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Persistence, Sacrifice, and Resistance: Life in Occupied Palestine in Three Films by Hany Abu-Assad

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Persistence, Sacrifice, and Resistance:
Life in Occupied Palestine in Three Films by Hany Abu-Assad

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by
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INTRODUCTION

Palestinian director Hany Abu-Assad said about his 2013 film, *Omar*, which follows a young man who navigates the obstacles of the occupied West Bank in order to rendezvous with the woman he loves:

My favorite is the scene on the wall, where Omar can't climb the wall anymore, and an old man helps him climb the wall... Because all of a sudden this wall represents everything that prevents him from doing the most simple thing, which is love and living like everybody else... Even when I did the scene and I was standing in front of the wall, it hit me, the meaning of this huge thing that you see every day. And that they see every day in the West Bank. It almost covers the sun (Abu-Assad, NPR).

Abu-Assad's films reflect these everyday struggles of life under occupation. Imposed restrictions stand in the way of his protagonists' access to life and love like everybody else. This project examines three of Abu-Assad's most successful films: *Rana's Wedding*, released in 2002, *Paradise Now*, released in 2005, and *Omar*, released in 2013. All three focus on life under occupation within Palestine and are representative of Abu-Assad's oeuvre.

In *Rana's Wedding*, the titular protagonist, Rana, wakes up to a note from her father giving her two options: she can travel with him to Egypt or get married before his plane takes off that afternoon. Her father has attached a list of marriageable men in Jerusalem to choose from. A race against time begins. Rana is unsatisfied with the list so she immediately disobeys her father's commands, running around the city searching for her lover, Khalil, a theater director whom her father disapproves of. On her journey she encounters several reminders of the climate of Jerusalem: she passes by Israeli soldiers, checkpoints, surveillance cameras, and even sees a young boy get shot in the leg after throwing a rock at an Israeli soldier. She eventually finds him sleeping at the theater and calmly asks his hand in marriage.

He accepts and the two embark on another journey through the city, this time searching for a registrar to swiftly officiate their marriage. Along the way are several more features of life in Jerusalem under occupation. In one instance, they stop their car for a large crowd carrying the body of a bandaged boy on a stretcher. Rana is consumed by the crowd and frantically cries in the car afterwards. When they find the registrar and bring him to her father, Rana listens through a window to learn that her father was convinced.

Rana, admittedly afraid, hesitates and runs away, rethinking her decision to marry and stay in Palestine. While deliberating at her friend's house, she watches a house demolition. She decides to reunite with Khalil and they set out to buy a ring and get their papers in order. After gathering the party and preparing for the wedding, a strict speech from her father reminds the audience of the pressure on Rana's shoulders. Rana learns that the registrar, necessary to officiate the wedding, is stuck at a roadblock nearby. With her father's departure imminent, Rana rushes the entire wedding party into the street where they find the registrar. They convince him to officiate the wedding in a car and her father reluctantly agrees. The party celebrates and dances outside of the car after Rana and Khalil are officially married.

Paradise Now, on the other hand, follows prospective martyrs and best friends Said and Khaled, Palestinians from the West Bank, as well as Suha, the daughter of a famous martyr who has just returned to Palestine. The beginning of the film portrays the everyday lives of Said and Khaled. They work a frustrating menial job before unwinding with a hookah, overlooking the city. They discuss work and Said's romantic interest in Suha. Their unromantic lives are slow and dull. That night, Said is told that he and Khaled were chosen to perform a suicide attack on Tel Aviv the next day. Said spends time with his family and visits Suha, where they discuss life,

martyrdom, and resistance. This conversation situates the two on opposite ends of perspectives on resistance.

The next morning, Khaled and Said record martyrdom videos, in which they expound their cause and say goodbye to their families, who will not know about the mission until its completion. A bomb is made, the pair is bathed and shaved, and they prey, in a rhythmic montage. They are then armed with explosive belts that can only be removed by their handlers. Said is quiet and pensive, while Khaled is wholeheartedly willing to sacrifice his life. They plan to detonate the bombs at an Israeli checkpoint. They are steeled for their mission and told to be unafraid of oncoming death. When they cross the Israeli border through a fence, they are chased away by soldiers. In the confusion, the pair is separated. Khaled makes it back to the handlers. When they leave, Said is left behind. The handlers remove Khaled's explosive belt and allow him a day to search for Said, worried that he has abandoned his mission and betrayed their cause.

On the Israeli side of the border, Said almost detonates his bomb on a bus, but he hesitates when he sees a child passenger, ultimately deciding to take a cab back home. The conflicted Said sneaks by the window of his family home to check on his mother, but does not reveal himself to her. He finds himself in a restroom reminding himself in the mirror that “There is no other way” (*Paradise Now*). Abu-Assad is careful to portray Said’s internal conflict; he is not resolute or single-minded in his mission. He returns to work to ask his boss if he has seen Khaled, when Suha arrives. Soon, he tells her that his father was executed for collaborating with the Israeli government and Said laments the humiliation and grief he has inherited from his father’s decision.

Said runs away again, so Khaled and Suha, now aware of their plan, chase after him. On their way, they have a heated debate in which the martyr’s daughter argues for peaceful forms of

resistance. After Khaled finds Said, the pair returns to their handlers and Said expresses his desire to finally carry out the operation. He expresses his desire to deliver a message to the rest of the world with his sacrifice, denouncing the injustice of the occupation and the silence of other nations. They both head back to Tel Aviv, but before they complete the mission, Khaled changes his mind, apparently influenced by Suha's words. It is now the devoted Khaled who is hesitant, and the doubtful Said who is committed to his mission. Khaled urges Said to retreat with him, but Said stays. The film concludes with Said sitting on a bus full of Israeli soldiers. The final shot slowly narrows in on his eyes before cutting to white.

Omar also follows resistance fighters in Palestine. Omar is a young Palestinian man who repeatedly climbs the separation wall to practice shooting and discuss resistance with his friends, Tarek and Amjad, but also to visit Tarek's sister, Nadia. In maneuvering this obstacle, Omar hurts himself and risks capture. His resistance does not define him, as he spends most of his time working a quotidian job and spending time with his friends. Putting their practice into play, Omar, Tarek, and Amjad meet up in the middle of the night and shoot an Israeli soldier at a checkpoint station. Amjad is the one who pulls the trigger. The trio meet at a café the next morning, where Amjad explains how monkeys are caught in Africa. Sugar cubes are placed through a small hole in the ground. The hole is small enough to escape empty-handed, but too narrow for a fist holding sugar cubes. Hunters make their approach, but the monkeys will not drop the sugar. Undercover agents raid the café and Omar is arrested during a high-paced chase.

In a detention center, he is tricked and tortured by Israeli agent and major antagonist, Rami. With very few options, Omar agrees to aid in the capture of Tarek in exchange for his release. Many suspect him of being an informant because of his hasty release. Caught between betraying his friend and being imprisoned, Omar stalls, leading to another chase sequence in

which Omar evades Israeli soldiers and spots Nadia talking with Amjad. After exchanging some notes with Nadia, Omar plans to set up Rami by arranging a meeting that he, Tarek, and Amjad will ambush. The plan is unsuccessful, as Omar is recaptured when Israeli soldiers take them by surprise; Rami saw through the ruse. This time, both Rami and other prisoners beat the protagonist, as suspicion of his collaboration foments. Rami lets him loose and offers him one last chance to aid in the apprehension of Tarek. Nadia accuses him of betraying the cause and he accuses her of being with Amjad.

A furious Omar attacks Amjad, surmising that he has a relationship with Nadia and has directed the Israelis to Tarek as a suspect for their crime. Amjad admits that he also has betrayed their cause; he has impregnated Nadia and the agents use their affair as leverage. After a brawl and argument, Omar and Amjad agree to meet with and confess to Tarek. Tarek is highly apprehensive of both of them, and attempts to kill Amjad after learning of his betrayal. The three engage in a struggle and Tarek is shot and killed in the confusion. Omar and Amjad have to enlist Rami's help in covering up their crime.

Two years later, Rami wants Omar to help take another resistance fighter into custody, in exchange for protection and discretion regarding the cover-up. It is clear that Omar's service to the Israeli government is not over. In search of his friend, Omar sits down with Nadia, now Amjad's wife. It is revealed that she was not pregnant before her marriage and that Amjad never delivered to Omar her apology for accusing him. Omar promises Rami to reveal who actually killed the soldier two years ago, if Rami gives him a gun. The pair meet, and Rami teaches Omar how to use a gun before handing him a pistol. Omar asks Rami if he knows how they catch monkeys in Africa before aiming the gun at him. Hard cut to black as the sound of a gunshot rings.

Hany Abu-Assad was born in 1961 in Nazareth, a city in Israel predominantly inhabited by Palestinians. Abu-Assad was born in an environment much like those he depicts in his work: an urban sprawl, ruptured and mired by the devastation brought on by occupation. The first film examined by this paper is *Rana's Wedding*, which was released in 2002 during the Second Intifada. This uprising of Palestinians lasted from 2000 to 2005 and sprung from tensions that had been boiling over since the tumultuous establishment of the state of Israel: consistent Israeli settlement in what was Palestinian land, socioeconomic strife, and restrictions on movement in particular are relevant to the films discussed in this paper. The uprising was characterized by stone-throwing, suicide bombing, and firebombing from the Palestinian side, as well as targeted killings, tank attacks, air attacks, and shell attacks from the Israeli side. The number of civilian deaths was high and the occupied cities of Palestine were turbulent and embroiled in the fighting. Rana is surrounded by symptoms of this conflict. For example, she encounters a dispute between children throwing rocks and a molotov cocktail at Israeli soldiers, who fire on a young boy, hitting his leg. She passes armed Israeli settlers, numerous military checkpoints, and watches as a house is demolished.

