their quarters.

One interpretation of these juxtapositions between the male and female
worlds, suggested by Khleifi himself, is that it is an exploration of the dialectic
between strength and weakness. He claims to want to show that the failure of
traditional male dominated Arab society is due to its rigid and archaic structures and
its disregard for women's rights. He implies that the feminine side of Arab society is
much stronger and more purposeful than the masculine (Sabouraud, 1987:111).
Several critics largely agree with such an interpretation of *Wedding in Galilee*.
Shohat, for example, reads the film as Khleifi's plea for transformation from
aggression to peace (1988:44), while Shafik sees it as an inversion of traditional ideas,
'linking putative female weakness with power and male power with weakness'
(1998:200). But, Khleifi's ambivalence is evident in his association of the modern,
rational Israelis with the exterior, masculine world, and the emotional, irrational
Palestinians with the interior, female world. Nonetheless, he is greatly concerned to
represent women's part in establishing the cultural boundaries of the Palestinian
nation. At the same time he opens up a political space in which women are seen to
contribute significantly to the expression of national identity.

Idealised women

In Arab film women are idealised – 'invested […] with the task of being the moral gauge in society' (Khatib, 2006:80). But, as Tina Sherwell found in her analysis of Palestinian art, this trope may be sub-divided into woman as virgin, as mother, and as the beloved (2003b:123). The virgin bride and the "natural" peasant woman are two of the most common means by which the notion of the home as an uncontaminated 'sanctuary' – the space in which traditional national values are safeguarded – is expressed.

Palestinian Visions: Traditional costumes and washing the bride

The ritual washing of the bride in *Wedding in Galilee* and *Palestinian Visions* evokes the continuity of the nation untarnished by "alien" influences. The pure young peasant women in traditional dress, frequently placed in 'utopian landscapes, from which the traces of modernity are absent' (ibid.:133), represent the preservation of Palestinian territory from the "invading" Israelis. Furthermore, the embroidery on their dresses – particular to each region of Palestine – are a way of 'mapping the […] homeland onto the bodies of women' (ibid.).

Thus, in Sherwell's illustrations from recent Palestinian art (for example, *The Village Awakens,* Sliman Mansour, 1988), and in cinematic examples such as *Palestinian Visions*, and *The Milky Way* (Nassar, 1997), Palestinian woman is not an object to be conquered but denotes an idealised culture that is to be preserved.
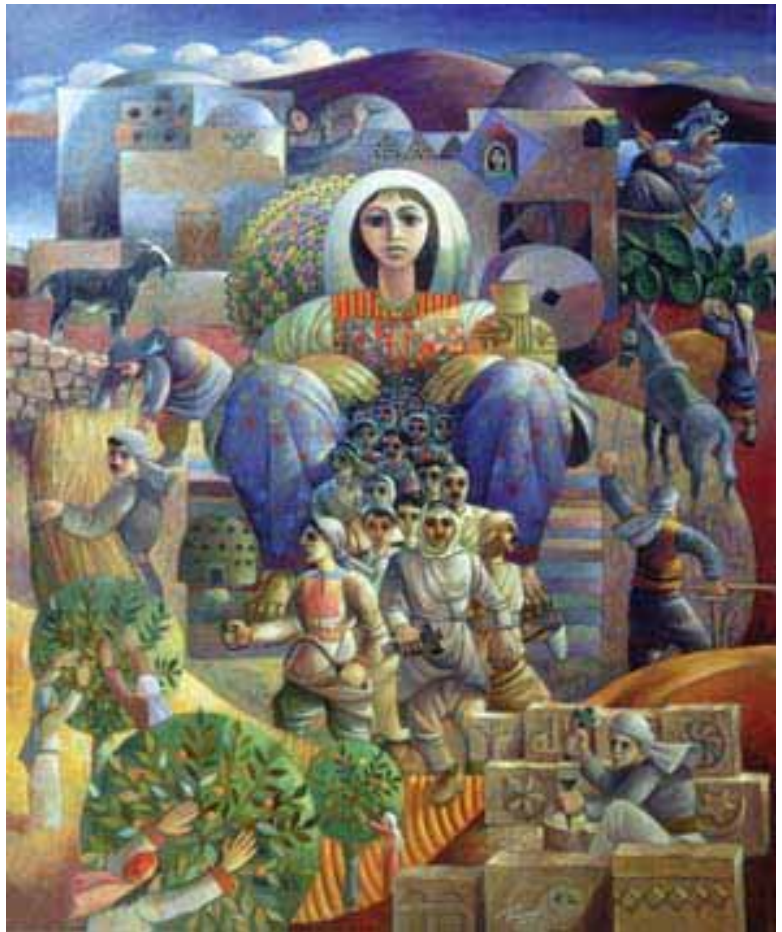
Woman, as mother of the nation, is positioned as responsible for reproduction, and striking examples of this simple metaphor may be found in Palestinian art, poetry, music and dance. Warnock however, uncovers a more complex 'cluster of interlocking images' where she is also expected to be 'life-giver, nourisher, sufferer, defender of the home, source of love, identity and continuity' (1990:52-3). It is these latter images that appear regularly in Palestinian film such as Khleifi's early documentary, *Fertile Memory* (1980). Here, Roumia, mother and grandmother, is captured performing everyday domestic tasks of cooking, washing clothes, and making woollen thread from fleeces. At the same time she works in a factory to support her family and resists family pressure to give up her title to the family land that has been expropriated by Israeli settlers. In *Wedding in Galilee*, we have seen that Umm Adel traces out the circles that define the community, and in *Curfew* (Masharawi, 1994) Umm Raji is the central, maternal figure holding the family together.

Woman as beloved reifies the homeland in the female body – it becomes 'an object of yearning' (Ashrawi, 1978:92-100). In some cases, this love is "consummated" in an act of becoming one with the land – the resistance fighters in *Tale of Three Jewels* merging with the earth, or *The Colour of Olives* (Rivas, 2006) in

which the father throws himself onto his field in a climax of desire. In others, like Roumia's son in *Fertile Memory*, looking at farmland that has been taken away by settlers, the love is frustrated. Or, in *Waiting* (Masharawi, 2005), the homeland which cannot be retrieved is fetishised in a symbolic stone the film director takes away with him. This sexualised yearning for the homeland is not confined to the male. Hanna Elias makes it the central theme of *The Mountain* (Elias, 1991) as the young woman's quest for her lover is fused with her desire for escape on the mountain, and Mona Hatoum, in *Measures of Distance* (1988), makes the object of desire the partially obscured naked body of her mother; both films symbolising the distant and unobtainable homeland.

Women and resistance

Abdo's detailed studies of Palestinian society reveal a 'marked transformation in women's consciousness' after 1967 (1994:155) as women began to assume a bigger role in the political process. While Khleifi analyses the position of women mainly in conservative rural society, another film-maker from the new generation, Rashid Masharawi focuses on Palestinian refugee camps. He, too, highlights the active role that women play in maintaining national identity, a role denied to men because of the greater restrictions placed upon them by the Israeli authorities (Armaly, 2002:3). His response to the imbalances in Palestinian society is to demonstrate the choices open to women, such as whether to continue with their studies or to refuse arranged marriages, and he encourages them to follow their desires. For example, in both *Curfew* and *Haifa* (1996) he condemns traditional female subservience and provides examples – role models – for the next generation of women to be more fully involved in the struggle for autonomy.

Elia Suleiman registers urban life, and brings to his representation many of the influences of Western film and television. But it is an urban life that is turning more and more inevitably into a ghetto culture, increasingly restricted and harassed, increasingly barren, quarrelsome, and resentful. For the most part, Suleiman's women, unlike Khleifi's, are not constructed in relation to their position in society, rather they take the shape of male fantasies: authoritative, smart women who reclaim power denied to the Palestinians for so long. In an example from *Chronicle of a*

Disappearance (1996), a mysterious woman, Adan, materializes in ES's[11] darkened apartment where a desk light illuminates a number of objects: a gun, a grenade, and a two-way radio – the trappings of a resistance fighter – made more evident by the colour scheme, green, red, black, and white, of the Palestinian flag. The first two of the objects turn out to be harmless cigarette lighters, but the radio is real, appearing in an earlier scene where it was dropped by an Israeli policeman. Tentatively, but with growing confidence, Adan uses it to communicate with police patrols. In a sequence in which the music, the cutting and camera positions, and Adan's clothes and performance are styled on Western action films, she sends them on a slapstick car chase. Then the tone changes. Suddenly, Adan takes control, commanding the police to leave Jerusalem. She then begins softly to sing the Israeli national anthem into the radio as she turns slowly in a swivel chair decked in Palestinian colours, as the song continues. The Palestinian female marks out and challenges the boundary between the two communities by transgressing it and controlling events.

Even more striking is the powerful, stylish woman in *Divine Intervention* (Suleiman, 2002). She is established as an object to be desired in a series of erotically charged images – a foot in a pink high-heeled shoe, a crumpled skirt with a glimpse of thigh, then full-face, mysterious behind dark glasses. That she is the subject of the male Israeli gaze – of the guards at a checkpoint – is inferred from the editing.

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[11] In discussing his films, I use Suleiman to refer to the director Elia Suleiman, and ES to refer to the character he plays in his films.

Then, Suleiman fantasises a transfer of power as she defies the guards by striding past the barrier causing their tokens of masculinity to detumesce: raised guns are lowered, and a phallic watch tower collapses. In a later sequence, the same woman, dressed now in the *kaffiya* of a resistance fighter, and wielding a shield in the shape of Palestine, single-handedly destroys an armed unit of the Israeli army.

Both sequences are filmed as fantasies – the first borrowing enthusiastically from advertising and Hollywood action movies, the second derived from Japanese *Ninja* cinema. These sequences, full of summarising and elaborating symbols of the Palestinian nation, are, at the same time, comic, slick, and potent fantasies of the re-assumption of power, accomplished by compelling Palestinian women.

In much modern Palestinian literature women's voices are not heard: there is what has been called a monologic discourse of patriarchy where the male voice dominates and excludes women (Ashrawi, 1990:81). This language, even during the *intifada*, largely fails to question gendered stereotypes (Abu Ghazaleh, 1998). However, I would argue that most of these and other films made in the context of

resistance against oppression, at least adequately demonstrate the participation of women. For example, Heiny Srour in her semi-documentary, *Leila and the Wolves* (1984), shows women participating fully in the armed struggle and thus 'refutes the image of the helpless female victim and its equation with the robbed and violated homeland' (Shafik, 1998:181). Similarly, the central role of women in Palestinian society is reflected in a variety of documentary films including profiles of prominent activists in *Hanan Ashrawi: A Woman of Her Time* (Masri and Chamoun, 1995), *Dreams of Justice and Freedom with Hanan Ashrawi* (Swann, 1995) and *My Home, My Prison* (Munoz and Marcus, 1992), the feminist writer Sahar Khalifeh in *Fertile Memory*, and representation of more "ordinary" sections of society in *The Women Next Door* (Aviad, 1992) and *This is not Living* (Arasoughly, 2001).

However, if women are to resist patriarchal repression, if they are to carry the burden of the daily struggle to preserve the family and the nation, and if they are to represent the land of Palestine, then Samia's question in *Wedding in Galilee*, 'where do you find the honour of a man?', becomes ever more pertinent. As women become more active in the resistance it is more difficult for them to be classed simply as passive objects of national symbolism and male honour. How then, does cinema portray man's role in constructing and sustaining Palestinian national identity?

The absent male

In many nationalisms the cultural representation of nationhood is synonymous with masculinity and heroic male action (Khatib, 2006:64). But for defeated and traumatised nations this role is unattainable. And the failure of the male population to defend the land and to protect women and children frequently appears in films about my stateless nations as metaphorical emasculation as in *Nahapet*, or, alternatively as martyrdom.

Returning to *Wedding in Galilee*, we find many expressions of defeat and the consequent loss of power. The *Mukhtar*, forced to invite the Israeli soldiers to the wedding, fails to prevent their "penetration" of the village, and his people. This results in the constant presence of the soldiers at the feast, causing strife among the men. But, more significantly, also causing the union of Adel and Samia to fail, a parallel for the failure to create a cohesive community and, by implication, a Palestinian state. An alternating series of cuts from the exterior world, where tension

between the villagers and soldiers is rising, to the interior world of the wedding couple, brings these themes together. A soldier moves from house to house through the darkened village, searching for Tali, at the same time as Adel confronts the *Mukhtar*, forcing him to retreat and destroying his dreams for the future. The echo of the soldier's footsteps intrudes on Adel and Samia as they try but fail to make love. He peers into windows and doors, seeming to see Hassan also reject the *Mukhtar*. And he knocks at a door just as Samia takes her own virginity. The filming of this scene sets Adel in a position of weakness, crouching on his haunches looking on in helpless fascination, while, by this explicit act, Samia assumes power. Adel is not only sexually impotent, but, like his father, has failed to preserve family honour. The simultaneous emasculation of the *Mukhtar* and Adel is profoundly linked to the intrusion of Israelis into the villagers' space.

The figure of the failed, powerless, or "absent", male is much in evidence in Palestinian films. Rarely is action motivated by a heroic male protagonist.[12] In *Haifa* the missing men are in prison, in exile, or working abroad. Where they appear, they are mad, like the eponymous Haifa; or, like Abu Said, a laid off policeman reduced to selling drinks at a stall and then incapacitated by a stroke; or preoccupied with trivia like Abbas Affondi. Abu Raji, the father in *Curfew*, has a bad back that forces him to spend most of the time on his bed, and two of his sons are rendered weak and ineffective by Israeli controls on their activities. The Man, in *Canticle of the Stones*, has writer's block, and cannot finish the various novels he has started. He is an elusive figure, appearing and disappearing, frequently filmed against the light so that his features are blurred and weakened. In *Tale of Three Jewels*, the father of the young boy, Yousef, is left demented by imprisonment, one neighbour is blind, another obsessed with his collection of significantly caged birds.

Suleiman links powerlessness to confinement and despair: in *Chronicle of a Disappearance* men sit idle watching the world go by, or they fight over nothing; in *Divine Intervention* they are consumed by an anger against their fellow "prisoners" in the city. Suleiman's father who appears in both films is an important figure, representing the lost Palestine of 1948. The first film begins with a long, slow track

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[12] One of the few exceptions I have found is the secondary role of Mahmoud, the blacksmith, in *The Milky Way* (Nassar, 1997). Even here, he is presented as a figure of integrity, but not as an active hero.

in close-up around the sleeping father, follows his constricted life, and ends with the father and mother asleep in front of the TV, unresponsive to the intrusion of the Israeli national flag and national anthem into their personal space.

The character ES, deliberately passive and silent, is a key element of Suleiman's comic style. He is the Tati-like figure who observes, dead-pan, the strange events in the surreal world that is Palestine. Even when not on screen, we view events through his perspective. But the passivity is more than just style; ES is *incapable* of action. Even when, in *Divine Intervention*, by throwing an apricot stone out of the car window, he destroys an Israeli tank, or by releasing a balloon with Arafat's image that threatens the Israeli army, the events do not register with him: these "acts" of resistance seem almost accidental. Suleiman admits that his character, ES, is, in general, a 'guide passif', and though he claims that in *Divine Intervention* he is less passive: 'je provoque des explosions imaginaires' (Garbarz, 2002:207), it is his female partner who is active and he is all but "invisible".

Though one of the main themes of the latter film is confinement and the liminality of Palestinian existence, the inability of the ES character to make more than superficial contact with his lover, also seems to reflect his emasculation. While she encapsulates his fantasies of power, by challenging and defeating the Israelis, he cannot overcome the barriers between them. He desperately touches her hands, twines his fingers with hers, but always fails to appropriate her sources of power. The adult Palestinian male has proved incapable of protecting the family, preserving the land, or being instrumental in retrieving autonomous power.

Earlier, I suggested that *Wedding in Galilee* is constructed around a set of interior feminine spaces and exterior masculine ones, where the exterior spaces have been appropriated by the occupying Israeli force. I have also highlighted instances in the work of Khleifi, Suleiman, and Masharawi which support Naficy's analysis that, for exilic film-makers, both spaces are predominantly coded as feminine (2001:154-5). But, while Naficy attributes this to 'the liminality of deterritorialization, [where] the boundaries of gender, genre, and sexuality are blurred and continually negotiated' (ibid.), I would argue it is also the product of political impotence following defeat and the consequent loss of power. Many adult males have been systematically relegated to a state of compliance by confinement and repression, and women have been

overwhelmed by the burden of daily struggle and survival. It is the young who then begin to assume a major role in maintaining Palestinian national identity.

