

Israel's strategy of "escalation dominance" failed in both Gaza and Lebanon, as it has in nearly every previous war. Israel is no more secure now than it was before the war.

Maoz, a professor of political science at the University of California, Davis, is former IDF soldier and director of the M.A. program at the IDF's National Defense College. He has written a powerful and certain-to-be controversial study of the paradox that has been at the heart of Israel's national security policy since its founding in 1948: that Israel's offensive doctrine of using preemptive and disproportionate force has time and again failed to bring it lasting security.

The long-term policy objective of this doctrine is what Israeli strategists term "cumulative deterrence"—the theory that the continual use of excessive force will eventually beat down Israel's Arab enemies and convince them of the futility of using military force against it. Maoz notes that this policy is an extension of Vladimir Jabotinsky's 1923 concept of an "iron wall"—the idea that only by acting as a modern Sparta living by its sword will Israel compel the Arab world to accept its existence.

Maoz's central contention, however, is that Israel's attempt to achieve "cumulative deterrence" is the cause of rather than the answer to Israel's insecurity. In detailed and well-documented chapters on every major Israeli war—from the 1956 invasion of Egypt to the recent fiasco in Lebanon—Maoz carefully demolishes the story that these were inevitable wars of self-defense. Arab states certainly bear their share of blame in each conflict, but Maoz demonstrates effectively that "Israel's war experience is a story of folly, recklessness, and self-made traps. None of the wars—with a possible exception of the 1948 "war of independence"—was what Israel refers to as *milhemet ein brerab* ([a] 'war of necessity'). They were all wars of choice or wars of folly" (p. 552).

In his most illuminating chapter, Maoz traces the history of Israel's strategy of "escalation dominance" back to the Ariel Sharon's infamous Unit 101, which first developed the strategic use of excessive retaliation, including attacks on civilians, to deter and sometimes provoke enemies into open conflict. Maoz demonstrates how Israel's excessive "retaliatory" violence sought to provoke Egypt into war in 1955; how it led to the escalation with Syria that produced the 1967

war; how it was deployed against the PLO to provide Israel a pretext to invade Lebanon in 1982; and how it was used through Sharon's "targeted assassinations" to provoke Palestinian militants to violence in order to legitimate large-scale military operations in the occupied Palestinian territories.

In his conclusion, Maoz pins the blame for Israel's failed doctrine of excessive force on "the domination of Israel's national security and foreign policy by a centralized, narrow-minded, self-serving, and self-perpetuating security community" (p. 556). Israel's national security establishment constitutes a praetorian guard that has militarized Israeli society and foreign policy and is responsible for Israel's reluctant and intransigent approaches to peace offers mostly made by its Arab opponents.

The book's nearly 700 pages make for demanding reading, but the result is a devastating and systematic demolition of the mythical view that Israel has become a modern Sparta as a matter of necessity, in spite of continually holding out its hand for peace.

It would appear that *Defending the Holy Land* is a volume one can place comfortably on the shelf next to other "revisionist" or "post-Zionist" works that critically investigate Israel's national myths—a sort of political science revisionism. This is only partly true, however, because Maoz does not share many of the ideological or epistemological commitments of other revisionist scholars. Ultimately, Maoz's hopes for greater political and civilian oversight in Israel's national security policy will do little to challenge the deeper imperatives implicit in Zionism's embrace of a concept of Jewish sovereignty that refuses to coexist with otherness and seeks an absolute solution to its insecurity through the fusion of violence, religion, and territorial identity. The problem of Israel's excessive violence is not simply a policy issue; it is a deeply political and social issue that raises fundamental questions about the future of the Zionist project in Palestine.

## A PEOPLE IN PICTURES

### **Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema**, edited by Hamid Dabashi.

London and New York: Verso, 2006. x + 160 pages. Notes to p. 174. Contributors to p. 177. Filmography to p. 203. Bibliography to p. 209. 21 illustrations. No index. \$24.95 paper.

*Reviewed by Haim Bresheeth*

*Dreams of a Nation* combines nine authors and a lecture by Edward Said into the first anthology devoted to Palestinian cinema. As such, this is a most welcome publication on one of the world's smallest and (until recently) little-known national cinemas. That Palestinian cinema is without exception produced under conditions of brutal Israeli military occupation makes its significant achievements all the more impressive and certainly worth the volume at hand.

The anthology is the result of a cinematic exhibition of the same name, the brainchild of editor Hamid Dabashi, which debuted in 2003 and has brought Palestinian cinema to North American audiences since then. The exhibition itself has been an impressive effort during a period of a decline of official international political support for Palestinian liberation; the level of popular support for this project (and many others across the globe) seems to suggest that the political betrayal of Palestine and its people is not mirrored by a similar public betrayal but rather by a growing interest in Palestinian art, culture, and film.

The nine authors contributing to the volume come from a range of disciplines. Some are well-known film and cultural studies scholars: Dabashi, Hamid Naficy, Ella Shohat. Some are established scholars in political history (Joseph Massad) or new scholars of cultural history (Bashir Abu-Manneh); others are renowned filmmakers and artists: Michel Khleifi, Nizar Hassan, Omar al-Qattan, Annemarie Jacir. This rich spread enriches the sources, disciplines, and viewpoints that inform the writing.