Paradise Now is also inseparable from this context. The film was released in October of 2005 and many mark the end of the uprising between 2004 and the beginning of 2005. Focusing on suicide bombers in the West Bank, it explores the “division and sterility that characterize post-Intifada Palestinian society” (Gugler 221). Abu-Assad illustrates the hopelessness of the protagonist and his friend—the would-be suicide bombers—by demonstrating their limited options and their humiliating circumstance. Using its principal characters to debate and explore political perspectives on resistance, and suicide bombing in particular, the film portrays the heterogeneous and contradictory perspectives of Palestinians during the end of the Second Intifada and moving

forward. The story is also permeated by a profound sense of personal impotence intrinsically linked to Palestinian history and culture.

Omar is less directly tied to the traumatic Second Intifada, but still grapples with resistance within Occupied Palestine: *Omar* is slightly more optimistic about the capacity for successful resistance and is a more universal tragedy than *Paradise Now*. The suicide bombers in *Paradise Now* never seem to have a choice in their resistance, they appear to be conscripted by the dire and impossible situation they are born into. The titular protagonist, Omar, however, occupies a more active role. His ability to navigate his environment is challenged and his hope for heroism ultimately disillusioned, but he can physically contend with the forces of the occupation, as he is able to outsmart soldiers in chase scenes and overcome physical borders when he climbs the West Bank separation wall. Years after the Second Intifada, occupied Palestinian cities are still consumed by the resistance struggle, but *Omar* argues that the fight is different—characterized by collaboration, betrayal, and stealth as opposed to suicide bombings.

CHAPTER ONE: RANA

Introduction:

In *Rana's Wedding*, Rana exhibits great perseverance in successfully marrying the man she loves regardless of her father's wishes, but Abu-Assad lays out a number of dominant threats standing in her way. She is cornered by and cast into a restrictive gendered position; she must be a wife to a successful suitor and she is relegated into a passive position on her journey to get married. Likewise, the constantly threatening occupation forces her into a state of passive observation that denies even minor expressions of emotion. She is forcibly kept at a remove from both the monumental changes in her life and the destructive political change that surrounds her. Abu-Assad establishes the prevalent, physically and mentally destructive apparatus of the occupation that pacifies its subjects by threatening them with violence and persistently monitoring them. Rana does not allow these influences to deter her. She disobeys her father and defies the occupation's attempts to impede her quest to get married. While accomplishing her goal of having a successful marriage, she retains hope for the future of her life and her people. Her resilience and resistance is not through political activism, but in her survival and unwavering determination to accomplish the relatively simple goal of marrying the man she loves. Abu-Assad argues that Rana's endurance and defiance is political resistance by presenting the imposing strength of the dominant oppressive forces with which she grapples. He also puts forth a somewhat flawed criticism of the patriarchy and the occupation in the process. At the heart of the film, the dominance and power of Rana's oppression is optimistically matched by her relentless defiance.

A Patriarchal and Occupied Environment:

Palestinian cinema has “retained patriarchal stances that identified the homeland with masculinity since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. As Ghassan Kanafani’s protagonist declares, in *Men in the Sun*: ‘The homeland has been lost and with it so has masculinity’” (Gertz and Khleifi 4). National pride and reconstruction are thus tied to masculine pride and masculinity reconstruction. Ali Nassar’s 1997 film, *The Milky Way*, is an example of this theme, wherein a villainous and corrupt village mayor collaborates with Israel and abuses his power. The protagonist, the town blacksmith, lives a virtuous and stable life and participates in political activism against Israel. The antagonist fails as a leader just as he fails as a patriarch: he is disliked and his children are disobedient and rebel against him. His counterpart, the blacksmith, has a loving relationship with his fiancé and with the people of the village (Gertz and Khleifi 121-122). Israeli collaboration is associated with broken patriarchal masculinity, while political resistance is associated with a successful performance of masculine roles. National struggle is tied to patriarchal familial unity and masculine national allegiance is lauded. Abu-Assad in *Rana’s Wedding*, however, follows a female protagonist who holds out *against* a masculine patriarchal environment.

The film is set in motion by the harsh demands placed upon Rana by her father. He gives her a list of men to marry before the end of the day; she can either get married to one of them or move with him to Egypt that afternoon. Therefore she is reduced to a gender role as the potential wife of a successful suitor approved by her father. The stipulation that she marries in order to live in Palestine reflects a Palestinian society in which women are often consigned to domestic spheres (Samed 11) (Hamamra 1-2). The extreme nature of these demands villainizes and criticizes these patriarchal pressures. Her father attempts to deprive her of agency in her marriage

and push her into a passive role. Similarly, when her fiancé Khalil and his friend accompany her around the city to get the marriage in order, she always sits in the backseat.



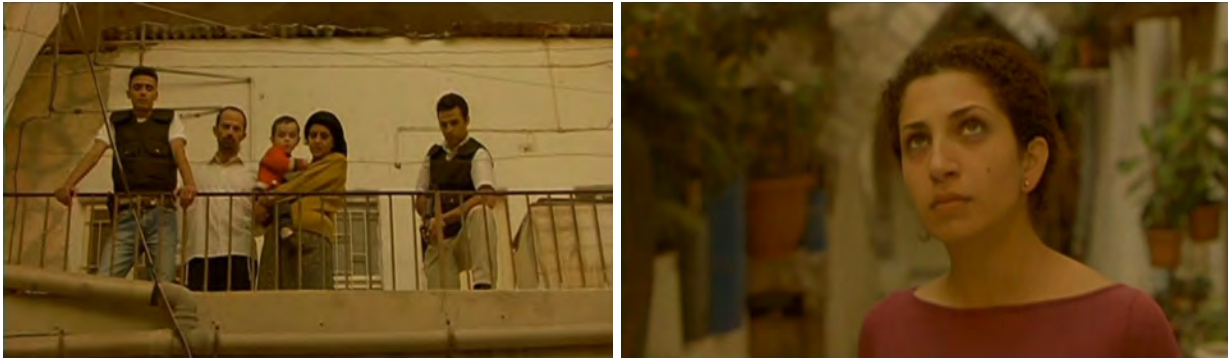
There are numerous moments in which she is asked to wait in the car while they leave to accomplish tasks. When the men join the registrar to confront and convince her father, she is told to stay behind and must eavesdrop through a window in order to discern their conversation.



This relegation constitutes her gendered position depriving her of agency, as she is literally consigned to the backseat as a passenger in one of the most significant days of her life, forced to stay behind while the men set off. Abu-Assad critically reveals the patriarchal limitations that Rana is bound to.

Rana not only faces immense pressure from her family to get married and a limiting gender role, she must also withstand the imposing force of the occupation. Like the imposition of gender norms that deny her agency, there are instances in which Rana becomes a passive

observer in the face of the occupation. When a group of Israeli settlers look down at her with a pointed gun, her face betrays a hint of frustration and resentment.



Instead of addressing them, she keeps her head down and walks away. She does not have the option to even express her anger, because she is at gunpoint. This same suppression occurs when her phone suddenly disconnects and she makes a loud grunt in frustration. Immediately, the clicking of armed weapons sounds as a nearby group of Israeli soldiers quickly aim their weapons at her.



Even small expressions of understandable emotion are suppressed by the occupation. This repression positions her on the outside looking in on the destruction and violence that surrounds her. At her friend's house, she looks through the window as a neighbor's home is demolished. Soldiers push people away from the scene to make way for an excavator.



The reality that she cannot do anything to stop this is made apparent by her position in the shot. She is consigned to the foreground and a window pane, wooden cross guard, as well as curtains on both ends stand between her and the action on screen. Further barring her from the demolition in the background are armed soldiers. The elements in the foreground and background between her and the destruction speak to her inability to intervene in this devastating act. The weapons of the occupation pacify Rana and keep her removed from their violent and destructive acts. Rana is depicted as a bystander, forced into passivity by a powerful and ubiquitous occupation that renders her impotent in addition to the gender roles that already strip her of her agency.

The power and ubiquity of the occupation are demonstrated by overhead shots consistently used throughout the film to portray Rana's journey around Jerusalem. The camera watches her at a remove from above as she walks and drives through the streets of the city in the pursuit of her goals.





In the crowded and tightly packed environment of Jerusalem, these shots help to clarify the geographical spaces that she navigates by moving away and illustrating a complete image of her travel. However, an interaction between Rana and a surveillance camera reveals another implication behind these shots. She looks up at the camera and, apparently tired of being constantly monitored, she turns her head and covers her face with her arm before falling into her fiance and crying.



Khalil comforts her and taunts the camera before leaving, but when he walks away, a shot of the surveillance camera rotating is followed by a panning shot of the city, both set to the same whirring noise of the moving machinery. Thus, the viewer is put in the perspective of the camera. The camera shifts and pans around the rooftops of Jerusalem until landing on a crowd of people.



What follows is a series of panning shots of the city and its inhabitants, all set to frantic and repetitive piano notes that induce concern from the viewer.



The shots in this montage are from the same distance and height as the frequent overhead shots before and after this sequence, which calls into question every overhead shot in the film. The shots in the montage get closer and focus in on the people of Jerusalem, and objective surveillance becomes subjective interest, ultimately concluding when the montage leads back to shots of Rana and Khalil. Considering this montage, the consistent use of overhead shots serves

as another reminder of the ever-present unavoidable nature of the occupation and its surveillance apparatus, as well as the stress and frustration that accompanies this constant monitoring as evinced by Rana's reaction. However, by associating the surveillance camera with the filmmaker's camera, and by transitioning its focus to the individual stories of people of Jerusalem, Abu-Assad transforms a monitoring device that polices Palestinians into a storytelling tool that represents them. Abu-Assad simultaneously presents the cold omniscience of the occupation and optimistically negates its power by transforming the surveillance camera into a tool for Palestinian self-representation.