Palestine's children

Though the traditional structures of authority in Palestine – the patriarchal political leadership – played an important part after the defeat of 1948 in sustaining 'vital elements of the sense of community and solidarity' (Harlow, 1987:88) in Palestinian society, and women took on a more important role after 1967, the late 1970s witnessed 'the political coming of age of the child' (ibid.). In highlighting the role of the young in the struggle, Palestinian film-makers mark a general shift in perceptions of national identity, from the nostalgia of the generation whose memories are of Palestine before 1948, to the active resistance of the generation that has grown up since 1967 and has known nothing but Israeli rule.

Wedding in Galilee concludes with the villagers throwing whatever they can lay their hands on, into the path of the departing Israeli governor and his soldiers. Released in 1987, this ending pre-figures the *intifada*. It also suggests the new responsibility of the young as they are precipitated into the heart of the conflict with Israel. The image of young, unprofessional fighters began to dominate news of the conflict. These 'children of the stone … ready to confront Israeli soldiers openly and head-on' (Kimmerling, 2003:297) acquired the imprint of the martyr, and their deaths served to increase revolutionary fervour among the Palestinian population (Kanaana, 1998:119-20).

Suleiman, expressively records the handover to the new generation in two related sequences: one from *Chronicle of a Disappearance* where his father arm-wrestles with a series of young men, seeming to defeat them all, the other from *Divine Intervention* where ES defeats his father, shortly before the latter's death. But, unlike generational conflicts in more stable societies, it is not simply a matter of the young wresting power from their elders, it is the inability of parents to protect or even provide properly for their children that has politicised the younger generation. Khleifi weaves resistance activities, killings, defiance by the young, into the fabric of *Tale of Three Jewels*; and in *Canticle of the Stones* he records the stories of school closures, of children being shot, of soldiers breaking the arms of women and children, and of bullet injuries incurred during the *intifada*. None of the adults is able to prevent these

things happening to their children; they can only stand by and weep. The children, on the other hand, have become knowing in the artefacts of war. Masharawi highlights the activism of the young: Suad in *Haifa* and Radar in *Curfew*. Though they seem to have no clear strategy, no idea of how they might shape the future, they epitomise the regenerative power of youth.

This generation, that has never known peace, that in many cases has never known the lost lands and homes of Palestine, and whose education has been stifled through the closure of schools and universities, has had to *derive* its culture. Palestinian children, in the absence of visible evidence of their history, attempt to construct an identity through their imaginings of Palestine. From *Wedding in Galilee*, where Hassan listens to the stories of the grandfather and grandmother about times before the *Nakba*, and his father's hope of recovering the lost lands, Khleifi's films are filled with the young "learning" history from their elders. *Tale of Three Jewels* includes fairy-tales, dreams, and fantasies that make up the young boy's world. Yousef is assailed by the memories of his blind "uncle", the stories of his mother, his sister's account of Palestinian history, and an old grandmother's tales of Jaffa before the war. He dreams of the warrior-hero Saladin on a white horse, riding on the beach and handing him a gun to fight with, and of his mother and sister embroidering a shawl with doves of peace which fly away. The core of the film is his fantasy of Aida, the mysterious gypsy girl, with whom he falls in love. She will only marry him if he finds the three lost jewels from her grandmother's necklace. In his dream, the jewels are transformed into three drops of blood, symbolising 'time, space, and the flesh', or as we might say, "history, land, and the people", which Yousef, the Palestinian child, clasps in his hand, uniting them.

History, religion, and language

Thus far, we have encountered Palestinian living culture through the people and their traditions. I have discussed how a number of film-makers mark out the boundaries that define Palestinian identity and reveal the different roles of men, women, and children in sustaining that identity. In many nations these cultural boundaries are protected and reinforced by the 'symbolic border guards' of history, religion, and language (Armstrong, 1982:6). We have already seen, for example, the importance of history and religion (in the Armenian case) and language (in both the Armenian and Kurdish cases) in the maintenance of identity. The paradox for

Palestinians is that while these elements are central to their identity also, and separate them from their Israeli oppressors, they do not differentiate them from their neighbours.

Religion, which is usually one of the strongest and most inflexible guardians of cultural boundaries, is not a major feature of Palestinian film. On the other hand, Palestinian assertions of identity through resistance to oppression have frequently been characterised by outsiders as essentially driven by religious fundamentalism. This is evident in the anti-Islamic narratives of Hollywood dissected by Khatib (2006:chapter 4) and the false assertions about Islam uncovered by Said in a range of (mainly) Western texts (1997:41). Though there has been a rise of religious ideology among sections of Palestinian society since the early 1990s (al-Qattan, 2006:118-20), resistance has been firmly rooted in the injustice of their situation. Thus religion has remained a minor element and film-makers have focused on re-iterating Palestinian rights to a separate identity.

Ancient history – the 'golden age' of Islam, the holy sites of Jerusalem, and the victory at Hittin of Salah al-Din (or Saladin) over the Crusaders – was frequently 'conjured' prior to 1948 in poetry and literature to inspire resistance against the new invaders (Parmenter, 1994:38-39). However, there have been few attempts in narrative film to use this history in the cause of nationalism. Saladin, for example, is simply rendered in *Canticle of the Stones* by a painting. First seen in close-up, this serves as a symbol for past glories, which, a voice over suggests, are gone forever and should be relegated to 'the walls of the museums'. Later, we see that the painting comes from among relics preserved by an old woman who stubbornly refuses to be pushed out of her home. Saladin resurfaces in a dream sequence in *Tale of Three Jewels* where he hands the young boy, Yousef, a gun as if encouraging him to take up the fight against the latest invaders of Palestine. More recently, *Waiting for Saladin* (Abu Wael, 2001) ironically invokes the hero as the saviour of Palestine who never appears (Abdel-Malek, 2005:119).

History has lost its resonance in a land of endless Palestinian defeats. Yet the modern history of the Palestinian people is ever present, as we shall see in Chapter 8. Films are peppered with memories of the wars and evictions of 1948 and 1967, the uprising of Land Day in 1976, and the *intifada* of 1987 and 2000. Though significant, these films constitute a *response* to events rather than an expression of the Palestinian

story. Unlike the Armenian and Kurdish cases, where historical narrative has been instrumental in preserving the culture, as Said laments 'no narrative of Palestinian history has ever been instituted in a definitive masterwork' (1995b:119).

Language on the other hand is used in various ways in cinema about Palestine as a strong cultural marker. First, the Palestinian colloquial, commonly used in films, registers a specific territory. As Sabbagh notes, this regional dialect becomes 'a shared bond that, under conditions of occupation or dispersal, can replace the homeland' (1998:140). Secondly, personal displays of the centrality of written language occur in a number of autobiographical films. For example, in Suleiman's *Homage by Assassination* and *Introduction to an End of an Argument* and Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance*, the Arabic script is literally inscribed on the body. Suleiman superimposes fragments of text from a computer screen onto his own hands and face, while Hatoum enfolds images of her mother's body in fragments of her letters. Thus, Arabic is a veil through which we see the person. Or, in Darwish's personification of the language:

> Who am I? This is a question that others ask, but has no answer
> I am my language, I am an ode, two odes, ten. This is my language.
> I am my language. I am words' writ: *Be! Be my body!* (2003:91)

Where these films use fragments of text to meditate on the 'cultural disembodiment' (Shohat, 2006:308) caused by exile, Khleifi uses language to reflect on the fractured nature of Palestinian identity. The opening of *Canticle of the Stones* consists of a harmonious sequence of images in counterpoint with bleak statements delivered in classical Arabic:

rooftop, blue morning light, cages	Man:	You shall see nothing but the splinters of time. You shall see nothing.
warm daylight, barred window		
stairs		
open sky	Woman:	I will see the handicapped
the sea, then breaking on rocks		I will see the shattered souls
rocks scattered on a road		I will see misery
shadow of tree on the ground		I will see refusal and resistance
children in a playground		

The sequence goes from confinement, through freedom represented by the sky and sea, to the permanence of rocks and the resistance of stones thrown at the Israeli army, to the tree of steadfastness, and, finally, hope for a future in the children, and echoes Darwish's poem in which the elegy of his homeland is shattered. The poet gathers the splinters of sound, places them in the heart of a lyre, and promises:

> … on the rooftops of our tragedy we'll play it
> To mutilated moons and to stones (Elmessiri, 1981:121-27)

Finally, as in the Kurdish case, film-makers have tried to resist the hierarchy of power expressed through language. Khleifi, for example, continually questions this hierarchy in *Wedding in Galilee* where it is the Israelis who are shown to be outsiders – left speechless since they cannot speak Arabic – thus reversing a trope common to colonial cinema and literature, where the colonised are dehumanised by being deprived of language.[13] Suleiman has a more subtle approach, destabilising the non-Arabic-speaking spectator's relationship to the language by frequently failing to provide translations of texts, whether these are images on a computer screen, graffiti, arguments, or songs. By forcing the viewer to experience similar feelings of alienation to those of a displaced person, he exposes the asymmetric power relationship between the language of the coloniser and that of the colonised (Shohat and Stam, 1985:321).

<p style="text-align:center">ഇൻൽ</p>

In the early decades of the 20th century, it would have been difficult to distinguish a specifically Palestinian identity from a more general regional identity, except for the territorial element and local folk traditions. Though poetry and literature were very influential and highly developed among the educated elite, the use of classical language limited their reach and tended to relate to a wider Arab history. There is little evidence at this time of the influence of popular culture such as cinema on the construction of Palestinian political consciousness. Nonetheless, a distinguishable political identity did exist among the population, partly as a result of exposure to trade, modern forms of transport and communications, and widespread education, but also as a reaction to the colonial powers and to large-scale settlement by Zionist Jews.

I have argued that the general discourse on Palestine in the West was influenced by the cinematic narratives of Zionism and Orientalism which, prior to 1948, virtually drowned out the notion of a Palestinian nation. Certainly, the Palestinian story was all but inaudible to the outside world. Though this chapter has not set out to show that cinema was a decisive factor in the UN plan for partitioning

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[13] As Shohat and Stam note '[t]he caricatural representation of Arabic in the cinema prolongs the Eurocentric "orientalist" tradition in both linguistics and literature' (1985:54-5).

Palestine, I have cited studies of film and the media that suggest it may have influenced the decision by the West to support the formation of a state for the Jews, at the expense of the Arab population.

After a hiatus between 1948 and 1967 there was a resurgence of Palestinian nationalism resulting in the development of a more independent cultural and political consciousness. Poetry, literature, art, and other cultural forms, whilst acknowledging their debt to the Arab world, began to find a distinct Palestinian voice. Film units set up by the PLO were instrumental in differentiating the nation and countering denial of its existence.

Despite the continuing barrage of negative images of Palestinians in Hollywood and Israeli cinema, American television, and other Western mass culture, a turning point occurred in the 1980s with the invasion of Lebanon and the first *intifada*. These events created a political space in which Palestinian national identity could be asserted more effectively. A new generation of Palestinian film-makers emerged, with a less didactic approach. However, as Said observed, the term 'Palestinian' carries 'a burden of interpretation and a multiplication of selves that are virtually unparalleled in modern political or cultural history' (1980:122). To disentangle these different strands of identity, I have followed Bhabha, examining performative narratives through which a number of Palestinian film-makers reveal their nation. As Naficy notes, 'the emphasis on [such] "documentary-like" descriptions of mundane routines and detailed activities' are common in Third Cinema and accented cinema and may have 'highly significant cultural, national, and critical import' (2001:117). This is particularly true for these film-makers whose work, I argue, uncovers tensions within Palestinian society: between tradition and modernity, between different sectors of society, and between pan-Arab and regional influences.

Khleifi, for example, demonstrates the power of tradition in sustaining the nation, but also its stultifying effects in resisting modernity. He makes a number of allusions to Arab history in an attempt to authenticate Palestinian culture through its roots, but ultimately he suggests that cultural identity is preserved in the everyday contemporary lives of the people. It is through these personal stories that he and other Palestinian film-makers have revealed the complexities and diversity of various sectors of Palestinian society. While doing so, they have had to counter reductive

stereotypes, most prevalent in the West, and the homogenising forces of nationalism that diminish differences within the community.

Despite all the vicissitudes, 'Palestinians […] have one asset […] a powerful sense of national identity' (Khalidi, 1997:205). But, as Khalidi goes on to make clear, it is now much harder to define what the dimensions are of the country with which they identify. The "internal maps" they carry with them of lost villages and towns now bear no relation to reality, and their limited freedom of movement restricts their ability to piece together a coherent community. However, a notional Palestine still exists and, in the next chapter, I examine the representation of this in the cinema and of the dynamic, living Palestinian culture that continues to resist erasure.

Chapter 8
Preserving the Spaces of Palestine

The film, *Private* (Costanzo, 2004), opens on a scene of Mohammad and his wife, Samia, arguing. Their home in Gaza is under constant threat of attack by Israeli settlers and Samia wants them to leave for their own safety. Mohammad is resolute in refusing:

> M: I don't want to be a refugee. Being a refugee means not being.

Subsequently the house is occupied by Israeli soldiers who divide the space into zones,[1] confining the family to one small area, while they take the rest. Despite repeated threats, physical danger, and humiliation the family stays put. One night, Mohammad goes to the kitchen for a drink of water and finds the lieutenant sitting at the table. In near darkness they confront each other – almost as if making chess moves across the chequered table-cloth:

> L: Why don't you leave this house?
> M: Why should I? This is my house.
> [long pause]
> M: Why don't *you* leave this house?

Though a rather laboured metaphor for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, *Private* encapsulates many of its elements: the appropriation of property and territory in the name of security, the brutality of occupation, the retaliatory violence that derives from humiliation, and the absolute determination of the Palestinians to stay on their land. Yet it is not reductive; it humanises both sides, it exposes conflicts within the family

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[1] Corresponding to the division of land in the Occupied Palestinian Territory into zones A, B, and C, by the Israelis.

as well as conflicts within the occupying force, and it shows how unthinking violence can break a fragile coexistence. Above all, the film concerns the cultural boundary between the nations and the division of space in Palestine.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the competing ties of tradition, family, clan, and nation that fragment Palestinian communities, and I examined the revolutionary period of exilic film-making which attempted to construct a collective identity based on eulogising the heroic resistance fighter. I argued that in the 1980s there was a shift of emphasis towards narratives that analysed Palestinian society itself; revealing the different parts played by women, men, and children and delineating cultural boundaries of the nation. In this chapter, I focus on the struggle to construct and preserve the spaces of Palestine that encompass the nation; a struggle that has occurred on a number of fronts.

Foremost, there is the struggle over physical space, or territory, inequitably partitioned at the end of the British Mandate and continuously annexed by Israel ever since. In Palestinian cinema since the early 1980s, the rhetorical battle over territory has focused on expressing the competing narratives of possession, the concepts of homeland, and the determination of the people to remain on the remnants of their land.

Related to this, there is the struggle to construct a political space in which a nation that includes geographically dispersed peoples can be "imagined". As different concepts of identity have emerged among Palestinians living in Israel, in exile, in refugee camps, or in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Bowman, 1994), film-makers have responded to the increasing fragmentation in different ways. Masharawi focuses on refugee camps and the constraints and frustrations they provoke; Suleiman tracks the disintegration of society and the cultural confinement of urban Palestinians under occupation; and Khleifi makes room for a variety of voices from Israel, Gaza, and Jerusalem to express their conceptions of what it means to be Palestinian. These and other film-makers contribute to the imagining of the Palestinian nation by trying to challenge the borders that divide it.

Finally, there is the struggle to resist erasure and annihilation – to maintain the cultural identity of the nation. Film-makers have confronted and exposed the extreme attempts that I detailed previously to drown out the Palestinian voice by stereotyping

and demonisation. Working under difficult circumstances they have also sought to preserve the collective memories of the nation by recording and re-telling its stories. In doing so, they have battled to find forms that reflect their unique identity within Arab and Islamic traditions and yet are accessible to the outside world.

I will return to the representation in Palestinian film of political spaces and the effort to maintain cultural identity, but first I want to consider the issue of territory.

