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Abstract:

This research explores the relationship between the female gaze and feminist documentaries in the case of Palestine through three feature-length documentaries: *The Judge* by Erika Cohn, *What Walaa Wants* by Christy Garland, and *Naila and the Uprising* by Julia Bacha. This thesis argues that the films demonstrate a few common features of the agency of Palestinian women and emphasize the importance of various issues related to their lives under patriarchy. This thesis argues that through their female subjectivity, experiences, and use of feminist aesthetics, this thesis argues that the female filmmakers innovatively and creatively expose these issues and put their subjects' struggles at the forefront, as feminist documentary practices are set to do. As such, through their female gaze, the findings demonstrate that the sample of female filmmakers' works leads to the critical re-thinking of the representation of Palestinian women and the questioning of patriarchy in Palestine.

Keywords: Feminist documentary, female gaze, Palestinian women, empowerment

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Introduction

Although patriarchy has a global effect on Western and non-Western societies, it manifests differently across various cultures.[1] Patriarchy is often understood as a system that reinforces the ideology that men should hold power positions, especially in the public domain, whereas women are often excluded from this sphere.[2] In the Middle East, unequal gender relations can also be seen in family structures,[3] where men are designated as breadwinners and women as homemakers who must depend on their male family members for their survival.[4]

In Palestine, for instance, Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2005) notes that gender dynamics are related to reproductive subordination and contextualized within the framework of patriarchy. However, within Palestine, she further asserts that this is less common in urban areas, especially among middle-class families where kinship ties are crucial for survival. In Palestine, patriarchal structures perpetuate discrimination against women and inequality between men and women in the historical and political context. In rural areas, women's maternal role is more highly valued. According to Shalhoub-Kevorkian, women's power increases upon bearing male heirs.[5]

For example, a young Palestinian bride who enters her husband's home is expected to be submissive to her husband and his male family members and older women, especially her mother-in-law. However, she begins to gain power after giving birth to a son.[6] Even though this is less apparent in middle-class families, one's extended family and blood relations strongly influence one's power across all social classes in Palestine. As such, a woman's power depends not only on whether she gives birth to sons but also on whether she has a powerful father, brothers, uncles, or other male kin. Hence, such familial relationships and interactions affect women's power.[7]

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[1] Robert Bahlieda, "Chapter 1: The Legacy of Patriarchy," *Counterpoints* 488 (2015): 15-67.
[2] Tamir Sorek, "Culture and Politics in Palestine/Israel," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 44, no. 6 (2021): 919-24.
[3] Valentine M. Moghadam, "Patriarchy in Transition: Women and the Changing Family in the Middle East," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 35, no. 2 (2004): 137.
[4] Lynn Welchman and Sara Hossain, *'Honour': Crimes, Paradigms, and Violence Against Women* (London: Zed Books, 2005), 167-69.
[5] Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, "Researching Women's Victimisation in Palestine: A Socio-legal Analysis" in *'Honour': Crimes, Paradigms, and Violence Against Women*, eds. Lynn Welchman and Sara Hossain (London: Zed Books, 2005), 160-180.
[6] S. Haj, "Palestinian Women and Patriarchal Relations," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 17, no. 4 (1992): 761-78; Yoav Litvin, "New Film Highlights Women's Role in the First Palestinian Intifada," *Truthout*, July 14, 2018, https://truthout.org/articles/new-film-highlights-womens-role-in-the-first-palestinian-intifada/.
[7] Welchman and Hossain, '*Honour'*, 168.

In general, Palestinian women's role within their society needs to be politically contextualized by understanding the national struggle that Palestinians collectively face due to the Israeli occupation.[8] Within the political context, the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967 led to creating external systems and laws that governed Palestinians' social, economic, and political lives. The occupation of their land also led to a decrease in the resources available to them, which affected their livelihoods. As such, the rise of unemployment exacerbated women's economic struggles as well those who were working in the field of agriculture or factories with very low wages.[9]

Shalhoub-Kevorkian notes that the Palestinian women's movement has been active since 1903, when women in Palestine interacted with women elsewhere in the Arab world on cultural, political, and intellectual issues. The Palestinian women's movement started with women forming charitable organizations, whereby elite Palestinian women began behaving liberally as active citizens. However, they were discouraged from doing so and encouraged to focus on their role in the home and family as a method of preserving the "authenticity" of Arab-Palestinian society. Decades later, when the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza began in 1967, societal norms of "honor" were once again utilized to limit women's social and political participation in favor of women's role in the home and private sphere. This further reflects male dominance in familial relationships, which influences women's position in the public *and* private sphere.