The task of introducing the volume, starting with a lecture delivered by Said in 2003 and complemented by Dabashi's preface, is best performed by the two chapters by Jacir and Massad, which develop the trope of cultural resistance as part of the Palestinian struggle. Jacir describes the many brutal attacks on Palestinian culture and cultural institutions by the Israeli army, including the many assassinations of Palestinian cultural figures; Massad lays out before us a

vista of Palestinian film, from its inception to the present—a masterful presentation of the power of cultural struggle as part of the liberation struggle against Zionist occupation, oppression, and injustice. By referencing the work of Amílcar Cabral, Palestinian cinema is understood as part of the anti-colonial resistance movements spanning the 1950s, in which literature, poetry, cinema, theatre, and the arts played their part alongside armed struggle. While a history of Palestinian cinema is yet to be published in English (but exists in Arabic and Hebrew), Massad's chapter serves well as the historical contextualization of the debates in this volume, ranging as it does across periods, countries, films, and filmmakers.

The cultural liberation theme is taken up by filmmaker Khleifi, one of the leading directors since his debut with *Fertile Memory* (1980). His work, ranging across the genres of fiction and documentary, is in many ways iconic, leading us to the work of another famous director, Elia Suleiman, whose oeuvre also straddles genres. The refusal to settle on one side of the generic divide between fiction and documentary cinema is an important part of the argument developed by Naficy in his work on *exilic* and *accented* cinema and in his chapter in this volume; Naficy's arguments about the typifying characteristics of *exilic/accented* cinema are beautifully exemplified by Palestinian cinema, and Suleiman, Hassan, Khleifi, and Hany Abu-As'ad all arguably fall within his analytical model.

Arguably, the contributions by filmmakers to this volume are what clearly distinguish it. Khleifi's description of his working method, creative history, and the issues facing him as an artist is lucid and original and helps us to further appreciate this pioneering figure—the first Palestinian feature filmmaker to place women and their perspectives center stage. The chapter by al-Qattan clarifies both his own and Khleifi's development as filmmakers and is of great historical value. Hassan's entertaining short piece is a real gem and reads like one of Suleiman's scripts, ironically, placing identity politics in the context of the bizarre political realities of film festivals.

Shohat's chapter introduces a much-needed critique of nationalism in the third world, exposing its patriarchal nature as analyzed in feminist films from across the globe, by many female but also some male filmmakers, including important Palestinians. The final chapter is a complex mapping

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by Dabashi of the work of Suleiman and includes some limited textual analysis.

Overall, this first English-language volume devoted to Palestinian cinema fills a gap in the field, especially with the very detailed and informative filmography, but also with the more limited bibliography, which misses some articles published in English. It is regrettable that the scope of this volume could not include many other important works and filmmakers. The many illustrations help bring the book closer to its subject matter.

#### TRADITION ON DISPLAY

**Embroidery from Palestine**, by Shelagh Weir. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006. Fabric Folios Series. 83 pages. Glossary to p. 84. Selected reading to p. 86. Acknowledgements and credits to p. 86. Index to p. 87. \$24.95 paper.

*Reviewed by Margarita Skinner*

With her new book, *Embroidery from Palestine*, Shelagh Weir, a research associate in the department of anthropology and sociology at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, gives us a beautifully updated version of her two treasured previous booklets: *Palestinian Embroidery* (British Museum, 1970) and, with Serene Shahid, *Palestinian Embroidery* (British Museum, 1988). For those who did not have access to Shelagh Weir's 1989 flagship book *Palestinian Costume* (British Museum), *Embroidery from Palestine* is a delightful and affordable entry to the wonderland of this embroidery. It gives glimpses into the richness and traditions of Palestinian village life in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. From village to town, people translated visions of simple and enduring everyday life into the colorful art form of embroidered threads. Artists, fashion designers, and fans of embroidery will enjoy the beauty of this tradition from times past.

For more than forty years the author has studied and contributed to the preservation of both the history of embroidery in

the towns and villages of Palestine and the skills of the embroiderers. With more than one hundred color photographs and illustrations, *Embroidery from Palestine* takes full advantage of modern high-resolution color photography. The color definitions of the illustrated dresses, particularly of some motifs from Weir's previous publications, are stunning, and the clarity makes it easy for an embroiderer to copy some motifs without needing a pattern. Through about sixty pages readers can admire a well-chosen variety of dresses from the different embroidery regions of Palestine, and each photograph is accompanied by an informative caption giving the name and description of the item and its region of origin.

Supporting the photographs is a helpful and well-written text. Its separate sections trace the art form through the influences of domestic scenes and life, travel, and changing material and threads. The author first tells of young girls learning embroidery skills at home and preparing their wedding trousseaux. We read of weddings that last a week and of the different dresses needed, with the bride sometimes changing her outfit several times a day. Weddings were occasions for every woman in attendance to wear her finest embroidered dress. Mothers looking for prospective wives for their sons often preferred young ladies who showed some embroidery skills. Embroidery was a key part of the celebration.

The depth of meaning imbued in the designs and motifs also indicates one way in which women, in choosing the designs they embroidered into their clothes, chose what statements they would make. The section "Art and Language of Embroidery" explains clearly the depth of feeling the women had, and have, toward maintaining the high standards of their embroidery, and it explains some of the symbolism in the patterns. "Their overall attire announced that they were peasants as distinct from Bedouin or townswomen, and which region of Palestine they came from. And the specific patterns and colors of their embroidery and patchwork revealed to those with local knowledge which group of villages, or even individual village, they belonged to" (p. 14).

Fascinating descriptions are given of the traditions of embroidery and patchwork from the region of Galilee and southern Palestine and of delightful techniques particular to certain towns. At some time in the middle of the nineteenth century, the women of Bethlehem and nearby villages,

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