Physical space – rhetoric of the land

Raja Shehadeh coined the useful expression 'land rhetoric' to describe competing Israeli and Palestinian national narratives concerning the contested territory of Palestine (1982:86-9). Setting aside claims rooted in the histories of the Arab and Jewish people, a major strand of this rhetoric is that whoever can demonstrate greater love for the land has the most right to it.

In the Palestinian narrative, love of the land is local and personal. It assumes a close affinity with all elements of the natural landscape such as its trees, rocks, stones, and rivers. But, as Parmenter argues, because Palestinians did not fully understand the necessity to articulate their relationship with the land in a 'nationally meaningful land rhetoric' they were slow to confront both European and Zionist colonialism (ibid.:26-7). Opposition to Jewish settlements was expressed both in the Arab media and in sporadic, violent confrontations; however Palestinian demands to be recognised as a nation inhabiting the territory of Palestine were not widely articulated in the early part of the 20th century.

Narratives of possession

Following the war of 1967 which, ironically, enabled greater communication between Palestinians living in Israel and in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Zionist narrative of possession began more actively to be challenged politically and culturally. The relative success of the 1976 strike in protest against large-scale confiscation of land for settlements was instrumental in promoting the peasant-farmer as the prime embodiment of Palestinian national identity at this time (Kimmerling and Migdal, 1994:195-6).

Thus, it is not surprising that many film-makers concentrate on rural life, the peasantry, nature, and themes of loss and displacement from the land. Khleifi's first film, *Fertile Memory*, for example, conveys the elemental nature of Palestinian rural

existence through the story of his widowed aunt, Roumia. At home, she communicates continuity through the everyday rituals of communal food preparation, tending to livestock, singing lullabies to her grandchild, and visiting friends. But Khleifi links these banal glimpses of her personal life into a more general vision of a people rooted in the land. When Roumia visits her family's fields, a medium close-up shows her sitting on the earth, touching it, scenting it; engulfed in a sea of gently waving grass and the sound of the wind. Though she quietly weeps, there is no room for nostalgia. In the closing sequence, showing her performing the primitive function of teasing wool by whacking it with a stick, Khleifi changes tempo from normal speed, through slow-motion, to the final freeze-frame, brutally suggesting the ending of a particular way of life.

In this and other Palestinian films, such as *The Mountain* (Elias, 1991) and *The Milky Way* (Nassar, 1997), the rich countryside, ripe cornfields, and orchards, the peasants' dress, their daily life, ceremonies, and stories, are enrolled not just as folklore, they are key attributes in countering the denial of Palestinian tenure of the land. Indeed, the continually moving camera of *Wedding in Galilee*, at times seems to weave the villagers into the landscape until they become intertwined with it. Even the rain, which Khleifi lingers over in *Canticle of the Stones*, reflects an imagery that Parmenter notes is commonly used by Palestinian writers to express 'the soft sadness of nature in sympathy with the Palestinian' (1994:80-81). Similarly, *Tale of Three Jewels* underlines the close connection of Palestinians to the land – Aida's intent scrutiny of insects, birds, plants and the weather showing an almost mystical connection to nature.

Richness, plenty, and fertility are symbolised by the repeated flashes of colour from golden oranges, especially in the final "birthing" scene of the boy, Yousef, emerging from a crate in which he has been hiding.

Naficy declares that the typical response of an exile to the rupture of displacement is to create a utopian vision of the homeland 'uncontaminated by contemporary facts' (2001:152). And Khleifi's work has been criticised for creating just such a sanitised vision of rural life.[2] While some of this criticism is valid – Khleifi's fictional characters often do live in a "constructed" world that is pre-modern – his is far from a vision of utopia. As I argued in Chapter 7, he reveals the tensions and contradictions inherent in this society. Even so, he presents the Palestinian people as having a passionate love of the land and attachment to the soil.

Masharawi also resists nostalgia and romanticism in claiming ownership and representing loss. The ostensibly "mad" Haifa, played by Mohammad Bakri in *Haifa*, repeating an angry litany 'Haifa, Jaffa, Acre' as he strides around the refugee camp echoes the national loss of these Palestinian towns to the Israelis. But this public display is related to personal loss – his secret love was forced into exile and has since married – and he privately expresses pain in harsh cries of her name. The economy and power of Bakri's performance avoids sentimentality and conveys the bleak reality of the permanent, public and private, displacement and dispossession of Palestinian refugees.

Direct challenges to Israeli claims to the land occur in much Palestinian literature of the last two decades. Riyad Baidas, for example, likens Jews to a camel who lives *on* the land 'unappreciative of [its] beauty and comfort' (Elmessiri and Elmessiri, 1998:161). Palestinian film-makers have taken this challenge further, associating the Israelis with sterility, infertility, and destruction. Soldiers of the IDF ride *over* the land, protected by dark glasses, uniforms, and armoured cars,

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[2] See, for example, Suleiman in Porton (2003:27), Shohat (1988), and Rapfogel (2003:2).

unconcerned with land or landscape. The sequence in *Wedding in Galilee*, where the *Mukhtar* rescues his prize mare, encapsulates his profound bond with the land and counters the Israeli claim to "know the land". Similarly, modern Israeli developments are characterised as 'imposed on the land rather than harmonizing with it' (Parmenter, 1994:88-92). Bleak rows of barren, faceless Israeli apartments and houses dominate the landscape, often as a backdrop to more "natural" Palestinian homes and villages which seem to grow out of the countryside (Mitchell, 1994:28).

Where Khleifi is relatively straightforward in his depiction of Israelis as outsiders, Suleiman channels his anger into satire. He targets the Israeli police, first seen in *Chronicle of a Disappearance* as a group tumbling out of a van to urinate in unison against a wall, like stray dogs marking out their territory. Then, in a choreographed invasion of his apartment,[3] they sweep through the rooms, subsequently reporting on everything they see but evidently do not understand. A similar group in *Divine Intervention*, returning from patrol, scrape the dust from their boots as if in disgust. And, the tenuous hold that Israelis have on the territory recurs in a later sequence where a tourist asks an Israeli policeman for directions in Jerusalem. Baffled, he turns to a Palestinian prisoner he is holding, who though blindfolded and handcuffed, is able to provide the answer. A variation of this trope by Enas Muthaffar in *Palestine, Summer 2006* (Habbash, 2006), points to the wilful lack of knowledge of Israelis about the Palestinian territory they occupy.

Yet, whether engaged or satirical, the narratives of possession presented in these films remain local and personal. They try to indicate that Israelis love their control of the land rather than the land itself, in contrast to Palestinians who truly love their homeland and its fruits.

Place, home and homeland

Benvenisti writes '[i]t is difficult to exaggerate the supreme significance to the Arab villager [even those who have left] of the house, in comparison to which all other possessions were temporary and lacking in importance' (2002:90). For many Palestinians it appears, identity is bound up in the house, as illustrated by the sequence from *Private* which opened this chapter. It is not just a shelter, it is a home by virtue of the memories it contains of lives lived among its walls. Khleifi illustrates

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[3] As noted before, the protagonist of his films, ES, stands in for the director.

this strong bond in *Canticle of the Stones* where an old woman tells the story of her family's dispossession in 1948 and their subsequent move to the West Bank. Her house on the edge of an encroaching Jewish settlement is a vivid articulation of her memories. Every bit of space is taken up with old photographs, paintings, furniture from her previous life, a framed calendar, relics, ornaments, and rugs. The very act of crowding her possessions into an inappropriate space serves to emphasise the fracturing of her life and her loss and displacement.[4] But her home is intimately connected to its immediate landscape – the "home-land" becomes an extension of the home. Thus, the old woman's expression of love for her home and for the surrounding land transmutes into love for the land of Palestine. It is this intrinsic, intimate love that is set against the Israeli idea of the house as a commodity, subsidised to encourage immigration.

A consequence of the importance attached to a house is the devastating effects of its destruction. As Benvenisti asserts, there was a 'terrible significance of the demolition of a man's [sic] house and his eviction from it: along with the house, his whole world was destroyed' (2002:90). Khleifi reflects this trauma in his filming of the story told by the Man in *Canticle of the Stones* of the blowing up of his home, and the desperate image he retains 'of a chair thrown into the sky. Of my little brother's socks floating in the air'. Tight framing, dark colours and subdued lighting, a static camera, and the absence of music, lend the scene an aura of confession, of personalised anger and deeply felt pain. His suffering is repressed and internalised because it can have no other method of release. In a parallel documentary sequence, Khleifi films the destruction by the Israeli army of a house in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, constructing charged images of a pair of child's slippers lying in the ruins, as its mother's cries echo on the soundtrack. The personal loss of a home is linked to the devastation of the Palestinian people.

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[4] Said remarks on the obsession among displaced Palestinians with re-creating the interior of their former homes, an obsession which 'inadvertently highlights and preserves the rift or break fundamental to our lives' (Said, 1986:58).

In a different context, *Ma'loul Celebrates Its Destruction* (1985) concerns a Palestinian village destroyed by the Israelis after 1948. Here, Khleifi mixes together sequences of displaced villagers returning to the ruined site with their children and another group discussing a mural depicting the village as it was nearly 40 years earlier.

They revisit the village as a grave and recount its "frozen" image as if tracing the profile of a lost loved one. But, these villagers do not mourn in a normal way; there is no sense of closure. Typical of many Palestinians, at least of the older generation, mourning cannot be completed; the very personal loss of home is inextricably linked to the larger and more profound loss of homeland. The fact that their "loved one" still lives yet is unattainable induces a deep and irresolvable melancholia.

Such melancholia blights Suleiman's mute observations: fathers and sons fight each other for no apparent reason, neighbours encroach on each other's territory, sullying it in the process, and ES silently fashions curses about his fellow citizens. It inflects Khleifi's stories of longing for the unattainable, and dominates Masharawi's revelations of refugee camp life. In Chapter 4, I discussed the melancholia induced in diasporan Armenians and the urge to memorialise the past and so build a future. In much Palestinian film there is no sense of ever "letting go", no surrender to the trauma of losing the land, though, as we shall see, Masharawi seems to recognise the increasing futility of hoping for its restoration.

Staying put

For those Palestinians who remained in Israel and those who have come under Israeli rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, an important element of their rhetoric of the land is *sumud*. This act of perseverance, of staying put and surviving, is most eloquently expressed by Mahmoud Darwish:

> Where should we go after the last border? Where should birds fly after the last sky? Where should plants sleep after the last breath of air?
> …
> Forever here, here forever (2003:9)

Tenacity, defiance of authority in the face of a steady erosion of human rights, the attempt to hold on to their land at all costs, have become essential elements of Palestinian national identity. A symbol of this rootedness, popular both with poets and film-makers, is the olive tree because of its physical roots in the land and its longevity.[5] But this steadfastness is also personified in the image of Roumia sitting in her fields like an old gnarled tree (*Fertile Memory*); in the family, surrounded by the ruin of their home, defiantly flying the Palestinian flag (*Canticle of the Stones*); and in the grandmother who encourages her family by saying 'as long as you are here on the land claiming your rights, anything is possible' (*Tale of Three Jewels*). Similarly, *The Milky Way*, *Private*, and *The Colour of Olives* (Rivas, 2006) illustrate the defiance of families clinging on to their homes and plots of land despite humiliation and physical danger; determined 'not to repeat the error of 1948' (Bakri, 2007) when so many Palestinians left their land.

Since the 1980s Palestinian film-makers have engaged with the rhetoric of the land. They have constructed narratives that counter the Jewish narrative and connect a deep, personal love of their homes, villages, and land, to the national homeland. They bleakly reflect what many argue is one of the pillars of Palestinian national identity – the determination to stay put on this land. Ultimately, however, they fail to present to the outside world a sufficiently coherent alternative that challenges the historical Israeli claim to the territory of Palestine. And the silent question that hovers over all these films is "what is the homeland?". Is it the scraps of territory surrounded by wire? Memorabilia packed into the house of an old woman? The "temporary" homes of the refugees? I will now turn to an examination of the cinematic representations of these fragmented places and the contribution they make to the construction of a political space in which Palestinian identity may be expressed.

Constructing political spaces

In Chapter 2, I introduced Tuan's concept of "national space" as a collection of places imbued with special meaning in the cinema through particular emphasis and connected by journeys of one sort or another. In the Armenian and Kurdish cases we have seen how these places may be analysed in terms of open chronotopes reflecting

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[5] See, for example, *On the Trunk of an Olive Tree*, reproduced in Parmenter (1994:75-6). For cinematic examples see Gertz and Khleifi (2005c).

the beauty of the landscape and nature, the warmth of the family home, and the perception of an endless time; and closed chronotopes of constriction, claustrophobia, poverty, and violence, and the sense that time has been interrupted or stopped.

Palestinian films also include both types of chronotope but they seem to be particularly marked by a dialectic between the forms which may be attributed to the fragmentation of this society. As Naficy argues,

> the closed form tends to emphasize control, distance, and unfamiliarity, while the open form tends to connote immediacy, intimacy, and familiarity (2001:154)

Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi expand on this idea, suggesting that "insiders", like Michel Khleifi, who have intimate childhood memories of the land, tend to employ both forms and thus are 'able to integrate the landscape of memory and the landscape of the present' (2005c:319). Whereas those "outsiders" who have grown up since Israeli occupation or in refugee camps find it more difficult to make any contact with the past or to envision a future. These film-makers, they argue, employ only closed chronotopes, focusing relentlessly on 'the bleak struggle for survival in a dead-end present' (Gertz, 2004:24). While this distinction is interesting, I find it difficult to sustain entirely. Certainly Khleifi, employs open and closed forms in, for example, *Canticle of the Stones*, but Suleiman, also an insider, restricts himself mainly to the closed type. And though both forms are evident in Masharawi's *Haifa* and *Waiting*, the closed form predominates in *Curfew*.

I would argue that there is no single national space that defines the Palestinian nation, rather there are multiple spaces constructed from real places such as Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, refugee camps, and the lands of exile, as well as imagined or remembered places, including Palestine before 1948 and lost homes and villages whose images, like that of Ma'loul, remain static, Edenic, and unchanging in the collective memory. The expression of Palestinian identity is heavily inflected by the film-makers' distance from or, conversely, intimacy with events that have occurred within these different spaces at different times.

In Israel

Palestinians in Israel face what Ramzi Suleiman calls an 'uncertain belonging' (2002:82). Before the first *intifada* most considered themselves to be Israeli citizens though they have been confined by "invisible" borders, subject to discriminatory

laws, and differing degrees of racism (Peleg, 2001:320-2). Khleifi's *Fertile Memory* and *Wedding in Galilee*, Elias' *The Mountain,* and Nassar's *The Milky Way* re-construct a historical Palestinian presence in the villages and countryside. *Wedding in Galilee* also denotes the many similarities between the communities, and there is a trace of cultural boundaries being blurred. An Israeli male soldier is told 'you will have to take off your uniform if you want to dance', and Tali, the female soldier, is re-dressed in Arab costume; both scenes metaphors for a potential reduction in barriers between Arab and Jew. Even so, the film ends in uncertainty as the villagers signal an uprising against military rule.

After 1987 many Palestinians began to perceive themselves to be Palestinian-Israelis (Bowman, 1994:145-6). Khleifi's vision was seen to be over-optimistic and in most films after 1987 there are virtually no direct encounters between the two communities. Exceptionally, Khleifi does explore the possibility of coexistence in two documentaries, *You, Me, Jerusalem* (1995) and *Forbidden Marriages in the Holy Land* (1995), where he allows Jews to be seen as real people, and not just as oppressors. But these films illustrate how far apart the two communities are, not how they might become closer. Otherwise, there is no real dialogue and the Jewish presence is impersonalised in summarising symbols: the Israeli flag, uniformed soldiers hiding behind dark glasses, barbed wire, the noise of tanks, bulldozers, gunfire, helicopters and jet fighters.

Palestinian space in Israel is now characterised by both visible and invisible barriers, but no formal borders. Palestinians remain in the position of being in "internal exile" – Israel is both homeland and exile at the same time. Khleifi probes this space in Jerusalem sequences of *Canticle of the Stones* where the couple always meets in marginal territory – entrance halls, a foyer, hotel rooms, or on roof-tops – and frequently in marginal time, at dawn or dusk. Nizar Hassan uses the trope of movement and travel in *Isteqlall* (1994) to engage with the "shifting space" experienced by Palestinians in Israel and to question their allegiances to the national flag and to national celebrations or ceremonies.