Despite the oppressive forces around her constantly restraining her, Rana is relentless in her optimistic defiance. When she discovers her father's demands, she does not hesitate to disobey him, by seeking out her partner, Khalil, whom her father disapproves of. When the officiator of the marriage is stuck at a checkpoint, she moves the entire wedding to him, carries out the marriage in a car, and the party celebrates on the side of the road.



By getting married at the same checkpoint that almost halts her wedding, she undermines the occupation and counteracts its attempts to interrupt her life. She doesn't let restrictions on movement stand in her way; in fact, she lets nothing stop her, even if it means getting married in the street. Her resilience is further tested when she watches the demolition from her friend's window. Despite the destruction in front of them, Rana looks to the future: "They are

demolishing a house on the day I want to build one” (*Rana’s Wedding*). Rana manages to preserve hope for the future and a semblance of normalcy despite the restrictions of gender norms and the destructive apparatus of occupation.

Rana’s frequent flouting of commands to stay in the car further demonstrates that she does not allow the restrictions of gender norms to greatly impact her. For example, when her fiancé stops the car to investigate a large crowd gathered in the street, he tells her to stay in the car, but she does not listen. Instead, she stands in the road as the crowd is revealed to be a funeral procession for a Palestinian boy, presumably a victim of the violent occupation. The crowd consumes her, walking through her as she looks them in the eyes. Rana refuses to turn and join them in their march, stubbornly standing still and facing in the opposite direction.



Rana stands her ground and literally goes against the grain, perhaps rejecting death itself or at the least refusing to accept it. Afterwards, she returns to the car and repeatedly screams. She releases

the bitter emotions in reaction to her brutal surroundings directly to the camera, banging on the windows and staring at the audience. She remains remote and inaccessible, however, as the glass windows of the vehicle confine her.



While she is physically trapped behind the windows of the car, she is also figuratively trapped behind the screen on which the audience sees her. The layering obstructions of Rana's pointed dismay implicates the audience. She pleads for the viewer's help, but Abu-Assad makes clear the detachment between them. But as Rana calms down, she turns to find a little boy watching her just outside the car. His sudden appearance suggests she imagines him. In direct opposition to the dead boy that set off her panic, this little boy represents youth and life. It is possible that she is envisioning her future child in a hopeful departure from the death encircling her. This is a political vision as well, as the child she imagines also represents the future of Palestine, diverging from the dead boy who lies on the Palestinian flag.

By taking her marriage into her own hands and by resisting the death and destruction of occupation, Rana subverts the expectations upon her to passively accept marriage and childbearing, making both active gestures. These active gestures also ensure the future of Palestine, despite the bleakness of the present. Childbearing thus becomes national resistance in the face of occupation. In a nationalist discourse impacted by gendered underpinnings that associate nationalism with masculinity, women's struggles are often "defined as sectional, as

women's interests (childbearing and childrearing), as opposed to the universality of men's interests (relating to masculinist assumptions of state, citizenship, and nationalism)" (Jacoby 514). On one hand, Abu-Assad challenges this dichotomy by depicting feminine acts as modes of national preservation and political resistance. On the other, Rana specifically imagines a son, which suggests an adherence to the thread of patriarchal and pronatalist nationalism that categorizes women as reproducers of future nationalist agents (Massad 468, 475) (Kanaaneh 73-74). While illustrating typically feminine domains like marriage and childbearing as active and universal nationalist measures, Abu-Assad reverts to the patriarchal trope of revering women for their heterosexual domesticity and reproductive capacity to continue the nation (Ball 9). In his attempt to imbue his female protagonist with feminine political power, he ultimately participates in and perpetuates a reductive patriarchal conception of women in nationalist discourse.

Conclusion:

Rana's Wedding focuses on the struggle to preserve normalcy and regular life when faced with the oppression of occupation in Palestine. Abu-Assad stated in an interview, "the title of a Palestinian filmmaker is already a form of resistance. My very being—a Palestine in this world—is my resistance" (Abu-Assad, Telegraph). For Abu-Assad, simply existing as a Palestinian is an act of resistance against oppression. He illustrates this notion in the film by presenting a main character that is forced to contend with multiple layers of restriction and oppression in her everyday life. As a woman and a subject of occupation who manages to marry a man of her choosing in spite of her father's wishes and the restrictive occupation, she is the perfect example of someone who perseveres through an environment that renders her passive and

impotent. Her resistance is on a small scale; however, the forces at play in this film are portrayed as so powerful and prevalent that simply maintaining agency and performing a relatively normal wedding is a massive accomplishment. Rana aptly represents resistance through the subsistence of everyday life, which marks a significant shift in Palestinian filmic identity towards the construction of national unity through shared common experiences (Gertz and Khleifi 79, 134-135). Her existence is depicted as, in and of itself, an act of resistance. In defining Rana's resistance, Abu-Assad lays out various struggles of life under occupation in Palestine: namely imposed impotence, normalcy prevailing through extreme circumstances, and restrictions on movement. These harsh realities of life under occupation are also explored through his following films, *Paradise Now* and *Omar*.

CHAPTER TWO: SAID

Introduction:

In *Paradise Now*, Abu-Assad retains his focus on the subsistence of the everyday within extreme situations in Occupied Palestine, but he shifts to a humanizing portrayal of suicide bombers that also presents the heterogeneity of Palestinian political thought. This chapter argues that Hany Abu-Assad sets a menial and insignificant life against a triumphant death in the context of martyrdom, presenting the diverse perspectives of his characters on the debate between those who cherish life and those who admire sacrifice. Abu-Assad provides personal familial motivations for the contrasting outlooks on resistance of his main characters. Said, the protagonist, is presented as a man who has never been free of the constant degradation of life under occupation in a city devastated by it; his extreme resistance is made understandable by juxtaposition against more prosperous people and places. In *Paradise Now*, a martyr is simultaneously a rebel in the act of political resistance and a desperate human being committing suicide. The humanity of the martyr is further teased out when mundane life is revealed during even the most charged steps to martyrdom. Abu-Assad draws out a spiritual tension between romanticized transcendence and prosaic reality with visual allegory while deromanticizing the religious implications of martyrdom. Martyrdom is also deromanticized when it is motivated by economic frustration and not solely by a sense of duty. The results of martyrdom are similarly questionable. The sacrifice of Palestinian resistance fighters is commodified and devalued by the public. The martyred protagonist, Said, does not attain increased agency or deeper meaning from his pursuit of martyrdom, subverting the tendency of the martyr trope to contrast victimization with empowerment and agency. By humanizing his characters and by complicating the both demonization and glorification of the martyr, Abu-Assad encourages sympathy for the

Palestinian martyr and unromantically expands portrayals of Palestinian resistance, all the while exploring class, political, and religious tensions.

Heterogeneity and Humanization:

The film includes a varied selection of political stances on the subject of martyrdom. Scholars have noted that Palestinian cinema is shifting from presenting a unitary ideal of nationalism to a more diverse set of political and cultural notions (Shafik 291) (Gertz and Khleifi 4-5) and Abu-Assad stated in an interview that Palestinian cultural production “should reflect the heterogeneous nature of the Palestinian society” (Gertz and Khleifi, 8). Suha, the romantic interest of the protagonist, believes that no one has to resort to killing and that there is always “a way to be equal in life” (*Paradise Now*). Khaled, the protagonist’s best friend and prospective suicide bomber, on the other hand, believes that “as long as there is injustice, someone must make a sacrifice” (*Paradise Now*). By including a varied and heterogeneous array of contrasting and oftentimes contradictory perspectives on Palestinian resistance, Abu-Assad counteracts the notion that there are unitary and homogeneous positions on suicide bombing within the West Bank.

Many pieces of Palestinian cultural production, typically earlier works, tend to utilize characters as plot devices and as expressions of contrasting and oftentimes contradictory versions of the Palestinian experience. For instance, Sahar Khalifeh’s novel, *Wild Thorns*, originally published in 1976, follows two primary characters who clearly represent different forms of Palestinian resistance. Adil represents internal resistance through subsistence and survival, providing for his family and fighting for labor rights within the system set out by Israel. Usama, on the other hand, is disappointed with what he sees as acceptance of occupation and leans into

full-fledged active armed resistance (El Masry 36-37). This representative strategy does not necessitate particularly nuanced portrayals of human beings, but its effectiveness comes from how characters clearly illustrate contrasting modes of resistance; their personal traits are less important than their representative capacity. The nuance comes from never explicitly favoring one model over the other and from presenting Palestinian perspectives on resistance as varied and heterogeneous (Hughes 27). By using characters as representative models, Khalifeh is able to present and compare two different political schools of thought, weighing their various advantages and disadvantages while presenting heterogeneity in Palestinian resistance politics.