Aside from the above-mentioned gender issues, Palestinian women further struggle with violence committed against women in the name of honor, domestic violence, and discriminatory laws. Women's struggle to defend themselves and stand up for their rights is further complicated by the complexities of state-building politics and resistance to oppression. For example, within the Palestinian Authority (PA), which is the party that is in power and governs the occupied Palestinian territories, political appointments are motivated by allegiances based on clan and tribal affiliations, which effectively hinders women's attempts to achieve liberty and equality. The absence of a robust legal system further affects women's efforts to reform laws that discriminate against them.

Nevertheless, Palestinian women's activism has been more apparent and robust since the outbreak of the First Intifada, which took place between 1987 and 1993,[10] marking the first large-

[8] Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Militarization and Violence Against Women in Conflict Zones in the Middle East: A Palestinian Case-Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 11
[9] Haj, "Palestinian Women" 761-78.
[10] Maura K. James, "Women and the Intifadas: The Evolution of Palestinian Women's Organizations," *Strife Journal* 1 (2013): 18.

scale uprisings and non-violent protests of Palestinians against the Israeli occupation. It was led mainly by women's fight against the Israeli occupation but also against traditional rules and patriarchal political, social, and legal structures. During the Intifada, Palestinian women played an essential role in organizing collectives to support economic cooperatives to sustain other Palestinians, mobilize clinics, and arrange underground schools. Their collectives were apparent across the occupied territories and were set by multiple committees, including the Women's Action Committees, the Working Women's Committees, and the Union of Women's Committees. All of these bodies were connected to Palestinian political parties that were emerging at the time.[11]

Many documentaries have captured women's struggles for political equality and national freedom in Palestine. Documentaries are a particularly effective medium that can expose social or political issues through representation. In the context of Palestine specifically, documentary films have been used to counter historical constructions of invisibility, Otherness, and "terrorism" associated with Palestinians. For instance, the award-winning documentary film *5 Broken Cameras* by Guy Davidi and Emad Burnat was instrumental in giving viewers a different outlook on the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including non-violent movements against settlements, which began in 2005. Emad Burnat is an olive farmer who used his camera to document seven years of his life in his village, where demonstrations, arrests, and killings were filmed. In addition, he wanted his personal memories with his wife and son, who was growing up during the conflict, to be preserved. Thus, his work can be considered a form of non-violent protest at the cultural level, which had political potential.[12]

Documentaries are also uniquely placed as films with political, cultural, or social subtexts that can help lend a voice to marginalized groups, including women. Women filmmakers are uniquely positioned to create documentaries that encompass their female subjectivity and expose women's struggles. In conservative societies like Palestine, female filmmakers may also have closer physical proximity to women subjects or access certain private spheres that are not open to men. As such, women filmmakers can create innovative and diverse works that help shed light on women's issues through their gaze as directors. Hence, there is a need for an increase in women working in documentary filmmaking to ensure increased representation of such challenges.

[11] S.M. Darraj, "Palestinian Women - Fighting Two Battles," *Monthly Review* 56, no. 1 (2004): 25-36.
[12] Martijn van Gils and Malaka Mohammed Shwaikh, "Fighting Without Weapons: Palestinian Documentary Films and Acts of Resistance," *Asian Affairs* 47, no. 3 (2016): 443–64; Yitvin, "New Film."

For example, filmmaker Julia Bacha further reflects on how her documentary "Naila and the Uprising," which focused on the Palestinian political activist Naila Ayesh, told "a story [that]… had important lessons for women and men alike…[as] both male and female audience members draw inspiration from the critical role women have played in Palestinian civil resistance." In such documentaries about women, female filmmakers from the Middle East and North Africa, including Bacha, utilize transgressive tools, both directly and indirectly, to challenge patriarchal notions of the private-public dichotomy for women.[13]

Research Problem

This research explores the application of the "female gaze" in different documentaries by female directors. In such documentaries, female aesthetics serve as the expressive and creative qualities in the documentary-making process that might trigger an emotional or intellectual response that resonates with female audiences.[14] Despite censorship and political and social restrictions, many such filmmakers, seek to represent and discuss relevant gender issues, which are elaborated upon in the literature review section of this thesis.

The complexity of how the female gaze of women directors influences the portrayal of Arab women, especially Palestinian women, is particularly under-researched. It is also unclear how this concept empowers women within a patriarchal society. Female filmmakers' documentaries about Palestinian women in society are often neglected, necessitating the analysis of the documentaries' creative and social relevance. This researcher[15] argues that it is essential to understand the relationship between the female filmmakers and the Palestinian women who have been the subjects of their films. More specifically, this study attempts to answer the following question: ***How can female filmmakers' gaze, when directing feminist documentaries depicting Palestinian women, lead to the critical questioning and rethinking of patriarchy in Palestine?***

Thesis Structure

[13] Loubna H. Skalli, "Communicating Gender in the Public Sphere: Women and Information Technologies in the MENA," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 2, no. 2 (2006): 55.
[14] Lisa French, "Women in the Director's Chair: The 'Female Gaze' in Documentary Film" in *Female Authorship and the Documentary Image: Theory, Practice and Aesthetics*, eds. Boel Ulfsdotter and Anna Backman Rogers (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 9-21.
[15] This thesis uses the term "this researcher" to refer to the author of the thesis, Zineb Haddoudi.

