



Shashat and cinema under occupation. Palestinian women in struggle

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PP. 35-44

Introduction

This paper comes in part from a talk presented during the international colloquium *Lutas das Mulheres no Cinema de África e do Médio-Oriente* in the University of Porto in may 2016. The holding of this colloquium reflected the increasing interest in African and Middle Eastern women's cinema since the mid-2000s. Among this wide category of films from such a big geographical area, one of the main focuses has been on Arab women's films. As an example let us note the Arab Woman Film Festival from Helsingborg and Malmö (Sweden) held in march 2016 for the first time or the last edition of the Amal Euroarab Film Festival in Santiago de Compostela (Spain) in October 2016, devoted to Arab women's films. At the same time, Arab film festivals seem also more and more interested in women's cinema and women's issues, like the latest Aswan International Woman Film Festival inaugurated in Egypt in February 2017.

Those examples, along with recently renewed academic interest, are also a reflection of the increasing number of films by women and the relative good health of this cultural expression in the latest years, particularly in the Arab world. In fact, one of the reasons for the aforementioned Amal festival to devote its 2016 edition to women's cinema was simply the extensive amount of women-made films they received in this year's call¹. This tendency shows the increasing empowerment of African and Middle Eastern women filmmakers and this serves as an inspiration for future filmmakers and for the advancement of women's issues in society.

Despite its exponential growth in the last decade, Palestinian cinema is still little studied. Two main books form the basis of any good bibliography on the subject: *Dreams of a Nation on Palestinian Cinema* edited in 2006 by Hamid Dabashi and *Palestinian Cinema. Landscape, Trauma and Memory* co-edited by Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi in 2008. At the same time, Palestinian women's cinema as an independent subject hasn't received much attention until the late 2000s with the exception of a brief article by Lila Abu-Lughod in 2004 with reviews of three short films released in 2001 by Alia Arasoughly, founder of Shashat, Maryse Gargour and Nada El-Yassir. It is worth noting the film-series *Ciclo de cinema e debates sobre mulheres palestinianas* that took place in Coimbra and Lisbon in 2011² and a series of articles published in 2012 by *Camera Obscura*, a journal with a feminist

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¹ Opening speech by Ghaleb Jaber Martínez, director of the festival, at the inaugural screening in Santiago de Compostela on the 25th of October 2016.

² Its minutes were subsequently published in 2014 by the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra.

approach to culture, under the title *In Practice: The Queer State of Palestinian Media*. There is also a notable recent Master's thesis by Sanja Siljak on this topic and particularly also on *Shashat*, from the University of Roskilde (Denmark). Lastly, in 2013, Alia Arasoughly, founder of *Shashat*, edited two books on the issue: *Palestinian Women Filmmakers – Strategies of Representation and Conditions of Production and Eye on Palestinian Women's Cinema*, the last one only available in Arabic for the moment. The remaining works are mostly articles on very specific subjects, like this one.

The following pages will deal with Palestinian women's cinema through the example of *Shashat*, a Palestinian NGO founded in 2005 with a double objective: to offer alternative women's representations and stories narrated by women themselves; and to train a new generation of Palestinian women filmmakers. This article also aims to contribute to the dissemination of Palestinian cinema in a broader sense, which remains little studied.

Shooting under occupation

Perhaps more than in other cases, when talking about Palestine it is inescapable to take into account the historical origins of the ongoing conflict, which still determine Palestinian women's lives, identity and struggles today at large as well as Palestinian women's cinema. In fact, the *Nakba*, the dispossession and the right of return are daunting and recurring themes in a lot of films, while the occupation has become the inevitable background of every story, as in real life.

The military occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East-Jerusalem by Israel started in 1967, following the Six-Day War. It caused the *Naksa*, the second major displacement of Palestinians and the creation of a new contingent of refugees after the «*ethnic cleansing*» of the country by Israel through the forced expulsion of almost 800 000 Palestinians and the destruction of more than 500 villages and 11 urban neighbourhoods during the *Nakba* in 1948 (Pappe, 2011: 11). Despite many UN resolutions condemning the occupation and labeling it as illegal, 50 years later Israel continues to systematically violate international law and still controls the lives of the Palestinian women living in these areas and the fate of the ones living inside Israel and in the diaspora as refugees. As Escudero Alday has put it: «*Palestine is a clear example of the failure of Law – distinctly International Law – as a tool in conflict resolution*» (Escudero Alday, 2005: 59).

