



**Arab American University**  
**Faculty of Graduate Studies**

**Representations of Women in Contemporary Palestinian  
Films**

By

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**This thesis was submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for the Master's degree in Integrated Digital  
Media**

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## Thesis Approval

### Representations of Women in Contemporary Palestinian Films

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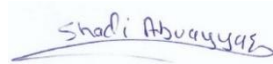
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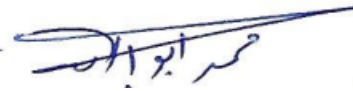
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## **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, presenter of the research titled:

### **Representations of Women in Contemporary Palestinian Films.**

I declare that the contents of this research are the product of my work and personal effort, except for what is noted wherever stated.

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**Lilian Attili**

**Abstract:**

This study examines the representations of Palestinian women in contemporary Palestinian award winning and nominated films, through analyzing how these films have portrayed women roles, images, social portrayals, and narrative contributions.

It employs a theoretical framework that consists of Bechdel test, Todorov's narrative and Hall representations. The study analyzes ten Palestinian films that won awards, and were nominated in film festivals.

The study findings reveal a persistent reinforcement of traditional gender roles and stereotypes in Palestinian cinema, aligning with global trends in women's representation. They show that the prevailing image of Palestinian women often revolves around negative stereotypes, and their roles within film narratives are marginalized.

The study underscores the need for greater diversity and empowerment in the portrayal of Palestinian women in cinema. The study calls for increased opportunities for female filmmakers and more nuanced storytelling.

**Keywords:** Palestinian Cinema, Representation, Narrative, Gender Equality, Women images

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# **Chapter One: Introducing the Study**

**Introduction:**

Film is a powerful medium that has the ability to entertain, educate, and inspire audiences of all ages. It is a form of visual storytelling that combines the art of photography, sound, and performance to create a unique and immersive experience. Cinema has evolved and grown to become one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the world. The technology used to create and display films has also advanced significantly, from silent films to talkies, black and white to color, and now to digital filmmaking.

Cinema has the ability to shape our perceptions of the world and its inhabitants. Film can draw attention to the experiences, struggles, and perspectives of marginalized groups that are frequently underrepresented or misrepresented in mainstream media through the representation of characters, storylines, and visual language. This representation has the potential to not only raise awareness of these marginalized groups, but also to challenge the stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination they face. For marginalized groups such as people of color, women, and people with disabilities, representation in film can be especially important because it gives them a voice and visibility in mainstream culture while also encouraging empathy and understanding among audiences, (Washington, 2021).

Media representations play an important role in producing sociocultural pressures. Despite social and legal progress in civil rights, restrictive gender-based representations appear to be still very pervasive in some contexts. (Santoniccolo, 2023)

Film representations profoundly influence how we see the world, affecting societal attitudes and sparking awareness. Diverse and thoughtful portrayals in movies contribute to a more inclusive and understanding society.

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall describes representation as the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged among members of a culture through the use of language, signs, and images that represent objects. (Hall, 1997).

Women representations in film stand out as one main social issue that the film industry has been addressing, (Mays, 2021). How women's roles are portrayed in daily life, what is their image in this society, and whether they are marginalized or provided with support and assistance; are all aspects of representation of women in film, (Fedorova, 2023).

Even though there has been enormous work done by activists throughout the 20th century and many objectives have been accomplished, women still receive stereotypical misrepresentation in the media, and films are no exception, (Murphy, 2015).

In the realm of the cinematic arts, Palestinian woman interested in the cinematic aspect, whether a director, screenwriter, or photographer, can play an influential and powerful role in producing

cinematic films that are not only required to reflect her reality, but rather to present this reality through the pulse of society, in addition to touching upon areas and issues of concern to the entire community. This optimism in the capabilities of Palestinian women endures, driven by their unwavering strength, courage, and unique perspectives, a phenomenon that has not gone unnoticed on the global stage (Abu Mualla, 2008).

Palestinian women images in films have not been clearly studied. It remains a needed scholarly work to study the representations of women in Palestinian cinema and to de-construct the way she is portrayed.

There is a notable research gap in the portrayal of Palestinian women in film, with limited attention given to their nuanced narratives within Palestinian cinema. Existing studies primarily focus on the socio-political context, sidelining the experiences of women. This gap hinders a comprehensive understanding of how gender intersects with national identity, resistance, and daily life for Palestinian women. Addressing this void could illuminate the ways cinematic depictions contribute to or challenge societal norms, offering a more inclusive representation of Palestinian women's diverse roles and stories.

The thesis seeks to inspire filmmakers to enhance the representation of Palestinian women in cinema, urging them to depict these women in authentic roles rather than confining them to repetitive and stereotypical portrayals. It also aims to confront existing stereotypes and the restricted roles assigned to women in film, stressing the importance of portraying them authentically and inclusively. Through a focus on Palestinian women, historically recognized for their strength and resilience, this research endeavors to amplify their voices within cinematic narratives and rectify their historical marginalization.

It underscores the significance of how films depict Palestinian women and their potential impact on society, aiming to promote a more positive and realistic image, and it explores the broader implications of cinematic representations, delving into their role in shaping cultural norms, challenging stereotypes, and impacting beliefs and behaviors.

A positive portrayal of Palestinian women in film carries the potential to convey a potent message to the world, advocating for their rightful place in society. Furthermore, from a scientific perspective, this study's outcomes are poised to inspire further research in the field of Palestinian women in cinema and beyond, fostering movements that champion realistic representations of women and contribute to broader societal awareness and change. This research is justified by the need to accurately reflect the evolving roles and contributions of Palestinian women in contemporary society and to challenge stereotypes perpetuated by film.

The research seeks to uncover whether women are marginalized in films and confined to stereotypical roles or portrayed realistically, with a particular emphasis on Palestinian women.

It aims to understand prevailing images of women Palestinian award winning and nominated films and explore their social roles and narrative prominence.

It is vital to understand the power of media in shaping collective consciousness and the potential consequences of limited, stereotypical, or empowering representations of women on issues such as gender equality, social expectations, and women's empowerment. By scrutinizing the societal and cultural dimensions of women's representation in films, this research aims to shed light on the broader social impact of cinematic narratives and characters.

Through analyzing ten award-winning and nominated Palestinian films, the study identifies forms of women representation and their roles in narratives, and explores prevailing images of women, their representation, social roles, and narrative significance. The Bechdel test is introduced as a tool for evaluating gender portrayal in cinema, ultimately aiming to encourage a more empowering depiction of Palestinian women on screen.

### **The Study Problem**

The portrayal of women in films holds the power to influence social reality; therefore, it should be presented in a positive and authentic manner to have a constructive impact on society. This approach aims to heighten societal awareness and promote the broader roles of women, extending beyond the confines of the home.

The examination of the representation of women in films centers on understanding the influence of cinematic portrayals on societal perceptions and attitudes towards women. This aspect delves into the broader consequences of these representations, investigating their role in shaping cultural norms, either reinforcing or challenging gender stereotypes, and impacting the beliefs and behaviors of viewers.

The research investigates the relation between the narrative structure of films and the portrayal of Palestinian women within the context of Palestinian nominated films.

### **Study Significance**

This research aims at highlighting the way women are portrayed in film, which may have a potential contribution to open discussion of women's true and important roles in society; and how film production plays a role in this process.

In practically, the study illuminates the impactful role of Palestinian women in cinema, recognizing their historical association with strength and resilience. A positive portrayal of Palestinian women in film can effectively convey a compelling and influential message to the global audience.

In terms of the study's scientific implications, the outcomes are poised to stimulate further research initiatives by scholars, sparking investigations into the depiction of Palestinian women in cinema and beyond. This may give rise to advocacy movements aimed at promoting a realistic portrayal of women, ultimately fostering community education on this significant issue.

### **Justification of research**

In the quest to understand the multifaceted role of Palestinian women and the influence of cinema, this research embarks on a journey to explore the portrayal of Palestinian women in award-winning films, so I chose this topic for several reasons:

Palestinian women have become more developed than before, and they have an active role in the growth and progress of society, so it was necessary to reveal how their images are represented in award-winning Palestinian films, because their image plays a role in shaping society, and how the world sees them.

It is necessary to study the extent of Palestinian filmmakers' interest in addressing women's issues, and to reveal whether the representation of women in films matches the image of women in reality, i.e. strong, educated, mother, worker, and with important goals. It is also important to see whether women are marginalized in films and their role is limited and confined to stereotypes or their image is presented realistically.

The significance of film as a medium that shapes mental perceptions on various issues and its role in influencing societies underscore the importance of studying the messages, meanings, and connotations within these films, particularly in relation to the portrayal of Palestinian women.

### **Objectives of the study:**

1. To examine how women are portrayed in these films and understand the influence of cultural and social contexts on these portrayals.
2. To help us deconstruct the story structures of these films.
3. To find out the prevailing images of women in Palestinian cinema, how they are represented, their social roles, and their prominence in the film narratives.

## **Research Questions:**

RQ1: How are women portrayed in these films and the influence of cultural and social contexts on these portrayals?

RQ2: How can narrative theory aid us in deconstructing the story structures of these films?

RQ3: What are the prevailing images of women in Palestinian cinema?

## **Terms Definitions**

### **1. Film:**

- Film as a medium of communication, has the potential of instruction and motivation for realizations in various fields. Since a film appeals to both the mind and the heart, it is a part of behavioral communication strategy. It serves as a reservoir of knowledge while also enhancing emotional fulfillment and fostering a sense of liberation. This medium can be deemed as efficacious in mirroring the societal engagement with socio-economic and political dimensions within a specific community (Hopkinson, 1971; Saravanan, 2016).

- Operational definition: an award-winning film with a minimum duration of 90 minutes, various and different films that discuss many issues, and we focused on the representations of women in films, and how they affected the film's narrative.

### **2. Representations:**

- Definition: Representations sometimes call our very identities into question. We struggle over them because they matter – and these are contests from which serious consequences can flow. They define what is 'normal', who belongs – and therefore, who is excluded" (Hall, 1997).

- Operational definition: Representation theory in the context of women in films refers to the way women are portrayed, both visually and narratively, in cinematic works. When applied to Palestinian women in films, representation theory examines how their identities, experiences, and roles are constructed and conveyed. Positive and nuanced representations can challenge stereotypes and contribute to a more accurate understanding of Palestinian women's lives. On the other hand, negative or stereotypical portrayals can reinforce biases and perpetuate misconceptions.

### 3. **Stereotypes:**

- Definition: a stereotype is a generalized belief about a particular category of people (Cardwell, 1999). People often hold certain expectations regarding individuals belonging to a specific group. These expectations can encompass a wide range of aspects, such as assumptions about the group's personality traits, preferences, physical appearance, or abilities.

Stereotypes are sometimes over generalized, overanalyzed, and inaccurate, and resistant to new information, but can sometimes be accurate, (Myers, 2013).

### 4. **Bechdel test**

- Definition: is a measure of the representation of women in film (and, by extension, in fiction in general). It requires movies to fulfill three simple tenets in order to pass: it must have at least two female characters, the two female characters must have a conversation with one another, and that conversation must not be about a man, (Bechdel,2017).The concept is to assert the guidelines on cinematic films to highlight the essence of women characters in the film. The established criteria for the test prioritize the depiction of female characters in films, even in situations where the focus should have been on male characters.

### 5. **Narratives:**

- Definition: Narrative is the structured storytelling of events, experiences, or a sequence of occurrences, typically with a beginning, middle, and end. It serves to convey information, entertain, or evoke emotions, providing a framework for understanding human experiences through organized storytelling.

- Operational definition: Narratives plays a crucial role in analyzing and understanding the representation of women in films. By examining the structure, themes, and character development within a narrative, one can gain insights into how women are portrayed, the roles they play, and the messages conveyed about gender roles and identity.