Following the introduction, this thesis describes the conceptual framework and methodology utilized. Subsequently, Chapter 1 outlines the historical background of women filmmakers. It also focuses on highlighting the contributions of female documentary filmmakers globally. Next, Chapter 2 discusses documentaries created by female documentary filmmakers who have depicted Palestinian women in their films. Then, Chapter 3 includes the analysis and discussions of the documentaries selected as case studies for this research, including the interviews conducted with and questionnaires disseminated to the directors. Lastly, the conclusion summarizes the research findings.

Literature Review

With many practical and ideological difficulties in the Middle East, the socio-political context within the region cannot be discussed openly due to censorship issues. Filmmaking in the Arab world is often seen as an act of activism,[16] especially in relation to women who make documentaries to expose the social problems in their communities. According to van de Peer, Arab women have found ways to subtly negotiate dissidence in their documentary films by developing cultural and political dissent in places where there is censorship, conservativism, and a lack of investment in documentary filmmaking.[17]

Skalli further argues that women in the MENA region have utilized the media to produce valuable knowledge to advocate for women's rights strategically. They have done so by shedding light on women's violence and sexual exploitation issues through print and commercial magazines and broadcast media. Through this, women filmmakers engaged in acts of transgression through documentary films to give a voice and visibility to women in the region.[18]

In the 1970s and 1980s, Arab women began to make documentaries. The first pioneers of documentary filmmaking were Atteyat Al Abnoudy from Egypt and Joycelene Saab from Lebanon. Al Abnoudy started documentary filmmaking in the 1970s in a country primarily interested in cinematic heritage and melodramas. In contrast, Saab committed herself to the less popular and more controversial form of documentary filmmaking during the Lebanese Civil War.[19] Van de Peer further notes that the transnational approach to the films is concerned with women, which is the main focus of feminist film studies.

[16] Stefanie van de Peer, *Negotiating Dissidence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).
[17] Van de Peer, *Negotiating Dissidence*.
[18] Skalli, "Communicating Gender."
[19] Van de Peer, *Negotiating Dissidence*.

In the Maghreb countries, pioneering women documentarians, including the Tunisian Selma Baccar, Algerian Assia Djebar, and Moroccan Izza Genini, created documentaries that depicted the realities of women's issues in their countries and also lent attention to the female gaze. In her study, van de Peer discusses the importance of increasing women's visibility through the female lens. She examines Assia Djebar's use of documentary film to raise awareness of heroic actions undertaken by women during Algeria's struggle for independence from the French between 1954 and 1962. In her movie *La Nouba des Femmes du Mont Chenouain 1978,* Djebar studies the role of women during the Algerian War of Independence and touches upon the trauma that war has inflicted on women.[20] A documentary made by a woman for women, Djebar's film had the express intent of reaching (illiterate) women in the domestic space. The film has many internal monologues and pays attention to voices more than women's faces or bodies. Through this film, Djebar fashioned a new representation aesthetic of independent Algeria and its traditions, whereby women are regarded as agents alongside men.

Another filmmaker noted by Skalli is the Algerian Horria Saihi, who used filmmaking to document Algerian women's cultural histories and roles in Algerian society. Skalli further argues that women use media, including filmmaking, to represent, express alternative voices, and present a vision that challenges stereotypical representations of women.

In Tunisia, filmmaker Selma Baccar made the pioneering documentary "Fatma" in 1978. However, Baccar had to work within the constraints of the Tunisian filmmaking landscape, where many films were censored or banned. In the 1980s, private and independent production companies emerged, giving women the opportunity to express political and feminist points of view. Baccar's film tackled the issue of how Tunisian women's rights in the personal status law were not enforced, despite the law outlining equality between men and women, which led to women's oppression.

