



AWAY FROM HOME

POLITICS OF THE IMAGE: COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN THE PALESTINIAN LIBERATION MOVEMENT AND THE TWO GERMANIES

June 13-19, 2025

This series sheds light on the little known and rarely explored cooperation in film and TV between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the two Germanies during the last decades of the Cold War. In the 1970s and 80s, the film groups and cultural organizations of the PLO worked closely with film institutions in the socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR) and with filmmakers from the capitalist Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). These collaborations continue to have an impact today, for example in Palestine TV and its partnership with German public television, the foundations of which the PLO established via East- and West-German joint contracts and projects during the 1980s.

As the series demonstrates, the PLO-GDR co-productions and collaborations were characterized by mutual dependency with regard to international political recognition. Moreover, the PLO had hard currencies, which the GDR desperately needed, while the GDR commanded a strong film infrastructure, which the PLO lacked. The PLO's collaboration with West-German individuals was less formalized and therefore more flexible. The liberation organization could for instance send film crews to shoot inside the Occupied Territories, as LAND DAY (1977) illustrates, or access Western audiences through Western filmmakers and the familiarity of their film-languages. The PLO's film delegate was based in East Berlin and, as holder of a so-called alien passport, could cross the Berlin Wall whenever he wished.

The PLO functions as a united front externally and as an umbrella organization internally. The different programs within this series reflect this structure. Each evening focuses on different aesthetic, political, and economic questions of the Palestinian-German collaboration. In Program 1, for example, the (back)stories of AWAY FROM HOME (1969) and HEYDA MOURAD, I AM NOT A DREAMER (1982) give insight into the range of GDR-PLO cooperation (which extended beyond the realm of cinema), while the films in Program 3 apply diverging methods to narrate Palestinian history using footage mainly found at the GDR's film archive, and in doing so reflect the scope of political ideas and the politics of the image within the PLO.

Guest-programmed by Irit Neidhardt (mec film), who wrote the introduction and program descriptions.

Irit Neidhardt and filmmaker Marwan Salamah will be here in person for selected screenings during the opening weekend!

PROGRAM 1

After completing his studies at the GDR's Deutsche Hochschule für Filmkunst (German Academy of Film Art, now the Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF) in 1967, Iraqi Kais al-Zubaidi worked for the Syrian Broadcasting Corporation, which was in close exchange with the East German DEFA film studios. AWAY FROM HOME (1969) is al-

Zubaidi's first film about the "Palestinian issue". It marks his transition to work with the PLO's Department for Culture and Information, for which he served as film delegate for almost 20 years. Palestinian Mahmoud Khalil began his studies at the same school in 1976. His diploma film, HEYDA MOURAD, I AM NOT A DREAMER (1982), is a portrait of a Palestinian woman – heavily injured in an explosion in Beirut – who receives medical treatment and vocational rehabilitation in the GDR.

Kais al-Zubaidi

AWAY FROM HOME

1969, 11 min, 16mm-to-DCP. In Arabic with English subtitles.

Mahmoud Khalil

HEYDIA MOURAD – I AM NOT A DREAMER

1982, 40 min, 16mm-to-DCP. In German with English subtitles.

Total running time: ca. 55 min.

• **Fri, June 13 at 7:30.**

PROGRAM 2

In 1976, the Palestine Cinema Institute (PCI) delegated cinematographer Marwan Salamah to the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen in the GDR. His ...FROM THE OLIVE TREE (1987), officially a GDR/PLO coproduction but in fact a one-man effort, tells the story of Paris-based Palestinian painter Samir Salameh. It will be screened alongside Adnan Madanat's PALESTINIAN VISIONS (1977) – a production of the PCI (and, aside from the existence of a German language version, not related to Germany), Madanat's film is a portrait of Palestinian painter Ibrahim Ghannam. The program showcases two artists who utilize very different genres to express their ideas and reflections about how to memorialize Palestine on canvas.

Marwan Salamah

...FROM THE OLIVE TREE / ...VOM OLIVENBAUM

1987, 26 min, 16mm-to-DCP. In German with English subtitles.

Adnan Madanat

PALESTINIAN VISIONS

1977, 30 min, 16mm-to-DCP. In Arabic with English subtitles.

Total running time: ca. 60 min.

• **Sat, June 14 at 5:00 and Tues, June 17 at 8:45.**

PROGRAM 3

In 1975 the PLO Department of Culture and Information (DCI) began negotiating a cooperation agreement with the East German DEFA Studio for Documentary Films. In it, DEFA granted the PLO access to the State Film Archive of the GDR. From this resource, Lebanese director Rafiq Hajjar made FROM PALESTINE (1975) for the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), while Kais al-Zubaidi made PALESTINE – A PEOPLE'S RECORD (1982) for the DCI. While Hajjar avoids the use of colonial footage of Palestine for his Leninist film, al-Zubaidi uses any available material to tell a rather linear story of Palestine, deploying the archive for illustration and evidence.

Rafiq Hajjar

FROM PALESTINE / MIN FILASTIN / GEBOREN IN PALÄSTINA

1975, 22 min, 35mm-to-DCP. In German with English subtitles.

Kais al-Zubaidi

PALESTINE – A PEOPLE'S RECORD / FILISTIN – SIGIL SHA'AB / PALÄSTINA – CHRONIK EINES VOLKES

1984, 110 min, 35mm-to-DCP. In Arabic with English subtitles.

Total running time: ca. 135 min.