# **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

## Literature review

### 1. Women Representations in Cinema

Although changes in the representation of women in film occurred in the industry, some elements of this representation remain unchanged. “The equality of men and women in obtaining professions and education, as well as the fact that women may express and choose their sexual identity, are among the things that have changed; in films, women are shown as having better education,” (Rohman, 2013, p176).

Culture has evolved into a vital source of economic sustenance in industrialized nations, necessitating the active participation of women across all facets of cultural advancement,(Rodal, 2018).Paradoxically, the industry often imposes barriers that hinder women's entry into high-profile film projects, particularly in commercially lucrative genres such as comedies, dramas, police procedurals, animation, and adventure films.

The tough, independent women in action movies challenge traditional ideas about how men and women are portrayed and their roles. These women break the usual active/passive roles by being strong and skilled, but at the same time, they're often judged based on their looks, their relationships with male characters, and societal expectations, (Wright, 2012).

Similar to film, in advertisement, Stewart and Kowaltzke (2007) argued that despite almost four decades of modern feminism, over 30 percent of advertising still presents women as young, slender, blonde individuals with a stereotypical image.

In the Arab World contexts, Khatib (2006) examines how Hollywood and Arab cinema portray the modern Middle East. She argues that both Hollywood and Arab films use women's images and bodies as "authentic" symbols and exploit gender issues to promote nationalism. However, Arab cinema also tries to challenge one-sided portrayals of the Middle East. She suggests that, in Palestinian cinema, for instance, the liberation of the country is linked with that of women.

As Khatib’s(2006) examination of Algerian, Egyptian, and Palestinian films in relation and in contrast to Hollywood films suggests, women, femininity, and sexuality are used to symbolize the nation. “[N]ation is symbolized by wholesome femininity. While sexually aloof women are used to symbolize the foreign enemy...Algerian and Egyptian films use gender as a mark of modernity, the latter symbolizing the oppression of Islamic fundamentalism through the representation of silent, veiled women while highlighting fundamentalism’s immortality through depicting the hypocrisy of Islamic fundamentalist men in their relations with women in general.” (Khatib,2006, p. 12)

Women are often depicted as victims of the patriarchal system, and they are expected to safeguard their family's honor and reputation. This discovery aligns with earlier research on

Tunisian cinema by Khelil in 2008 and Moroccan short films studied by Jaidi in 1994, (Dinia, 2016). “These tropes of victimhood and honor are very familiar content which often appears in dominant western portrayals of Arab and Muslim women.” (p.53)

Ali (2018) concluded that cinematic films were characterized in all their historical stages by communicating the masculine discourse to the audience, and accordingly, the issue of women was presented in a sarcastic and superficial way. The films of the Egyptian director Enas El-Degheidy focused mainly on women's issues and their suffering under the male authority, which constituted a basic issue in all her films. These issues presented in her films are consistent with the issues of radical feminism, which considered that the patriarchal authority is fully responsible for the suffering of women.

In Africa, mainly in Nigeria, Ibbi (2018) highlighted a significant ongoing debate in Nigerian society regarding the portrayal of different groups, prompting various organizations to create platforms aimed at addressing this issue. In 2010, a two-day forum called 'Nollywood and the Dynamics of Representation' convened in Lagos, where participants discussed the need to rectify certain negative stereotypes that had been perpetuated in movies about women. These stereotypes depicted women as wicked, manipulative, morally lax, diabolical, and inferior to men.

Even though women outnumber men in Nollywood films (a portmanteau of Nigeria and Hollywood), they still often have less significant leading roles and are depicted less frequently in positions that mirror contemporary social norms, especially in professional settings. Nollywood continues its tendency to portray accomplished and powerful women in social and domestic contexts as perilous and destined for downfall, as highlighted by (Onyenankeya, 2019).

The portrayal of women in Nollywood (Nigeria's film industry) remains rooted in traditional gender roles, which not only has the potential to discourage women from pursuing diverse roles but also impedes the cultivation of empowered and independent female figures in various fields such as business, politics, and the professions. The paragraph supports the idea that the representation of women in Nollywood has been resistant to significant change over the past two decades and continues to reinforce traditional stereotypes and expectations of women's roles in society. (Usaini, et al., 2017). Even though women outnumber men in Nollywood films, they still often have less significant leading roles and are depicted less frequently in positions that mirror contemporary social norms, especially in professional settings. Nollywood continues its tendency to portray accomplished and powerful women in social and domestic contexts as perilous and destined for downfall, as highlighted by (Onyenankeya, 2019).

In Hollywood, Miller (2018) found that women have held underrepresented positions such as producer, executive producer, cinematographer, writer, director, editor, and lead roles in all the years under scrutiny. Although there have been minor improvements in some roles, these enhancements remain limited. Moreover, Miller (2018) data suggests that certain roles have

either seen a decline in female representation or have remained unchanged over the past 38 years. Notably, the roles of cinematographer, writer, and editor consistently display the lowest percentage of women in these positions.

## **2. Women in Palestinian Cinema**

Women in Palestinian cinema occupy a compelling and multifaceted space, where their narratives and representations intersect with the complex mixture of Palestinian society, history, and identity. Through the lens of cinema, women become storytellers, actors, and symbols, offering a unique perspective on the challenges, aspirations, and resilience of women in the face of political turmoil and cultural dynamics.

Palestinian cinema remains a complex and contested endeavor marked by conflicting tensions. However, this intricate situation may hold more promise than initially apparent, (Ball, 2008). In the context of Palestinians living under occupation, who often experience a ghostly, absent-yet-present existence, the challenge for filmmakers and visual artists appears to revolve mainly around emphasizing the need for visibility, Jankovic (2014).

Said (2006) proposes that when confronting the paradox of Palestinian invisibility and hyper-visibility, the initial inclination may be to pursue strategies perceived as politically efficacious. Within this context, particular models of women's and feminist cinema emphasize the crucial importance of promoting positive representation as a means to challenge and dismantle misrepresentations and stereotypes. Consequently, it becomes plausible to expect Palestinian filmmaking to organically diverge from the conventions of Hollywood and Israeli cinema. Meanwhile, Sholi (2019) highlights the interconnectedness of Palestinian cinema with the broader Arab film industry, suggesting that Palestinian films are influenced by the larger Arab cinematic context.

Despite the insightful examination of Palestinian women's representations in cinema provided by this study, there remains a notable research gap that warrants further exploration. While the study adeptly analyzes the portrayal of Palestinian women in various films, it falls short in delving into the perspectives and voices of Palestinian women themselves.

A significant research gap exists in the realm of Palestinian women's representations in film and the narratives that surround them. While there has been a growing body of scholarship on Palestinian cinema, scant attention has been paid to the nuanced portrayal of women within these narratives. Existing studies tend to focus primarily on the broader socio-political context, relegating the experiences and perspectives of Palestinian women to the periphery. This research gap hinders a comprehensive understanding of how gender intersects with national identity, resistance, and daily life for Palestinian women. Exploring this void could shed light on the complex ways in which cinematic depictions contribute to or challenge prevailing societal norms

and perceptions, thereby providing a more inclusive and authentic representation of the diverse roles and stories of Palestinian women in the cinematic landscape.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The framework I will employ is Stuart Hall's theory of Representations, a tool designed to analyze signs or visual depictions that symbolize real-world entities. These images serve the purpose of attributing significance to entities that exist, but a disjunction can often emerge between the assigned meaning and the actual reality. It's worth noting that culture plays a pivotal role in how we interpret these representations, while these representations, in turn, exert an influence on our cultural perceptions. Consequently, diverse cultures can yield varying interpretations of representations, which can range from negotiated, opposing, to preferred readings.

### **1. Representations**

According to Hall (1997), representation involves the use of language, symbols, and images to craft and communicate meaning. He argues that representation isn't a simple reflection of reality but rather a complex process involving negotiation, interpretation, and disagreement. Hall underscores that representations are not neutral; instead, they are shaped by the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which they emerge and circulate.

In Hall's (1997) framework, representations are further categorized into three main conceptual paradigms: reflective, intentional, and constructionist. Reflective representation suggests that representations act as mirrors, faithfully reflecting and reproducing reality. Intentional representation, on the other hand, asserts that representations are purposefully constructed to convey a particular version of reality. Finally, constructionist representation contends that representations are actively shaped through dynamic social and cultural processes.

Overall, Hall's definition of representation emphasizes the importance of understanding how meaning is produced and exchanged within cultural and social contexts. His work highlights the ways in which representation is shaped by power relations, cultural values, and historical contexts.

This theory posits that everything presented in the media serves as a representation of some underlying reality. Even media formats that appear to be grounded in reality, such as TV news and documentaries, should be understood as constructed narratives. Whether it's what we see on television or read on the front page of our daily newspapers, it all constitutes someone else's interpretation of reality.

This principle applies universally across the media landscape. For instance, when we encounter a politician or a public figure in a newspaper, we are not encountering the unfiltered reality but

rather a meticulously crafted image—a representation. These representations encompass a broad spectrum of media forms, including radio broadcasts, newspaper stories, photographs, films, and more, and they emerge from an intentional process involving the selection, omission, and construction of content.

Prior to capturing a photograph, you have already determined its content, made choices regarding what to include or exclude, decided on the portrayal of the subject, and selected the lighting and camera angle. Each of these decisions significantly influences the meaning you convey and how the audience interprets your representation.

The three most important elements in representations are gender, race, and age. In terms of gender, the stereotype of men always represents them as strong and assertive, while women represent them as beautiful, delicate, very sensitive and always in need of protection. As for race, the stereotype of the African American race is that they are gangs, drug dealers, assaulting women and harassers.

Stereotypes constitute a crucial element within Stuart Hall's framework of representations. Throughout the history of the film industry, women's behavior and roles have often been depicted negatively, perpetuating regressive beliefs about women in society. These stereotypes cast women as primarily domestic figures, emphasizing their worth in relation to marriage. Such portrayals diminish women, rendering them inconsequential, unnoticeable, and relegating their societal opinions to insignificance.

The media frequently perpetuates stereotypes for individuals of color and women, whether it's in Hollywood productions or news broadcasts, casting them as violent criminals, servants, terrorists, submissive figures, overly sexualized personas, or portraying them as lacking intelligence, among other stereotypes. The ongoing pattern of neglecting diversity and inclusion, as well as overlooking misrepresentation in the entertainment and media sector, underscores the significance of involving a diverse array of storytellers, actors, directors, and producers both in front of and behind the camera, (Washington, 2021).

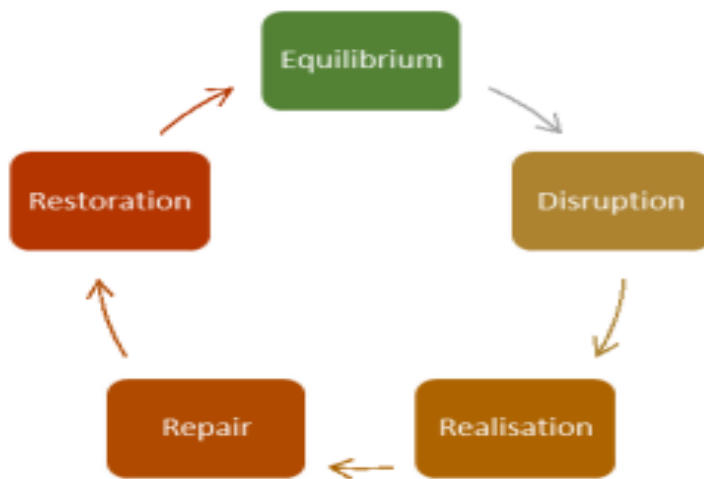
The importance of representation lies in its ability to ensure the complete narrative is told, preventing the propagation of one-sided stories that do not fairly reflect a diverse society, (May, 2018). Media should mirror the communities it serves, as the absence of self-representation can convey a sense of disregard to individuals.