During King Hassan II's repressive rule in Morocco, filmmakers, especially documentarians, faced strict censorship. It was only until the late 1980s when European pressure on Morocco increased due to human rights violations that dissenting voices were provided with leniency. For example, Issa Guenini's documentary *Aita* (1987) follows *cheikhat,* female cultural artists or troubadours. These *cheikhat* were usually seen as subversive and often called prostitutes because they escaped restrictive environments to

[20] Stefanie van de Peer, "A Transnational Feminist Rereading of Post-Third Cinema Theory: The Case of Maghreb Documentary," *Journal of African Cinemas* 4, no. 2 (2012): 178.

become independent. Guenini, through her film, tried to shape the representation and perception of these groups of women as artists whose songs invoke a forgotten part of Moroccan identity. She focused on their voices and close-ups to emphasize the role of women as transgenerational guardians of culture and identity.[21]

According to Skalli, the perspectives of Arab and Muslim women filmmakers contribute to reshaping dominant discourses and images of women, as they have used a feminine lens to capture and articulate distinctive angles of women's realities and sensibilities. Skalli further argues that whether or not filmmakers identify their work as feminist, their camera work offers an aesthetic vision that can be personal, bold, creative, challenging, and disturbing at the same time. Through fiction and documentaries, female filmmakers are beginning to offer a reinterpretation of social reality that affirms women's agency and translates the complexity of women's worlds and identities. [22]

For example, the Egyptian filmmaker Atteyat Al Abnoudy used documentaries to explore the impact of class and gender on women's daily lives. Her films showcase women's struggles in a society that restricts their rights as full citizens. Another example is from her 1992 film *Elli Baa Well Eshtra* (Sellers and Buyers). She exposes the challenges female heads of household experience while supporting themselves and their families in Cairo. Abnoudy also released a documentary in 1996 titled *Ayyam Al Demokrateyya* (The Days of Democracy). The director documents the experiences of female candidates in the 1995 Egyptian parliamentary elections and the obstacles they faced.[23] As such, women's camerawork suggests the potential for visual media to counter dominant representations of womanhood that have been restricted to domestic gender roles. [24]

In the Gulf region, Sadia Mir and Christina Pashyn discuss how documentaries can potentially provide visibility to Qatari women in a traditional society where they are prohibited culturally from appearing in visual media that men dominate. Despite Qatari women's strong presence in the workforce, they remain unrepresented in the media due to cultural and social norms.[25] The authors intended to study a *majaalis* (plural: majlis), a traditional gathering unique to the Middle East. Members of society typically meet to discuss

[21] Van de Peer, "Transnational Feminist," 175-89.
[22] Skalli, "Communicating Gender," 50.
[23] Ibid., 48.
[24] Ibid., 50.
[25] Julia Breslin and Toby Jones, "Qatar," in *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance*, eds. Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin (New York: Freedom House, 2010).

social, political, and economic issues relevant to their communities.[26] Since *majaalis* are gender-segregated, the authors wanted to investigate whether similar substantive talks could occur there.[27] However, most women who participated wanted to be heard but not seen due to cultural restrictions in such settings. Thus, the performative nature of the documentary involved the construction and staging of filmmaking and inspired students to utilize innovative tools to respect the Qatari women's wishes regarding their visibility. These innovative tools included reenactments of interviews, animation, and vignettes to represent the Qatari women of the Majaalis, even if they could not be visible on camera.

This article highlighted the critical role of documentary filmmaking in telling the stories of women on a public level of discourse and encouraging community dialogue around the social and political issues experienced by Qatari women, such as gender discrimination in the workplace. However, the authors did not elaborate on how this information was utilized to achieve social justice for Qatari women. They claimed that after the study was published, they were asked by the local government to form recommendations regarding the country's gender-based policies, such as maternity leave, female citizenship rules, and female employment quotas. The study also did not consider the fact that Qatar is an authoritarian, resource-rich, paternalistic state. Since the authors did not provide this information, it could be argued that their work did not necessarily result in policy changes that have helped Qatari women, as women's invisibility remains a problem in the Gulf.[28]

The documentary has also served as a powerful tool in raising awareness during the Syrian Civil War. Syrian women filmmakers have utilized documentary films to critique political regimes creatively. For example, van de Peer argues that Syrian filmmakers such as Reem Ali, through her documentary film *Zabad*, criticized Syrian President Bashar Al Assad's regime. Van de Peer references the transnational feminist Ellie Shohat, who argued that film studies have been homogenous and demonstrate a disregard for diversity.[29] She emphasizes that more attention should be given to moderate and female expressions of

[26] Sadia Mir and Christina Paschyn, "Qatar's Hidden Women: Symbolic Annihilation and Documentary Media Practice," *Visual Communication Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (2018): 96.
[27] Mir and Paschyn, "Hidden Women," 96.
[28] Christina Paschyn, "Educated and Ambitious, Qatari Women Nudge Their Way Into the Office," *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 1, 2014, http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2014/0501/Educated-and-ambitious-Qatari-women-nudge-their-way-into-the-office.
[29] Stefanie van de Peer "The Moderation of Creative Dissidence in Syria: Reem Ali's Documentary Zabad," *Journal for Cultural Research* 16, no. 2-3 (2012): 297-317.