Today it is a bit paradoxical to talk about a Palestinian cinema when there is neither a Palestinian state, nor a Palestinian film industry supported by national funding, nor a network of exhibition platforms for Palestinian films in Palestine³. Furthermore, Palestinian population is dispersed worldwide, with very different life experiences. According to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, there are more than 5 million Palestinian refugees in the world⁴, lots of them still living in refugee camps in the neighbouring Arab countries, whose right to return is not respected by Israel. Palestinian diasporic cinema is quite dynamic, as it is connected with international production networks. Some relevant Palestinian women filmmakers from the diaspora are Mai Masri, Annemarie Jacir or Cherien Dabis. There are also Palestinians who after 1948 remained within what are today

³ According to Gertz and Khleifi «*In the 1930s, movie houses were set up in all the major Palestinian cities*» (Gertz and Khleifi, 2008: 15), but the Israeli occupation put an end to it. In recent years some projects aiming to reverse this situation have seen the light, though, as *Shashat* illustrates.

⁴ Around half of the more than 500 000 Palestinian refugees who lived in Syria since 1948 are now displaced again as double refugees because of the war in Syria. See «*Más de 5 millones de refugiados de Palestina representan a la mayor población de refugiados en el mundo*» (2005), UNRWA, retrieved April 20, 2016, from: <http://www.unrwa.es/documentacion/estadisticas/item/212-mas-de-5-millones-de-refugiados-de-palestina-representan-a-la-mayor-poblacion-de-refugiados-en-el-mundo>.

the borders of Israel. They represent about 20 percent of Israel's population. According to some NGOs they are subjected to racist and discriminatory laws despite their Israeli citizenship⁵. Recently, Palestinian cinema from inside Israel has undergone a notable boost by the hand of Palestinian women directors with Israeli citizenship like Suha Arraf or Maysaloun Hamoud. Both Palestinian women filmmakers from the Diaspora and Palestinian women with Israeli citizenship tend to address women's issues in their films and prioritize female characters.

Palestinians living in the West Bank are the ones directly dealing with the Israeli occupation. The Peace Process of the 1990s which culminated in the Oslo Accords brought hope to the region. Nevertheless, these Accords failed to improve the living conditions of the Palestinian people. In many aspects, in fact, those conditions were degraded. The Accords' division of the West Bank in three, theoretical, temporary areas with different jurisdictions –some areas under total Israeli control– along with the continuous expansion of the illegal Israeli settlements resulted in the increasing fragmentation of the territory, more loss of land for the Palestinians and the «ghettoization» (Latte Abdallah, 2011: 18) or, as some have called it, «bantustanization» (Sufyan, 2008: 173) of the Palestinian communities. The collapse of the Peace Process and the discomfort of the Palestinian people with this situation led to the beginning of the Second Intifada in October 2000, which marked a turning point in the conflict. Israel intensified its military occupation establishing more permanent and flying checkpoints, restricting even more the freedom of movement, imposing curfews, and beginning the construction of the so called Apartheid wall⁶. Because of these conditions, whenever they need to move from one city to another –or even within a single city, like in Hebron⁷– Palestinians' freedom of movement is severely restricted. Palestinians face a lot of humiliations and regular harassment from the Israel Defense Forces in the checkpoints and from the Zionist settlers in some areas like Hebron⁸. Pregnant women in particular are even forced to give birth at checkpoints sometimes with the result of complications during labour⁹.

Obtaining shooting permissions in areas controlled by Israel is also problematic. These conditions both complicate the work of Palestinian filmmakers and the development of a film industry and force them to come up with creative strategies to cope with the effects of the occupation. Speaking of the difficulties her crew encountered while shooting the film *Salt of this Sea* in Jaffa in 2007, director Annemarie Jacir said «*In some cases we just filmed anyway. We put the actors in a real situation and we just did it guerrilla-style. That's how most Palestinian filmmakers are managing to do their work*». To cite another well-known example, the production conditions of *Divine Intervention* in 2002, one of the most famous films by Elia Suleiman, were extremely difficult because of the Israeli raids and the unrest during the Second Intifada. As Suleiman himself described: «*In every place where we began shooting, they began shooting*» (Gertz and Khleifi, 2008: 42).