## **2. Narrative theory Todorov:**

Todorov defines narratology as the structural analysis of story parts to reveal their functions and relationships. The story is defined as: "what is told" (what is narrated). The story is usually told in a chronological order of themes, motives, and plot lines. The plot of a story depicts the logical and causal relationship.

Todorov (1971) posited that every narrative commences in a state of 'equilibrium,' characterized by a harmonious balance where opposing forces coexist without conflict. This equilibrium is subsequently disrupted by "an event that alters this tranquil state". Subsequent events then play a role in shaping the narrative's second 'equilibrium' state.

Todorov narrative development is characterized by five cyclic stages that emerge as distinct units of textual meaning. The process begins with an initial equilibrium, a necessary state of balance that sets the stage. This balance is then interrupted in the disruption stage, where the existing order is challenged. Following this, the recognition stage involves the awareness of the disruption, leading to a phase where efforts are made to repair the damage. The cycle concludes with the restored equilibrium, where harmony is reinstated. These stages do not progress in a linear fashion but instead form a continuous loop, highlighting the cyclical nature of narratives.



**Figure 1: Todorov's Narrative Cycle**

Narration is driven by the urge to create balance. The initial balance and the final balance in the cycle are not the same. According to Todorov, "narration always involves transformation. The characters of the stories and their situation are transformed through the development of disruption. Disruption often occurs outside local social norms, for example murder and creation of fear from which a character who solves the mystery will appear" (Todorov, 1971, p. 92).

Representation and narrative theories will be instrumental in addressing the research questions related to Palestinian award-winning and nominated films. On the one hand, representation theory, as proposed by Hall (1997), allows us to examine how women are portrayed in these films and understand the influence of cultural and social contexts on these portrayals. It helps us analyze whether women in these films conform to traditional roles or challenge societal norms, and if these portrayals reinforce or challenge stereotypes about Palestinian women.

On the other hand, Todorov's (1971) narrative theory will help us deconstruct the story structures of these films. It enables us to identify how women's roles evolve throughout the narratives and whether they undergo character development or have a significant impact on the plot.

By using these theories together, we can gain insights into the prevailing images of women in Palestinian cinema, how they are represented, their social roles, and their prominence in the film narratives. This combined approach will provide a comprehensive understanding of the cinematic portrayal of Palestinian women in award-winning and nominated films.

# **Chapter Three: Methodology**

## Method and Study Design

This dissertation methodology follows the constructive tradition. The premise of this tradition is found to be appropriate for this dissertation research.

This philosophical viewpoint of constructivism asserts that the world perpetually undergoes change, with humans serving as significant agents in propelling these transformations. It suggests that the nature of facts is inherently subjective, as their unveiling relies on the methods of experimentation and thorough testing, (Pathak, 2017). “Constructivism as a theory of knowledge rejects a static, passive or fixed view of knowledge and does not accord an objective value. It is centered on the idea that human knowledge and learning are actively constructed by the learner and not passively received from the environment”, (Sharma et al., 2017, p. 51).

This qualitative study using a case study approach depends on content analysis, precisely representation and narrative analysis of a selected number of films. In a case study, researchers aim to understand the complexity of the phenomenon being studied by examining it in its real-life context. They may use various theoretical frameworks or perspectives to analyze the data and draw conclusions about the underlying mechanisms or processes that are at play, (Elo, Kanste, 2014).

### The study sample:

This population consists of the Palestinian cinema films that represent Palestinian women, especially those that won awards and got nominated in different festivals. A deliberate sample of ten (N=10) of these films that were shown in the last years were selected. These films were selected based on several criteria, including winning and being nominated for awards at many film festivals. It was watched by a large audience. Also, these films were directed by Palestinian directors, not foreigners. Most films deal with the political issue in a clear or hidden way, but each film differs in the way it discusses this issue. Some are action, some are romantic, some are drama, and some are black comedies. I chose these films based on their success and distinction in festivals, and also based on the similarity of their basic theme, which is (the Palestinian issue).

**Table (1): Titles of the ten selected films in this study.**

	Title	Year	Director	Duration	Genres
1	Huda`s salon	2021	Hany Abu-Assad	1h 31m	Drama
2	200 meters	2020	Ameen Nayfeh	1h 37m	Drama
3	Gaza mon amour	2020	Arab Nasser, Tarzan Nasser	1h 27m	Romance/Drama

4	It Must Be Heaven	2019	Elia Suleiman	1h 37m	Drama/Comedy
5	Wajib	2017	Annemarie Jacir	1h 36m	Drama/Narrative
6	3000 nights	2015	Mai Masri	1h 43m	Drama
7	Omar	2013	Hany Abu-Assad	1h 36m	Drama/Thriller
8	Amreeka	2009	Cherien Dabis	1h 36m	Drama/Indie film
9	Salt of this Sea	2008	Annemarie Jacir	1h 49m	Drama/Romance
10	Paradise now	2005	Hany Abu-Assad	1h 30m	Drama/Thriller

## Analysis Tools:

### 1- Representation

Films will be analyzed based on the model of representations, the Bechdel test and narrative structure, in order to find out how women were represented in films.

Hall divided representation forms into“(1) Reflective Representations, (2) Intensiveional Representations, and (3) Constructionist Representations. Reflective representation is language or various symbols that reflect meaning. Intensiveional representation is how language or symbols embody the personal purpose of the speaker. While the constructionist representation is how meaning is reconstructed 'in' and 'through' language”.(Hall, 1997, p. 15)

### 2-Narrative analysis

Within the construction of storytelling in narratives, Todorov(1960) outlines three key stages that characters typically traverse: Equilibrium, Disruption and Reestablishing Equilibrium. Many literary works have effectively employed this narrative structure in their storytelling.

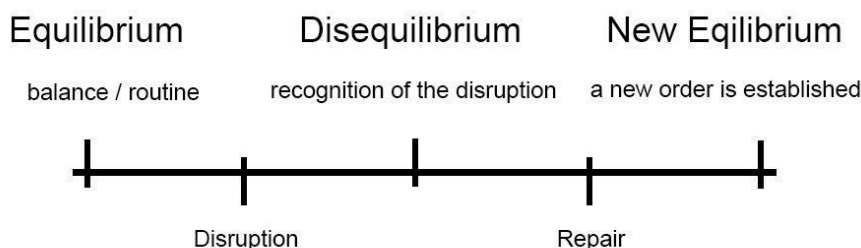


Figure 2: Todorov's Narrative Theory

- a. Equilibrium: this is a stage where the character is having a normal life and doing the daily activities that a character has.
- b. Disruption: this is a stage where the character starts to get disturbance in life.
- c. New Equilibrium: this is a stage where the character has fixed problems that took place in the story. Here the character is having a new normal life or adjusting to the new situation.

Todorov's theory of narrative structure provides a framework for understanding the progression of stories: they initiate with a state of stability, followed by a disruption that prompts characters to acknowledge the issue and attempt to resolve it. This journey culminates in the establishment of a fresh equilibrium, marking the conclusion of the narrative. While not every narrative adheres precisely to this model, it plays a role in shaping the manner in which narratives influence our perception of events and their resolutions (Todorov, 1971).

### **3-The Bechdel Test**

The Bechdel test analysis serves as an instrument for measuring representation of women in various forms of media, originating from the concept introduced by cartoonist Bechdel in 1985. According to this test, a piece of fiction must feature a minimum of two named female characters engaging in a conversation that does not revolve around a man, (Raalte, 2015).

Although the Bechdel test is a straightforward metric, it effectively underscores a lack of female representation in media and points to the common relegation of female characters who are situated in secondary positions or are objectified as romantic interests. It does not provide a comprehensive assessment of a work's quality or its feminist themes but rather serves as a catalyst for initiating discussions and raising awareness about gender representation in media.

The Bechdel Test serves as a straightforward benchmark for assessing gender representation in films, specifically focusing on the portrayal of women. To meet the criteria, a movie must feature at least two named female characters engaging in a conversation about a topic other than men. While it doesn't evaluate the overall quality or complexity of female characters, the test brings to the forefront the existence of significant interactions between women in cinema and underscores the glaring lack of diverse and substantial female roles in media, (Matt, 2022).

It consists of three questions to objectively determine the representation of women in a movie and if a woman's role can exist independent of a man's role. In order to pass the Bechdel Test, a movie must meet three related criteria: (1) it must have at least two women with names; (2) these named women must talk to each other; and (3) in their conversations, the named women must talk about something other than a man, (Lindner et al., 2015).

In summary, the Bechdel test, a measuring tool for the representation of women in films, assesses whether a work includes at least two identifiable female characters having a

conversation with each other about something other than a man. When a film passes the Bechdel test, it suggests more complex and diverse female characters engaging in meaningful conversations beyond their relationships with men. On the other hand, failure refers to the lack of significant female representation and interaction in the story.

# Chapter Four: Results

## I-Films Analysis:

### - Film One: Huda`s Salon



Image 1: A shot from Huda`s Salon film

### The Plot

Nadia, a young mother married to a possessive husband, visits Huda's salon in Bethlehem. What should have been a routine appointment takes a dark turn when Hoda, the salon owner, unexpectedly drugs Nadia, rendering her unconscious. The sinister motive behind this act becomes apparent as Hoda plans to photograph Nadia in a compromising situation with a man. The intention is to use these images for blackmail, coercing Nadia into working for the secret service of the occupiers and ultimately betraying her own people.

#### 1. Bechdel test

Table (2) Huda`s salon failed the Bechdel text analysis

Bechdel test Questions	Are there at least two named female characters?	Do they speak to each other?	Do they speak to each other about something other than a male "love" interest?
Explanation	Reem and Huda, the two main characters, played significant and impactful roles.	Yes they were gossiping together about life and men.	Huda and Reem were engaged in a conversation, discussing their husbands and expressing how they find their lives lacking excitement.

## 2. Narrative

The narrative de construction is done through identifying elements of women's roles, characters, nature of work, marital status and influencing role.

- Women Characters in the Film: Reem and Huda

1) Character One: Reem

1. Role:

In the film, Reem holds a significant role and is wedded to a distrustful and envious spouse who constantly suspects her interactions with other men. Reem finds herself discontented in her marriage, attempting to repair her relationship with her husband. However, the conclusion of the film unveils that he failed to assist her during a crucial moment, intensifying her resentment towards him and causing her to contemplate ending their life together.

2. Her Character:

At the outset of the film, Reem's character exhibited traits of vulnerability, defeat, betrayal, and being under threat and control. However, as the story unfolded, we observed a significant evolution in her character. She gradually transformed into a more assertive and resilient individual, bravely confronting both her husband and the challenging aspects of her reality. Her journey led her to make decisions that aligned with what she believed to be right in addressing her problems.

3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears):

Her religious affiliation remains undisclosed, and she does not don a hijab. She opts for modest attire. However, in certain scenes, the film depicts her in a provocative manner.

4. The nature of her work: a housewife

5. Marital Status: Married

6. Her role in influencing events, is weak

2) Character Two: Huda

1. Role:

Huda emerged as a pivotal character in the film due to the significant impact of her role. Portraying a hairdresser, she becomes a poignant symbol of exploitation by the occupying forces, illustrating the harsh reality faced by women in immoral circumstances. Despite being coerced to collaborate with the occupation and divulge current events in the country, Huda undergoes a parallel experience herself. She is captured and exploited through photographs, leading her to

make the difficult decision to distance herself from her family. In order to shield her loved ones from discovering compromising images, Huda sacrifices her role as a mother and wife, compelled to comply with the occupation's demands to prevent her children from seeing their mother in a compromising light.

## 2. Her Character:

Huda's on-screen persona exudes boldness, strength, and confidence. She harbors a deep disdain for societal norms, the harsh realities of her existence, and the environment that surrounds her. Unafraid of facing death, she is determined to rid herself of the burdens that weigh her down.

Despite her tough exterior, there's a part of her heart that longs for the children she left behind. However, she is reluctant to risk tarnishing her image in their eyes. Consequently, she makes the challenging decision to keep her distance, a choice that is arguably the most difficult for any mother to make.