dissidence, such as those found in Reem Ali's documentary film, and which van De Peer describes as the director's "moderation aesthetics." These are described as rebellious without denouncing violence instead of implying and contemplating.[30]

In her work, Janet Burnstein analyzes two documentaries made by female filmmakers, noting how Israeli women filmmakers have used transgressive acts to film their documentaries.[31] Burstein suggests that Israeli female filmmakers have been able to choose not to see what is happening to the "other side" or the Palestinians, as they are not faced with the reality of the occupation in the same way Palestinians are. This can be showcased in that Palestinians do not currently nor have they historically had the same freedom of movement as Israelis.[32] Such documentaries implicitly expose Israeli women's privilege in contrast to Palestinian women,[33], and it is essential not to overlook these inequalities and address them.

Female filmmakers have also utilized documentaries as a tool to engage with gender and political identity critically, as Dorit Naaman highlights in her analysis of two autobiographical documentaries, the Israeli documentary *My Land Zion* by Yulie Cohen Gerstel in 2004 and the Palestinian documentary *Paradise Lost* by Ebtissam Mara'na in 2003. Naaman chose these two films to explain how they critically discuss national narratives, gender placement within those narratives, and mother-daughter relationships.

Naaman argues that the two female filmmakers have harnessed the autobiographical genre in these two films and engaged in a more extensive critique of nationalism and women's place in it by being the subjects of their films. Naaman focuses on these women's political discussions in her analysis. She begins her investigation of the first documentary produced by Cohen and closely examines the conversations between Cohen and her parents about the events of the Nakba in 1948. While analyzing the conversation between Cohen and her friend Motti and later with her Zionist parents, the author critiques the rhetoric echoed by Motti in justifying the killing of Arabs and "defending" the Jewish state.

[30] Van de Peer, "Moderation," 305.
[31] J. Burstein, "Like Windows in the Wall: Four Documentaries by Israeli Women," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 25 (2013): 129-46.
[32] Are Knudsen and Sari Hanafi, eds. *Palestinian Refugees: Identity, Space and Place in the Levant* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).
[33] Elisabeth Marteu, "Israeli and Palestinian Feminisms: Postcolonial Issues," *Revue Tiers Monde* 209, no. 1 (2012): 72.

In her analysis of the Palestinian documentary, Naaman explains that the filmmaker Mara'na examines her relationship with her mother, father, and the village elders, and her conflicts surrounding what it means to be a modern woman from a rural Palestinian village while being well integrated into Israel. She argues that gender, religion, nationalism, and differing lifestyles intertwine throughout the film.[34] The article provides insightful perceptions of gender and political discussions in these two analyzed films.

The literature explored above demonstrates how female filmmakers have been approaching documentary filmmaking in the Arab world, showing and conveying relevant issues related to them. Women remain the central focus of these documentaries. The discussion also highlights how the female gaze is utilized by certain directors to address relevant issues pertaining to women and the potential of analyzing their work using a feminist lens. These particular documentaries, which entail feminist practices, have not been thoroughly studied in the academic literature in general.[35]

The following section briefly describes the documentaries selected as case studies for this research before proceeding to discuss the conceptual framework and methodology.

Selected Documentaries

In this thesis, this researcher analyzes three documentaries that depict Palestinian women who are challenging social dynamics and gender relations in their societies.

1. The Judge

The first film that is studied is *The Judge*, a documentary directed by Erika Cohn in 2017. It depicts the life and work of Kholoud El Faquih, who became the first woman to be appointed as a judge in the sharia courts of the Palestinian territories in Ramallah. The documentary offers a unique portrait of El Faquih and her journey as a lawyer. It showcases her fight to achieve justice for women and her drop-in visits with clients, friends, and family. The film highlights some of the most common conflicts in the domestic life of Palestinians, which include court cases pertaining to custody of children, divorce, and domestic violence. It also

[34] Dorit Naaman, "Unruly Daughters to Mother Nation: Palestinian and Israeli First-Person Films," *Hypatia* 23, no. 2 (2008): 20-21.
[35] Lisa French, *The Female Gaze in Documentary Film: An International Perspective* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

offers insight into the life of the women in that region and how sharia gets applied in daily life.[36]

2. Naila and the Uprising

The second film is *Naila and the Uprising*, produced in 2017 by Julia Bacha. This documentary film recounts the story of Naila Ayesh, an active student organizer in Gaza in the 1980s. Naila spent years championing economic independence for women and self-sufficiency for the Palestinians under Israeli occupation. The film discussed her struggles when she was arrested in 1986 by the Israeli army while she was pregnant. [37]