5 See for example the "Discriminatory Laws Database" by Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, retrieved April 20, 2016, from: <https://www.adalah.org/en/law/index>; or the "World Report 2012: Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories" by Human Rights Watch, retrieved April 20, 2016, from: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2012/country-chapters/israel/palestine>.

6 The International Court of Justice in the Hague declared the wall illegal and contrary to international law in 2004. See Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Advisory Opinion, I. C. J. Reports 2004, p. 136, retrieved February 10, 2014, from: <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/131/1671.pdf>.

7 See "Fragmented Lives: Humanitarian Overview 2015" (2016) by the OCHA, pp. 10-11, retrieved February 15, 2017, from: https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/annual-humanitarian-overview_10_06_2016_english.pdf.

8 See "The humanitarian impact of Israeli settlements in Hebron city" (2013) by the OCHA, retrieved February 15, 2017, from: https://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_hebron_h2_factsheet_november_2013_english.pdf.

9 According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, 61 women gave birth at checkpoints between 2000 and 2004. See the Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights "The issue of Palestinian pregnant women giving birth at Israeli checkpoints" (2005) by UN General Assembly, retrieved February 16, from: <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/9a798adb322aff38525617b006d88d777acac141d3593cce85257085004dd6c5?OpenDocument&Highlight=0,pregnant>.

The situation in Gaza deserves a special mention because of its specific context and because, as we shall see later in this paper, *Shashat* is also making a big effort to promote cinema in the Gaza Strip. Despite the Israeli disengagement from Gaza, Gazans suffer from an Israel-imposed blockade through land, sea and air since the electoral victory of *Hamas* in 2006. The humanitarian crisis caused by this blockade could make the Strip uninhabitable by 2020, according to a UN report¹⁰. Filmmaking in the Gaza Strip is even more difficult. Not only do the restrictions on products that can enter through the Erez crossing make it complicated to bring equipment and crews, but we must also take into account that electricity is a luxury in Gaza, so editing and post-production are very slow. Meeting in person with Gazans working in the film sector is impossible for Palestinians in the West Bank. Alia Arasoughly described a film training program in Gaza in the following terms: «*Lacking face-to-face communication with the trainees or the Gaza trainers, we had to work through email, phone, Skype, and Vimeo to provide feedback. This doubled the training time and effort for all of us. Everything was difficult although it did not have to be, but was made so because of the political conditions*» (Arasoughly, Alia, 2013b: 122-123).

As we have seen, Palestinian women filmmakers face a lot of difficulties filming under occupation. The varying degrees of restriction on the movement of people in and out of the West Bank along with the Gaza blockade imposed by Israel have obstructed the mobility of cultural products and people inside, between and outside the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT from now on), transforming the «*Palestinian cultural landscape*». Cultural activity concentrates in the main central cities, Jerusalem, Ramallah and Bethlehem, while the periphery suffers from cultural poverty (Arasoughly, Alia, 2013b: 101). The occupation has also particularly obstructed and shaped Palestinian filmmaking, as cinema is an artistic activity that requires great freedom of movement, because of the different shooting locations and the need to carry a lot of equipment. Furthermore, the applications for permits to enter Jerusalem or Israel to shoot are often rejected (Woldt, 2009), some filmmakers like Omar Al-Qattan or Annemarie Jacir have been forbidden from entering Palestine, and even some, like Amer Shomali, are not allowed to attend international premieres of their films (Shomali, 2015).

Palestinian women's struggles and *Shashat*

Contrary to some orientalist and stereotyped visions of the Palestinian woman –and the Arab woman in general–, Palestinian women have historically taken an active role in the public sphere, organizing and reaching the governments to grant their political demands. Palestinian women's movement has its roots in the XIX century when women were merged in charitable and social organizations. In 1914 they created two nationalistic societies who promoted the local industry against the Zionist commercial competition: *Jam'iat al-Ihsan al-'Am* (*Society for charity*) and *Jam'iat Yaqqat al-Fatat al-'Arabiyya* (*Society for the awakening of the Arab young woman*) (Kayyali, 2014: 41). But it wasn't until 1929 that they established a more organized movement to protest against the British colonialist rule and the Zionist immigration to Palestine (Fleischmann, 2000). After the *Naksa*, Palestinian women became a pillar of the revolution of the 1960s and 1970s as *fedayeen*, fighting side by side with men in Jordan and Lebanon mainly with the aim of recovering the lost land. Some female *fedayeen* achieved worldwide notoriety for their actions, like Leila Khaled. The hard film *Women in Struggle* (2004) by Buthina Canaan Houry, screened by the

¹⁰ "Gaza in 2020: a liveable place?", UNRWA, August 28, 2012. Retrieved June 09 from: <http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/gaza-2020-liveable-place>.

organization of the colloquium *Lutas das Mulheres no Cinema de África e do Médio-Oriente*, tells that history of struggle during the years of the revolution by the hands of women who participated in those historical events¹¹.