Ticket to Jerusalem (Masharawi, 2002) explores the contested space of Jerusalem, where a family of Palestinians is under threat from a Jewish family that has occupied the top floor of their building. The tension between the communities becomes tangible when one Israeli deliberately and slowly performs exercises in the

common courtyard, proclaiming ownership through the act of filling this space. But, Jaber, a film projectionist, chooses active resistance; insisting, after many difficulties, on showing a film on a wall in the yard despite the threatening display of the Israeli flag. Masharawi uses the metaphor of "projecting" the national narrative (the film Jaber projects is Masharawi's own *Haifa*) into this unstable, borderless space to demonstrate the precarious state of Palestinian culture in Israel.

Similarly, the sound-space experienced by Palestinians in Israel is represented as insecure; shifting between the home-grown and the alien. Films are studded with diegetic rural sounds: goat-bells, wedding songs, the songs of village women and children, ululation; or urban sounds of street vendors, popular music, a group of musicians. Yet the alien is inescapably present in the noise of helicopters, fighter jet-planes screeching overhead, sirens, loudspeakers shouting commands, and Israeli radio and television programs. *The Colour of Olives* goes further by virtually silencing the Palestinian family trapped in their home, surrounded by barbed wire, while the Israeli presence is marked by continual, discordant noise. It is as if these Palestinians cannot even claim their own aural space.

Thus, as Kimmerling and Migdal observe, Palestinians have not been able to 'construct a unified community and constituency in the Jewish state' (2003:180). Their national space in Israel, as expressed in film, hovers uneasily between a past that is beyond reach and an uncertain future as unwanted and unrecognised citizens of Israel.

The Occupied Palestinian Territory

Israel has no officially defined frontier with the Occupied Palestinian Territory.[6] But, since the 1990s Palestinians have been forced progressively to live in separate population areas surrounded by Israeli controlled land, dominated by settlements, strangled by road networks, fences, and barriers (see map on page 180). The people are subjected to intolerable travel restrictions, arbitrarily imposed curfews, arrests without due process of law, restricted work opportunities, and the destruction of much of their social, cultural, and political infrastructure (Khalidi, 2006:200-206). With the Israeli decision to build a separation Wall, barriers have become ever more sharply defined and impermeable. Palestinian centres of population have been enclosed in separate, unsustainable spaces seemingly designed to preclude the development of a viable Palestinian state (Carter, 2006).

It is therefore not surprising that fences, barbed wire, checkpoints, the Wall, and the sheer barbarity of the occupation is repeatedly displayed in Palestinian film. Equally, it is difficult to miss the symbols of spatial confinement and fragmentation – the 'claustrophobic spaces [that] are employed to mark out a national space' (Alexander, 2001:172) – dark, airless rooms, bird-cages, cells, alleviated only by glimpses of the sky and the open sea. What strategies can we find, then, that film-makers have used in trying to construct a national space from this disjointed territory?

A common trope is the journey, frequently that between Jerusalem and the neighbouring city of Ramallah. Though these journeys are frustrated by checkpoints and barriers, as in Abu-Assad's *Rana's Wedding* and *Ford Transit*, and Masharawi's *Ticket to Jerusalem*, they denote ingenious attempts to transmit culture – a wedding, politics, a film – between Palestinian places. Similarly, Al-Qattan's *Diary of an Art Competition (Under Curfew)* (2002) brings together Palestinian artists and their art from Israel, Europe, and various refugee camps for an exhibition in Ramallah. Despite the barriers to their journeys, threats, and harassment the artwork denotes a thriving culture, the separate artworks linked by the common thread of Palestine.

Suleiman's *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Divine Intervention* also denote the fragmentation and knitting together of space, but in more abstract and satirical ways. In the former, for example, a number of scenes introduce the seemingly

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[6] The Armistice Line at the end of the 1948-49 war and the Green Line at the end of the 1967 war are not recognised by Israel even as the putative boundary of a Palestinian state.

innocent squeaking of a postcard rack rotating in the wind. Later, this becomes a "proto-film", displaying a selected sequence of images:

> A barbed-wire fence and soldiers, with the title 'Patrolling the border'
> Jerusalem, with the Dome of the Rock prominent, and a camel in the foreground
> Baby Jesus on a bed of straw
> Statue of the infant Jesus
> Mosaic with Christian symbol of the fish
> Workers on a kibbutz
> Falafel, with the title 'Israel's national snack'
> Arab men, back view, with headdress
> The border again

Tellingly the "border" starts and ends the sequence. It is as if Suleiman is unable anymore to find stable images he can build into a Palestinian narrative – the city has been appropriated by alien traditions and the Arab presence relegated to colourful tourist clichés of camels, *kaffiyas*, and minarets.

Gertz and Khleifi note the distinct shrinking of space in the time that elapsed between the making of these two films as a result of the escalation of Israeli action during the second *intifada* (2005c:323). Whereas in the former, travel between his family's home in Nazareth and Jerusalem is relatively easy, and the film depicts some open and outdoor spaces, the latter takes place mainly in claustrophobic interiors and in the vicinity of roadblocks and border crossings.

In these and other films that have been called 'roadblock movies', tropes of movement, such as bus rides or car journeys, end in blocked spaces and immobility (ibid.). Unlike the Kurdish case where journeys signified the connection of places, here they serve not only to accentuate separation from former lands observed through windows or windscreens, but also to illustrate the destruction of Palestinian space. Gertz and Khleifi make an interesting observation that as 'the public space is blocked [and] the private space is missing or destroyed […] borders have become emblematic of Palestinian space and identity' (ibid.). For them, these films allow no past or future, only an empty present in the borderlands.

Yet, though many films certainly are dominated by fragmentation and obstructions, various strategies have been employed to transcend barriers and connect Palestinian places together into a whole. Suleiman floats a balloon, carrying the face of Arafat, over a check-point to settle on the al-Aqsa mosque in *Divine Intervention*; a white foal repeatedly passes through the gates that fence off the family in *The Colour of Olives*; a stream of ants pass on gossip to each other, despite their path being

blocked in *Palestine, Summer 2006*; and the song of *Yasmine's Song* (Najjar, 2006) floats above the Wall, joining the separated lovers. As Gertz and Khleifi concede, perhaps 'the power of imagination, dreams and longing can reclaim the blocked national space' (ibid.:327).

Refugee Camps

Even more difficult, though, is the position of the largely peasant populations of the refugee camps. For many of them

> village life had provided the frame of reference for all experience, and the loss of that frame effectively led to the disintegration not only of their world but of their conceptions of self as well (Bowman, 1994:148).

Refused right of return to their origins in Israel, they are denied national identity in the sense of belonging to a place.

Nonetheless, a type of political space in which identity can be preserved is constructed in the tension between the physical facts of the refugee camp and the memory of a lost Garden of Eden. Alexander, referring to *My Very Private Map* (Zobaidi, 1998), notes that '[a]gainst the real space of the refugee camp, [the refugees] construct their identity in an imaginary space' (2002:173). The community of the camps, like other Palestinian communities also characterised by confinement, has created its own form of Palestinian identity, one 'deeply shaped by trauma, discrimination, marginality and yet resistance and survivability' (Peteet, 1996:11).

In *Tale of Three Jewels* and in the documentary sequences of *Canticle of the Stones*, Khleifi grounds memory and imagination in the harsh realities of everyday camp life: poverty, violence, confinement, limited opportunities, and despair. In so doing, he exposes the psychological trauma and schizophrenia characteristic of much of this section of Palestinian society. However, it is Masharawi who crystallises the condition of Palestinian refugees, showing how, faced with physical restrictions, they create their own spaces. In *Curfew* we see space rapidly diminish from an establishing shot looking over the rooftops of occupied Gaza, down to the boundaries of a camp, then to a courtyard where Radar, the youngest son of Abu Raji is playing football. Receiving a letter from Germany, he takes it into his house, where he reads it to his family, just as a curfew is announced. From then on, the camera more or less stays in the confined space of one or two rooms – the letter from the outside world making the space appear smaller. Though seemingly cut off, the community is

preserved through the secret connections they make: a neighbour climbs through a window to play backgammon, a mid-wife negotiates a complex path through the houses to deliver a baby, and Radar exchanges messages with a friend through adjoining windows.

Haifa, following the Oslo agreements that abandoned the refugee's right of return, illustrates the 'unique type of disorientation' that Armaly observed is a result of this betrayal (Armaly, 2002:3-4). In the opening sequence, Haifa (Bakri), is first seen in close-up at the wheel of a truck, turning the wheel in intense concentration. A series of cuts shows that the truck is a wreck without wheels, sitting in a vast dry landscape on the edge of a refugee camp; he is driving nowhere except in his imagination. Haifa's subsequent "patrols" through the camp link together the individual family stories and construct a Palestinian space from his encounters. Bakri's performance, with its echoes of a Shakespearian fool – jokes, elliptical tales, and songs – provides the spine of the film. However, an element of uncertainty enters in the closing sequence with two processions that cross, mingle, and separate again. One, the funeral procession for Haifa's aunt, represents loss of the past, the extinguishing of memory of the old times in Jaffa and elsewhere; the other, a political demonstration with Palestinian flags and banners, represents resistance and the struggle for rights of the refugees. In the final close-up – his eyes swivelling from one to the other – Haifa is torn between acknowledging, for the first time, that dreams of the past are gone forever, and acceptance of the more difficult reality that they will remain refugees; that they have nowhere to go.

In Masharawi's most recent effort to date, *Waiting* (2005), Ahmad, a film-maker, tours refugee camps in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon filming auditions of actors for a production in the 'National Theatre of Palestine'. Ahmad gives the putative actors the theme of 'waiting' which they understand only too well. They act out scenes of patience, humiliation, longing, and memory, and thus, even in the abandoned spaces of the refugee camps, a form of unity is constructed. Though

Masharawi links the camps together through Ahmad's journey, the ending is ambiguous as he is cut-off from returning to Gaza by Israeli bombing.

Peteet was probably correct when she argued in 1996 that refugees 'are the guardians of resistance and Palestinian cultural authenticity' (1996:5). Since the disaster of the Oslo talks and the second *intifada*, much of this confidence is waning, and Masharawi seems to suggest that their ability to preserve a national space may be failing.

Exile

The national spaces I have discussed so far, characterised by marginality, uncertainty, repression, and confinement, generally support the conclusion drawn by Abdel-Malek that 'the central Palestinian experience [is] of living a marginal existence on literal and figurative borders' (1999:180). However exiles, who in some respects may have greater freedom of movement than refugees, are frequently more fundamentally displaced, lacking *any* fixed point of reference or territory they can call home. Some of this extreme loss or lack is evident in two films that I touched on in Chapter 7 – Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* and Suleiman's *Homage by Assassination*. In these, the film-makers superimpose fragments of Arabic – a unifying bond – onto fragments of the body as a way of denoting an attempt to recreate identity in what Shohat and Stam call 'the liminal zone of exile' (1994:319-21).

A more common trope in exile is the strong attachment to an imagined homeland and an obsession with a frozen or fetishised past. For Naficy, these utopian or open chronotopes, in such films as Khleifi's *Wedding in Galilee*, recall an idyllic, *unreal* existence (2001:152-4). I have already argued that this film and others such as *Ma'loul* .. and, to a lesser extent, *The Milky Way*, serve more subtle purposes. This is not to say that Naficy is mistaken – there are strong elements of nostalgia in these and many other Palestinian films. Film-maker Azza El-Hassan, for example, describes her own work in exile as exhibiting a deep 'nostalgia for the lost land' and constructing an image of Palestine that is both 'unreal and divine' (2002:65). But, alongside this lies the closed chronotope of imprisonment and claustrophobic spaces which El-Hassan goes on to liken to being 'caged inside public pain' (ibid.). Such painful confinement is articulated in many of the films of Suleiman and Masharawi that I have previously discussed.

More complex is the homecoming journey, where the exiled film-maker returns, temporarily or permanently, to Palestine. Khleifi uses the Woman in *Canticle of the Stones* as a surrogate for himself – she returns from abroad to try to understand the resistance and sacrifices of the Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Alexander perceptively points out that the dialogue between the lovers 'mirrors a dialogue Khleifi himself conducts with Palestinian society as both a native of Palestine and an exile returning to his homeland' (2002:171). The Man, initially dismissive of the Woman's mission, says:

> You shall feel nothing
> Nor learn anything
> Unless you live here nothing is perceptible

And Khleifi acknowledges the difficulty of making the transition from outside to inside as the Woman confides to her lover:

> Exile is desolate, but more terrible is the return

However, as the film progresses Khleifi makes us aware that the documentary sequences, ostensibly the Woman's "field-work", are observed through the eyes of an outsider. She is confined to angled views; views through car windows; views through doorways and from gardens. Though she is the motivating force for many of the scenes, Khleifi does not hide the fact that it is he who conducts the interviews – occasionally his voice appears on the soundtrack – while the Woman is always outside the frame. Thus, he creates a doubled awareness of separation; of the isolation of the exile from both the outside world and the homeland.

Suleiman devastatingly describes the isolation of the exile and his inability to make contact with other people in *Homage by Assassination*, despite the plethora of electronic communication devices at his disposal. Furthermore, his silent observation of surreal events in *Chronicle of a Disappearance* – a book falling from the sky; a man cleaning his teeth at a petrol pump; a mime artist performing strange rituals – suggests that he is increasingly at a loss to understand the homeland from which he has been separated and which has changed in his absence.

The national space constructed by these films is individual and personal. In contrast with Ariç's attempt to *unify* the different spaces of Kurdistan in *A Song for Beko*, Palestinian films of exile and return seem less able to find coherence. More like

films of the Armenian diaspora, such as Egoyan's *Calendar* or Torossian's *The Girl From Moush*, they position the film-maker as an outsider trying to make sense of the spaces he or she encounters.

<div align="center">೫೦೮</div>

The various depictions of national political spaces I have described tend to support Bowman's assertion that 'particular articulations of Palestinian identity can function to fragment the Palestinian nation rather than bring it together' (1994:147). Given the splintering of physical space I discussed earlier, what is it, then, that binds the people into a community? Here, Renan's conception of the nation as a community that has shared suffering is most useful (Renan, 1996). In the narratives of Palestinian film, suffering in common is derived from oppression and fear: the oppression of Israel's policies of ethnic cleansing and settlement; the oppression of Western hegemonic discourse; and the fear of the erasure of Palestinian culture. But, suffering has led to resistance and struggle which have been themes of the Palestinian narrative since the 1960s.

Narratives of resistance

The term "resistance literature" was first applied by Ghassan Kanafani to describe Palestinian literature written under occupation (Harlow, 1987:2). By extension, graffiti scribbled nightly on the walls of occupied Palestinian towns, artworks and photographic essays displayed in exhibitions, Palestinian flags hoisted on telegraph wires, postcards sent around the world depicting symbols of the Palestinian nation, defiant murals, political posters, and of course film, are part of a "discourse of resistance" that, more than anything else, has come to define the Palestinian nation and hold it together.

Palestinian film-makers of the 1960s and 1970s were largely concerned with encouraging physical resistance. Yet, even during that time of turmoil, there was also an awareness of the need to preserve Palestinian culture and resist Western (and Israeli) hegemony – to create narratives of resistance. From the early 1980s film-makers have tackled this problem in a number of important ways. First, they compete with the dominant negative view of the Palestinian nation by engaging with and deconstructing stereotypes. Secondly, they look for alternative cinematic forms and symbolism to enable a distinct Palestinian voice to emerge. And, finally, they

document stories and record memories, creating new works of art that resist the threat of cultural erasure.

Resistance to stereotyping

The many studies of Hollywood film and television and the media that I previously cited, demonstrate a consistently negative representation of the Middle East, Arabs in general, and the Palestinian people in particular. Such stereotyping ensures that the people remain largely unknown, faceless and homogenised. I argued that this perception of Palestinians created an imbalance in Western opinion that has, at least, delayed the formation of a viable Palestinian state.