3. What Walaa Wants

The third film is *What Walaa Wants*, directed by Christy Garland in 2018. It is a film about a strong-willed Palestinian teenager who strives to join the Palestinian Security Forces (PSF), prompted by her upbringing in a West Bank refugee camp. During this time, her mother Latifa was sent to an Israeli prison for eight years due to her alleged involvement in a militant attack. Walaa's ambition and desire to have agency over her life is manifested in her interest in becoming physically stronger by joining the police, which would allow her to carry a gun to ensure her security and that of her people.[38]

[36] "A New Documentary Film From Director Erika Cohn," *The Judge Film*, accessed December 10, 2021, www.thejudgefilm.com/about; Jean Bently, "How 'The Judge' Inspired Middle Eastern Women to Pick Up the Gavel," *IndieWire*, November 20, 2018, https://www.indiewire.com/2018/11/the-judge-documentary-erika-cohn-kholoud-faqih-1202018418/.
[37] "Naila and the Uprising: Watch Free," Just Vision, accessed December 13, 2021, https://justvision.org/nailaandtheuprising.
[38] "What Walaa Wants," National Film Board of Canada, accessed November 20, 2021, https://www.nfb.ca/film/what-walaa-wants/.

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

Each of the documentaries that have been selected is primarily analyzed by the researcher through the use of a feminist lens. A feminist lens explores various issues central to gender and social action.[39]

The Female Gaze

The female gaze was first coined by feminists inspired by Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In her work, she argues that classical Hollywood films required all spectators, regardless of their sex, to identify with the male protagonist and adopt the controlling male gaze through which such films were structured. "The female gaze" thus marked out a neglected field.[40] In her essay, Mulvey contributed to film studies by applying feminist thought to visual studies, which proved crucial to rethinking women's representation.[41]

Building on this, in *Women in the Director's Chair: The 'Female Gaze,'* Lisa French explores what it means to employ the "female gaze" in documentary making. French defines the “female gaze” as the individual way in which filmmakers who identify as female communicate their female subjectivity, which is shaped by their female voice, experiences, and perspectives, while also making use of female aesthetic approaches.[42] She also suggests that there is some evidence from women themselves that being a female filmmaker can serve as an advantage in gaining access to subjects through closer physical proximity to them within documentary filmmaking.

French argues that, for some female filmmakers, the "female gaze" embodies feminism, noting that men dominated the production of films. Hence, they influenced the representation of women and restricted it to their gaze. In addition, she states that women are

[39] P. Leavy, “The Feminist Practice of Content Analysis,” in *Feminist Research Practice*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2007), 228-48.
[40] Roberta Sassatelli, “Interview with Laura Mulvey,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 28, no. 5 (2011): 123-43.
[41] Sassatelli, “Interview,” 124.
[42] French, “Director’s Chair,” 9-21.

more likely to make films about other women because they are interested in their stories. Women will tell such narratives from their gendered point of view. This is essential because the problem with not having the same number of men and women in key creative roles is that men have more opportunities to tell their stories, leaving female-centered stories untold.[43]

Drawing on these ideas, this researcher intends to explore whether female filmmakers chose to feature Palestinian women using the female gaze to convey a more nuanced and empowering representation of their subjects. This researcher employs this notion while further analyzing the films as works of art with their own sociopolitical relevance. By doing so, this author intends to draw on the essential premise of how biographical or personal portrait films – which is the genre chosen as a sample for this research – tend to bring up broader social issues and can be implicitly evoked by the films and individuals featured therein, where they often attest to or live out the underlying issue.[44]

Components of the Female Gaze

Through her study, French outlines useful markers and guidelines to better understand and identify the female gaze, including the critical marker of female subjectivity. The female gaze is about prioritizing the feeling body; in other words, the subjective camera of the director attempts to step into the protagonist's shoes. The camera frame attempts to share and evoke sensation through *feeling* rather than seeing. The female gaze is also about returning the gaze, where the protagonist has agency and is no longer seen as an object.

As director and cinematographer Jill Churchill note, "the male gaze seeks to devour and control. The female gaze is more a frame of mind, where the approach to subject and material is more emotional and respectful." Churchill's notion of the female gaze concerns understanding what it means to be female in a patriarchal world.[45] Additionally, the female gaze decolonizes the gaze by returning a different angle that critiques dominant and normalized paradigms.