Her speech is laced with vulgarity, a reflection of the harsh reality she navigates and the profound sadness she endures. Indignant at her circumstances, she expresses herself in a manner befitting the challenges she confronts.

3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears): Although her religious affiliation is not specified, she is adorned with a hijab.

4. The nature of her work:employee

5. Marital Status: divorced

6. Her role in influencing events, is very strong.

## 3. Todrov's Three Acts

Reem, a new mother, goes to Huda's salon for a haircut. Huda, the salon owner, is familiar with Reem, and since Reem is the only customer at the moment, they engage in a friendly discussion covering various topics. Reem, facing challenges in her marriage due to her husband's constant doubt about her faithfulness, finds comfort in the joy her infant daughter brings.

However, the situation takes a disturbing turn when Huda offers Reem coffee, secretly adding something to it while they talk. As a result, Reem falls unconscious, and Huda undresses her and a man in compromising positions. Huda creates a false narrative, claiming she is part of the Israeli secret service and coerces Reem into providing information on rebel militants, threatening to expose the compromising photographs if she refuses.

Upon awakening, Reem discovers her altered situation and her baby beside her. Huda reveals her supposed identity and demands Reem's cooperation. As Reem contemplates ending her life, she realizes the gas cylinder is empty. She contacts Musa, a member of the Israeli secret service, who instructs her to wait for pickup. Reem then contacts Huda, now in the possession of the Resistance force, and changes her allegiance, offering to help them apprehend Musa.

Later, Hasan assures Reem that her family is safe and that she won't face punishment as Huda has cleared her name. He asks for her assistance in capturing Musa and his secret service team. In the end, Nadia, who represents Reem's resilience, smiles despite the deceitful circumstances, acknowledging the pervasive dishonesty in various aspects of her life, including her husband, the occupiers, the Palestinian resistance, or her family.

The female character in this film is portrayed as embodying traditional gender stereotypes, depicting her as weak, threatening, talkative yet hesitant, and entirely reliant on the male character. Her representation suggests a lack of agency and personal development, with her storyline predominantly focused on marriage and children, neglecting exploration of her cultural background or individual growth.

Furthermore, the film underscores her vulnerability, highlighting her susceptibility to deception and reinforcing harmful stereotypes about women and their societal roles. This portrayal not only oversimplifies her character but also perpetuates regressive ideas about gender dynamics within the narrative.

The film presents an image of the woman as weak, threatening, talkative, and indecisive, unable to make independent choices and entirely dependent on the man. She is depicted as easily deceived, and the film primarily addresses topics such as marriage and children, without delving into her cultural identity or her potential for personal growth as a significant member of society.

- **Film Two: 200 Meter**



**Image 2: A shot from Wajib film (looking at the apartheid wall)**

- Plot:

Mustafa, a Palestinian construction worker, resides 200 meters away from his wife Salwa and their children, situated in villages separated by the Israeli border wall. Despite his family being Israeli citizens, Mustafa refuses to acquire a permit to live with them, standing firm against what he perceives as unjust laws. Instead, he relies on his work permit to visit them daily.

However, a distressing call shatters his routine one day when he learns that his son has been injured and is hospitalized. Anxious to cross the Israeli checkpoint, Mustafa faces denial due to a technicality. Determined to be with his child, Mustafa embarks on an arduous journey. What was originally a 200-meter distance transforms into a 200-kilometer odyssey, as the increasingly desperate Mustafa endeavors to smuggle himself to the other side of the wall.

**1. Bechdel test:**

Bechdel test Questions	Are there at least two named female characters?	Do they speak to each other?	Do they speak to each other about something other than a male "love" interest?
Explanation	Slawa, the hero's wife, and Anna, the German tourist, were both present."	Salwa had just had a conversation with her mother-in-law. There were few scenes featuring female characters.	I couldn't discover any dialogues between them on various topics, there were only a limited number of female roles, and they were not engaging in conversations with one another.

The film "200 Meter" did not pass the Bechdel test due to an insufficient presence of female characters.

## 2. Narrative

### 1) Character One: Mustafa mom

#### 1. Role:

She assumes a supporting role, taking on the tasks of preparing meals for him and engaging in morning and evening discussions about his circumstances and their lives in Palestine.

#### 2. Her Character:

She is a composed and typical woman who speaks in a soothing manner, making an effort to console her son.

#### 3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears):

She is a Muslim woman who consistently dons a hijab.

#### 4. The nature of her work:A housewife

#### 5. Marital Status: widowed

#### 6. Her role in influencing events, is Neutral

### 2) Character Two: Salwa his wife

#### 1. Role:

Playing a supporting role, Salwa, Mustafa's wife, holds Israeli citizenship, which her husband declined. Consequently, they maintain a long-distance relationship marked by confusion and numerous challenges.

#### 2. Her Character:

Consistently grappling with stress, devoid of happiness, displaying signs of weakness, and her voice remains unheard.

#### 3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears):

She is a woman who follows the Muslim faith and wears modest attire, including a hijab, when outside her home.

#### 4. The nature of her work: Housewife. Employee.

#### 5. Marital Status: married

6. Her role in influencing events, is weak

3) Character Three: German tourist

1. Role:

She is a tourist who arrived in Palestine to explore the region and film for personal purposes. This traveler is passionate about capturing every aspect of the journey, including moments of evading and entering the occupied territory without authorization.

2. Her Character:

She possesses a bold, courageous, enthusiastic, confident, adventurous, and fearless personality.

3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears):

She is a liberated Christian woman who dresses in accordance with her personal preferences.

4. The nature of her work: Photographer and director.

5. Marital Status: Singles

6. Her role in influencing events, is strong

### **3. Todorov's Three Acts**

Mustafa, an ethical construction worker, grapples with the challenges of residing on opposite sides of the Israeli wall from his wife Salwa and their three children. Despite being eligible for a permit to live in Israel, Mustafa refuses to adhere to what he deems as unjust regulations. Instead, he uses his work permit to commute and spend time with his family. Salwa, weary of the ongoing separation, occasionally voices her frustration, yet their affectionate connection prevails. A disruption arises when Mustafa's permit expires, hindering his entry into Israel. Faced with an urgent need for employment and a desire to reunite with his family, he seeks the assistance of a people smuggler named Nader, who demands \$100 for facilitating the crossing.

The new equilibrium equilibrium uncovers that although getting to the hospital for their son Majd initially appears to be the hero's ultimate mission, the genuine aim is to come back home, serving as a symbol of homeland, serenity, and peace. Mustafa's presence at the hospital triggers a rapid transition back to the house, underscoring the aspiration of returning home, not only in Palestine but universally. The resolution of the film revolves around Mustafa on the rooftop, communicating with his family through radiant lanterns, symbolizing hope for a future devoid of barriers, where a united home signifies the homeland.

Based on the analysis provided, the portrayal of the woman in this film is intricate and varied, encompassing both traditional and progressive facets. On one hand, she is depicted as hesitant and faces challenges in expressing her views, suggesting a struggle to assert her agency within her family dynamics. However, her portrayal as a working woman and housekeeper underscores her strength and crucial role in maintaining the family's well-being, showcasing her ability to balance responsibilities both inside and outside the home. Nevertheless, the film's marginalization of the Palestinian woman in favor of a German character highlights a disparity in representation.

The foreign woman is depicted as more intelligent, liberated, and self-reliant, enjoying greater independence and sartorial freedom. This portrayal may inadvertently perpetuate cultural and gender stereotypes. The contrast in character portrayals emphasizes the necessity for a more equitable and balanced representation of women from diverse backgrounds and experiences in film narratives.

The film presents the woman as hesitant and struggling to convey her opinions, portraying her as someone whose views may face challenges gaining acceptance. Despite being introduced as a worker and housekeeper, emphasizing her strength in maintaining family harmony while juggling external responsibilities, her role is important. However, the film marginalizes her presence, giving more prominence to scenes featuring the German character, creating a distinct contrast in the representation of the Palestinian and foreign women.

The foreign woman is portrayed as more intelligent, free, and entirely self-reliant, enjoying the freedom to choose her attire and being responsible for her decisions. This disparity in the depiction of the two characters emphasizes the importance of presenting a more balanced and fair representation of women from various backgrounds in film narratives.

### **Film Three: Gaza Mon Amour:**



**Image 3: A shot from Gaza Mon Amour film**

Plot:

In present-day Gaza, Issa, a sixty-year-old fisherman, harbors a secret affection for Siham, a woman employed at the market alongside her daughter Leila. Upon stumbling upon an ancient phallic statue of Apollo ensnared in his fishing nets, Issa conceals it, uncertain about how to handle this enigmatic and powerful find. Despite his initial confusion, he senses that this discovery will have a profound impact on his life. Surprisingly, his self-assurance begins to blossom, leading him to finally muster the courage to approach Siham.

### 1. Bechdel test:

Bechdel test Questions	Are there at least two named female characters?	Do they speak to each other?	Do they speak to each other about something other than a male "love" interest?
Explanation	Yes There were numerous characters with names like Siham, Laila, and Manal.	Yes they engaged in conversation, particularly Siham and Laila, as they share a mother-daughter relationship.	In numerous scenes, the discussion revolved around the prospect of women marrying a man. One such occasion was when Siham advised her divorced daughter to tie the knot before reaching an advanced age.

Gaza mon amour failed the Bechdel test. because their conversations were about men.

### 2. Narrative

1) Character One: Siham

1. Role:

Siham assumes a supporting role in the movie, portraying the mother of a divorced young woman striving to overcome adversity and poverty through her work as a seamstress and in a women's clothing store. Weary of the monotonous routine, Siham's life takes a turn when she falls in love with Issa, bringing a welcome change to her previously mundane existence.

2. Her Character:

Siham possesses a resilient and determined personality, despite her initial shyness. Enduring significant hardships, particularly the loss of her husband, she faced numerous challenges in life. Single-handedly raising her daughter, she continued to provide unwavering care and support even after going through a divorce.

3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears):

A muslim woman, wears a hijab, and is devoutly committed to her religious beliefs.

4. The nature of her work: Worker (dressmaker).

5. Marital Status: widowed

6. Her role in influencing events, is strong

2) Character Two: Leila

1. Role:

In the narrative, Leila assumes a supporting role as Siham's daughter, grappling with feelings of depression and concern stemming from the challenges of life and poverty, exacerbated by her previous divorce. Despite these adversities, Leila tenaciously confronts the harsh realities, pursuing her desires and asserting independence. She remains resolute, successfully completing her university studies and actively assisting her mother in sewing. As the movie progresses, she ultimately rallies behind her mother, fostering a deeper connection and empathy. In a pivotal moment, she encourages Siham to embrace love and consider marrying Issa.

2. Her Character:

Laila shows little interest in adhering to the customs and traditions of her society. She chooses to dress and conduct herself according to her own preferences, embodying a sense of freedom and determination. Marriage and her challenging economic circumstances are aspects she strongly dislikes. Instead, she is focused on achieving success and completing her university education.

3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears):

A Muslim woman who does not wear a hijab, she dresses freely without concern for societal expectations.

4. The nature of her work: Student + worker

5. Marital Status: Divorced

6. Her role in influencing events, is strong

### **3. Todrov's Three Acts:**

Issa, a 60-year-old fisherman, sustains a humble livelihood by presenting his permit to authorities nightly and bringing in a modest catch on his fishing boat. In the marketplace, he frequently encounters Siham, a widow employed alongside her divorced daughter Laila as a seamstress in a women's clothing store. Siham faces the imminent threat of reduced working hours at the store due to soaring prices and a dearth of customers. Tensions arise when Issa stumbles upon a sizable underwater statue during a night of fishing, sparking his initial displeasure with the port police.