One could argue that these representative models strengthen the novel's political effect by neatly separating them into two distinct political schools of thought on resistance. However, while arranging the characters into these demarcated roles makes for an effective political message, this simplification can also be reductive. They are models before they are fully realized individuals, and real people do not fit archetypal categorization so easily. Khaled, Said, and Suha in *Paradise Now*—a much more character-driven text—have political beliefs that overlap and interact with their personal motivations. Their politically representative capacity is complicated by their personal and humanistic portrayal. An intimate sympathetic depiction is subversive in an environment where Palestinian people are forced to endure dehumanization and demonization, especially at the hands of portrayals from the West and Israel that associate any resistance against occupation with terrorism (Ahmed et. al 88-89). A multitude of caricatures of Arabs in Western film and television deprive them of their humanity and approachability by associating them with terror (Al-Nima 68-69) (Barnes 11-12). Those seen as terrorists are seen as subhuman actors of evil, justifying and enabling violence against them. Thus, a humanizing portrayal of even the most extreme and most stigmatized Arab figure, the suicide bomber, is a crucial addition to this

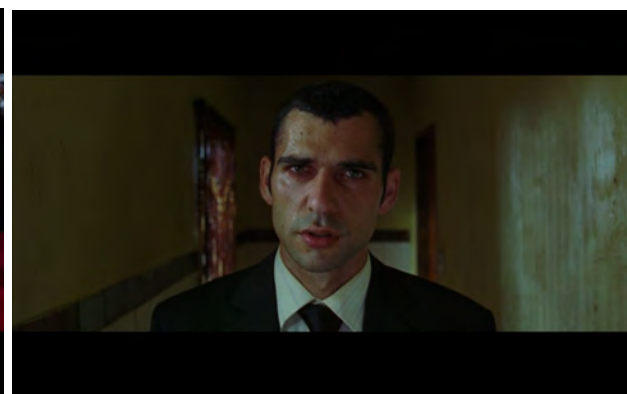
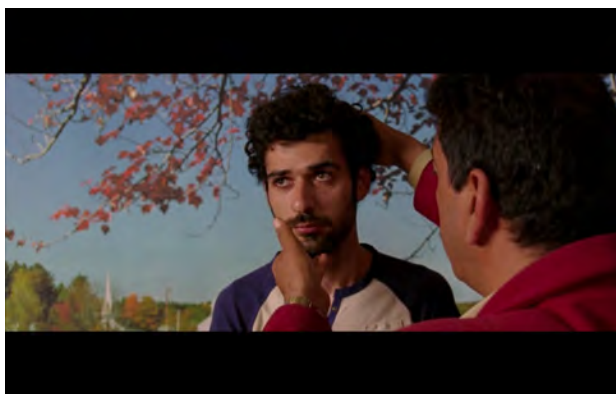
discourse. Like *Wild Thorns*, *Paradise Now* extracts multiplicity and diversity in the perspectives of his subjects, but Abu-Assad diverges from Khalifeh's representative strategy when he humanizes the dehumanized and demonized figure of the Palestinian suicide bomber. While it changes the clarity of the political presentation, this humanistic portrayal serves to create relatability between the viewer completely divorced from the political landscape of Palestine and the character of the suicide bomber entrenched in it, opening a door for any viewer to understand and sympathize with a demonized figure.

Personal, Unromanticized, Subversive Portrayal:

Suha, the daughter of a martyr, grieves over and condemns her father's actions. She consistently laments being left behind in the wake of the actions of a martyr. By contrast, Said praises her father's actions and congratulates her on being related to a martyr. He explains that her father's death kept inspired resistance and imagines she must be proud of him, but Suha values his life more than her own pride. Said is more interested in what legacy one leaves behind after their death and Suha places far greater value on survival. This disagreement typifies the dispute in Palestine between the valorization of death in the efforts to free Palestine and the association of these deaths with the subsequent grief and loss, as well as the argument for peaceful resistance (Allen 44-46) (Abu Zaida 1-5). While indicative of these political debates, the dispute is also tied to the pasts of these characters. Said has had to endure the fallout from his father's death as a collaborator. Unable to face the humiliation of inheriting this betrayal that shaped his entire reality, he seeks to correct it by experiencing a more honorable death. He cannot relate to Suha, despite having feelings for her, because she is the daughter of a highly-respected martyr and comes "from a different world... living in a fancy neighborhood"

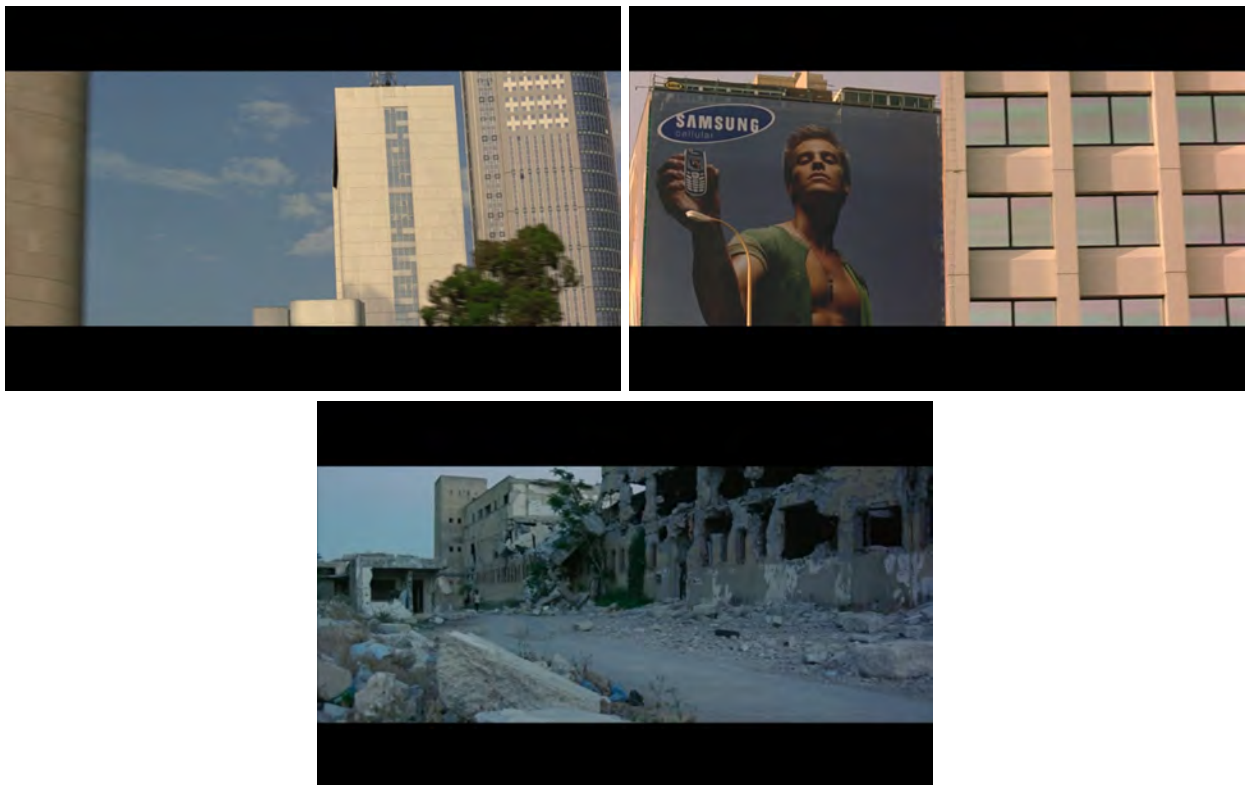
because of her father's sacrifice (*Paradise Now*). Suha, despite gaining wealth and respect from her peers, has felt pain from a supposedly honorable sacrifice. Suha and Said both seek to counteract the decisions their fathers made. The pair exhibit opposing perspectives on the debate between life and sacrificial death, because their differing social class and their backgrounds have influenced their morals and beliefs; Abu-Assad leaves room for very personal motivations for their politics while demonstrating the wealth of differing opinions on martyrdom among his subjects.

When discussing favorite film genres, Said asks Suha if there is a "boring" type of film, because life is boring. Suha disagrees and states that his life is like a minimalist Japanese film. Said's pessimism is contrasted by Suha's optimism. It is not coincidental that Suha, a well-traveled and wealthy woman who was able to leave the West Bank and return, has a far more positive outlook on life. Suha is deliberately positioned as an outsider in the film; the film begins with her arrival into the West Bank. She romanticizes Said's normal life by describing it as minimalist, demonstrating her celebration of all life and her optimistic frame of mind. Said, on the other hand, is jaded and visibly emotionless, and has never been afforded the opportunity to leave the West Bank.

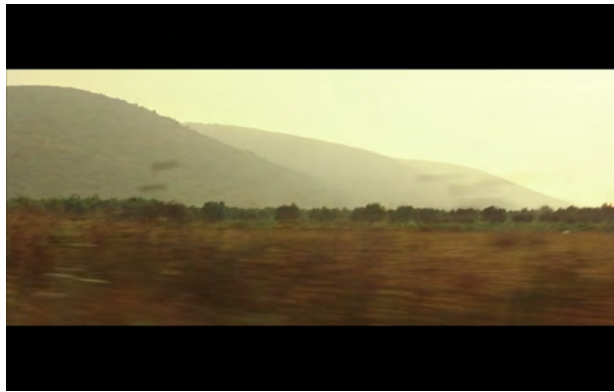


Said, inside Palestine and with no other options, romanticizes death through his praise and pursuit of martyrdom, as opposed to Suha, the outsider, who places great value on life. Their difference in opinion on the inherent value of life and their divergent perspectives can also be traced to their positions as an insider or an outsider of the West Bank.