Another essential component of the female gaze is aesthetics, which encompass expressive, creative, formal, and stylistic qualities. Sex and gender often influence aesthetics. For the female gaze, female subjectivity and its aestheticization in the film are seen through

[43] French, *International Perspective*, 64.
[44] Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary, Third Edition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).
[45] French, *International Perspective*, 61.

the lens of a *female* aesthetics that focuses closely on the female experiences and perspectives contingent on cultural and historical situations or circumstances.[46]

Since the female aesthetic represents female subjectivity, it may also be considered a *feminist* aesthetic, which focuses on advocating for women's rights and highlights female perspectives that aim to counter a patriarchal culture. In contemporary filmmaking, a feminist aesthetic is expressed subtly, less visibly, and directly conveys female subjectivity through a female aesthetic. It is arguably more likely to be found in the creations of female directors, given that they are subjected to patriarchal ideologies that depict stereotypes about women. Hence, she describes it as an aesthetic of a woman who prefers to present an alternative to male-centered discourse.[47]

To examine the manifestations of the female gaze in the documentaries this research analyzes, the primary hallmarks mentioned above of the female gaze, especially pertaining to feminist aesthetics, are analyzed and used to identify the main themes of the documentaries studied. These themes are further explored and discussed in order to examine the feminist aspects of these documentaries. The themes are also reflected in the questions formulated for the qualitative interview that was conducted and the questionnaires that were disseminated.

Research Methods

This thesis utilizes the qualitative research method by analyzing a few female filmmakers' productions of documentaries depicting Palestinian women. The research method also involves combining audio-visual material and content analysis of secondary sources in English and Arabic. This researcher chose documentaries as primary sources to analyze because documentaries can serve as a powerful medium that depicts realities, intimate stories, and social issues through personal journeys and "in the complex interaction between text, context, producer and spectator."[48]

In fact, some documentary scholars view the act of producing documentaries as a media practice that aims to achieve specific social change through increasing public engagement with a particular issue of concern.[49] In other words, as audiences nowadays increasingly access documentaries through multiple outlets, such as theatres, televisions, online streaming outlets, and social media, documentary storytelling has an influential

[46] Ibid., 87.
[47] French, *International Perspective,* 77.
[48] Paul Ward, *Documentary: The Margins of Reality* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), 11.
[49] Caty Borum Chattoo and Lauren Feldman, "Storytelling for Social Change: Leveraging Documentary and Comedy for Public Engagement in Global Poverty," *Journal of Communication* 67, no. 5 (2017): 678-701.

persuasive role that can be instrumental in shaping public opinion and acting as the centerpiece of strategic efforts to spotlight social issues. Documentaries are increasingly used as an advocacy communication mechanism to raise awareness and advocate for change on social issues.[50] In this thesis, every documentary has been analyzed using specific female gaze markers, themes, and aesthetics.

Moreover, documentaries represent history because they add a new dimension to popular memory and social history.[51] Contrary to fiction films, where the people involved are professionally trained actors; documentaries stand to represent the views of individuals or groups by telling their stories and offering their perspectives on a particular matter at hand. Instead, these subjects are social actors who "conduct their lives more or less as they would have done without the presence of a camera, [and] they remain cultural participants rather than theatrical performers." This factor is essential for this research's documentary analysis as the main focus is on how the depiction of women, who are the social actors, in this case, is showcased by the documentary creators.[52]

In addition, this research uses interviews and questionnaires disseminated to the directors mentioned above as additional primary sources.[53] Conducting interviews with filmmakers of documentaries can offer a concrete first-person testimony from them, in addition to the analysis of their work. The questions asked in the interview and questionnaires further reflect this researcher’s interest in knowing more about the filmmaker’s perspective and experiences as women in creating their work within the context of Palestine. This author also intended to explore their choice and approach to highlight the themes and topics related to their female subjects and overall context.

Two of the questionnaires were disseminated by exchanging written questions via email to Julia Bacha and Christy Garland (or members of their filming crew). The other was a phone call with Erika Cohn. The purpose of including this primary data in the analysis is to assess how and whether the director's female gaze was employed to challenge patriarchy by determining whether the filmmakers utilized specific markers in their directing to expose gendered social issues in Palestinian society. The questions were formulated in accordance with the markers and themes of feminist aesthetics.

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[50] Caty Borum Chattoo, *Story Movements: How Documentaries Empower People and Inspire Social Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).
[51] Nichols, *Introduction*, 30.
[52] Ibid.
[53] See Appendix 1 to read the interview questions that were distributed.

The analysis of the answers is employed in this research to provide a more nuanced understanding of the effects of the female gaze on producing feminist documentaries that can help empower women.

Limitations

In order to have a concise research sample, this researcher intentionally limited the documentaries analyzed to those produced between 2017 and 2018 and revolved around Palestinian women and gender dynamics in Palestinian society. Another limitation this author experienced when conducting this research is that it could not be carried out in Palestine due to time limitations and travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. If it had been possible for the researcher to be there and go personally to media organizations in the West Bank, access to local media organizations and contact with the filmmakers could have been facilitated. Some of these media organizations have funded and helped Palestinian women filmmakers to make their documentaries. Although the researcher called some of these organizations and attempted to contact local Palestinian female filmmakers for interviews via email, no responses were received.