Not surprisingly, with that history of politically engaged ancestors, today's Palestinian women continue to fight mainly through conventional political acts –collective nonviolent protests, boycotts, stone-throwing and other actions– inside and outside the OPT against the occupation and the negative effects of the conflict on Palestinians in the OPT and around the world. But the prolonged and worsening occupation has set the ground for a new way of struggle or, rather, resistance: *sumud*, defined in Richter-Devroe's words like a «*steadfast and stubborn insistence on carrying on with life and even seizing every opportunity to enjoy it, despite all odds*». *Sumud* should not be romanticised, though, as it can challenge and support «*different forms of domination at the same time*»¹² (Richter-Devroe, 2011: 33-36). In this sense, *Shashat's* ambitious efforts to train young women filmmakers and establish networks across the OPT, despite all the difficulties that come with living under the Israeli occupation, could be considered a form of *sumud*.

Shashat, which means “screens” in Arabic, is an NGO co-founded in 2005 by Palestinian filmmaker and film scholar Alia Arasoughly whose focus is: «*women's cinema and the social and cultural implications of women's representations*». Having been funded since 2008 mainly by the EU, *Shashat* has trained 43 young women filmmakers and has produced over 70 short films and 15 documentary TV programmes. Even though there are other organizations both dealing with culture and cinema in Palestine, (for example A. M. Qattan Foundation, the Palestinian Social Cinema Arts Association or the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center), *Shashat* is, in its own words, «*unique*» in the country because it «*has focused on and made as its priority, women's representations in film and video*»¹³. The aim of the NGO is «*to build the capacity of Palestinian women filmmakers and the Palestinian filmmaking sector in general which has suffered fragmentation due to internal and external conditions*». The nature of those restrictive conditions is specified a little further as «*Israeli conditions of closure and checkpoints*», or in other words, the Israeli occupation, as we have seen. Cultural networking reveals itself as the best strategy to achieve that goal. *Shashat* moreover tries to empower young women Palestinian filmmakers that, because of their gender, have generally more difficulties of pursuing a career in this sector.

Shashat's activities are divided into four sections. First, the Annual Women's Film Festival, held since 2005¹⁴, the longest running of its kind in the Arab world. The festival tours the OPT through a partnership with 10 universities, 7 refugee camps and 25 cultural and community centers. Second, workshops and consultancies for production or funding which resulted in 8 short film collections. *Shashat* also assures the dissemination of their films to International film festivals. Third, a year-long screening and discussion program with another network of 7 universities and 23 cultural and community organisations. Arasoughly describes this programme as a «*cultural community empowerment intervention*» (Caillé, 2015) as it reaches communities with a weak cultural life. Finally, fourth, three decentralized film libraries, publications and the Ciné-Club “Film Conversations” (Arasoughly, 2013b: 102-104).

¹¹ Another film that addresses this historical period is *When I saw you* (2012) by Annemarie Jacir, where the director tells the same story while focusing on a different female character: a mother in a refugee camp in Jordan who tries to keep his little son safe, away from the dangers of the revolution.

¹² Richter-Devroe alludes to class, patriarchy, and nationalist or islamist structures of domination.

¹³ “New”, SHASHAT, (n. d.). Retrieved January 25, 2016 from: <http://www.shashat.org/new/>.

¹⁴ In 2014 the festival was canceled because of the Israeli bombing of the Gaza Strip «*as nearly half of our filmmakers are from Gaza, and half of the festival tour takes place there*», in Arasoughly's words (Ibid.).

Shashat has established a wide network with regional and international filmmaking communities, with over a hundred community organizations across the West Bank and has established partnerships too. This has enabled films of Shashat's women filmmakers to reach audiences in «*under-represented communities*» where «*cultural life is weak*».