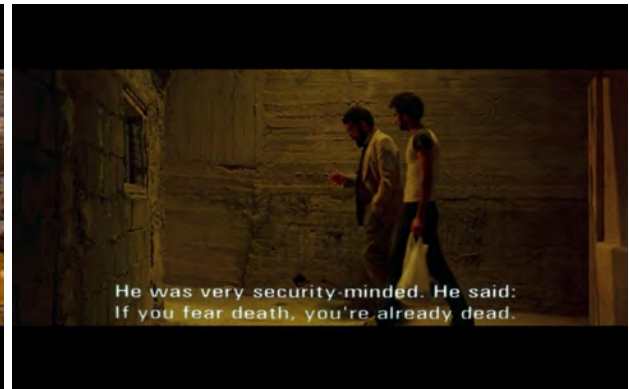
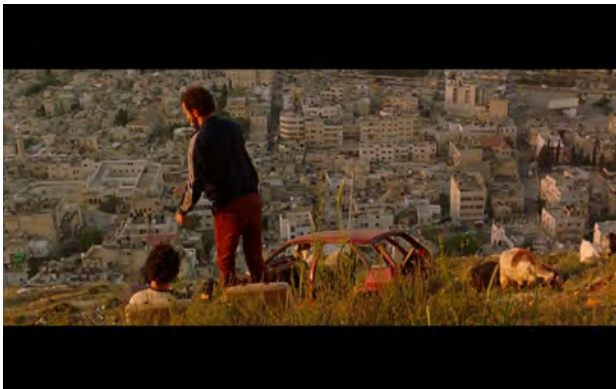
This dichotomy between the outside and inside is heightened in a montage when Said is driven through Israeli territory on the way to finally completing his mission. This montage contains more trappings of opulent modernity than anywhere else in the film. The tall buildings and billboard advertisements in Tel-Aviv are in stark contrast to the run-down and devastated landscape in the West Bank.



The sky in the West Bank is mostly one muted monochromatic color, usually using either white or an off-white yellow hue, furthering the contrast. The sky feels foggy or even dusty and it tends to shroud other background elements.



In general, throughout the West Bank portion of the film, the color palette consists of many beige yellows and pale greens and other dry colors.



The pallid color palette of this destroyed city renders it cadaverous and decayed. The sky in the Tel-Aviv montage contains more clouds and is much more blue, which may suggest the impending doom of Said, but it also amounts to a break from the oppressive color palette of the earlier portion of the film.



The images in the Tel-Aviv montage in general are far more saturated and bright than the rest of the film.



By laying out and consistently insisting on a very dry color palette in the West Bank, Abu-Assad is able to draw more attention to the moment when he uses brighter saturation. This break feels like an escape for the eyes from all of the dull colors, drawing further attention to the economic distinction drawn by the difference in the environments. The color contrast and imagery visually

illustrate the inequity between two very different places in very close proximity. Abu-Assad divides the decaying, dull, and impoverished occupied city from a vibrant, colorful, and opulent city in the territory of the occupier, accentuating the strife within the West Bank and the destruction wrought upon it by Israeli forces and encouraging sympathy for Said's struggle to simultaneously escape and violently oppose occupation.

The choice to escape and oppose occupation through sacrificial death is both political and personal. For example, Said's best friend and fellow prospective martyr, Khaled, claims that martyrdom is the only way to equalize both sides in the struggle for freedom from Israeli occupation. He adds, "If we had airplanes, we would not need martyrs" (*Paradise Now*). This is the political defense of suicide bombing "as a weapon of the weak, as a justified response of those who are oppressed beyond endurance" (Asad 129). This is the same defense positing that the Israeli military is much stronger than the Palestinian resistance forces, therefore resisters with very limited options are forced to resort to using their own bodies as weapons (Pape, 51). In the same breath, Khaled also remarks, "I'd rather have paradise in my head than live in this hell" (*Paradise Now*). The value of his own internal peace gained through imagining paradise becomes important as a motivator for martyrdom and resistance. While Khaled and Said's sacrifice is expressly political, it is simultaneously an act of personal suicide in order to escape their lives. Abu-Assad presents both political and personal motivation for suicide bombing. He refuses to completely divorce and disentangle political logic from personal mentality, exhibiting a humanist ambiguity that not only politicizes, but humanizes.

This humanism allows for the interspersal of mundane realities throughout the film that disturb the possibility of romanticized martyrdom. Khaled is being filmed for his martyrdom video, reciting his official last words to his family, comrades, enemies, and to the world. His

martyrdom requires an element of performance, which is broken down when there are technical difficulties with their camera. Khaled gets angry and drops his arms, essentially breaking character. Khaled returns to character to recite meaningful written words, but suddenly lowers the paper, looks into the camera, and reminds his mother that he found a new store with cheaper water filters than they were buying prior. This reminder of everyday life makes him freeze for a few seconds in silent contemplation and possibly regret.



He is embarrassed as he recomposes himself. Betraying his martyrdom as a malleable performative act indicates that he does not fit the heroic mold demanded of him. The trivial details of water filters and camera problems also renders approachable a scenario that is inaccessible for many viewers, arguing that regular everyday life does not cease even in extreme circumstances. The mundane trappings of normal life interspersed throughout these seemingly absurd and dramatic moments both complicate the performative nature of martyrdom, as well as argue for the subsistence of relatable quotidian life even in the most extreme of times.

Palestinian martyrdom is charged with religious implications and a sacred veneration that is oftentimes perpetuated in art (Abu Hashhash 391-396). The sacralized nature of the martyr is questioned when juxtaposed with worldly experiences in Said and Khaled's preparation for martyrdom. Abu-Assad cuts from Khaled and Said shaving to a man building a bomb to a pan

from left to right as Khaled is being washed by multiple men as he lies on his back, as if his body were being bathed for a religious burial.

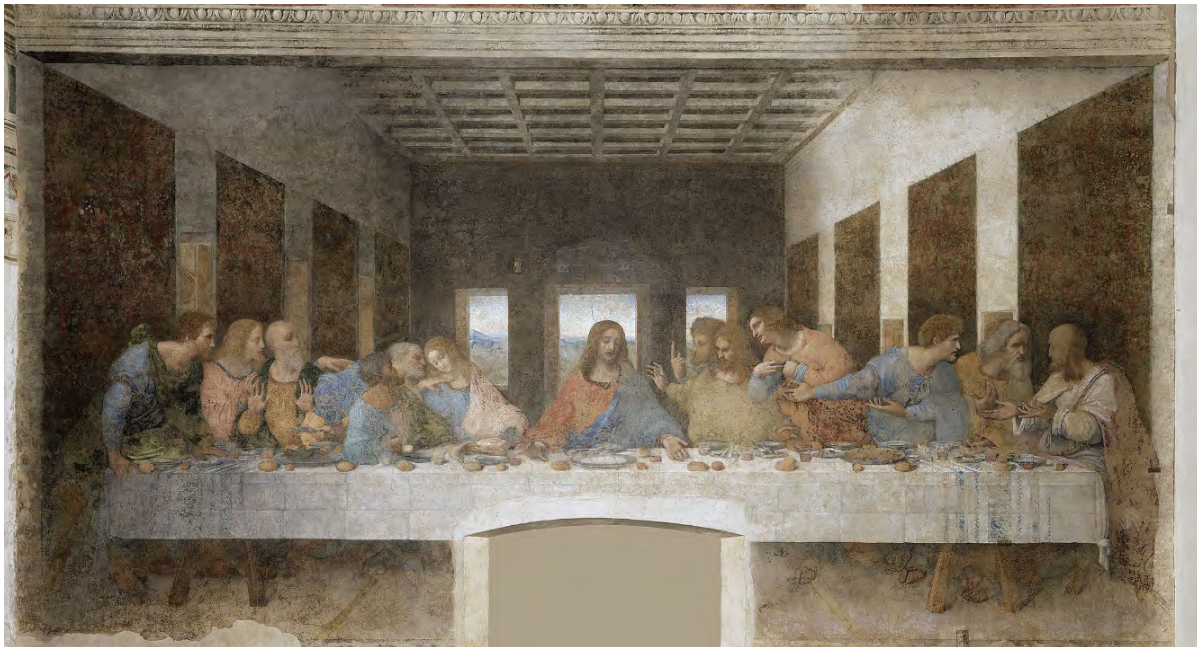


When the camera reaches a pillar that takes up the entire frame, Abu-Assad cuts to another pillar in a shot panning from left to right that shows Khaled and Said in prayer.



This image is followed by a panning shot of the pair putting on suits. This sequence of back and forth panning shots, connected through match cuts, alternates between religiously charged

symbols of burial and prayer, and worldly acts, like shaving and getting dressed, all set to the rhythmic sounds of an echoing group prayer. This tension culminates when the sequence is punctuated by a meal that would be Khaled and Said's last. The shot recalls Leonardo Da Vinci's mural, *The Last Supper*.



In both this scene and the painting, a row of men sit at a long table vertically central in the frame; the background of both images suggests depth through light and shadow. By juxtaposing worldly imagery and imagery that evokes significant religious experiences, as well as establishing a likeness of *The Last Supper* with modern men in plainclothes, Abu-Assad juxtaposes the practical reality of life and the transcendent spirituality of oncoming death, unglorifying the sacred characteristics of martyrdom.

Despite Said and Khaled's individual romanticized notions and the popular association of martyrdom with selfless patriotism or religious duty (Singh 261), Abu-Assad reveals less glorious motivating factors for resistance. Economic factors of life in the West Bank play a considerable role in the film. The explosion of prices and the difficulty in finding decent work in the West Bank are consistently discussed. The viewer is introduced to Khaled and Said through a monotonous argument about a crooked car bumper at their work, not through a moment of active oppression and resistance. Said explains his first moment of active resistance when he burned down a cinema. As opposed to deeper ideological concerns, the demonstration was motivated by Israel's decision to stop employing workers from the West Bank. As Said says in the film: "the occupation defines the resistance" (*Paradise Now*). Work and economy precede the martyrdom of the film. If "the occupation defines the resistance," and the occupation eliminates Palestinian opportunity for work, then money and survival and subsistence "define the resistance." The martyrdom displayed in *Paradise Now* is motivated by the individual frustration with the economy of occupied Palestine, as opposed to being motivated solely by a selfless urge to fight against injustice for the greater good.