It was not until the early 1980s that film-makers and the media began to challenge this imbalance and to present more nuanced portraits of Palestinians. Khleifi, among others, took the route of contesting stereotyping by means of revealing the humanity of the people and giving them a voice with which to express themselves. Alexander has criticised his approach for failing to engage sufficiently with 'the discursive colonial language' responsible for generating stereotypes. Following Homi Bhabha, she argues it is insufficient simply to ignore stereotypes, it is necessary to displace them, to speak using a 'deconstructive language that is yet comprehensible to that audience' (1998:326). Jayce Salloum is also distinctly critical of this type of film-making, arguing that it can only lead to a kind of empathy, never an understanding of the other culture. He sees such attempts at proving a people's humanity as 'a paternalistic gesture at best, dehumanizing at worst' (2002:95). While there is some merit in these arguments, and many documentary film-makers do present their subjects as specimens, Khleifi largely avoids this trap. As we have seen in all his films, he provides both documentary and fictional insight into the lives and concerns of men, women, and children, demonstrating the complexity of Palestinian society.

Suleiman prefers to tackle the subject head-on in *Introduction to an End of an Argument* and *Homage by Assassination*. In the first of these, he not only confronts dominant images and stereotypes, exposing their underlying ideologies, but also makes plain how difficult it is to tell the story of a colonised people. He embarks on several false "beginnings": a song of Palestine, where the singer has forgotten the words and the tune; a failed street interview; a failed tape recording; all of which are contrasted with the simplicities and certainty of the MGM lion motif that starts so

many Hollywood films. He juxtaposes "explanations" of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from American television news shows, with fake history lessons, film trailers, and clips from *Exodus*, to illustrate the lack of comprehension about Palestinians in the U.S. media. And, by parodying the rapid cutting of Western TV images, he exposes the absurdity of "representations" of Arabs and Palestinians in Western film and mass media, revealing the ignorance evident in the supposedly authoritative voices of their commentators.

Though Suleiman challenges the construction of Palestinians in the media, confronting stereotypes and prejudices, it seems that in *Homage by Assassination*, made at the time of the Gulf War, he shared Salloum's pessimism about their inability 'to dent the mass of misrepresentation that existed and continues to exist' (ibid.:92). In the latter film, the character ES makes his first appearances. Not only is he diminished physically by the framing, but all his efforts to express himself, perhaps to tell the Palestinian story, fail. He is framed partially hidden by walls, confined to small sections of the screen, constricted by doorways. He peers through windows and from balconies, at distant, always unreachable landscapes.

Finally, Suleiman highlights the way the term "terrorist" is used to block out what it means to be Palestinian: to erase their identity by routinely associating the word with Palestinians. As Laura Marks points out, Suleiman's words appearing on his computer screen at the end of the film: 'Let us all be terrorist people till we can be people all over again', question how to 'create another language in which to represent *Palestine* and the activity called terrorism' (1992:72). But, what is the language that these film-makers strive after to express the identity of the Palestinian people?

Resistance to dominant forms

Edward Said argues that 'essentially unconventional, hybrid, and fragmentary forms of expression' are most appropriate for representing the disjointed and precarious nature of the Palestinian nation (1986:6). When he put together the photographs for *After the Last Sky*, he claims he worked according to:

> principles within the non-representational art of the Islamic world … where there were certain kinds of patterns that you could see that were not representational in the sense … that they had a subject, but they had some motif and rather a musical motif (1998:16-17).

Before discussing how successful Palestinian film-makers have been in finding forms in which to express national identity, I want to consider their work in the context of some general views of Arab cinema.

Arab cinema is often qualified by what is lacking or uncommon in comparison with Western norms, rather than what characteristics it possesses that are unique. For example, Malkmus and Armes note that explicit point-of-view shots, close-ups, the cutting up of visual space, and montage, common in Western film are fairly rare in classical Arab cinema (1991:119-20). Khatib, in her analysis of more recent Egyptian film, shows that this distinction no longer applies, but goes further in highlighting differences in the representation of space, gender, conflict, and Islamic fundamentalism, between Hollywood and Arab cinema (2006). Shafik argues that Islamic visual arts rarely seem to influence Arab cinematic styles and also notes that 'the number of historical films produced by Arab countries has remained relatively low' in comparison with Western cinema (1998:164-82).

Can we, then, identify stylistic choices in Arab film that defy the dominant modes of expression and are able to convey elements of a unique regional culture? Some of the more obvious tropes include the frequent use of local music, traditional narratives, and anecdotes. Words and the language used to express ideas are also important. As Shafik argues 'the lack of widespread traditional, figurative, and symbolic modes of representation encouraged the dominance of linguistic means of expression' (ibid.:209-10). And Malkmus and Armes note the richness of the language and its emphasis on multiple meanings, the tensions created between silences and speech, and the threading together of speech, song and dance, especially in Egyptian film (ibid.:133-38). Finally, there is a preference for interior spaces and melodrama which Khatib relates to the 'dominant national view of Arab countries [which] feminizes them' (ibid.:33). She draws a further important distinction that 'Arab films depict the experience of space' (ibid.:60), that is, they construct space as personal.

Palestinian films contain many of these elements of style that place them within the realm of Arab cinema and theatre. But, some Palestinian film-makers go further, fusing styles, narratives, modes of language and regional accents, to create a 'cinematic syncretism' that Shohat and Stam have observed in a range of anti-colonial

cinemas (1994:313-8). This artistic strategy of resistance appropriates from but is not subordinate to dominant forms.

Consider the widely different anecdotes of the older villagers in *Wedding in Galilee*, which according to Slyomovics, Palestinian audiences would interpret for their political meanings (1991:22). Or, the mix of indigenous music and dance, from the song created by students in *Fertile Memory*, through wedding songs and dances, to the music of the West Bank group, Sabrin, in *Canticle of the Stones* and *1948* (Bakri, 1998). Or, again, note the songs from Morocco and Lebanon that Suleiman incorporates into his soundtracks, and the children's chants and songs that Masharawi uses in *Haifa*. In a manner similar to the arabesk, discussed in Chapter 5, such strategies of cultural resistance in the cinema go some way towards Ashrawi's conception of culture 'affirming the legitimacy of Palestinian rights and realities' (1990:81).

However, these film-makers have also had to struggle to find a mode of expression that represents the complexities of the Palestinian nation and, at the same time, resists colonial domination. A clue to the different approaches adopted is provided by a distinction that Malkmus and Armes draw between two 'dialectical forms' of realism in Arab literature: one relates to the Islamic vision of community – of an integrated society – and the other to the 'nightmare' of civil strife, of a society that is fragmenting and splintering (op.cit.:115-27). This opposition also permeates Arab cinema.

In the most convincing examples of the first form, film-makers weave together political stories, newsreels, or documentary footage, with details of real and fictional everyday life, producing a metonymic relationship that compounds a personal story with the tensions and contradictions of a people and the nation to which they belong. Khleifi strives to achieve this blend as he explores fractures in Palestinian society, revealing its heterogeneity, while at the same time expressing the essential unity of the community. He inserts newsreel footage, documentary, and drama-documentary sequences into fictional narratives, claiming that he wants to 'blur the boundaries' between fiction and reality (Alexander, 1996:32). However, Khleifi is not always successful in relating the individual to society. Though *Wedding in Galilee* and *Tale of Three Jewels* are motivated by the viewpoint of various individuals, this is not true of all his films. As Malkmus and Armes rightly stress, 'a fragment of reality does not

really register unless it is placed in the story, the diegesic [sic] context' (op.cit.:117). Unless one of the film's protagonists is involved with a documentary sequence, it has no real meaning in the film. *Canticle of the Stones* is particularly problematic in this respect. The lovers scant relationship to events in the refugee camps exposes its seams too obviously, lessening the power of the film as a whole to say anything significant about Palestinian society.

Masharawi also shows the unity of the family and community while he probes its tensions through the structure and form of *Curfew*. The family of Abu Raji is intricately connected to its community, as I described earlier, and serves as a metaphor for Palestinian society and its strength in resisting the pressures of occupation. But the letters from the outside world that frame the film also give an insight into its unresolved problems. Can these people survive by staying where they are? Should they actively resist? Should they try to find new lives elsewhere?

The second form of realism is less stable since it deals with disruption and fragmentation. There are signs of this in Khleifi's breaking up of time and space in the opening sequence of *Wedding in Galilee*, indicative of the *Mukhtar*'s loss of control over space – of a contested space – and in the spatial/temporal indeterminacy of *Canticle of the Stones*. Masharawi, also highlights instability of the community of the refugee camps through the agency of the "fool", Haifa, in *Haifa*. But it is Suleiman who is most active in trying to find forms that represents the rupture of Palestinian society.

His early films used cutting and montage to create a critical discourse on the Western representation of Palestinian identity. In later films he has gone further, deliberately aligning himself with the "Oriental" in opposition to what he regards as a Western predilection to 'proceed by logic and reason' (Garbarz, 2002:207). He creates an "ordered chaos" that he claims 'allows the viewer the freedom to reinvent their own memories, their own sensuality' (ibid.). Through his non-linear and non-verbal strategies, he devolves onto the audience the task of understanding his language, of making meaning from his images. In *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, ES is introduced to talk about his 'use of cinematic language' – but he cannot speak because the microphones don't work, he is trapped, speechless in front of his audience who meanwhile, move about freely, taking and making mobile phone calls. If Khleifi is not always successful in relating the individual to society and so fails to present

realistic images of Palestinian society, Suleiman goes to the opposite extreme. He reproduces the fragmented reality of Palestinian life – so evident in other visual arts – out of unreal or absurdist sketches and repeated patterns and cinematic motifs. In so doing he attempts to construct a collective identity: a sense of the instability and insecurity that say what it means to be Palestinian.

Khleifi and Masharawi have made small rebellions against conventional forms, both being more concerned with elaborating the lives of their protagonists as a way of explicating Palestinian identity. Suleiman attempts a major rebellion: trying to create a cultural space in which he hopes the viewer will question why this nation is denied its rights. But, how successful are any of these rebellions in challenging the constraints placed on the Palestinian right to express their identity and national aspirations?

Naficy partially addresses this issue with his accented style which he places in opposition to conventional narrative cinema. He claims that Palestinian film-makers, in particular, are 'uniquely driven by exile' (2001:167). To an extent, Suleiman's films are amenable to Naficy's analysis. They exhibit dislocations of space and time, and are preoccupied with territoriality, displacement, and distance from the "homeland". But I would argue that his films, and those of Khleifi, Masharawi, and a wide range of Palestinian film-makers are far more marked by resistance: resistance to homogenisation – a determination to represent the different political and social spaces occupied by Palestinians and the effect this has on their national identity; resistance to being absorbed into other cultures; and, above all, resistance to erasure.

Resistance to erasure

Since the turn of the 20th century, Palestinians have been moved off their land in a long drawn-out process. In Israel, Palestinian villages have been levelled, ancient agricultural infrastructure and irrigation systems destroyed, trees planted to remove traces of former occupants, and geographical features renamed (Benvenisti, 2002:165-7). These processes are now being applied to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Objectively, it may be understandable that a new nation, finding itself with a homeland for which it has fought, would seek to ground its existence in this way. Schama, for example, suggests that the planting of forests is an *innocent ritual* behind which lies 'a long, rich, and pagan tradition that imagined forests as the primeval birthplace of nations; the beginning of habitation' (1995:6 emphasis added).

However, there is more behind this innocent ritual – it is an attempt to erase Palestinian cultural identity and the memory of places that were an intrinsic part of Palestine. This policy was enunciated more than 50 years ago by Israel's future Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion who stated: "We must do everything to ensure they [the Palestinians] never return." He predicted, "The old will die and the young will forget".

Even so, there is a will to survive: to preserve a record of Palestinian life, to bear witness to events, and to tell and re-tell the story as a way of sustaining the collective memory. For without a story there is no nation. Music, songs, poetry and literature, and the visual arts, such as painting, postcards, and posters, have always been a means of recording a way of life and as a repository for the collective memory. But what function does Palestinian film play in resistance to extinction of the cultural identity of the nation?

Various Palestinian film-makers, including Khleifi and Ali Nassar, have sought to raise questions of how their political and cultural identity are to be represented through details of village life and its rituals. Though fictionalised, these stories create a strong sense of connection between the villagers, the land, and their local history. Masharawi's films record the immediacy of existence in the refugee camps: the division and parcelling out of food; the cycle of birth and death in a community cut off from medical facilities; the games that pass the time of waiting; the efforts to continue education when schools are closed. Suleiman documents an urban existence lived under occupation: life in cafes and bars, fishing trips, cooking and eating food, argument and discussion. Collectively, they create distinctly Palestinian views of their society.

Palestinian film-makers also are driven to bear witness to the destruction of a culture. Interrogating people about the demolition of their houses, appropriation of land, random arrests and imposition of curfews, checkpoints, encroachment of settlements, police activity, restrictions and harassment, they try to counter the Israeli version of events and ensure that their own version will not go unrecorded.

Finally, there is the preservation of collective memory. The narratives of a nation almost always involve the construction of a glorious past, underscored by unique traditions. But how that past is recalled and remembered is open to dispute

and manipulation and as Hobsbawm pointed out (1983) traditions are frequently invented in order to connect individuals into a new community. Film, which plays directly into the mind of the viewer and mimics the way our own memories are formed through half-remembered images, voices, and sounds, is a powerful means of recording memory. Whether real or fictional, and whether told through interviews, reminiscences, or autobiography, cinematic representations are imbued with a gloss of authenticity. I have demonstrated that Palestinian film includes many examples of these forms of individual memory, but as Said points out, there has been little understanding of 'the importance of constructing a *collective* history as a part of trying to gain independence' (1999:12, emphasis added). Film-makers have largely failed in this respect to reclaim the Palestinian heritage. With the minor exception of *Palestine - A People's Record*, which I discussed in Chapter 7, there is, as yet, no collective history of Palestine from an Arab perspective.

Freud, of course, understood and applied the therapeutic benefits of telling stories in dealing with mourning, of talking about oneself and the deceased. Bresheeth argues that film-making, as an extension of story-telling, provides a means of reconciling the subject to loss (2002a:77-9). *Chronicle of a Disappearance* recounts the "erasure" of the character ES. He is ignored, as if he were absent, by Israeli soldiers searching his apartment; observed by a poster of Arafat, he swims lengths in a hotel pool, disappearing from the frame on each length; he appears and disappears in the flickering lights of a café, under a gently waving Palestinian flag. Suleiman's silent presence accentuated by the static camera, his loss of the ability to speak, to tell the story of his own disappearance, is a denial of himself, a self-effacement. Each sequence is personal but is also linked to the disappearance of Palestine territory and of the Palestinians as a people. His melancholia seems to suggest that Palestinians cannot be reconciled to their loss because they cannot tell their own stories. They are constrained by the Israeli presence which, in the final sequence of the film, even invades the home and dreams of his parents as they lie asleep in front of a television playing the Israeli national anthem and displaying the Israeli flag. Their country is even 'absent from the senses' (Gertz, 2005b:140).

Conclusions

> Palestine is a country which has a past and a future. Sometimes I think it will always be thus.
> – Elia Suleiman (2001:54)

Palestine is a country with a long and well recorded past, and a distinct Palestinian national identity began to assert itself in that country over the first decades of the 20th century. As Khalidi points out, at the end of the Ottoman era Palestinians were in the majority throughout virtually all of the country, they had a freely elected parliament (though not a national one), and some public associations, including a reasonably free press (1997:206-9). That these trappings of an embryonic state never fully developed is a function of internal and external struggles: the countervailing forces of pan-Arabism, Islam, local and regional affiliations, and the intervention of the colonial powers. In the absence of a state and a stable framework of institutions, Palestinians were restricted in their ability to construct a wholly national narrative. Furthermore, any attempts to project such a narrative to the outside world were drowned out by the opposing narratives of Orientalism and Zionism.

Paradoxically, in more recent times, it is the absence of a state that has been instrumental in shaping Palestinian identity and the development of what Kimmerling and Migdal call 'a vibrant civic society' (2003:400). Cultural artefacts have been important in establishing and preserving this society through their "performative" narratives that resist the forces of oppression. It is a nation marked by resistance. But, as Ashrawi observes 'the most noticeable quality of [this] culture is its emergent nature. Like Palestinian society it is in a state of being or becoming' (1990:78). From this comes Suleiman's complaint that it has no present – that it has, as yet, failed to construct a coherent national narrative. Though the nation has survived the onslaught of implacable opponents, it remains under subjugation.

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> Whoever writes the story [of the place] first – owns the place.
> – Mahmoud Darwish (1997).[7]

The story of Palestine has been told often in recent times, but not always accurately. In the cinema, Zionists told it first and laid claim to the land. Israelis, abetted by Hollywood, told it second and tightened their grip. As I discussed in

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[7] From the newspaper *Ha'aretz*, January 10, 1997, translated and quoted by Yosefa Loshitsky (2001:171).