After uncovering a statue hidden in his apartment, the police temporarily detain him. Nevertheless, the film takes a positive twist as Issa and Siham defy societal challenges and age-related expectations. They successfully challenge and break tradition, culminating in the expression of their love through marriage. This unexpected union becomes a powerful symbol of overcoming societal norms and embracing love, demonstrating that a new beginning is always possible, no matter the circumstances.

According to the analysis, the portrayal of women in this film predominantly conforms to traditional stereotypes. The main characters, a widow and her divorced daughter, are depicted as cohabiting and engaged in a sewing business. The mother's urging for her daughter to remarry reinforces the conventional idea that a woman's life should center around a man, aligning with expected gender roles. Nevertheless, the film takes an unexpected turn when the mother challenges societal norms by marrying someone she genuinely likes, breaking away from the stereotypical narrative. This departure offers a unique and unconventional depiction, challenging the idea that women must adhere to traditional expectations for happiness and companionship. Despite the overall adherence to stereotypes, this deviation stands out as a notable exception in the storyline.

The film presents a stereotypical image of women—a widowed mother and her divorced daughter living together and working in the sewing industry. The mother encourages her daughter to marry again, emphasizing the belief that a woman's fulfillment depends on having a man, portraying her as a dependent figure. However, what sets this movie apart is the mother's unconventional choice to marry someone she genuinely likes, even in old age. This departure from the norm is the only instance in the film that breaks away from stereotypical representations

#### **Film four: It Must Be Heaven**



**Image 4: A shot from It Must Be Heaven film**

Plot:

Elia Suleiman flees Palestine in search of a new homeland, only to discover that Palestine is persistently following him. The prospect of a fresh start transforms into a series of comedic mishaps, no matter how distant his journeys take him, spanning from Paris to New York.

### 1. Bechdel test:

Bechdel test Questions	Are there at least two named female characters?	Do they speak to each other?	Do they speak to each other about something other than a male "love" interest?
Explanation	No female characters with specified names appeared in this film.	No, they weren't engaged in conversation as this film lacks sufficient female characters.	No mention was made of men in the film.

It must be heaven failed the bechdel test. Because there weren't enough female characters with a name.

### 2. Narrative

## 1) Character One: Palestinian girl

### 1. Role:

She assumes the role of the sister to two anxious gentlemen, seated at a restaurant enjoying their meal. Both men exhibit a keen interest in observing the hero's table, wearing apprehensive expressions. Eventually, they summon the chef to convey their sister's critique of the food, asserting that it tastes sour. The chef clarifies that the sour taste is attributed to the inclusion of wine. The men express their displeasure at their sister consuming food with alcohol while simultaneously indulging in wine themselves.

### 2. Her Character:

Her lack of individuality stems from her brothers' control, preventing her from freely communicating and expressing her emotions.

### 3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears):

Her religious beliefs are not specified, but she chooses not to wear a hijab and dresses without any restrictions.

### 4. The nature of her work: not mentioned

### 5. Marital Status: single

### 6. Her role in influencing events is very weak.

## 2) Character Two: Palestinian woman

### 1. Role:

A humble Palestinian Bedouin woman, adorned in traditional attire, gracefully roams the landscapes with utensils in hand, gathering water from the lake. The protagonist observes her closely during both her departure and return.

In a subsequent scene, as he voyages to France and America, he contrasts this image with that of a woman in those locales – she appears liberated, clad in revealing and casual attire, actively seeking to showcase her physique. This portrayal highlights a stark difference in cultural norms.

In a later scene, upon the hero's decision to return to his homeland, a parallel moment unfolds reminiscent of the initial depiction. The genuine Bedouin Palestinian woman embarks on her journey to fetch water, donning her exquisite traditional dress. However, a subtle moment occurs as her head shawl slips, revealing her beautiful hair. This serves as a poignant commentary, asserting that Palestinian women effortlessly radiate beauty without the need for deliberate displays, in stark contrast to the more overt approach observed elsewhere. The symbolism

extends to the broader idea that women are subjected to societal expectations, whereas men enjoy greater freedom in their choices.

## 2. Her Character:

The director depicted her as self-assured, moving with reverence, clad in modest attire, and adhering to ancient customs. Her role comprised only two wordless moments, as her actions spoke louder than words, showcasing her familiar activities.

## 3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears):

Her religious affiliation is not specified, but she covers her head with a shawl and adopts modest attire.

4. The nature of her work: not mentioned

5. Marital Status: single

6. Her role in influencing events, is neutral

## 3. **Todrov's Three Acts:**

A man from Palestine departs Nazareth, which is under occupation, in search of a different homeland, hoping for a better life between Paris and New York. Weary of the routine and difficulties in his occupied homeland, he initially settles in his parents' house in Nazareth before embarking on a journey to Paris, envisioning it as a paradise. However, his romanticized perception is shattered as he encounters reminders of occupation, police alerts, and constant scrutiny of foreigners, leading him to try his luck in New York, only to face similar security issues.

The new balance emerges as he returns to Nazareth, prompting questions about the practicality of integration and the existence of a genuine alternative homeland free from scrutiny and self-discovery. The film concludes with uncertainty, leaving viewers contemplating the challenges of finding a place of authentic belonging and peace.

The analysis reveals a concerning underrepresentation of women and their impact on shaping narratives related to events, conflict or stability. Particularly, the film presents a troubling portrayal of women, particularly Palestinian women, with minimal presence and one explicit scene reinforcing negative gender stereotypes of women as weak and oppressed. These depictions implies women lack autonomy, are under male control, and face severe limitations on their freedom.

Moreover, the film creates a stark contrast between the depiction of Palestinian women and foreign women. The latter are portrayed as free, beautiful, and independent, emphasizing a

significant imbalance in representing different cultural backgrounds and women's experiences. Despite receiving accolades, the film's marginalization and negative portrayal of Palestinian women raise concerns about its potential reinforcement of regressive gender norms and its failure to showcase the diverse strength of women's experiences.

The movie notably lacks scenes featuring women, save for one depicting a woman in a stereotypically weak role—unable to make choices, controlled by men, and subject to severe restrictions. This portrayal, despite the film's awards, diminishes the image of women, opting to showcase freedom, beauty, and independence in foreign women rather than highlighting the diversity and strength of Palestinian women's experiences.

### Film five: **Wajib**



**Image 5: A shot from wajib film**

Plot:

The film unfolds as Shadi, an architect working in Italy, returns to Nazareth for his sister's wedding. He collaborates with his father in the wedding preparations, where, in adherence to social traditions, his father insists on personally distributing wedding invitation cards to friends and relatives. This decision leads them on an extensive journey to deliver the invitations, during which the dialogues between father and son unveil the disparities in their perspectives and personalities. Through these conversations, the audience gains insights into the family's past and glimpses into the daily life of Nazareth, as the duo visits various families and explores the streets of the city.

#### 1. **Bechdel test:**

Bechdel test Questions	Are there at least two named female characters?	Do they speak to each other?	Do they speak to each other about something
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			other than a male "love" interest?
Explanation	Yes Numerous female characters with various names appeared in the movie, including Amal, Maria, and Georgette.	the characters engaged in dialogue in numerous scenes.	Yes, they frequently discussed topics such as men, marriage, and the idea of not living alone without a male companion.

Wajib failed the bechdel test. Because the characters were having many conversations about men.

## 2. Narrative

### 1) Character One: Amal

#### 1. Role:

Amal assumes a supporting role as Shadi's sister, unprepared for her own wedding but eager to welcome her brother Shadi back from Italy. Lacking a strong personality, Amal finds herself compelled to comply with her family's wishes rather than expressing her own views on her marriage.

#### 2. Her Character:

She possesses a timid and indecisive personality, lacking a clear opinion or determination in selecting her wedding goals, as she prioritizes accommodating the desires of others in her choices.

3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears):Christian.

4. The nature of her work: not mentioned

5. Marital Status: engaged

6. Her role in influencing events is very weak.

### 2) Character Two: Maria

#### 1. Role:

Maria plays a supporting role in the film, making a brief appearance in one scene. She enters while wearing a short and inappropriate dress, serving coffee to the guests. However, the purpose of her entrance is to showcase herself in front of someone, portraying the woman's image as a commodity for sale.

## 2. Her Character:

Her character appears fragile due to her family exerting control over her appearance and communication. To win Shadi's affection, she must step into the room and showcase her true self.

## 3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears):

She follows the Christian faith and dresses in whatever attire she chooses.

## 4. The nature of her work: not mentioned

## 5. Marital Status: single

## 6. Her role in influencing events is very weak.

## 3) Character Three: Noura

### 1. Role:

In the film, Noura plays the role of Shady's neighbor, expressing admiration and affection towards him. However, her interactions with Shady are marked by sympathy, as she persistently tries to entice him into her home with a desire for intimacy. This portrayal of Noura depicts a woman taking the initiative in pursuing desire, highlighting the depth of her perceived inadequacy as a conscious woman.

### 2. Her Character:

Nora exhibits a fragile and anxious demeanor, struggling to maintain clear thinking, displaying recklessness, and engaging in irrational behavior. She pursues sensuality without pride, making an inappropriate advance towards a man who rejects her actions.

3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears): She follows the Christian faith and dresses in whatever attire she chooses.

### 4. The nature of her work: worker

### 5. Marital Status: single

### 6. Her role in influencing events is very weak.

## 3. **Todrov's Three Acts:**

Abu Shadi, a divorced father and esteemed school teacher, has single-handedly raised his two children, Shadi and Amal, since his wife departed two decades ago. With Amal's impending marriage, Shadi returns from Italy to partake in a local tradition in the northern region of

Palestine – driving around town with his father to distribute wedding invitations. The story unfolds through their interactions and encounters with people.

However, disruption ensues as Shadi, influenced by new ideas from Europe, grapples with readapting to the customs of his homeland and expresses disdain for the practices in Nazareth. The clash between father and son emerges due to their contrasting mentalities, embodying two visions of Israel. While the father embraces compromises for the sake of family under Israeli surveillance, Shadi, distanced from the perils of his homeland, confronts his father, accusing him of cowardice and treason toward Palestine. This leads to a powerful and climactic argument that challenges their perspectives, compelling them to face their differences head-on.

The analysis suggests that the movie reinforces conventional gender roles and stereotypes concerning women. It depicts women as reliant on men, emphasizing the expectation that women should pursue and seduce men rather than the reverse. Furthermore, the film highlights the oppressive aspects of Palestinian society, where women who challenge tradition and assert their desires face defamation and scrutiny.

The pervasive themes of gossip, intrusion, and excessive curiosity in conversations imply that women's actions are closely monitored and judged by society. This further limits their autonomy and reinforces the idea that they should adhere to traditional norms and expectations. This portrayal underscores the importance of promoting more diverse and empowering depictions of women in cinema, challenging these stereotypes and delving into the complexities of their lives and desires. In the movie, it depicts a woman's duty as being dependent on a man, portraying her as weak and the one who must take the initiative in seduction.

The film illustrates how Palestinian society tarnishes the reputation of women who defy traditions to pursue their own satisfaction. The constant presence of gossip, intrusion, and excessive curiosity in discussions serves to emphasize the societal scrutiny and judgment faced by these women.

**Film six: 3000 night**



**Image 6: A shot from 3000 night film**

Plot:

Following false accusations, Layal, a young Palestinian schoolteacher and newlywed, is arrested and handed an 8-year prison sentence. Transferred to a high-security Israeli women's prison, she encounters a daunting reality where Palestinian political prisoners share confinement with Israeli criminal inmates. Upon discovering her pregnancy, the prison director pressures Layal to undergo an abortion and act as a spy on the Palestinian inmates. Despite being resilient and still in chains, she defies the pressure, giving birth to a baby boy.

Throughout her struggle to raise her son within the confines of the prison and her interactions with fellow inmates, Layal finds a sense of hope and purpose in her life. As prison conditions worsen, the Palestinian prisoners decide to initiate a strike. The prison director warns Layal against participating in the rebellion and threatens to separate her from her son. Faced with a moment of truth, Layal is compelled to make a choice that will irrevocably alter her life.