The honor and dignity of martyrdom is minimized further by resulting commodification. Philosopher Ivan Strenski writes that the successful act of martyrdom relies "upon the kind of

communal recognition and subsequent ritual celebration of the operations by the community from which the bomber comes” (Strenski 7). Khaled’s final request before he goes on his mission is that his poster hangs in the town center after his death. This hope for commemoration is fractured when Said and Suha enter a video store and discover the owner selling the final speeches of martyrs. They are sold for 15 shekels. The deeply personal act of sharing one’s final thoughts before dying, as well as the last words of a supposedly celebrated hero are boiled down to a small price. The shop owner adds that they also have videos of individuals confessing to collaboration with Israel before being shot for their betrayal. He points out that these videos are worth more than 15 shekels because they are far more in demand than the videos of martyrs. Abu-Assad subverts the assumption that the sacrifice of the martyr is a far more valuable act than the betrayal of a collaborator, by boiling both down to a price driven by demand. The revelation that people are more attracted to the videos in which collaborators confess suggests that they are more willing to seek out cathartic revenge rather than glorify and champion the people who are supposedly heroes for sacrificing themselves for the cause of resistance. Public approval and praise of martyrdom is minimized, questioning the notion that many respect and appreciate the sacrifices a martyr makes. This complication challenges the binary relationship between the archetypal martyr and the group they sacrifice themselves for. The martyr archetype typically trades the cost of their life for the effect it will have on others, and in turn the public respect and appreciate this sacrifice. In *Paradise Now*, however, the level of respect for martyrs from the public is limited. Martyrdom is economically devalued despite being romanticized by some of the central characters and the respect it archetypically incurs.

Said feels trapped and unable to shake free of his monotonous and degrading reality. Said remarks that he has no hobbies and does nothing except hang around cafés to smoke. The only

sliver of Said's regular life presented is his frustrating experiences at work, and his relaxation with a water pipe. Said is stuck working a dead-end job and has no room to improve his situation, depriving him of agency. However, his handler, Jamal, reassures him on their way to Israeli territory: "If you are not afraid of death, you are in control of life" (*Paradise Now*). This line paints martyrdom as a step towards agency and scholars Lina Khatib and Elizabeth Buckner explain that the modern martyr trope favors narratives in which a martyr transcends from "victimization to empowerment and agency" (Buckner and Khatib 369, 377). Their victimization at the hands of the occupation is coupled with their listlessness and difficulty to undertake typically masculine obligations like providing through a stable job. Said and Khaled are both part of the "the second Nakba generation... the first generation was accused of passivity and incompetence by its sons, who have matured along with the national Palestinian movement and in the shadow of the First Intifada. The male identity of this generation as a whole is presented in these films as a mere semblance of such, with the men clinging to manly functions that they can no longer fulfill" (Gertz and Khleifi, 109). Said attempts to reclaim agency in death, and cling to the masculine heroism of the martyr.

Instead of obtaining empowerment and agency, Said perpetuates his surrender to impotence. For example, on the night that Said accepts his suicide mission, he leaves Suha's house and stands outside her door. Parallel editing between Suha waiting for him to come back inside and a moment of anticipation from Said tells the audience to expect a romantic gesture and a culmination to release the tension between them.



Instead, Said runs away.



He cannot act on his romantic desires and he remains castrated despite his attempts to reassert control over his life. His choice to accept death has not awarded him reckless abandon nor the freedom to finally follow his heart and take action. He cannot control his life so he chooses to pursue death, but by doing so, anything that occurs in his life seems even more pointless and futile as he is merely awaiting the end. In a cyclical fashion, his attempt to grasp control generates a further lack of control. Said's monotonous, powerless, listless, and impotent existence seems completely inescapable, even through his acceptance of death. By altogether shattering any hope of escaping a life of submissive worthlessness, Abu-Assad subverts the trope of the martyr's romanticized journey from passive victimization to active empowerment.

Conclusion:

It is easier for Suha to rely on peaceful resistance than Khaled and Said, who have always endured the struggle of living inside the West Bank. Abu-Assad illustrates it as a decaying and oppressive landscape that begs escape. For Khaled and Said, the only viable method of flight is spiritual transcendence, as they are trapped in a cycle that altogether prevents action. By presenting all of these facets of their lives, Abu-Assad demonstrates that these two are offered very little recourse in the face of humiliation and oppression, decrying the injustice they face. Unlike many Palestinian texts that focus on distinct models of Palestinian experience, Abu-Assad favors a humanistic approach that manages to maintain political implications: there is a multiplicity of opinions on martyrdom within the West Bank and suicide bombers are to be understood as opposed to demonized. He actively avoids reduction by complicating and humanizing at every turn and depicting a grueling environment loaded with various tensions: tension between people, between social classes, between those inside and outside of Palestine, between political stances, and between transcendence and subsistence. Abu-Assad renders the spiritual down to materiality and everyday life continues to subsist despite the absurd circumstances, breaking the façade of performing martyrdom. Deromanticization is consistent: martyrdom is not motivated by pure selflessness and does not garner personal agency or public respect. Abu-Assad provides an in-depth depiction of West Bank martyrs, simultaneously decrying and demystifying their complex and dire situation. Taken with *Rana's Wedding*, it is clear that Abu-Assad's work takes care to maintain the everyday human angle within the dire circumstances of Palestinians in occupied cities.

CHAPTER THREE: OMAR

Introduction:

Omar delves further into a major theme of *Rana's Wedding*: the restriction of Palestinian movement. Abu-Assad expands upon this theme by presenting Omar's direct contention with symbolic obstructions on Palestinian motion. This chapter argues that Omar is fantastically good at moving, and through navigation of a symbol of oppression in the wall and other hurdles, the film goes back and forth between movement and disruptions to movement. Accentuating this relationship are stark differences in lighting as well as association of movement with protagonist and paralysis with antagonist. Omar cannot negotiate a number of tensions; tensions that are markedly different from those laid out in much of earlier Palestinian cinema. These distinctions suggest a shift in Palestinian cultural production.

The Wall and Other Hurdles:

Much of Palestinian cinema released after the defeat of the 1967 War is fixated on memory. This quick defeat caused a mass exodus of Palestinians away from their homeland. In these works, the past is a frozen image to be unearthed and remembered fondly in the present (Gertz and Khleifi 71, 136). As a consequence of being a static past, these memories become utopian in relation to the depiction of the present. Thus, many Palestinian films revolve around a tension between the hardships of the present—constituted by displacement, poverty, and occupation—and the nostalgic paradise of the past—constituted by stability, prosperity, and freedom (Gertz and Khleifi 2-4, 187). These films deal with the theme of memory and rely heavily on flashback sequences. Oftentimes, the flashbacks represent a limbo between times and an inability to reconcile the difficult moment with memories of a blissful past. Abu-Assad

explores slightly different tensions in *Omar*, focused on space as opposed to time. Occupation and freedom remain, but present as tension between mobility and paralysis or collaboration and resistance. There are no flashbacks, and instead of existing between different temporalities, Omar spends a great deal of time negotiating barriers between physical areas—namely, the West Bank separation barrier. A liminal space between fragmented time, in earlier Palestinian cinema, is memory, while a liminal space between fragmented environments, in *Omar*, is the separation barrier.

It is not only the separation barrier that Omar must navigate. In fact, much of his time on screen is devoted to quickly climbing, leaping, and vaulting through the streets and across the rooftops of the West Bank. Abu-Assad highlights a major feature of Omar's resistance: his mobility in an environment designed to immobilize. His spectacular movements, presented by performing impressive stunts, are an embellishment of this freedom that characterizes him.



His extraordinary talent for effectively and efficiently moving through the complex urban environment is intentionally contrasted with Israeli soldiers who do not have the same ability. On a number of occasions, Omar deftly navigates obstacles that Israeli pursuers cannot. For example, when he leaps across a building and leaves an Israeli officer behind, or when he flies down steps that the officers stumble through.



In both instances, editing Omar and his pursuers in immediate succession intentionally draws attention to the comparison. In another chase, Omar runs through a Palestinian home. The family points him to the exit and wishes him luck without question. Local children throw rocks at the vehicle in pursuit. Taken together, these moments convey the impression that, in occupied Palestine, Omar is uninhibited while Israeli forces are unwelcome. Emphasis on movement accentuates the diversion from previous representations concerned with time instead of space. The deliberately constructed display of Omar's freedom becomes fantastical and idealistic when compared to the harsh mobility restrictions of reality and throughout other moments of the film.

Harsh moments of disillusionment frequently interrupt this fantasy. To a large extent, the film is constituted through a back and forth between Omar's capacity to move and interruptions to this freedom. When Omar first encounters Israeli soldiers, they force him to stand completely still on a stone. Later, Israeli agents resort to shooting his leg and directly depriving him of mobility in order to capture him. The prison itself constrains his mobility and brutal

interrogations occur in which Omar hangs by his tied hands from the ceiling of a cell. The pinnacle of his subjugation is defined by complete restriction of autonomous motion. In order to interfere with the protagonist's goal of freedom from oppression, the antagonistic forces attack his ability to move; the plot becomes a competition between these two forces. The broad dichotomy between freedom and occupation, in *Omar*, specifically manifests as a struggle between mobility and paralysis. The emphasis on his fluctuating capacity to move points to Abu-Assad's representation of resistance. The vehicles of occupation repeatedly jeopardize Omar's control over his movements, but, nevertheless, Omar resists their attempts to restrain his freedom, evidencing his resolve and quality as a resistance fighter.