The cultural struggle against the Occupation takes place at a local, regional and international level. Shashat also encourages networks «*among members of the Palestinian filmmaking community*». At the local level, Arasoughly explains that Shashat wants to «*build connections between the Palestinian professional film community and the emerging young second-generation Post-Oslo women filmmakers from the provinces*» (Arasoughly, 2013b: 112) because the former can teach the trainees about the real conditions on the ground. Perhaps networks at a regional level are the more difficult ones due to the restriction of movement. However, Shashat organises activities that «*bridge the division between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip through cinema*».

In addition, there are some schools and organisations of Palestinians of 1948, inside Israel, that are collaborating with *Shashat*. At an international level, Shashat launched an exchange workshop for young Swedish and Palestinian filmmakers in 2010 (Caillé, 2015). The participation in training programmes such as the ones of *Shashat* opens further training and professional doors for aspiring filmmakers, like Liali Kilani and Omaima Hamouri, who got a scholarship for the Red Sea Institute of Cinematic Arts after their participation in one of the NGO's programs.

One of the critics that can be addressed to Shashat is its high dependence on foreign funding, mostly European. That dependence is not exclusive to Shashat, though, as since the Oslo Agreements there has been a proliferation of NGOs that are mainly sustained with foreign funding. Some name this phenomenon *NGOization*¹⁵. The European aid to Palestine has also been criticized because «*it contributes to maintain a certain political stability, at the same time as it frees Israel of the economic burden of the occupation and in some way it eliminates the urgency to search for a solution to the conflict*» (Thieux, 2015: 210). However, as Lila Abu-Lughod has noted:

«*Despite widespread self-criticism about the depoliticizing effects of the NGOization of the Palestinian women's movement that has brought on professionalization, hierarchization of expertise, diversion of energies to funders' desires [...] the national commitments and constant attention to the larger political situation remain apparent in everything these women's rights advocates do*» (Ginsberg, 2015: 5).

And this is also true for the stories that the women from Shashat tell in their films. Furthermore, even in the seemingly passive *sumud* of Palestinian women there is an underlying, and very political, intention to confront the occupying power. In this case, this intention is shown through a cultural expression like cinema and its challenging discourses and images, which don't need to be explicitly challenging, as the mere act of filming and telling stories is enough for Palestinian women filmmakers to affirm their own identity and the existence of their struggle and history, which is almost a political statement in the Palestinian context. In this regard, the late Edward Said said: «*One has to keep telling the story in as many ways as possible, as insistently as possible, and in as compelling a way as possible to keep attention to it, because there is always a fear it might just disappear*» (Barsamian and Said, 2003: 187).

Joseph Massad has stated that «*people survive as people only if their culture survives, for what would the notion of peoplehood signify outside the notion of culture?*» (Massad, 2006: 32). For that reason, Palestinian cinema is a tool to preserve Palestinian culture and history

¹⁵ There is even a documentary short film about this dependency: *Donor Opium* by Mariam Shahin and George Azar (2011).

against the occupier's attempts to erase it¹⁶ and to remind the rest of the world, specially the old –and new– colonial powers in the region that this conflict still exists and needs to be solved. As Omar Al-Qattan has noted: «*with the exception of Said's work, no other medium in Arabic has reached a universal audience as widely and effectively as cinema*» (Al-Qattan, 2007).

Journeys and A day in Palestine

We have examined two of the many *Shashat* collections of short films edited in DVD, both of them produced in 2009¹⁷, and all of them shot and edited by young Palestinian women. First, the collection *Masarat*, «*Journeys*» in Arabic, whose primary focus is on current Palestinian women issues. This collection is made up of four short films: *Golden Pomegranate Seeds*, *Samia*, *First Love* and *Far from Loneliness*.

Ghada Terawi interviews in *Golden Pomegranate Seeds* several women who tell their heartbreaking personal experience of being raped by family members, or being forced to marry at a young age and leave the school. During the intermission of the stories another woman, whose face we can see (the other women's faces are darkened to preserve their privacy), tells us a little fairytale with a clear moral message to the audience: break the silence and talk about it. And this is precisely what the film is doing by choosing to deal with such a taboo theme in the Palestinian society. In this sense, we can state that this film has a clear potential to transform the attitudes of the Palestinian people towards women.