### 1. Bechdel test:

Bechdel test Questions	Are there at least two named female characters?	Do they speak to each other?	Do they speak to each other about something other than a male "love" interest?
Explanation	Numerous female characters were featured in the film, each with distinct names, including Layal, Sana, Riyhan, Imali, Jamila, and Fidaa.	All the primary characters engaged in conversations, including the adversaries who were actively communicating with them in the movie.	They engaged in numerous discussions about men, one notable instance being when Ali introduced her sons to the girls and encouraged them to select a son for marriage.

3000 nights failed the bechdel test. because they had many conversations about men.

## 2. Narrative

### 1) Character One: Layal

#### 1. Role:

Layal assumes the protagonist's role in this film, finding herself unjustly imprisoned. Initially fragile and fearful, she evolves throughout the movie, showcasing her resilience and composure under pressure. Witnessing her transformation, we observe her growing strength and newfound control over her challenging circumstances.

#### 2. Her Character:

She possesses a resilient, patient, and intelligent personality, carefully assessing situations before taking any misguided actions. Enduring the challenges of eight years in prison, discovering her pregnancy, and giving birth behind bars, she demonstrates the capability to handle the pressures of confinement and navigate the difficulties of raising her child within the confines of prison walls amidst the challenging health conditions.

#### 3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears):

Her religious affiliation is not specified, but she chooses not to wear a hijab and dresses without restrictions.

#### 4. The nature of her work: employee.

#### 5. Marital Status: married.

#### 6. Her role in influencing events is very strong

## 3. Todrov's Three Acts:

Layal, a young schoolteacher residing in Nablus, Palestine, intends to embark on a new chapter in Canada alongside her husband Farid. However, their plans take an unexpected turn when Layal is falsely accused of aiding a teenage boy in an attack on a military checkpoint. Her refusal to testify against the boy results in Layal receiving an 8-year sentence in a high-security Israeli women's prison, where she discovers she is pregnant. Confronted with abandonment by her husband, who is heading to Canada, and pressure to undergo an abortion from the prison director, Layal faces a moment of despair. Despite the challenges, she finds strength in the support of her fellow inmates, ultimately deciding to stand up for herself and protect her unborn child.

In the unfolding of a new equilibrium, Layal, fearful of losing her son, actively participates in a strike, barricading herself with other women and gaining support from male prisoners. While some inmates are released, Layal must serve her full term. Determined to fight for herself and

her child, Layal confronts the challenges with resilience and holds onto the hope of a future reunion.

The film stands out for its portrayal of a resilient and empowered woman who challenges traditional gender norms. The protagonist is presented as an independent individual, excelling in education, work, and homemaking without relying on a man for support. Her character exhibits remarkable perseverance when faced with adversity, particularly when she discovers her pregnancy while incarcerated, and her husband abandons her. Choosing to keep the child despite these challenges highlights her unyielding self-confidence and determination to live autonomously, even during an eight-year prison ordeal. This portrayal breaks away from conventional gender stereotypes, providing a refreshing and empowering depiction of a woman thriving on her own strength and resilience.

### **Film seven: Omar**



**Image 7: A shot from Omar film**

Plot:

In the tumultuous landscape of the West Bank, Omar, a Palestinian baker, bravely confronts barriers to pursue his forbidden love with Nadia, the sister of his friend Tarek. Fueled by anger and a thirst for vengeance, Omar and his comrades embark on perilous attacks, resulting in betrayal and tragedy. Captured and subjected to torment, Omar strikes a deal with agent Rami, becoming further entangled in a web of deceit.

Amidst the backdrop of love, loss, and lies, Omar seizes an opportunity for redemption, breaking free from the cycle of violence through a daring and unexpected act. Subsequently, Omar informs the ringleader about Amjad but secures an agreement that designates him as the one responsible for dealing with Amjad. During the meeting with Rami and three other Israeli agents, Rami provides Omar with a gun, only for Omar to turn the tables and use it to kill Rami.

#### **1. Bechdel test:**

Bechdel test Questions	Are there at least two named female characters?	Do they speak to each other?	Do they speak to each other about something other than a male "love" interest?
Explanation	There was only Nadia, the sole female character with a name.	Nadia was conversing with some acquaintances, but their identities remained unknown.	Amjad has sisters, and there is a surplus of women interested in marrying any eligible man. They often take turns opening the door to determine the visitor's identity, playfully teasing him in an attempt to encourage him to consider marriage with one of them.

Omar did not pass the Bechdel test due to a lack of named female characters engaging in conversations unrelated to men.

## 2. Narrative

### 1) Character One: Nadia

#### 1. Role:

Nadia assumes a supporting role in the protagonist Omar's life. Having feelings for Omar, who is a friend of her brother Tariq, she aspires to formalize their connection through marriage while balancing her life as a school student.

#### 2. Her Character:

She possesses a robust and determined personality, exhibiting fearlessness and boldness, evident in her choice to engage in a relationship with her brother's friend and meet him at various locations. Her passion and ambition drive her desire to pursue further education.

#### 3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears):

She is a Muslim who does not wear a veil, and her attire is partially covered.

#### 4. The nature of her work: student.

#### 5. Marital Status: In relationship with Omar.

#### 6. Her role in influencing events is weak.

### 2) Character Two: Amjad sisters

### 1. Role:

They assume a supporting role in the movie, being the sisters of Omar's friend Amjad. Their presence is limited to a handful of scenes, where they are seen together in a single room, answering the door for anyone who knocks. The central theme revolving around them is marriage, with numerous references in the film highlighting their perceived unattractiveness, and the difficulty they face in finding acceptance for marriage proposals.

### 2. Her Character:

They lack strength and excitement, lacking a clear purpose beyond the desire to marry. They serve as poor role models for Palestinian women.

### 3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears):

All of them practice Islam, with some choosing to wear hijab while others do not, opting for regular clothing instead.

### 4. The nature of her work: Housewives.

### 5. Marital Status: Single.

### 6. Her role in influencing events is very weak.

## **3. Todrov's Three Acts:**

Omar, a Palestinian baker, routinely scales the West Bank barrier to rendezvous with his beloved, Nadia, with whom he intends to marry. Accompanied by his childhood companions Tarek and Amjad, they participate in simulated attacks on soldiers, culminating in a fatal shooting during a nighttime checkpoint assault. Disruption ensues as Omar and his friends become targets of the Israeli authorities. Captured and subjected to torture by agent Rami, Omar is pressured into self-incrimination to secure his release. However, suspicions of collaboration linger, resulting in social ostracism.

Two years later, Omar uncovers Amjad's deceit about an affair with Nadia, who is now married to him with two children. Despite the betrayal, Nadia's love for Omar endures. Rami reappears, seeking to manipulate Omar into assassinating a militant. Omar reluctantly agrees, pledging to assist in apprehending a new leader and disclosing the actual perpetrator of the soldier's death in exchange for a firearm. This sets the stage for a intricate tapestry of loyalty, betrayal, and moral dilemmas.

The analysis suggests that Omar's film reinforces conventional gender roles and stereotypes, depicting women primarily as individuals whose main objective is marriage and motherhood. The central character, a school student aspiring to complete her education, is portrayed as lacking

agency in her decisions. Her family swiftly agrees to a marriage proposal, diverting her from her educational aspirations, ultimately making her a mother.

Furthermore, the film perpetuates the notion that women's desires are subject to male influence, evident when Omar comments on the attractiveness of Amjad's sisters and when Amjad seems to have the final say in his sisters' future. This representation highlights an alarming gender imbalance, where women's aspirations and choices often take a backseat to male preferences and decisions, reinforcing traditional stereotypes and societal expectations.

In Omar's film, women are depicted as being primarily concerned with marriage and motherhood. Despite the protagonist being a school student with dreams of completing her education, the film portrays her as lacking autonomy in her decisions. The family readily accepts Amjad's marriage proposal, leading her to marry and become a mother without fulfilling her educational goals.

### **Film eight: Amreeka**



**Image 8: A shot from Amreeka film**

Plot:

Amidst the backdrop of morale, societal struggles, and security challenges in Ramallah, as well as the complications of checkpoints and the lingering shadows of a failed marriage, Mona resolves to transform her life. This transformation unfolds when she receives a letter in the mail, revealing that she has been granted a green card. Despite feeling a sense of sorrow about leaving her current surroundings, Mona is buoyed by Faraj's enthusiasm for a new and secure future for her and their son, Fadi. Consequently, she decides to relinquish her job at the bank and set out for America with her son, where her sister Raghda and her husband Nabil reside. However, Mona's aspiration for a brighter future hinges on the obstacles and challenges that impede its realization, demanding sacrifices on personal, familial, and community fronts.

#### **1. Bechdel test**

Bechdel test Questions	Are there at least two named female characters?	Do they speak to each other?	Do they speak to each other about something other than a male "love" interest?
Explanation	Several female characters were mentioned, including Muna, Raghda, and Rana.	They engaged in conversation throughout various scenes, making this movie rich in diverse scenes and gender roles—a positive aspect.	In various scenes, they discussed men. For instance, Raghda persuaded Muna to consider marriage.

Amreeka did not pass the Bechdel test as numerous scenes primarily revolved around discussions about men.

## 2. Narrative

### 1) Character One: Muna

#### 1. Role:

In the film, Mona assumes the compelling and persistent role of a mother striving to ensure the success of both her personal life and her son's future by providing them with the best possible resources. Hailing from Bethlehem, Mona commutes daily to Hebron for her job at a bank. Divorced and emotionally shattered due to her husband's abandonment for another woman, Mona grapples with the bleak conditions in her country and the prevailing occupation.

Surprisingly granted an American visa, Mona decides to take a courageous leap, leaving behind her entire life to start anew. Initially fearful, her bold decision becomes evident as she demonstrates determination and resolve, securing employment in her new surroundings. This newfound courage emerges after facing challenges that surfaced since her departure.

#### 2. Her Character:

At the outset, Mona's demeanor reflected a sense of misery, sadness, and preoccupation with her life circumstances, coupled with the monotony of her daily routine in a country under occupation and the indignity imposed by the occupying army. Nevertheless, as the film unfolded, we witnessed her transformation into an independent character, driven to establish herself even in the unfamiliar surroundings of a foreign land.

#### 3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears):

She follows the Christian faith, and her attire has a modest openness.

#### 4. The nature of her work: employee.

#### 5. Marital Status: divorced.

6. Her role in influencing events is very strong.

### **3. Todrov's Three Acts:**

Muna, an accountant at a Palestinian bank, confronts the difficulties of being an outsider at the Israeli checkpoint she crosses daily. Yearning for a brighter future, she wins the U.S. green card lottery, aspiring to relocate to America with her teenage son, Fadi, in search of a more inclusive society. However, their plans are disrupted when they arrive during the Iraq war, facing anti-Arab sentiment and having their life savings confiscated at O'Hare airport.

Undaunted, Muna and Fadi arrive in a distant Chicago suburb with optimism but no financial resources. The new chapter unfolds as Muna, displaying resilience and resourcefulness, triumphs over challenges, securing a job and income to sustain herself and her son in America. Adapting to the unfamiliar surroundings, she forges connections, even forming a close bond with the principal of Fadi's school. The film concludes on a positive note, underscoring Muna's tenacity and successful assimilation into her new life.

Based on the analysis, this film is commendable for its portrayal of women in a refreshing and realistic manner. It breaks away from traditional gender stereotypes by showcasing a woman's self-reliance, education, and multifaceted roles as a worker, housewife, and provider for her family during challenging times. Her ability to travel independently and engage in various fields to support herself and her son underscores her autonomy and resilience.

While the film briefly touches upon the societal expectation of a woman remarrying after divorce and relying on a man for support, the central character remains resolute in her determination to live independently and not be dependent on a man. This representation serves as a positive departure from conventional gender norms, highlighting the strength and agency of women, and challenges the notion that a woman's happiness and stability must be contingent upon a male partner.