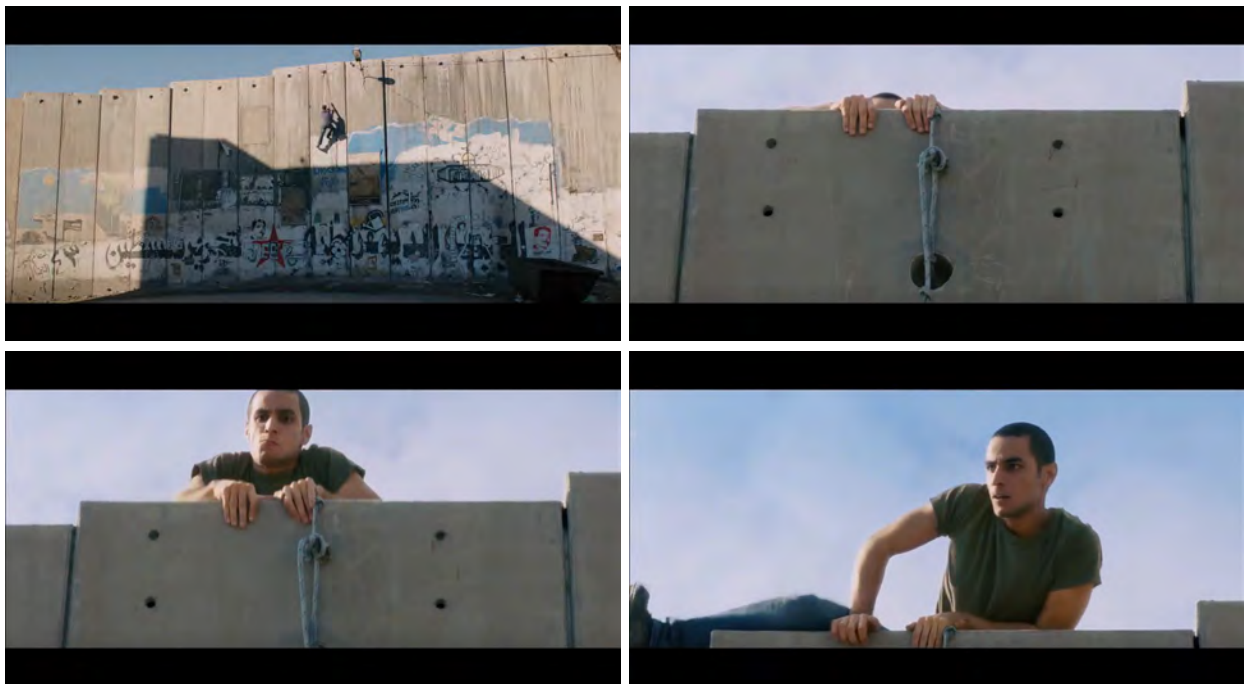
The most significant vehicle of occupation in the film is the West Bank separation wall, erected by the Israeli government in 2002 under the pretense of security, but the wall also represents an explicit endeavor to annex the Palestinian population to a designated area, granting Israeli freedom to build more settlements and minimizing the possibility of establishing an autonomous Palestinian state. According to many scholars, the wall "snakes through these lands, isolating many villages and towns from the source of their livelihoods, farmers from their agricultural lands and students from their schools" (Ibhais et. al 105). The wall's purpose also serves to simply isolate Israel proper from surrounding Palestinians, very unambiguously demarcating a border (Ibhais et. al, 13-14). The wall has verifiably damaged Palestinian economy, limited access to health care, housing, and impeded the movements of Palestinians (Ibhais et. al 23, 84-86). The separation wall is a liminal space that represents the separation between Palestine and Israel. By standing in the way of freedom, it also represents the separation between freedom and occupation or between mobility and immobility.

The unmistakable effect of the separation wall on the mobility rights and livelihoods of Palestinians has made the barricade a symbol for the oppression of the Palestinian people and the restriction of their personal freedoms by the state of Israel. Carl Jung defines a symbol as “a term, a name, or even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning. It implies something vague, unknown, or hidden from us” (Jung 20). The familiar image of the separation wall not only represents a boundary in the everyday lives of Palestinians, it also evokes the feelings of captivity, restriction, and isolation the barrier creates. Research indicates that some Palestinians perceive the wall as “a symbol of loss of freedom” and a constant reminder of occupation (Sansur 9). With increasing restrictions on open space, through checkpoints and roadblocks as well as walls, representation of borders is an important component of Palestinian cultural production (Gertz and Khleifi, 152).

The separation wall is immediately established as an omnipresent challenge that goes on to consistently consume the screen throughout the film. It is vast and unending in its first appearance, going from behind the camera and off into the illegible distance. Abu-Assad is careful to minimize distraction in sequences where Omar comes up against the wall. The only distinct visual elements in the majority of these shots are the ground, sky, Omar, and the wall itself. Buildings, cars, the road, and any other objects in the frame take a backseat to the considerable focus on Omar, notably set against the wall. In almost every shot containing the wall, the background consists entirely of the fortification’s concrete planes and the Palestinian graffiti that ornaments it. Omar appears small and insignificant against the Israeli barricade. Long shots continue to remind the audience of how small Omar is in comparison to the massive industrial obstacle he attempts to maneuver, and also alerts the audience of the dangerous height,

should Omar fall. Recurring low angle shots highlight the threatening incline, psychologically placing the audience into the same dwarfed and insignificant position as Omar, by forcing them to look up at the wall above them. Abu-Assad skillfully frames and angles his shots to emphasize the scale and overbearing presence of the separation wall.

Many of the long or low angle shots in which Omar climbs the overbearing separation wall, a sliver of blue sky occupies the top of the frame. This bright empty blue is juxtaposed with the darker grey wall, crowded by graffiti and posters. When Omar finally pushes himself up onto the wall, the camera invariably pans up with him, pushing the wall out of the frame.



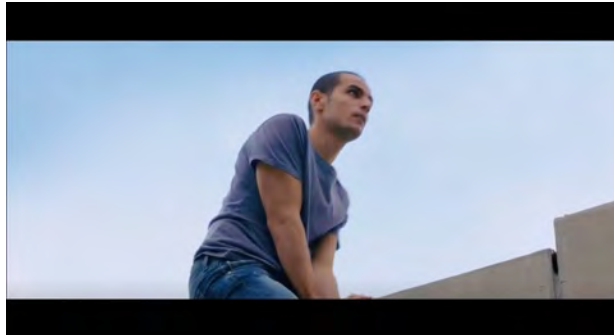
In the following brief moments, Omar is surrounded by the background of a clear blue sky devoid of boundaries or obstacles, evoking freedom. Thus, in reaching the top of this daunting barricade, Omar pushes the wall out of view, cinematographically and figuratively. In surmounting it, Omar effectively pushes back against this overwhelming and repressive image, gaining a small measure of freedom. His ability to climb allows him a brief escape from the

oppressive visual presence of the wall, and figuratively liberates Omar from this symbol of Israel's authoritarian rule. Through successful conquest of the obstacles of the separation wall, Omar achieves a small measure of figurative freedom.

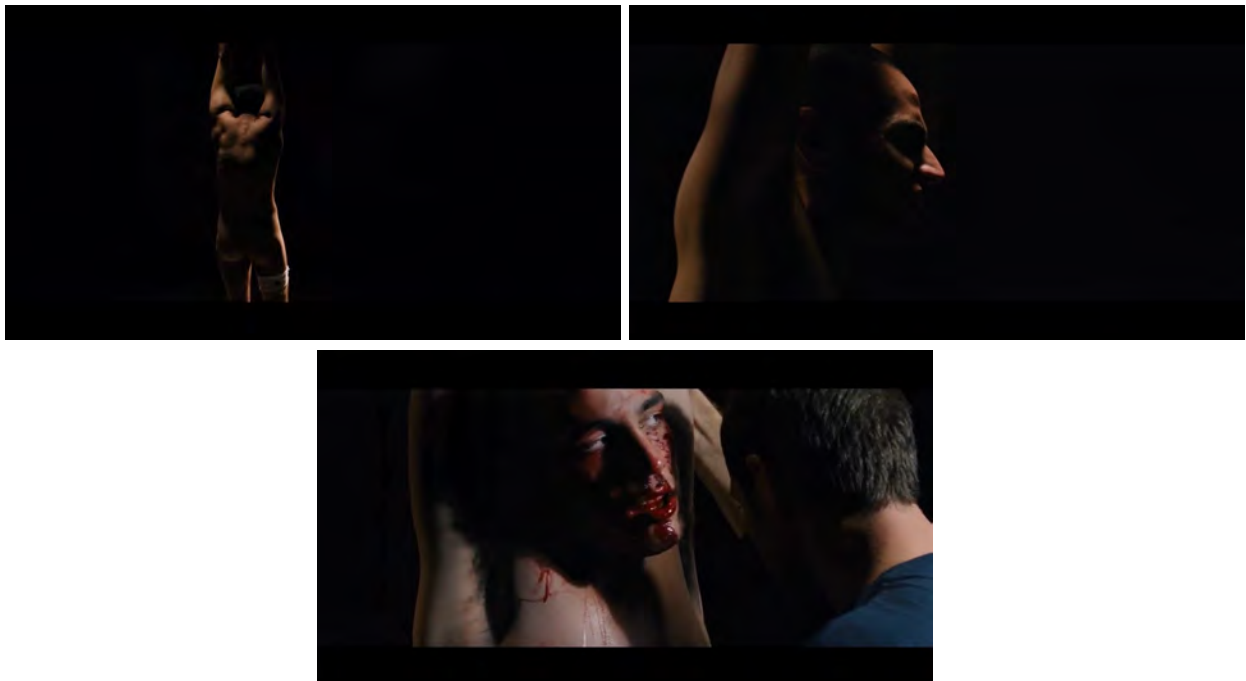
These moments of success are short lived, however, as the constant threat of being shot or detained by Israeli authorities inserts itself, alongside the dangerous height of the wall and the risk of physical harm from maneuvering around it. While his moment atop allows him to look down on the city free from the wall, it also allows his persecutors to easily notice his trespass; these moments are interrupted when bullets narrowly miss Omar, or sirens start to blare. Oftentimes, Omar's only goal on the other side of the border is to deliver a love letter or meet with Nadia. Omar is discovered on his return from one such outing, and is promptly humiliated and struck by Israeli soldiers. It is this moment that drives Omar to suggest to his friends that they advance their attack to that night. Abu-Assad clarifies that the separation wall imperils and discourages not only acts of explicit resistance—such as practicing shooting in preparation of an attack—but also benign undertakings—such as sending a love letter. It is the infringement of the apparatus of the occupation on Omar's innocuous and innocent movements that propels him towards active resistance. A typical narrative consists of a protagonist and their goals in opposition to an antagonist and a collection of obstructions who stand in the way of said goals. In *Omar*, the antagonistic obstructions are physical barriers like the separation wall. Restrictions on movement through physical space antagonistically stand in the way of the protagonist's goals and drive main features of the plot.