Chapter 7, Palestinian film-makers were slow to start. It was not until the late 1960s that a cinematic narrative began to take shape – the "revolutionary cinema". Funded by the PLO, it signalled the presence of a resurgent Palestinian political identity. But, today, can we really say there is a "Palestinian narrative" in cinema that defines the nation?

Alexander argues that the realities of Palestinian film-making, as in other small nations without large domestic markets, mean that film-makers are forced to adopt transnational strategies such as international funding, the use of non-national technical and artistic resources, and appeals to 'the palate of Western audiences' (2001:67). But they also suffer greater problems than most with a lack of exhibition venues, limits on movement in the country, difficulties for exiles to enter and leave, and considerable restrictions on their work. Masharawi, for example, claims that, under military occupation, film making was regarded as a political activity and not allowed, unless it conformed to the requirements of the Israeli authorities (Armaly, 2002).

Despite transnational forces and local oppression, Alexander suggests that the role of a Palestinian 'nation-state cinema' still persists. For her, it is a cinema that avoids detailing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and, instead focuses on 'the humanist aspect of their struggle, highlighting the Palestinian plight crushed under the heavy boot of Israeli occupation' (ibid.:74). She is partially correct in this analysis – much of the work of Khleifi, Masharawi, and Suleiman, for example, is concerned to uncover the diversity of the Palestinian *people* and to avoid or play down the negative impact of resistance fighting and, especially, of suicide bombing.[8] There is much violence, actual or implied, but all of it is perpetrated by the Israelis: tear-gas killing a baby, rubber bullet wounds that kill or leave their victims crippled for life, curfews that force the people to starve, the noise and terror of gunfire, helicopters, and rockets that traumatise the population. However, Alexander overlooks the scale and depth of resistance offered by these films. Though they do include many 'inert victim[s]' among their characters (ibid.:74), they are not themselves inert or inactive. I have

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[8] By contrast, a (small) number of films, such as *Wild Flowers: Women of South Lebanon* (Masri and Chamoun, 1986) and *Paradise Now* (Abu-Assad, 2005), have attempted to explore the actions of suicide bombers.

argued that the one element that characterises Palestinian film, that gives it coherence as a unique cinema, is its expression of resistance. It is a cinema driven by resistance.

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> The image [of Palestine] is that of a few fragments of the historic land, and the feeling of communal belonging threatens to become nothing more than the bric-a-brac of family memories, the sparse debris of collective memory …
> – Bassma Kodmani-Darwish (1997).[9]

The image to which Kodmani-Darwish refers, is derived from an analysis of what it means to be Palestinian in each of the Arab states and in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. But, if all that is left of this dispersed people – a few fragments of the historic land – a bric-a-brac of family memories – 'such objects of memory as stone houses, artisanal artifacts, the scent of lemon trees, *madafahs* or guest houses, "memorial books" and family photographs' (Harlow, 1998:83), can we say that cinema has played any significant role in creating and sustaining a Palestinian national identity?

I argue that Palestinian film-makers, working in the variety of spaces of exile, refugee camps, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and Israel, have contributed to the struggle to reclaim the identity of the Palestinian people by telling their stories, re-imagining their communities, and helping to preserve the memories of their nation. From the realist documentary form of Fertile Memory and Ma'loul .., through the fairly conventional narrative filmmaking of Wedding in Galilee, Curfew, Haifa, and Ticket to Jerusalem, and the fragmented, repetitive structure and serious comedy of Chronicle of a Disappearance and Divine Intervention, to the docu-drama of Canticle of the Stones, and the impressionism of Tale of Three Jewels, they have sought and found different ways of bearing witness to the outside world of the existence of a unique Palestinian cultural identity.

However, there is an underlying utopian view of victimization that pervades Palestinian film. With the exception of *Wedding in Galilee*, Israeli action is shown as cold, devoid of humanity, and unnecessarily cruel. The films restrict the range and depth of knowledge available to the viewer in order to create sympathy for the Palestinian people and antipathy towards their oppressors. A common trope of narrative or documentary sequences is to approach so close to the action that Israeli

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[9] Quoted by Barbara Harlow (Harlow, 1998).

soldiers try to stop the filming, to prevent the "truth" being told, by pushing a hand over the camera lens. The viewer is placed in the midst of the action, forced to participate in the events being shown, and invited to sympathise with the Palestinians as victims.

Secondly, the context of action is removed: why are the villagers in *Wedding in Galilee* under curfew? The governor says at the outset that they have caused trouble, but we don't know whether this was significant. Why were the various male characters in *Canticle of the Stones*, *Tale of Three Jewels*, and *Haifa*, imprisoned? What were their crimes? A litany of similar manipulations of the political point-of-view occurs throughout these films. Sequences of conflict are regularly sanitized and simplified. Narratives are self-conscious, not in the sense used by Bordwell that they directly address the audience (1985:57-61), but in the sense that they recognize they are addressing a *particular* audience; one expected to be sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.

The image of Israelis as the Other, the perpetrator of all evil, is constructed rather too obviously. All Israelis are heavily armed soldiers, they almost always wear dark glasses, their faces are hard and unsmiling, their stance aggressive and threatening. Again, with the exception of *Wedding in Galilee*, there is a tendency to reduce the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to a battle between good and evil. Numerous sources have commented on the way Israeli cinema emphasises the vision of themselves as victims, as a nation under siege from implacable foes.[10] As Semmerling points out, 'the positive presentation of the national self as victim relies on the negative presentation of the national Other as perpetrator' (2004:116). The problem with this strategy is that it leaves no room for compromise, no space for the development of positive images of Palestinian or Israeli identity. No nation can fully emerge until it embraces this issue. Palestinian film, while it has performed an immensely important function for the nation of preserving their cultural identity, is in danger of fossilising that identity into that of the helpless victim.

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[10] See, for example, Nitzan Ben-Shaul's detailed analysis of a number of Israeli films (1997). Loshitsky remarks that 'contemporary Israeli identity politics is based on perceived and real victimhood' (2001:xiv).

> The Zionist movement is one of the most successful national movements in history for it started with the aim of forming one national group, and it ended up with forming two.
> – attributed to Meir Pa'el.[11]

The history of the Palestinian people intimately intersects with other histories. They are a people who have existed under one or other form of colonial rule, Ottoman, British, and now Israeli, and under pressure from neighbouring Arab states. They first found a political voice in spaces carved out of the Ottoman empire, and in the void that existed transiently with the collapse of that empire. They defined themselves as a nation by virtue of their common language, culture, religion and territory, and by their clear separation from British and Jewish Others who spoke different languages, had different religions, and were not *of* their country.

Though Meir Pa'el was being ironic in his statement, some historians still assert that a Palestinian national identity only emerged after the state of Israel was formed. Khalidi's position is more plausible. For him, Palestinian political consciousness had its roots much earlier – in the late 19th century – and grew strongly during the 1920s and 1930s, aided by the forces of modernity: by the close proximity of the majority of its people to the economic and political processes taking place in the outside world. The war of 1948 and the *Nakba* set back this development.

Palestinians were told Palestine was not theirs and never had been, and that they were no different to the peoples in the surrounding states – they were all Arabs. The forcible displacement of large numbers of people fragmented the nation physically, culturally, and politically. With the loss of the intellectual urban elite, symbols of peasant life and forms of dress, especially the *kaffiyah*, became prominent in the national narrative. The large number of refugees forced into neighbouring Arab states created a new form of separation, this time from Arab Others. At the same time, a new political centre emerged in exile, and a more specific identity re-emerged in the late 1960s after the failure of the pan-Arab alliance. Thus, the Palestinian collective identity has been shaped by competing loyalties: to their Arab heritage, to Islam, to local and regional leaders, and to "national" political leaders.

The Palestinian case goes some way towards supporting modernist arguments for nation formation – Palestinian identity clearly strengthened as a result of burgeoning trade, improved communications and education, war, and social contacts.

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[11] Cited in Nassar (2001:26) from a personal communication with Ilan Pappé.

And Palestinians possess few of the factors that Anthony Smith defines as the basis of a distinct ethnic identity (Smith, 1986:22-30). There is no common myth of descent, no unique ancient history or culture, weak solidarity, and their collective name is comparatively recently defined.

Palestinian films, though the majority are of relatively recent origin, can tell us something interesting about the way the existence of this modern nation is sustained. As I have illustrated, the majority of films are permeated with expressions of a Palestinian living culture – its music, dance, costumes, language, traditions, and ceremonies. Many films provide evidence of the strong social structures that help to unify Palestinian society even while exposing tensions between the different sectors and between the various competing loyalties. They acknowledge pride in the Arab heritage, yet assert their own particularity, especially as a result of the collective consciousness of the trauma of 1948 and 1967. And they contribute to the collective memory of a people who are being reduced from 'children of Palestine to children of the idea of Palestine' (Barghouti, 2000:62).

Graffiti on the Wall

However this case also reveals that transnational influences are particularly important for nation formation in modern times. Precarious peoples, like the Palestinians, need support from outside to develop fully into a nation and a state. The fact that international support is largely absent would appear to consign the Palestinian people to a liminal existence in Israel; to poverty in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, surrounded by the Wall; or to exile and statelessness abroad or

in refugee camps. The greatest contribution of Palestinian film-makers is to continue to express resistance to this fate and keep alive 'the idea of Palestine'.

Chapter 9
Conclusion: Re-imagining National Identity in the Cinema

Flags, waved and unwaved, have been a theme of this study, and I have shown through a number of cinematic examples how they contribute to the range of visual images that enable a community to "imagine" itself as a nation. But, as Renan points out, a nation's existence is dependent on 'a daily plebiscite' (1996:41-2), that is, it must constantly be "re-imagined". This is particularly true for stateless nations and their diasporas whose cultural boundaries must repeatedly be reinforced against erosion for their survival to be guaranteed.

While film may not play a *central* role in the construction of national identity, a starting point of this thesis is that cinema is, nonetheless, an important site for re-imagining and re-presenting such communities. That this is so may be understood not only from my analysis of a range of films about these nations, but also from the discussion of extreme measures taken by various states to control the production and distribution of their cinematic narratives. As we have seen, censorship of film in Soviet Armenia, with varying degrees of success, suppressed expressions of Armenian identity. In a similar fashion, the Turkish government has resolutely tried to deny the existence of its large Kurdish population. And overwhelmingly negative Israeli and Hollywood propaganda films have restricted the development of a Palestinian narrative.

Thus, my focus has been on film and film-makers who take the nation as a principal theme. I argued in Chapter 1 that the concept of "national cinema", which has been seen as 'somehow reflective of a certain national spirit' (Alexander, 2001), is limited as a means of categorising film with respect to stateless nations and diasporas. And I put forward an alternative framework which groups together films about different nations, regardless of where they originate, into a "cinema regarding nations". The aim was to test assumptions that an analysis of various cases would show significant differences in the way in which nations are depicted that would not only reflect their diverse historical origins, but also indicate how they have sustained a distinct identity over time.

The selection of cases was governed by a further assumption that there would be differences in the re-imagination of identity between, on the one hand, "ancient" nations with deep historical roots and, on the other, nations with more modern origins.

In order to span these two extremes, I settled on three communities that share a number of common features and yet provide a spectrum of experience that supports a meaningful comparative study. Throughout the body of this thesis, observations have therefore been related to the theories of nation formation outlined in Chapter 2. I would argue that this provides a valuable continuation of academic studies of the relationship between 'the imagery of cinema […] and the interpretations of national identity' (Smith, 2000:57) that have surfaced in recent years.

In choosing to include a wide range of film and film-makers, I was conscious of the problem of dilution – that many of the examples could only be treated relatively superficially. In justification, I return to the issue of the "outsider position" with respect to foreign cultures. The approach, using a large body of works, has been to locate elements – symbols, formal methods, and narratives – that are repeated in several films; that appear in different contexts; and that are elaborated in different ways. This has then allowed for a focus on a much smaller number of key films and film-makers that provide the necessary detail for a credible comparison.

This analysis of film has been guided by the central questions set out in Chapter 1, which are used as the overall structuring device for the remainder of this chapter:

> What differences and commonalities are there in the representation of each nation?
>
> Can differences between the representations of the nations be related to their different social and political contexts?
>
> Can the representations be related to the historical process of formation and maintenance of a distinctive identity?

What are the differences?

Though there are common motives among many of the film-makers selected (oppositional and socially committed) and common circumstances (exilic and liminal), different approaches are evident *within the cases* towards the representation of identity.

The main divide in Armenian film is between a line of Moscow-trained film-makers who evoke identity through the traditions and way of life of, mainly, rural Armenian communities, and the diaspora where the ancient history of the people, their myths of foundation, and their unique language and religion predominate. Despite the unifying force of the genocide, this tension between representations of identity in the homeland and the diaspora reflects continuing fissures within the Armenian

community. The divide in the Kurdish case is between film-makers, such as Ariç and Ghobadi who try to represent the nation as unified, and those such as Güney and Saleem more concerned with the articulation of a separate Kurdish identity within the respective "host" states. Palestinian stories of oppression have a different emphasis not only in the different spaces that Palestinians occupy but also at different points in their recent history. This is evident in the contrast between Khleifi's subjects who show a deep humanity within their community, Suleiman's subjects who seem isolated and almost de-humanised by the frustrations of their confinement, and Masharawi's subjects who have descended slowly into despair in the refugee camps.

These contrasts highlight tensions between different sectors of the respective societies and remind us that identity cannot be assumed to be singular, cohesive, or stable over time.

What are the commonalities?

However, there are also instances of coherence in the representations of each nation that, without essentialising, might be understood as "defining" them.

In Soviet Armenia I suggested that cinema was instrumental in the survival of Armenian identity in the Soviet Union, and similarly, that diasporan film, with its focus on the genocide, played an important part in maintaining cohesion among the scattered Armenian people. In this respect, Armenian film could be thought of as representing a "community of memory" based on a homeland (both real and remembered), a shared history, and a common culture (both actual in Armenia and symbolic in the diaspora). In the Kurdish case, division of the people remains as strong as ever. However, various film-makers have been responsible for articulating a "virtual nation" based on cultural similarities between different communities, and the mythical homeland of a unified Kurdistan. Palestinian film provides ample evidence that Palestinians have a powerful sense of national identity, closely associated with their land. Despite the different forms this identity takes in the different fragments of the nation, it is overwhelmingly characterised by resistance and steadfastness.

These commonalities across a range of film-makers offer valuable insights into the wider social and political circumstances of these communities that will now be examined.

Can differences be related to the context?

The framework set out in Chapter 2, anticipated major national themes that would emerge from detailed analysis of film in each of the cases. Though research of this nature does not always produce results that fit neatly into such a categorisation – there may be overlaps, ambiguities, or contradictions – I have retained this framework for its usefulness for comparing and contrasting the cases.

Territory

Territory is vital in defining nations, but the relationship of these nations to the land is expressed in different ways because of their historical and current hold on particular territories.

The homeland carries strong historical associations for Armenians. It is shown in Soviet Armenian film as primordial (*The Beginning*), the site of ancient battles (*Davit-Bek*), the home of poets and scholars (*The Colour of Pomegranates*), the "cradle" of the ancient nation (*A Lonely Nut Tree*), and almost universally as a sacred place – the symbol of Mt. Ararat signifying the origin of the Armenian Church. The notional homeland of Kurdistan also carries mystical significance as the home of the poet Khani, expressed indirectly in *Sürü* and then more explicitly in *Dava*, and, again, is regarded as a cradle. But here, it is not the cradle of an ancient civilization, rather it is an idyllic "protective" space marked out by mountains (*A Song for Beko*). Palestinians have a more pragmatic association with the land – it is personal and directly experienced – and Palestinians appear as an organic part of their homeland (*Tale of Three Jewels*).