In this film, I felt happy, because it was one of the few films that were able to represent women in a different and real way.

This movie shows her ability to rely entirely on herself, as she is educated, working, a housewife, supports her family in difficulties, travels alone, and works in many fields to provide a living for herself and her son.

Although in several scenes they also discussed the importance of the heroine marrying a man after her divorce and that she should not remain alone, and that her life should be supported by the man, she was stubborn enough to be completely dependent on herself without a man.

### **Film nine: Salt of this Sea**



**Image 9: A shot from Salt of this Sea film**

Plot:

Soraya, a native of Brooklyn raised in a working-class community of Palestinian refugees, uncovers a startling revelation about her grandfather's funds being frozen in a Jaffa bank account during his exile in 1948. Driven by directness, stubbornness, and an unwavering determination to reclaim what rightfully belongs to her, Soraya realizes her lifelong aspiration of "returning" to Palestine. However, as she immerses herself in the harsh realities, she gradually grapples with the complexities of her own anger.

In the course of her journey, Soraya crosses paths with Emad, a young Palestinian whose aspirations diverge from hers, aiming to leave permanently. Weary of the constraints that dictate their lives, they recognize that true freedom necessitates taking matters into their own hands, even if it involves engaging in illegal activities.

### 1. Bechdel test:

Bechdel test Questions	Are there at least two named female characters?	Do they speak to each other?	Do they speak to each other about something other than a male "love" interest?
Explanation	Suraya and Corrine were friends from their hometown, but Corrine only appeared in a single scene, making her role more akin to that of an extra compared to a regular actor.	In one particular scene, there were a few female actors, with the exception of the main character Soraya, who was the only one with a named role.	No, their discussion revolved around different topics, unrelated to men.

Salt of this sea successfully passed the Bechdel test by featuring a conversation between at least two named female characters who discuss topics other than men.

### 2. Narrative

### 1) Character One: Soraya

Soraya assumes the heroic lead in this film as a Palestinian woman hailing from New York but with roots in Jaffa. Determined to return to Palestine, where her family had been exiled since 1948, she embarks on a journey to accompany her grandfather and retrieve his wealth stored in a Haifa bank, only to encounter resistance when the bank denies her rightful claim.

#### 1. Role:

She broke the laws, boldly conceived and plotted the notion of robbing the bank, successfully executed the theft, and then escaped to a secluded area to remain hidden for a period.

#### 2. Her Character:

She possesses a resilient, determined, and self-reliant character, occasionally using strong language. She disregards others' opinions, exuding fierceness while maintaining a degree of openness. In certain instances, she is seen embracing her male friends.

#### 3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears):

She declared herself as agnostic and dresses without constraints.

#### 4. The nature of her work: Independent worker.

#### 5. Marital Status: single.

#### 6. Her role in influencing events is very strong.

### **3. Todrov's Three Acts:**

Soraya, a Palestinian hailing from a refugee community in Brooklyn, sets out on a resolute quest to recover her grandfather's frozen savings in a Jaffa bank account, a legacy from his 1948 exile. Despite her steadfast passion for the concept of "returning" to Palestine, she confronts harsh realities upon her arrival. Disruption ensues as Soraya, accompanied by Emad, opts to defy the limitations of their lives.

Frustrated with the constraints, they take matters into their own hands, robbing a bank and escaping to the Israeli side with new identities to elude the authorities. The new balance is depicted at the Tel Aviv airport, a symbolic space symbolizing transitions. In this setting, the film captures an impersonal atmosphere teeming with weary, tense, and anxious individuals, underscoring the challenges and uncertainties inherent in the pursuit of freedom and a life free from constraints.

Based on the analysis provided, this film is exceptionally empowering in its representation of women. The central character is portrayed as strong, determined, and resolute, embodying qualities of a warrior who takes her rights by force and is completely self-reliant. Her character serves as a powerful symbol of women's agency and the ability to fight for justice and reclaim what is rightfully theirs, especially in the face of adversity and historical injustices.

This film stands out as a beacon of empowerment, sending a message that women can be free, educated, and assertive, capable of challenging systemic barriers. It is a valuable contribution to cinema in promoting and encouraging women, presenting a realistic and inspiring portrayal that transcends traditional gender roles and showcases the multifaceted strength of women. More films like these are indeed needed to promote gender equality and break free from limiting stereotypes.

The image of the woman in this film was strong, stubborn, warrior, taking her rights by force, and completely self-reliant.

This film was one of the few films that starred a woman and she was very strong, so she was free and educated and returned to her country in order to take the rights of her grandfather that were wasted during the occupation period.

She did not remain silent about her right, and instead culminated in robbing the bank, which refused to give her rights.

This film gives a good feeling to women when watching it. We need a lot of these films that support and encourage women and present their image in a realistic and beautiful way and do not limit them to a few roles and marginalize them.

#### **Film ten: Paradise Now:**



**Image 10: A shot from Paradise Now film**

Plot:

Palestinians Said and Khaled, now in young adulthood, have been lifelong friends living in Nablus in the West Bank. They have both had what they consider a difficult life, now working side-by-side in unfulfilling jobs as auto mechanics in a small garage, being unfulfilling as difficult as the jobs were to get.

Those difficult lives include feeling like they are prisoners in the West Bank. Said who has only left the region once on a medical issue when he was six. They blame all their problems on the oppression by the Israelis. As such, they have volunteered and have been accepted by a Palestinian resistance group to carry out a suicide bombing mission in Tel Aviv: after the initial response to the first bomb, the second bomb would be detonated at the same site.

Following the bombing, the resistance group would release pre-taped video messages of Said and Khaled confessing to the bombing in the name of God. The mission would require Said and Khaled to cross "illegally" into Israel. They are not afraid of death in light of their deaths having some meaning, and in feeling like their lives are like being dead anyway. In the process of carrying out the mission, they end up being separated which could jeopardize not only the mission but their individual lives without their death being in the name of a cause, that is if they cannot locate each other.

In this their time apart, Said and Khaled may have time to think about what they are about to do, their thoughts not only shaped by their different family histories, but Said's budding friendship/romance with a young woman named Suha, the daughter of a wealthy and famed Palestinian, she who has only recently moved back to the West Bank after years living overseas.

### 1. Bechdel test

Bechdel test Questions	Are there at least two named female characters?	Do they speak to each other?	Do they speak to each other about something other than a male "love" interest?
Explanation	There is only one named character, Salwa. However, the second character, who is Saeed's mom, remains unnamed.	No, there wasn't communication between the female characters; the majority of the roles were male.	No communication took place between them.

Paradise did not pass the Bechdel test due to a lack of female presence and interaction in the film.

### 2. Narrative

1) Character One: Saeed mom

## 1. Role:

She assumes a supporting role as Saeed's mother, engaging in tasks such as cooking and conversing with him while tidying up. Formerly wedded to a Palestinian man, accusations of espionage and betrayal led to their family living under the shadow of shame. Her interactions are brief and restrained.

## 2. Her Character:

She is a resilient woman, worn out by the struggles of life, making a determined effort to confront the obstacles that have arisen since her husband, who was involved with Israel, passed away.

## 3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears):

She is a woman who practices Islam and wears a hijab.

## 4. The nature of her work: housewife.

## 5. Marital Status: widowed.

## 6. Her role in influencing events is weak.

## 2) Character Two: Salwa

## 1. Role:

She assumes a supporting role and hails from Morocco, with a father recognized as a Palestinian hero. Demonstrating a strong work ethic, she actively strives for peace within the nation, adamantly opposing any bloodshed in Palestine.

## 2. Her Character:

She possesses strength and independence, leading a self-reliant life.

## 3. Women's structure(how she looks, her religion, what she wears):

She follows the Muslim faith but does not wear a hijab.

## 4. The nature of her work: employee.

## 5. Marital Status: single.

## 6. Her role in influencing events is strong.

**3. Todrov's Three Act:**

Palestinians Said and Khaled, now in young adulthood, have been lifelong friends living in Nablus in the West Bank. They have both had what they consider a difficult life, now working side-by-side in unfulfilling jobs as auto mechanics in a small garage. While Saeed loves a Moroccan girl named Soha.

After Said and Khaled felt the difficulty of life, their poor situation, and the boring routine, they found that the best solution is to become the heroes of the "martyrs" of their family and homeland, in order to improve the conditions of their home and their people, so they participated with the resistance team, and they went to blow themselves up in the process of assassinating the Jewish settlers. Saeed indirectly bid farewell Soha. Soha did not know that he was going to die with his feet.

Suha tried to convince them not to continue with this devastation, because, as soon as the explosion occurred in Israel, Israel would strike back, with the miserable Palestinian citizens. In the concluding scene of *Paradise Now*, Said tricks Khaled into leaving, while he commits to the attack. Khaled is emotionally shattered, realizing his misconception of self. Said, who once hesitated due to a child, now sits on a bus wearing an explosive vest, encircled by Israeli soldiers. The camera zooms in on Said's intense eyes until the screen goes white, then black, leaving the outcome uncertain—a perpetuation of violence or an admission of an endless narrative.

Based on the analysis provided, this film appears to be severely lacking in the representation of Palestinian women, as it predominantly focuses on a single character, Saeed's mom, who is portrayed in a stereotypical and limited manner as an uneducated, veiled, widowed housewife with inconsequential discussions. This representation reinforces traditional and potentially harmful stereotypes about Palestinian women. While there is another character, Suha, of Moroccan origin, who exhibits strength and independence, the primary focus of your research was on Palestinian women. The limited and stereotypical depiction of Saeed's mom emphasizes the need for more diverse and nuanced portrayals of Palestinian women in cinema that go beyond clichéd roles and reflect the multifaceted realities and experiences of this group.

This film was completely devoid of Palestinian women. It was only Saeed's mom, and her role was minimal in some scenes, and her image was stereotypical, a housewife, uneducated, a widow, veiled, and the topics she discussed had no importance.

There was Suha, a woman of Moroccan origin, who is the daughter of a Palestinian hero. She was strong, persistent, free, completely self-reliant, and lived on her own. But analyzing her image was not the main point of my research because she is Moroccan.

## II: Main Results

- **Palestinian Women Representation in Films**

The cinematic representation of Palestinian women encompasses a spectrum of complexities and nuances. While there are recurring themes that illuminate gender dynamics and societal expectations, the depictions are far from monolithic. Some portrayals perpetuate traditional gender roles and stereotypes, relegating women to roles of subordination and dependency. Concurrently, other films challenge these constructs, presenting women who exhibit resilience, autonomy, and agency in their personal and societal spheres.

The representations of women in the ten films were analyzed in this study based on several elements, including their role in the film, character, appearance, the nature of their work, and role in influencing the events of the film.

Results indicate that negative stereotypes of women while reducing their appearance on a screen, were evident. Women appeared in most of the films with the same appearance, personality, and weak influence, except for *Paradise Now Film* that lacked a female character.

Using the Bechdel test, which is another measurement tool of women's representation in films, most of the films failed this test. They consist of a small number of female characters, who in the considerable part of the film's durations were gossiping with each other about men.

Todorov's narrative theory structure of films was used in order to understand how filmmakers create tension, suspense, and resolution. It's particularly relevant for identifying how different plot elements are introduced, developed, and resolved within a film. Results of Todorov three act movement indicate that women in those films do not have any influence on the story narrative, they were marginalized, can't act and can't take any action without a man. The man was the hero, and he is the one that is holding the key of influencing.

- **Prevailing images of Palestinian women in films**

The prevailing image of Palestinian women in cinema often reflects the tensions between cultural norms and individual aspirations. While films like "Huda's Salon" and "Wajib" portray women as subservient and reliant on men's decisions, other films like "200 Meters" and "Salt of this Sea" present women as determined and empowered individuals who navigate challenges with strength. The dichotomy of tradition and modernity emerges as a consistent backdrop, shaping how women's roles and identities are framed within Palestinian society.