Starkly distinct lighting accentuates the divide between the protagonist's intended freedom and the antagonist's restrictions on movement. The aforementioned moments in which Omar reaches the height of his freedom atop the separation wall are paired with the sky behind

him. These moments are also some of the brightest shots in the film, in which Omar himself is well and evenly lit.



Therefore, moments of heightened freedom are associated with bright background color and even lighting. The aforementioned moments in which Omar experiences his ultimate restriction and subjugation take place in prison in which he is hung from the ceiling and tortured. Omar is enveloped by the complete darkness of a pitch black background. Chiaroscuro lighting on his body and face is uneven and highlights the shadows upon him in an appropriately bleak scene.



Therefore, moments of heightened restriction are associated with complete absence of color in the background as well as uneven chiaroscuro lighting. These differences in lighting add another cinematographical dimension to the battle between mobility and its restrictions. This visual element binds the positive association of bright light with the protagonist's goals and the negative association of total darkness with the antagonist's aims of obstruction; the viewer is directly guided to the conclusion that one intention is good and the other is evil. More plainly, the contrast also serves to couple Omar's mobility and strived-for freedom with clarity, while the paralysis of imprisonment is coupled with blindness.

By the end of the film, Omar loses his ability to strive for freedom by climbing the wall and navigating divided physical space. He is inexplicably unable to pull himself up the rope and climb. He breaks down crying until an old man passing by reassures him and helps him up the rope. This moment evinces bitter and painful disillusionment. The occupation's attempts to immobilize him have taken a significant toll on Omar, and thus neutralizes his extraordinary proficiency for navigating the separation wall. Abu-Assad illustrates Omar's personal devolution with visual deviations from previous sequences depicting the same climb. Every previous shot of Omar's climb to the wall is steady and controlled or completely static. Here, the camera sways and shakes, representing a newly developed instability. The sky he strives for is noticeably different from other climbing scenes; the overcast atmosphere and dreary grey light creates a grim shadow of earlier imagery and distorts earlier lighting choices.



The clear blue freedom he resolved to reach before is no longer attainable. Omar's now contrastingly arduous ascent lasts just a beat too long as he struggles to move up, eliciting a decidedly discomforting feeling. These cinematographic and editing cues construct an apocalyptic sequence appropriate for Omar's teetering reality between two incompatible worlds.

Just as the separation barrier itself represents a divide between freedom and occupation, mobility and paralysis, as well as Palestine and Israel, this failure to climb represents an inability to reconcile several binaries. As the person who cleared Omar's name, Rami is the only reason he is free from the punishment and imprisonment obligatory for his crimes. At this late stage in the film, Omar's freedom is contingent on an agent of the occupation, and his freedom is therefore forfeit. Accordingly, the extent of his mobility is now fully determined by Rami and other occupation instruments, like barricades. Omar is caught between two worlds, coerced into working for the Israeli government in spite of his desire to resist. This paradox corrupts his personal life in which, despite his genuine efforts to cast off the Israeli yoke, he is ostracized due to suspicion of his collaboration with Israel. His attempts to balance his collaboration with his resistance through tactics of stalling or deceit ultimately aggravate his precarious circumstance. The moment in which he can no longer climb the wall underscores his failure to accommodate existing between these burdensome contradictions.

Conclusion:

Hany Abu-Assad presents an idealistic and hopeful portrayal of a resistance fighter with the potential to circumvent powerful symbolic deterrents, only to portray the disintegration of this fantasy through his struggles with occupation forces. Omar is rendered unable to reconcile the sphere of freedom, mobility, and resistance with the sphere of tyranny, paralysis, and authority. Protagonists of many earlier Palestinian films exist in a limbo between times, trapped in memory. For example, Tewfik Saleh's 1972 film, *The Dupes*, follows refugees and employs a great deal of flashbacks to explore their disjointed sense of time. However, Omar's existence in a limbo state between opposite poles is represented by being trapped at the wall, incapacitated between physical spaces.

In *Omar*, Abu-Assad establishes the separation wall as an oppressive liminal image. Cinematographically, it consumes the frame and becomes a menacing force standing in the way of the protagonist. Omar, remarkably, is able to overcome this and other obstacles. Symbolically, the climbing of this fortification represents the attainment of a minute degree of freedom from the Israeli occupation. The frustrating hindrance of Omar's benign romantic aspirations thrusts forward and motivates his active resistance, driving the plot as an antagonist; likewise, the occupation hinders Rana's benign romantic attempt to marry her lover. The loss of Omar's exceptional ability to ascend the separation barrier is depicted with a visually melancholic mirror of earlier climbs. This newfound powerlessness evinces successful subjugation from the antagonist and indicates that Omar cannot maintain his unstable position between worlds. He is consistently caught in a conflict between his mobility and immobility, but he persistently labors for the former. Through presenting a protagonistic and antagonistic relationship between Palestinian mobility and Israeli restriction respectively, *Omar* becomes a polemical piece.

Building upon the spatial obstructions in *Rana's Wedding*, Hany Abu-Assad condemns the restriction of, and glorifies the fight for, Palestinian mobility rights.

Omar, and its focus on mobility, is metonymic of a broader trend in Palestinian cinema. A broader Palestinian cultural weight placed upon refugee ideology drove artistic emphasis on temporality. The transient character of the Palestinian refugee oscillates between forecasting return to Palestine and recollecting a time before displacement; thus, films of the time reflected this oscillation (Gertz and Khleifi, 2). The emphasis on the temporal in earlier cultural production was a signal of a much larger cultural trend, and the following emphasis on the spatial is likely no less significant. While the Palestinian diaspora is still a significant aspect of Palestinian cinema, increasing representations of life under occupation suggest increasing cultural focus inwards into Occupied Palestine. This cultural evolution requires a new set of themes and tensions, as exemplified by *Rana's Wedding*, *Paradise Now*, and *Omar*. By explicating the precarious spatial partitioning of life under occupation as opposed to harsh temporal divisions of displacement, *Omar* is part of a transition into a new era of Palestinian culture and cultural production.

CONCLUSION

In *Rana's Wedding*, *Paradise Now*, and *Omar*, Abu-Assad depicts fractured space as opposed to fractured time. In these splintered physical spaces, the camera navigates and relates varied point-of-views, reflecting the complexity of the environments and also the positions of the protagonists. In *Rana's Wedding's* overhead montage, the camera inhabits a perspective that is only attainable for the surveillance cameras in Jerusalem and for the filmmaker. While Abu-Assad disarms the surveillance system with his camera, Rana never experiences this elevated perspective herself. In *Paradise Now*, Said briefly escapes the dry jaundiced landscape of the West Bank and traverses the colorful urban sprawl of Tel-Aviv. While he achieves a new perspective, he is not granted the same elevated reprieve as the cameras of *Rana's Wedding*. His point-of-view of Tel-Aviv is on the ground looking up at the towering skyscrapers above, further reducing his position. Omar momentarily breaks the trend when he temporarily achieves an aerial perspective as the camera captures him atop the boundary wall. He escapes the tight shots of alleyways, buildings, and narrow streets. Every other shot of the wall points up at it from the ground, but when Omar reaches the top, the camera joins him at this new height. However, it never assumes his point-of-view atop the wall. Perhaps because he is too rushed by the fear of capture, Omar never takes in the all-encompassing perspective in front of him. Thus, Abu-Assad highlights the diminished capacity of his protagonists to both navigate and perceive fragmented physical environments.

The protagonists of all three films also exhibit fluctuating agency and inhabit passive roles at times. Rana is made a passive observer by the patriarchy and the occupation. She fights for her agency and is ultimately successful in achieving her goals and a significant degree of agency. Said in *Paradise Now* does not achieve the empowerment that is archetypically

associated with martyrdom. The most active role he takes in his own life is when he decides to end it at the conclusion of the film, presumably exploding on a crowded bus. However, this moment is more of a last resort than a sign of positive empowerment; Said does not exist in a world that permits him to obtain agency, even by extreme means. Omar oscillates between mobile control and paralyzed restriction. He cannot escape this paradox and his only means of escape is through a final act of violence. All three characters are often consigned to inactive, impotent, or immobile roles by the threatening forces of the occupation.

Abu-Assad maintains the everyday, benign, and monotonous in order to humanize his characters. All of them have personal and relatable motivations that allow the audience to understand these characters. Paired with the intense subjugation, the limited perspectives, and the forced passive roles highlighted in each of these works, this humanization orients the viewer towards sympathy. The viewer is compelled to question why and how these protagonists have been relegated to passivity. By humanistically illustrating the harsh realities of life under occupation, these three pieces serve to denounce and foreground the oppression faced by Palestinians living in Occupied Palestine.

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