Territory is defined by maps and borders, and the journeys that link parts of the territory together. In Soviet Armenia, at first there could only be subdued references to the river boundary with the former lands in Turkey – for example, crossing the Araxes in *What's All the Noise of the River About* and *Nahapet*. Later, with the collapse of the communist regime, Dovlatyan could be more explicit in *Yearning*, yet throughout, there is little sense of a divided territory. By contrast, the dividing borders are ever-present in Kurdish film (*Propaganda*, *Marooned in Iraq*, *Kilometre Zero*). Journeys across these borders are used first of all to link the territory and then, in *A Song for Beko* and *Yol*, where places are named and mapped, the journey may be interpreted as an attempt to construct a "virtual" Kurdistan out of its pieces. Palestinians are also dominated by barbed wire, road blocks, and the

iniquitous Wall. But as well as being divided, they are confined into ghettoes, as illustrated by the frustrated journeys of, for example, *Rana's Wedding* and *Security Leak* (al-Faqih, 2006). There is a morbid sense of being ineluctably squeezed out – their lands reduced to a garden in *Canticle of the Stones*, and Jerusalem reduced to a shared courtyard in *Ticket to Jerusalem*.

Images of the homeland are produced through specific landscapes and monuments in an attempt to construct unified territory for each nation. In the Armenian case this is achieved through historic associations with territory – the ubiquitous Mt. Ararat, ancient churches, and memorials; for Kurds, it is the fortress of mountains and nurturing pastures; and for Palestinians, it is the rolling hills and stony villages of Palestine where the rights to territory (compared with Israelis) is signified by their deep love of the land.

Different expressions of territorial loss play an important role in differentiating the construction of national identity. Though, in the Armenian case, the former lands in Turkey are shown to be essential to the community's myth of origins and shared memories (*A Lonely Nut Tree* and *Yearning*), it is in the diaspora that the lost homeland is fetishised, for example by Michael Hagopian in a number of documentaries, and Tina Bogosian in *An Armenian Journey*. In *Calendar* and *Ararat*, Egoyan exposes what he regards as an unhealthy melancholia over this loss. With some exceptions, Kurds have not lost territory, but loss by division of Kurdistan is marked by the "damaged" burdens carried across borders in *A Time for Drunken Horses* and *Marooned in Iraq*, and into exile by Beko. For many Palestinians, the land carries little historical significance, being the site of endless defeats, but is idealised as a "lost paradise". Loss affects everyone – loss of home, villages, territory, farmland – and unlike the other two cases is a continuing and current process that affects both insiders and the diaspora.

The territory is gendered in all three cases (as in most nationalisms), though in subtly different ways. For Armenians, the land is associated with the figure of Mother Armenia who gives birth to the renewed nation (*Nahapet*); the mother who is unable to nurture her young (*Family Viewing*); the lost mother (*Ararat*); or the found mother (*Mayrig*). Kurdish films overwhelmingly suggest a "broken" nation through images of damaged women; women who have broken the taboos of society or the patriarchy; and women who have failed in their obligation to reproduce. Women

figure much more prominently in Palestinian film and seem to be expected to fulfil three roles: as mother of the nation, as active participant in the resistance struggle, and as the beloved – representing the lost lands of Palestine forever to be mourned over.

Culture

Culture is the second essential ingredient of national identity, and film-makers emphasise not only the unique elements of their culture but also how it differs from that of other nations. In film about Armenians, "high culture" predominates: the church and its archaic liturgy, its ruined and deserted temples, its memorial stones (*khachkars*), and its ancient books, poetry, and music. For the Kurds, it is folk music, song, and dance, the village, and old folk tales that are most evident. And for the Palestinians, again it is folk music, song, and dance, but above all, the house, the home, and the village, stand out.

The Armenian language, script, architecture, religion, and ancient history are unique to the nation and are used repeatedly in film, though sometimes they are challenged as markers of identity. However, in the diaspora, with the exception of Armenian-speaking enclaves, these are fetishised – elements that are revered as an intrinsic part of the nation but mainly in symbolic form. This is an irony that Egoyan skilfully explores in *Calendar* and *Ararat*. Language in the Kurdish case is a differentiator from other nations, though, because of its variations, it is not a unifying factor. It has been suppressed in each state and could not be used in films until after the 1980s, since when it has become the focus for resistance to the hegemonic power of the host states (*Hejar*, *Kilometre Zero*). None of these constituents of identity are unique in the Palestinian case, and with the exception of *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Measures of Distance*, where language is explored for its symbolic value, they are not prominent themes in Palestinian film.

For Armenians, collective memory is inextricably tied into myths of a historic past, lost homeland, and the concrete reality of genocide. We have seen how the historic past intrudes into much Armenian film; how the more recent loss of a homeland invokes deep nostalgia in the diaspora; and how a traumatic response to the genocide binds the nation together. But there is little sense of a common destiny between the homeland and the diaspora. With the exception of the often quoted fable of *Mem û Zîn*, there is scant evidence of historic memory in film about the Kurds. Rather, they appear to be bound up with the present and suggest an uncertain vision of

the future. And, while for the Palestinians there is intense nostalgia for the lands and villages lost in the 1948 and 1967 wars and the subsequent annexation of large sectors of Palestine, there is little in the way of historic memory reflected in film. But Palestinians assert their right to be remembered, their right to record their tenure of the land, and thus their vision of a united future (*Tale of Three Jewels*).

In each case, film-makers engage with the dialectic between modernity and tradition, where modernity is seen as a movement towards a brighter, more progressive and enlightened future. In Soviet Armenia, this is evident in criticism of the honour code and the influence of the patriarchy, for example in *Namous* and *Pepo*. In Kurdish film it appears indirectly in Güney's films (which also explore the paradox that modernity may involve break-down of social structures and the loss of identity); in Şavata's films about the persistence of tribal structures (*Dava*, *Sinir*); and in a number of films that deal with the unequal position of women in what remains a patriarchal society. Khleifi also provides a critique of the archaic social structures of Palestinian villagers in *Fertile Memory* and *Wedding in Galilee* in which he cites the problems of the Arab world in dealing with modernity. But, in general, Palestinian films represent a much more modern society than the other two cases.

Flags are used by states to impose identity on the nation. They are notable by their absence in film from Soviet Armenia, where the flag was banned. In the Kurdish case, we see how the state (particularly Turkey) uses flags (and slogans) in a banal form of nationalism to enforce its culture indirectly (*Propaganda*), and the importance of flags to the Kurds of Iraq (*Kilometre Zero*). However, in Palestinian film, flags are more actively used as weapons by both the Israelis and the Palestinians (*Chronicle of a Disappearance*, *Divine Intervention*).

In Chapter 2, I distinguished between the physical or geographical borders of states and the cultural boundaries of nations. We have seen that borders and border crossing have different meanings for each of these nations, and we should expect their boundaries also to be distinct. Though some cultural markers are not exclusive and are losing relevance in the modern world (for example traditions are similar in each case, and modernity tends to dissolve difference), nonetheless differences are observable and these seem to be most felt in the Armenian diaspora and among the Kurds.

A number of Armenian diasporan films, for example, express fear and ambivalence towards assimilation – (*Pink Elephant*, *Chickpeas*, *After Freedom*, and *588 rue Paradis*). And Egoyan, in particular, deconstructs the problem of crossing the boundary between cultures (*Next of Kin*, *Family Viewing*), and challenges the nationalist need to preserve this difference in *Calendar*. For the Kurds, construction of identity is overlaid with the need to resist forced assimilation; they are identified by difference from their host states. Assimilation suggests a journey – across a boundary – from one identity to another, which is one reason for the prevalence of journeys in Kurdish film.

Constructing space

Cinema constructs spaces in which identity may be expressed, by linking together special places of "felt value". These spaces are politicised in my cases first of all with respect to a "colonising" power: the Soviet Union; Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq; and Israel. But national space is not homogenous. It is also politicised with respect to internal power structures – most often the patriarchy – and the relationship between the homeland and a diaspora. Analysis of the formal and other means by which space is represented in the cinema provides a further means of differentiating how each nation constructs its identity.

Relationship to the colonial power

In Soviet Armenia, though film-makers were largely constrained to the use of Moscow-inspired forms, space is created by subversive means: the river Araxes is the most obvious sign. This gradually led to an assertive ethnic identity that we may observe in the transition from the multiculturalism of *Pepo* to the nationalism of *Yearning*. Pelechian and Paradjanov were exceptions, defying Soviet influences to create unique visions of the nation through their radical re-evaluation of space and time.

Though there are few formal innovations in film about the Kurds, the arabesk – especially in Güney's work in the 1970s and then more widely (*Fotograf*, *Drejan*, and *Eskiya*) – directly challenge the Turkish state, creating a space in which Kurdish identity begins to be conveyed. In terms of narrative, the repeated trope of journeys across state borders and cultural boundaries also may be interpreted as an attempt to represent a unified nation in opposition to colonial division of the people.

In Palestinian film the realist documentary prevails, frequently portraying narratives of victimhood, misery, violence, and despair. However stylistic means, especially the fragmented, broken forms of Suleiman, also confront the world with the forced disintegration of the nation.

Relationship to internal power structures

As we have seen, the construction of national identity is consistently gendered in film about each of the three nations, and representations of the patriarchal structure as archaic are common. However, other issues also emerge as these social structures have fractured and as the diaspora assumes greater importance.

In Soviet Armenia, a few films touch on emasculation resulting from the genocide (*Nahapet*, *Dzori Miro*), however, the exploration of gender relations does not go much beyond this. In the diaspora there are echoes of this emasculation in the sexual difficulties explored in Egoyan's films. However, Egoyan and other film-makers also began to use experimental means (breaking up time and space, and highlighting cinematic processes themselves) to contest the way the nation has been re-imagined by Armenian nationalists.

In Kurdish film, though the patriarchy is subverted, for example, in *Yol* and *Sinir*, it is not seriously challenged even in contemporary film. The crisis of masculinity found in arabesk is more an expression of the problem for men in finding a role within a patriarchy that is breaking down.

The Palestinian case is the most complex of the three. Here, the "failure" of masculinity dominates, and women are frequently shown to be the mainstay of the nation. Throughout Khleifi's work; in Suleiman's *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Divine Intervention*; and in the work of a new generation of Palestinian film-makers (for example, Jacir, Abu-Assad, and Najjar), women not only challenge their "allotted" role in society, they actively resist oppression of the nation.

Can representations be related to the formation and maintenance of identity?

This research helps illuminate the central debate about the process of nation formation outlined in Chapter 2. Clearly, film is a recent invention and, as a means of mass communication, its role in re-imagining and re-presenting national identity fits with the modernist arguments of Deutsch, Anderson, and Gellner. However, the way

in which each nation is represented is, I argue, indicative of its origins. And, in the cinema, each nation has its own meta-narrative through which we can observe the processes by which it has reached its present condition.

Films about the Armenians emphasise the deep historical and cultural roots of the nation, a sense of continuity, then persecution, genocide, and trauma. In Soviet Armenia it becomes a question of re-affirming identity whenever an opportunity arises; in the diaspora, identity is sustained by continual allusions to the genocide and increasingly symbolic references to the cultural heritage and an unattainable homeland. Despite political and social cleavages between the communities, and the forces of assimilation, cinema re-imagines a nation that remains unified by a subjective feeling of being Armenian.

Kurdish films promote a myth of historical unity, then division of the nation, persecution, repression, economic disadvantage, and forced assimilation. There is increasing stress on cultural differences from their "hosts", cultural similarities among the different Kurdish communities, and the unity provided by the mountainous homeland of Kurdistan. In spite of the strong forces of assimilation in each state and in the diaspora, cinema re-imagines a collective identity that survives in the form of a "virtual nation".

Palestinian film stresses their status as victims of colonisation, the *Nakba*, betrayal by Arab states, the violent appropriation of their land by Israel, and betrayal by the world. Identity is centred on local traditions, strong links to the land, the justice of their cause, their collective will to resist erasure, and an increasingly illusory hope for return.

It is not unreasonable to argue, therefore, that films about these nations reflect the observations set out in Chapter 2. The Armenian case tends to support Smith's perspective that a strong genealogy (that is, common cultural roots and myths of origin) is essential to the formation and maintenance of a collective identity. In the Kurdish case the construction of a "virtual nation" is dependent more on their ability to communicate a sense of identity over a dispersed population than on a deep awareness of history. While this would seem to support the modernist view of nation formation, lack of cohesion among the Kurds could be attributed to their relatively weak genealogy, and thus would also provide evidence for the perennialist position.

The construction of a Palestinian identity separate from their Arab neighbours, and its persistence in the face of extreme pressure, would seem to be based on factors associated with modernity rather than on their cultural heritage.

<div align="center">₧₨</div>

The analysis of cinema regarding the three case studies illustrates differences in the way these nations are re-imagined. Different treatments of territory and culture tell us about historical changes to the homeland; the contrast between the "reality" of the territory remaining for the nation as opposed to its "imaginary" or notional homeland; and the relationship to "host"/colonising cultures. Different ways in which political space is represented tell us about the coherence of the nation, that is, about the strength of its binding. And the set of representations show differences that may be related to the distinct historical processes of formation and maintenance of identity of each nation.

This thesis contains a certain tension. It is the tension between trying to find some coherence in the representations of each nation in the cinema while avoiding essentialising the identities of the different communities. The results from my examination of a wide range of film and film-makers point to the emergence of national identities that are multi-focal and multi-sited in each case. They also suggest that subjective factors (that is, those based on cultural roots) are insufficient on their own to bind a nation together. Other factors such as the existence of a homeland and extreme forms of persecution are equally important. The study shows that the contextual analysis of film could fruitfully be applied to investigations of the formation and survival of nations in further cases.

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Additional films

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After Freedom (Vahé Babaian, 2002) [U.S.A.: 82 minutes, English, Armenian] DVD

Al Nakba: The Palestinian Catastrophe 1948 (Benny Brunner, and Alexandra Jansse, 1997) [U.S.A.: 56 minutes, English] University of California, Berkeley (February 2002)

America America (Elia Kazan, 1963) [U.S.A.: 90 minutes, English] New York University (January 2006)

Anoush (Sétrag Vartian, 1945) [U.S.A.: Armenian]

Aprilkinder / April's Children (Yüksel Yavuz, 1998) [Germany: 85 minutes, German] VHS

Archin Mal Alan (Sétrag Vartian, 1937) [U.S.A.: Armenian]

The Armenian Genocide (Andrew Goldberg, 2006) [U.S.A.: 64 minutes, English] National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, Boston (April 2006)

The Armenian Genocide 1894-1896, 1915-1919 (Thomas Ohanian, 1982) [U.S.A.: 52 minutes, English] Harvard University Middle East Division (May 2006)

An Armenian Journey (Theodore Bogosian, 1988) [U.S.A.: 58 minutes, English]

Armenian Kurds / *Hayastani Krdere* (Jergiz Zhamharyan, 1959) [Armenia: 22 minutes, Armenian] Armenian Film Archive, Yerevan, Armenia (April 2005)

Ashik Kerib / *Ashug-Karibi* (Sergei Paradjanov, 1988) [Georgia: 73 minutes, Russian] Harvard University Middle East Division (May 2006)

Assignment Berlin (Hrayr Toukhanian, 1982) [U.S.A.: 94 minutes, English, Armenian] VHS

At / *The Horse* or *Mein Pferd* (Ali Özgentürk, 1982) [Turkey, West Germany: 87 minutes, Turkish, with English sub-titles] New York University (April 2004)

Avetik (Don Askarian, 1992) [Germany, Armenia: 100 minutes, Armenian, with English sub-titles] VHS

Back to Ararat (Peå Holmquist, 1988) [Sweden, U.S.A.: 100 minutes, English] University of California, Berkeley (October 2002)

Back to Haifa (Kassem Hawal, 1981) [Palestine: 85 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] Arab and South Asian Film Festival, New York (March/April 2007)

Beyond the Walls (Uri Barbash, 1984) [Israel: 103 minutes, Hebrew, with English sub-titles] New York University (April 2004)

Bitter Bread / *Aci ekmek* (Yilmaz Duru, 1984) [Turkey: 90 minutes, Turkish] VCD

Black Sunday (John Frankenheimer, 1977) [U.S.A.: 143 minutes, English] University of California, Berkeley (February 2002)

Bogdan Khmelnitsky (Igor Savchenko, 1941) [Soviet Union: 114 minutes, Russian]

The Boy Who Stopped Talking / *de jongen die niet meer praatte* (Ben Sombogaart, 1996) [Netherlands: 105 minutes, Kurdish (Sorani), Dutch, with English sub-titles] VHS

Boys From the Band / *Nvagakhmbi Tghanere* (Henryk Malyan, 1960) [Armenia: 86 minutes, Armenian] VHS

Brothers Saroyan / *Saroyan Yeghbayrnere* (Frunze Dovlatyan, 1968) [Armenia: 102 minutes, Armenian] VHS