• **Sat, June 14 at 7:15 and Wed, June 18 at 7:30.**

PROGRAM 4

For the PLO, international networks were vitally important. Its institutions regularly invited delegations from all over the world, among them filmmakers. The PLO's United Information section was responsible for the shooting permits, chose the camps in which to shoot, and selected the interview partners. The GDR film THE CHILDREN OF PALESTINE (Kurt Tetzlaff, 1980) was produced in the framework of the same cooperation agreement as FROM PALESTINE (Program 3). FREEDOM – WHAT DO I MEAN? (1981) – a collective work by West Germans who came to Lebanon as part of a political exchange on the invitation of the DFLP – focuses on forms of self-organization and discussions around the revolutionary "new Palestinian".

SERIES

Kurt Tetzlaff

THE CHILDREN OF PALESTINE / DIE KINDER PALÄSTINAS

1980, 54 min, 35mm-to-DCP. In German with English subtitles.

Wolfgang Bienek, Robert Krieg, Thomas Reuter, Brigitte Schulz

FREEDOM – WHAT DO I MEAN? / FREIHEIT – WIE MEINE ICH DAS?

1981, 42 min, video. In German with English subtitles.

Total running time: ca. 100 min.

• **Sun, June 15 at 5:00 and Thurs, June 19 at 8:30.**

PROGRAM 5

Most films by the PLO focused on documenting the present lives of Palestinians in exile. The PLO was prohibited in Israel and the Occupied Territories, and access for Palestinian refugees was forbidden. In rare cases, the organization sent in foreign film crews with instructions about whom and what to document. LAND DAY (1976) by Ghaleb Shaath, manager of the film laboratory of the Palestine Martyrs Works Society (SAMED), is one example. In AIDA (1985), another official PLO/ GDR coproduction – but in fact a one-man effort by Marwan Salamah – the children in the PLO's orphanage in Tunis stay connected with their homeland by living both their heritage and the new social relations of the Palestinian Revolution.

Ghaleb Shaath

LAND DAY

1983, 50 min, 16mm-to-DCP. In Arabic and Japanese with English subtitles.

Marwan Salamah

AIDA

1985, 25 min, 16mm-to-DCP. In German with English subtitles.

Total running time: ca. 80 min.

• **Sun, June 15 at 7:30 and Thurs, June 19 at 6:30.**



LAND DAY



AIDA

PROGRAMS 6 & 7

These programs are linked by their connections to the Palestinian writer and politician Ghassan Kanafani. RETURN TO HAIFA (1982) is an adaptation of Kanafani's short novel of the same name. Iraqi director Kassem Hawal, head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)'s film group, cast distinguished GDR actress Christine Schorn in one of the lead roles. During its 1982 invasion of Lebanon, the Israeli army looted the PLO Research Center, including its film library. Starting with this material and inspired by Kanafani's writings, Palestinian director Kamal Aljafari, who has been based in Germany for several decades, constructed A FIDAI FILM (2024) from historical footage that has lost none of its topicality. Both films transgress the documentary genre to reflect on oppression and resistance.

PROGRAM 6

Kassem Hawal

RETURN TO HAIFA / A'ID ILA HAYFA

1982, 75 min, 35mm-to-DCP. In Arabic with English subtitles.

"The first feature-length Palestinian fictional film, RETURN TO HAIFA adapts Ghassan Kanafani's 1969 novella by the same name. Filmed in Lebanon during its crushing civil war, the film team relied on the communities of Palestinian life-in-exile and the infrastructures of the Palestinian resistance for its production; per Hawal's screen notes, resistance fighters went door-to-door in Badawi and Nahr al-Bared refugee camps to furnish the actors for the scenes of mass exodus filmed in Tripoli. What results is a national initiative, at once polemical and cautious, of exodus and its attendant psychologies." –Kaleem Hawa

• **Mon, June 16 at 6:45.**

PROGRAM 7

Kamal Aljafari

A FIDAI FILM

2024, 78 min, DCP. In Arabic, English, and Hebrew with English subtitles.

In the summer of 1982, the Israeli army invaded Beirut. During this time, it raided the Palestinian Research Center and looted its entire archive. The archive contained historical documents of Palestine, including a collection of still and moving images. Taking this as its departure point, A FIDAI FILM aims to create a counter-narrative to this loss, presenting a form of cinematic sabotage that seeks to reclaim and restore the looted memories of Palestinian history. It's a poignant exploration of identity, memory, and resistance, told through a unique blend of documentary and experimental filmmaking techniques.

• **Mon, June 16 at 8:45.**

PROGRAM 8

The West Germans Manfred Vosz and Monica Maurer produced their films with PLO funds and were both loosely connected to the PCI. Vosz's RASHIDIYA – SCENES FROM A PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMP (1977) is a short social reportage with a working-class aesthetic and Brechtian alienation effect, aimed at a politically educated German audience. Maurer worked mainly with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, whose work she portrayed. Her films have an educational character, a political urgency, and a historical context. Often (as in the case of Maurer's 1979 film CHILDREN OF PALESTINE, made with Samir Nimr) they also served as evidence before international bodies.

Manfred Vosz (Friedhelm Fett, Almut Hielscher, Franz Lehmkuhl, Eva Schlensag)

RASHIDIYA – SCENES FROM A PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMP / RASCHIDIA – SZENEN AUS EINEM PALÄSTINENSISCHEN FLÜCHTLINGSLAGER

1977, 20 min, 16mm-to-DCP. In German with English subtitles.

Monica Maurer & Samir Nimr

CHILDREN OF PALESTINE

1979, 34 min, 16mm-to-DCP. In English.

Total running time: ca. 60 min.

• **Tues, June 17 at 7:00.**