The prevailing images for Palestinian women were mainly that she is an uneducated woman, modestly dressed, weak in character, does not have the ability to make decisions or influence, is pessimistic, is not happy with her life, and has no ambition or goals.

Even her role during the film and her influence on the events are barely visible, as she simply did not appear on the screen much. The image of the man was dominant; the number of males in films is twice the number of females, and the duration of a woman's appearance on screen is very short compared to the duration of a man's appearance, and the man's influence on the events of the film and their narration was in control, unlike the woman.

For example, the women portrayed in *200 meters*, *Gaza Mon Amour*, *It Must Be Heaven*, *Wajib*, *Omar*, *Paradise now*, are so weak, while her influence on the events of the film is limited. Also, her appearance in these her the scenes was short, and she had no effect on the flow of the film

- **Social roles of Palestinian women in films**

Issues concerning marriage, motherhood, and societal expectations often loom large in the cinematic portrayals of Palestinian women. "200 Meters" and "Omar" exemplify the emphasis on marriage and motherhood, where individual dreams often take a backseat to familial and societal demands. Moreover, the struggle to reconcile personal desires with cultural mandates is palpable, as depicted in "Gaza Mon Amour," where a woman defies expectations to marry based on her own inclinations. These films thus encapsulate the multifaceted negotiations that Palestinian women navigate in their pursuit of self-determination.

Through starring roles in films, Palestinian women's social roles and interests are contextualized within a complex interplay of societal norms. Films like "Amreeka" underscore women's abilities to be independent, educated, and providers for their families, subverting traditional gendered expectations. In contrast, "3000 Nights" amplifies women's strength in adversity, depicting a woman who harnesses her resilience and self-reliance despite incarceration. "Salt of this Sea" further reinforces the strength of Palestinian women as it portrays a woman's unyielding determination to reclaim her ancestral rights.

In terms of directing, women's roles were very few and the times of their appearance on the screen were very short, and here we find that they are marginalized in a huge way.

The cast of Palestinian actresses does not have a great diversity, as there is repetition of actresses in most films. There must be a large number of actresses and diversity in films, and acting is not restricted to some actresses only.

Women must be represented in a stronger way than this, as Palestinian women are great role models for all generations, and there are many different stories in Palestine about women who left an important impact on the people's brains. Therefore, it must be represented in a realistic way and should not be limited to stereotypes.

- **Main roles of Palestinian women in films narratives**

The role of Palestinian women in films, from a narrative standpoint, has no influence on the events or the course of the film. Most of the scenes were led by men, not women. Women were marginalized and secondary.

Studying roles of women and their influence in the three stages (equilibrium, disruption, new equilibrium) within the film, led to identify that roles of women in the works are ineffective and very weak, neither at the beginning of the film nor in the middle of the prime time nor at the end. The man was the master of the situation.

She appears in only a few scenes and the duration of her appearance on screen in scenes does not exceed two minutes. This may show us the extent of her weakness and lack of resourcefulness in real life, and this influence that cinema provides us with is a negative influence capable of implanting this stereotype in our minds and making us accept it.

In conclusion, the representations of Palestinian women in starring roles in cinema mirror the intricate web of socio-cultural dynamics, presenting both conformist and defiant narratives. These portrayals encapsulate women's struggles to reconcile societal roles with individual aspirations, delineating the interplay between tradition and modernity. While certain films perpetuate traditional gender roles, others challenge and diversify these representations by showcasing empowered women who defy norms.

The cinematic discourse thereby engages with essential conversations surrounding women's agency, identity, and resilience within the Palestinian context, contributing to broader discussions on gender dynamics and equality. As such, Palestinian cinema stands as a potent medium for advocating change and presenting multi-dimensional portrayals of women's lives.

The cinematic representation of Palestinian women in recent years is multifaceted. It spans from reinforcing traditional gender roles and stereotypes to challenging these norms with resilient, autonomous characters. Analysis considers elements like their roles, characterizations, appearances, marital status, and influence on the narrative. However, many films fail the Bechdel test, indicating limited female-centric conversations. Todorov's narrative theory reveals that women often have weak roles with minimal impact on the film's progression, with male dominance being prevalent.

The dominant portrayal of Palestinian women through starring roles often revolves around traditional stereotypes, depicting them as uneducated, modestly dressed, and lacking agency. They are often portrayed as pessimistic, devoid of ambition, and with minimal influence in films. Limited screen time reinforces their marginalization. Additionally, a lack of diversity in actresses perpetuates these stereotypes, highlighting the need for more authentic and diverse representations.

Social roles of Palestinian women in films are closely tied to themes of marriage, motherhood, and societal expectations. Some films emphasize the subjugation of individual aspirations to familial and societal demands, while others challenge traditional norms, showcasing women's independence and resilience. The representation is varied, portraying the complexity of navigating societal expectations.

From a narrative perspective, Palestinian women in films often have minimal influence on the plot. Male characters frequently dominate scenes and drive the narrative, while female characters are marginalized and secondary. Their limited on-screen presence raises questions about women's real-life agency and resourcefulness and can perpetuate negative stereotypes. This portrayal calls for more diverse and empowering narratives for Palestinian women.

# **Chapter Five: Discussion**

## Discussion

The films were similar in their content in that all the films combined to discuss the Palestinian issue, but each film presented this image in its own way, so the films intersected here in terms of how they presented it. Some films presented it in a dramatic way, others in a romantic way, and others in a black comedic way.

### 1. Prevailing images of Women in Films

This study finds that the prevailing images of Palestinian women in films often reflect traditional stereotypes, portraying them as uneducated, modestly dressed, and lacking confidence. They are often depicted as pessimistic, devoid of ambition, and with minimal influence in films. The limited screen time reinforces their marginalization.

Previous studies in the field of cinema representation, such as (Khatib, 2006) examination of Arab cinema and (Dinia, 2016) study on Tunisian and Moroccan cinema, resonate with this study findings. They also emphasize the portrayal of women as victims of patriarchal systems and the emphasis on safeguarding family honor.

### 2. Women Representations

The study found that women in Palestinian films have limited influence on the narrative, with male characters dominating scenes and driving the story. Female characters are marginalized and secondary in most films; further perpetuating negative stereotypes. This aligns with the findings of Miller (2018), who revealed that women have consistently been in underrepresented roles in the film industry. The roles of women behind the scenes, such as cinematographers and writers, have also been marginalized. The results are consistent with what Hall (1997) proposed when discussed the negative forms of representations in media contents.

### 3. Social roles of Women

The study results highlighted that social roles for Palestinian women in films often revolve around themes of marriage, motherhood, and societal expectations. Some films emphasize the subjugation of individual aspirations to familial and societal demands, while others challenge traditional norms, showcasing women's independence and resilience. These findings resonate with the broader discussion of how women's roles in cinema have been shaped by societal norms. Ibbi's (2018) study in Nigeria, for example, discusses the perpetuation of negative stereotypes about women in cinema, depicting them as wicked and manipulative.

### 4. Women Roles in Narratives

Results of this indicate that Palestinian women in films often have minimal influence on the plot, with male characters frequently dominating scenes and driving the narrative. Female characters

are marginalized and secondary. These findings align with Ali (2018) findings who concluded that cinematic films often communicate a masculine discourse to the audience, relegating women's issues to a superficial level. Results in light of the concept of narrative 3 stages according to Todorov.

The limitations of the study were that the years of films were between 2005 and 2021 and the process of finding and watching it on the platforms was very difficult and it is not easily available.

All the films under consideration revolve around the Palestinian issue, providing a platform for examining and discussing the challenges faced by the Palestinian people.

The films differ in their presentation, some adopting a dramatic approach, others presenting the issue romantically, and some using a black comedic tone. This divergence in style suggests a variety of perspectives on the Palestinian narrative.

In summary, while the films share a common theme, their divergent presentation styles contribute to a nuanced exploration of the Palestinian issue. The consistent negative portrayal of Palestinian women and the marginalization of their characters underscore broader challenges related to gender representation in cinema. The study sheds light on both the perpetuation of stereotypes and the potential for challenging traditional norms within the context of Palestinian cinema.

## **Recommendations**

### **Promote Diverse Narratives:**

Encourage filmmakers to explore and depict a diverse range of narratives that showcase the complexity and diversity of Palestinian women's experiences. This can help break away from traditional stereotypes and offer a more nuanced portrayal of their lives, aspirations, and challenges.

### **Increase Female Representation behind the Scenes:**

Address the underrepresentation of women in key roles behind the scenes, such as directors, cinematographers, and writers. Supporting and promoting female talent in the filmmaking industry can contribute to more authentic and balanced portrayals of women in films.

### **Challenge Gender Norms:**

Encourage filmmakers to challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes in their storytelling. Highlight the strength, independence, and resilience of Palestinian women in various roles beyond the stereotypical themes of marriage and motherhood.

### **Support Emerging Female Filmmakers:**

Provide support, mentorship, and resources for emerging female filmmakers in the Palestinian film industry. Fostering the voices of women in filmmaking can lead to more diverse perspectives and contribute to breaking down gender-related barriers in the industry.

### **Educational Initiatives:**

Implement educational initiatives that raise awareness about the impact of media representation on societal perceptions. Workshops, seminars, and discussions can engage filmmakers, students, and the public in conversations about challenging stereotypes and promoting more accurate and empowering depictions of women in films.

### **Encourage Collaboration:**

Foster collaboration between filmmakers, scholars, and activists to collectively address the issue of gender representation in Palestinian films. By combining efforts, a more comprehensive and impactful approach can be developed to challenge and reshape prevailing stereotypes.

#### Funding for Diverse Projects:

Support funding initiatives that prioritize projects with diverse and inclusive representations of women. Financial backing for films that challenge stereotypes and present a more authentic portrayal of Palestinian women can contribute to a positive shift in the industry.

#### Critical Media Literacy:

Promote critical media literacy programs that empower audiences to analyze and question the representations they encounter in films. By fostering a discerning audience, there is potential to influence filmmakers to produce content that reflects a more accurate and respectful portrayal of women.

#### Research and Data Collection:

Encourage continued research and data collection on gender representation in Palestinian films. Regular assessments of the industry can track progress, identify persistent challenges, and inform ongoing initiatives aimed at improving the portrayal of women in cinema.

#### Global Dialogue and Collaboration:

Engage in a global dialogue on gender representation in cinema, collaborating with international film festivals, organizations, and filmmakers. Sharing insights and strategies can contribute to a broader movement advocating for more inclusive and equitable portrayals of women in films globally.

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## المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة تمثيل المرأة الفلسطينية في الأفلام الفلسطينية المعاصرة، من خلال تحليل كيفية تصوير هذه الأفلام لأدوار المرأة وصورها وأدوارها الاجتماعية ومساهمتها السردية.

وتستخدم الدراسة الإطار النظري الذي يتكون من اختبار بيشدل وسردية تودوروف وتمثيلات ستيوارت هول، حيث حلت الدراسة عشرة أفلام فلسطينية فازت بجوائز، وترشحت في مهرجانات سينمائية كبرى.

تكشف نتائج الدراسة عن تعزيز مستمر للأدوار والقوالب النمطية التقليدية للجنسين في السينما الفلسطينية، بما يتماشى مع الاتجاهات العالمية في تمثيل المرأة. وهي تظهر أن الصورة السائدة للمرأة الفلسطينية تدور في كثير من الأحيان حول الصور النمطية السلبية، ويتم تهميش أدوارها وتأثيرها في السرد السينمائي.

وتؤكد الدراسة على الحاجة إلى مزيد من التنوع والتمكين في تصوير المرأة الفلسطينية في السينما. وتدعو الدراسة إلى زيادة الفرص أمام صانعي الأفلام وسرد القصص وتمثيل المرأة بشكل أكثر دقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السينما الفلسطينية، التمثيل، السرد، المساواة بين الجنسين، صور المرأة