By Soul and Blood / *De toute mon âme et avec mon sang* (Mustafa Abu Ali, 1971) [Palestine: Arabic]

Chickpeas (Nigol Bezjian, 1992) [U.S.A.: 120 minutes, English, Armenian] VHS

Children of Fire (Mai Masri, 1990) [U.K.: 58 minutes, English] University of California, Berkeley (October 2002)

Children of Rage (Arthur Allan Seidelman, 1975) [U.K., Italy, Israel: 106 minutes, English] Harvard University Middle East Division (May 2006)

Children of Shatila (Mai Masri, 1998) [Lebanon: 50 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles]

The Colour of Olives (Caroline Rivas, 2006) [Palestine: 97 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] Palestine Film Festival, London (April/May 2007)

Cup Final (Eran Riklis, 1992) [Israel: 105 minutes, Hebrew, Arabic, with English sub-titles] Harvard University Middle East Division (May 2006)

Dava / *The Trial* (Gani Rüzgar Şavata, 2001) [Turkey: 105 minutes, Turkish, Kurdish (Kurmanji)] VCD

David of Sasun (Amasi Martirossian, 1939) [Armenia: 43 minutes, Armenian] Armenian Film Archive, Yerevan, Armenia (April 2005)

Davit-Bek (Hamo Bek-Nazarov, 1944) [Armenia: 93 minutes, Armenian, Russian] Armenian Film Archive, Yerevan, Armenia (April 2005)

The Death of Klinghoffer (Penny Woolcock, 2003) [U.K.: 120 minutes, Arabic, English] VHS

Diary of an Art Competition (Under Curfew) (Omar Al-Qattan, 2002) [Palestine: 45 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] Al-Qattan Foundation, London (April 2004)

Diyet / Blood Money (Lütfi Akad, 1974) [Turkey: 45 minutes, Turkish] VCD

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (Reuben Mamoulian, 1931) [U.S.A.: 98 minutes, English] University of California, Berkeley (February 2002)

The Dream of My People / Halome Ami (A.J. Bloome, 1934) [U.S.A.: 66 minutes, English (dubbed)] University of California, Berkeley (February 2002)

Dreams and Silence / Ahlam Fi Faragh (Omar Al-Qattan, 1991) [Palestine, Belgium: 52 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] VHS

Dreams of Justice and Freedom with Hanan Ashrawi (Christopher Swann, 1995) [U.K.: 56 minutes, Arabic, English] New York University (April 2004)

Drejan (Sahin Gök, 1997) [Turkey: 94 minutes, Turkish, Kurdish (Kurmanji)] VCD

Düğün / The Wedding (Lütfi Akad, 1973) [Turkey: 82 minutes, Turkish]

Duvar / The Wall (Yilmaz Güney, 1983) [France: 117 minutes, Turkish, with English sub-titles] VHS

Dzori Miro (Zhirayr Avetisyan, 1980) [Armenia: 155 minutes, Armenian] VHS

Earthquake in Leninakan (Hamo Bek-Nazarov, 1926) [Armenia: 22 minutes, silent] Armenian Film Archive, Yerevan, Armenia (April 2005)

Eskiya / The Bandit (Yavuz Turgul, 1996) [Turkey: 121 minutes, Turkish, with English sub-titles] DVD

Exodus (Otto Preminger, 1960) [U.S.A.: 209 minutes, English] University of Reading

Father / Hayrik (Henryk Malyan, 1972) [Armenia: 76 minutes, Armenian] VHS

Forbidden Marriages in the Holy Land (Michel Khleifi, 1995) [Palestine, Belgium, U.K.: 66 minutes, Arabic, Hebrew, with English sub-titles] New York University (January 2006)

Ford Transit (Hany Abu-Assad, 2002) [Palestine, Netherlands, United Arab Emirates: 87 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] Hamid Dabashi private collection, Columbia University, New York (April 2004)

Forty Days of Musa Dagh (Sarky Mouradian, 1982) [U.S.A.: 143 minutes, English, Armenian, Turkish] VHS

Frontiers of Dreams and Fears (Mai Masri, 2001) [Palestine: 56 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] University of California, Berkeley (February 2002)

Gelin / The Bride (Lütfi Akad, 1973) [Turkey: 97 minutes, Turkish] Turkish Film Festival, Boston (April, 2005)

The Genocide in Me (Araz Artinian, 2006) [Canada: 53 minutes, English] National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, Boston (April 2006)

A Girl From Palestine / Fatat min Filastin (Mahmoud Zulfikar, 1949) [Egypt: Arabic]

Going Home (Omar Al-Qattan, 1995) [Palestine: 48 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] VHS

Gueorgii Saakadze (Mikhail Tchiaoureli, 1942) [Soviet Union: 184 minutes, Georgian]

Half Moon (Bahman Ghobadi, 2006) [Iran, Iraq, Austria: 114 minutes, Kurdish, with English sub-titles] Kurdish Film Festival, London (December 2006)

Hamsin / Hot Wind (Daniel Wachsmann, 1982) [Israel: 88 minutes, Hebrew, Arabic, with English sub-titles] University of California, Berkeley (October 2002)

Hanan Ashrawi: A Woman of Her Time (Mai Masri, and Jean Chamoun, 1995) [Palestine: 50 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] University of California, Berkeley (October 2002)

A Handful of Grass (Roland Richter, 1999) [Germany: 114 minutes, Kurdish (Kurmanji), German, with English subtitles] DVD

Histoire d'une terre: Part I, 1880-1950 (Simone Bitton, 1993) [France: 60 minutes, English] University of California, Berkeley (February 2002)

House (Amos Gitai, 1980) [Israel: 51 minutes, Hebrew, Arabic, with English sub-titles] Harvard University Middle East Division (May 2006)

I Will Not Be Sad in This World (Karine Epperlein, 2002) [U.S.A.: 55 minutes, English] VHS

Içi et ailleurs (Jean-Luc Godard, 1976) [France: 53 minutes, French, Arabic, with English sub-titles] University of California, Berkeley (February 2002)

Işiklar Sönmesin / *Let There Be Light* (Reis Çelik, 1996) [Turkey-Germany: 82 minutes, Turkish, Kurdish (Kurmanji), with English sub-titles] DVD

Isteqlall (Nizar Hassan, 1994) [Israel: 55 minutes, Arabic, Hebrew, with English sub-titles] Royal Film Commission Library, Amman (April 2007)

Kafr Kassem (Borhane Alaouié, 1974) [Syria, Lebanon: 120 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles]

Kanun Namina / *In the Name of the Law* (Lütfi Akad, 1952) [Turkey: 56 minutes, Turkish]

Khaspush (Hamo Bek-Nazarov, 1927) [Soviet Union: 75 minutes, silent]

Kikos (Patvakan Barkhudaryan, 1931) [Armenia: 53 minutes, Armenian] Armenian Film Archive, Yerevan, Armenia (April 2005)

Kings and Extras: Digging for a Palestinian Image (Azza El-Hassan, 2004) [Lebanon, Palestine: 62 minutes, Arabic, English] Palestine Film Festival, London (April 2006)

Komitas (Don Askarian, 1988) [Belgium, U.K., Germany: 96 minutes, German, Armenian, with English sub-titles] VHS

Kurds-Yezidis / *Krder-Yezidner* (Amasi Martirossian, 1932) [Armenia: 52 minutes, silent] Armenian Film Archive, Yerevan, Armenia (April 2005)

Kurds of Soviet Armenia / *Sovetakan Hayastani Krdere* (Yakov Kocharyan, 1947) [Armenia: 12 minutes, Armenian] Armenian Film Archive, Yerevan, Armenia (April 2005)

Kutuzov (Vladimir Petrov, 1944) [Soviet Union: 95 minutes, Russian]

Kuyu (Metin Erksan, 1968) [Turkey: 92 minutes, Turkish]

The Legend of Love / *Afsaneh-e eshgh* (Farhad Mehranfar, 2000) [Iran, Kurdistan: 85 minutes, Kurdish (Sorani), with French and German sub-titles] VHS

Leila and the Wolves (Heiny Srour, 1984) [U.K., Lebanon, Belgium, Netherlands: 90 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] New York University (April 2004)

The Life and Songs of Gomidas Vartabed (Sétrag Vartian, 1946) [U.S.A.: Armenian]

Mahmoud Darwich: As the Land is the Language (Simone Bitton, 1997) [Palestine: 60 minutes, English and Arabic, with English sub-titles] VHS

Measures of Distance (Mona Hatoum, 1988) [U.S.A.: 50 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] New York University (April 2004)

Mexican Diplomats / *Meksikakan Diplomatner* (Amasi Martirossian, 1931) [Armenia: 58 minutes, Armenian] Armenian Film Archive, Yerevan, Armenia (April 2005)

Midnight Express (Alan Parker, 1978) [U.S.A.: 121 minutes, English, Turkish] University of California, Berkeley (February 2002)

Millenium (Gurgen Balasanyan, 1939) [Armenia: 35 minutes, Armenian] Armenian Film Archive, Yerevan, Armenia (April 2005)

The Mountain (Hanna Elias, 1991) [Israel: 60 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] New York University (April 2004)

My Home, My Prison (Susana Blaustein Munoz, and Erica Marcus, 1992) [55 minutes, English] University of California, Berkeley (October 2002)

My Very Private Map / *Kharitati al-khassah jiddan* (Subhi Zobaidi, 1998) [Palestine: 21 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] Hamid Dabashi private collection, Columbia University, New York (April 2004)

Nadia (Fatin Abdel Wahhab, 1949) [Egypt: Arabic]

The Olive Harvest (Hanna Elias, 2003) [U.S.A.: 89 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles]

On the Old Roman Road (Don Askarian, 2001) [Armenia, Germany, Netherlands: 76 minutes, English] VHS

Ostura (Nizar Hassan, 1998) [Palestine, Israel: 21 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] Royal Film Commission Library, Amman (April 2007)

Palestine - A People's Record (Kais Al-Zobaidi, 1984) [Syria, Germany, Lebanon: 110 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] Palestine Film Festival, London (April 2006)

Palestine, Summer 2006 (Ismael Habbash, 2006) [Palestine: 35 minutes, Arabic, English] DVD

Palestine: This Modern Age (Robin Carruthers, 1946) [U.K.: 35 minutes, English] BFI library

Paradise Now (Hany Abu-Assad, 2005) [Palestine, France, Germany, Netherlands, Israel: 88 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] DVD

Peace, Propaganda & the Promised Land: U.S. Media & the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (Bathsheba Ratzkoff, and Sut Jhally, 2004) [U.S.A.: 80 minutes, English] DVD

Pink Elephant (Ara Madzounian, and Vahé Babaian, 1988) [U.S.A.: 22 minutes, Armenian, English sub-titles] DVD

Private (Saverio Costanzo, 2004) [Italy: 90 minutes, Arabic and Hebrew, with English sub-titles] DVD

Queen Christina (Reuben Mamoulian, 1933) [U.S.A.: 97 minutes, English] University of Reading

Rana's Wedding / Al qods fee yom akhar (Hany Abu-Assad, 2002) [Palestine, Netherlands, United Arab Emirates: 87 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] Hamid Dabashi private collection, Columbia University, New York (April 2004)

Ravished Armenia / Auction of Souls (Oscar Apfel, 1919) [U.S.A.: 60 minutes, silent] lost

Reise der Hoffnung / Journey of Hope (Xavier Koller, 1990) [Switzerland: 105 minutes, Turkish, with English sub-titles] VHS

Return to Zion / Shivat Zion (Ya'ackov Ben-Dov, 1920) [Israel: 20 minutes, Silent, dubbed in English] University of California, Berkeley (October 2002)

The Riverside / Qeraxa Çem (Ali-Reza Amini, 2004) [Iran: 80 minutes, Farsi, with English sub-titles] Kurdish Film Festival, London (November 2004)

Romance of Palestine (Ya'ackov Ben-Dov, 1922) [Israel: 25 minutes, Silent, dubbed in English] University of California, Berkeley (October 2002)

Route 181 (Michel Khleifi, and Eyal Sivan, 2003) [Belgium, France, Germany, U.K.: 272 minutes, Arabic, Hebrew, with English sub-titles] DVD

Sabra / Halutzim (Aleksander Ford, 1933) [Poland, Israel: 84 minutes, Hebrew, dubbed in English]

A Season in Hakkari / Hakkâri'de Bir Mevsim (Erden Kiral, 1983) [Turkey, West Germany: 110 minutes, Turkish, with English sub-titles] Turkish Film Festival, New York (October 2004)

Secret of Suram Fortress / Ambavi Suramis tsikhitsa (Sergei Paradjanov, 1985) [Georgia: 89 minutes, Russian] New York University (April 2004)

Security Leak (Rowan al-Faqih, 2006) [Palestine: 3 minutes, Arabic, English] DVD

Seven Songs About Armenia (Grigoriy Melik-Avagyan, 1967) [Armenia: 60 minutes, Armenian] Armenian Film Archive, Yerevan, Armenia (April 2005)

Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors / Tini zabutykh predkiv (Sergei Paradjanov, 1964) [Ukraine: 97 minutes, Russian] New York University (April 2004)

Shor and Shorshor (Hamo Bek-Nazarov, 1927) [Armenia: 59 minutes, Armenian inter-titles] VHS

Sinir / *The Border* (Gani Rüzgar Şavata, 2001) [Turkey: 105 minutes, Turkish, Kurdish (Kurmanji)] VCD

Siyabend û Xecê (Sahin Gök, 1993) [Turkey: 100 minutes, Turkish, with English sub-titles] Kurdish Film Festival, London (November 2002)

The Son of the Sheik (George Fitzmaurice, 1926) [U.S.A.: 68 minutes, Silent] Harvard University Middle East Division (May 2006)

Song of Songs (Reuben Mamoulian, 1933) [U.S.A.: 90 minutes, English] University of California, Berkeley (February 2002)

Susuz Yaz / *Dry Summer* (Metin Erksan, 1963) [Turkey: Turkish] Turkish Film Festival, Boston (April, 2005)

The Thief of Bagdad (Raoul Walsh, 1924) [U.S.A.: 155 minutes, Silent] University of California, Berkeley (February 2002)

This is not Living (Alia Arasoughly, 2001) [Palestine: 42 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] Hamid Dabashi private collection, Columbia University, New York (April 2004)

Triangle / *Yeronkyuni* (Henryk Malyan, 1967) [Armenia: 84 minutes, Armenian] Armenian Film Archive, Yerevan, Armenia (April 2005)

Turtles Can Fly / *Lakposhtha hâm parvaz mikonand* (Bahman Ghobadi, 2004) [Iran / France / Iraq: 97 minutes, Kurdish (Sorani), with English sub-titles] DVD

The Visit / *Al-Ziyara* (Kais Al-Zobaidi, 1970) [Syria: 10 minutes, Arabic] DVD

Vizontele (Yilmaz Erdoğan, 2001) [Turkey: 110 minutes, Turkish, with English sub-titles] Harvard University Middle East Division (May 2006)

Vizontele Tuuba (Yilmaz Erdoğan, 2004) [Turkey: 111 minutes, Turkish, with English sub-titles] DVD

Voices From the Lake: The Secret Genocide (Michael J. Hagopian, 2000) [U.S.A.: 83 minutes, English] VHS

Waiting for Saladin / *Bi-Intizar Salah al-Din* (Tawfiq Abu Wael, 2001) [Palestine: 53 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles]

Wild Flowers: Women of South Lebanon (Mai Masri, and Jean Chamoun, 1986) [Lebanon: 75 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] VHS

Without Rights (Charles Stewart, 1995) [U.S.A.: 24 minutes, English] University of California, Berkeley (February 2002)

The Women Next Door (Michal Aviad, 1992) [Israel: 84 minutes, Hebrew, Arabic, with English sub-titles] University of California, Berkeley (October 2002)

Yasmine's Song (Najwa Najjar, 2006) [Palestine, Israel: 21 minutes, Arabic, with English sub-titles] Palestine Film Festival, London (April/May 2007)

You, Me, Jerusalem (Michel Khleifi, 1995) [Palestine, Israel, U.S.A.: 53 minutes, Arabic, Hebrew, with English sub-titles]

Zare (Hamo Bek-Nazarov, 1926) [Armenia: 72 minutes, silent] Armenian Film Archive, Yerevan, Armenia (April 2005)