First Love by *Dima Abu Goush* also talks about a somewhat taboo theme, the falling in love among teenagers; a natural feeling which is often denatured and which causes a generational conflict between many Palestinian girls and their parents. The final aim of the film is the same as the previous one, that is to change this prejudice against teenager love and demystifying it while at the same time advocating for not leaving school if married young.

Samia, by Mahasen Naser-Eldin, is the portrait of a 71 years old Palestinian teacher who has dedicated her life to the struggle for the girl's right to education, the opposition to early marriage of girls and the defense of a Palestinian curriculum against the one that Israeli authorities wanted to impose. Samia appears as a very combative woman participating in different social and political causes despite her age. For example the right of Palestinians to live in Jerusalem or the association of teachers she is part of. *Samia* provides a very good counterpoint to the stereotypes disseminated by many Western media, of a passive and victimized woman that doesn't take part in the public sphere while at the same time pays tribute to the older Palestinian women's generation and their historical struggles.

Finally, *Far from Loneliness* depicts the lives and everyday struggles of three Palestinian women: Khadra, Na'ima and Sa'diyyah. The interest of this short film is the social class of the women chosen as protagonists. The three of them are peasants with an unbreakable sense of connection to their land. The land has always been a key concept in the Palestinian national liberation movement, but for Palestinian peasants it may possibly be an even more important concept. Not only do the lives of these women depend on their lands, but they also go everyday through dangerous roads and passages to elude Israeli checkpoints and go to Jerusalem to sell their harvest. They are portrayed in the short film as the real head

¹⁶ The attempts have been very tangible, like the targeting and looting of several Palestinian cultural institutions during the Second Intifada, or Al-Aqsa Intifada, which started in september 2000. For example the attack on the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center in 2002, or the destruction and ransacking of the Kasaba Theater and Cinematheque, both located in Ramallah (Jacir, 2006: 26).

¹⁷ We must thank the Amal Euroarab Film Festival of Santiago de Compostela for granting us access to their archive and thus to these films.

of household. And here again we can see how the occupation hampers the normal life of Palestinian women.

The other collection, *A day in Palestine*, is made up of eight short films, each with a running time between two and four minutes. The only short film with an explicit political approach is *Ni'lin in my heart*, about the resistance of Ni'lin villagers against the building of the Apartheid Wall. The rest are report-like, with almost no dialogue, depicting simple daily activities and scenarios like for example: traditional bread baking; farming; opening stores in the streets of Jerusalem; the activity at a local market; pottery from Hebron; souvenir stores in Ramallah or selling «sweet carob» in the streets of Nablus. The scenarios are both rural and urban.

At first it may appear that this particular collection of *Shashat* doesn't have the potential to socially and politically inspire the audience nor to challenge any Zionist or Western discourses about the Palestinian people. But in fact we could argue that all short films, analysed as a whole, are making a powerful statement. Fighting against the stereotype of «the masked Arab, the kufiyya, the stone-throwing Palestinian – a visual identity associated with terrorism and violence» (Said, 2003: 3) can also be made through recalling that Palestinian society is a normal one, that the Palestinian people enjoys going to the market or buying souvenirs as much as any other. That they are human. Furthermore, the short films *Hebron and Clay* and *Palestine's Heritage* also serve to commemorate Palestinian craftwork and heritage, which in itself is also a way of contesting the invisibility discourse inflicted on the history of Palestine and its people.

Conclusion

In summary, the Israeli occupation, intensified since the Second Intifada in 2000, has severely obstructed the Palestinian film production. This prolonged adverse context has forced Palestinian women to develop a new type of resistance, apart from traditional ways of political fight and has forced Palestinian women filmmakers to reinvent their profession through new ways of networking. Despite the adverse context, Palestinian women filmmakers and organisations linked with cinema –*Shashat* is a good and successful example of this– have resisted and have continued challenging those restrictions and making films using their creative visions against the burden of the occupation. Through their moving images and stories, these women keep affirming their existence and by doing so they «stand against invisibility» and «stereotypes in the media» (Said, 2003: 3).

Furthermore, the screening and discussion programs held by *Shashat* in universities, refugee camps and other community centers allows debates and exchanges of new ideas about gender roles to take place all over the OPT. According to *Shashat*, «culture and media can play a transforming role and serve as an interventionary agent in changing cultural attitudes about women» (Arasoughly, 2013b: 102).

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