Lastly, given the short period of a few months that the researcher had to complete this research, the number of interviews conducted was also limited. Of the seven filmmakers contacted, only three filmmakers responded and agreed to be interviewed, which is why the number of documentaries analyzed was restricted to three.

Chapter 1: Historical Background

This chapter firstly discusses women's entry into documentary filmmaking, focusing on how this medium engages with various subjects, including race, gender, and nationalism. It then proceeds to outline women's involvement in this genre of filmmaking historically and the relevance of highlighting women filmmakers' contributions in this domain in different parts of the world.

1.1 Women's Access to Documentary Filmmaking

Women have been directing documentaries since the 1900s, with documentary filmmaking existing as a genre for over 100 years.[54] Today, documentary filmmaking has a higher number of women participating as directors, more than in other filmmaking genres. Several factors have contributed to this and to women's increased participation and success in the documentary field. French attributes this high participation to a few factors: Firstly, documentaries do not require a high budget, which means that the threshold for entry is less, and the pay is lower than that in other fields.[55]

Secondly, another factor that attracts women filmmakers to the documentary medium is the possibility to investigate and have a relationship with the reality of their subjects while also offering them some freedom and independence to make their own decisions.[56] Additionally, documentary filmmaking offers women filmmakers the possibility of creating their opportunities and serving as writers, directors, producers, cinematographers, and editors.[57] Moreover, they can also employ other women, which means that the more women there are in the field, the more they hire. [58]

[54] Russell Belk, "Examining Markets, Marketing, Consumers, and Society Through Documentary Films," *Journal of Macromarketing* 31, no. 4 (2011): 403.
[55] Harriet Margolis, Alexis Krasilovsky, and Julia Stein, *Shooting Women: Behind the Camera, Around the World* (Bristol: Intellect Ltd, 2015), 73.
[56] French, *International Perspective*, 16-17.
[57] Stacy Smith, Katherine Pieper, and Marc Choueiti, *Exploring the Barriers and Opportunities for Independent Women Filmmakers* (Park City, Los Angeles: Sundance Institute and Women in Film Los Angeles, 2013), 10
[58] French, *International Perspective*, 25-46.

Thirdly, women's increased accessibility to this field also means that female filmmakers are more likely to create films about female subjects with high empathy and sensitivity, solidifying the connection between filmmaker and subject. French explains that male filmmakers are empathetic, but women's empathy is expressed differently.[59]

Nevertheless, women still face many obstacles to participating in global screen industries. Barriers include unconscious bias against women, men's domination of production and filmmaking,[60] non-inclusive professional networks, work environments that are not family-friendly,[61] a lack of role models,[62] and women's films being viewed as niche.[63] Moreover, financial challenges make it more challenging for women to produce documentary projects. Raising money is challenging because women's storytelling is seen as financially too "risky" to invest in. French also notes that many broadcasters are also not interested in documentary films with a "strong woman's" point of view. Socio-cultural barriers also exist, such as silence on sexism, sexual harassment,[64], and the disparity in pay.[65] It is also challenging to maintain a sustainable career for filmmakers since budgets for documentaries are generally low and funding inequities persist. Films by male filmmakers about men get the most funding, even though documentaries made by women directors are amongst the best performing in terms of awards received and at the box office.[66]

1.2 The Beginnings of Women Filmmakers in the Field of Documentary Filmmaking

Women's engagement in documentary filmmaking dates back to the silent film era (from the mid-1890s to the late 1920s), where significant contributions were made to ethnographic filmmaking throughout the years. In late 1920, Zora Neal Hurston was possibly the first African American woman filmmaker to document African American life through documentary film. The first pioneer in the documentary subgenre type known as "a

[59] Ibid., 27.
[60] Deb Verhoeven, Katarzyna Musial, Stuart Palmer, Sarah Taylor, Shaukat Abidi, Vejune Zemaityte, Lachlan Simpson, "Controlling for Openness in the Male-dominated Collaborative Networks of the Global Film Industry," *PLOS One* 15, no. 6 (2020): 2.
[61] Natalie Wreyford, "The Real Cost of Childcare: Motherhood and Flexible Creative Labour in the UK Film Industry," *Studies in the Maternal* 5, no. 2 (2013): 1-2.
[62] Kathleen Sweeney, "Grrls Make Movies: The Emergence of Women-led Filmmaking Initiatives for Teenage Girls," *Afterimage* 33, no. 3 (2005): 37-42.
[63] French, *International Perspective*, 27.
[64] Sophie Hennekam and Dawn Bennett "Sexual Harassment in the Creative Industries: Tolerance, Culture and the Need for Change," *Gender, Work & Organization* 24, no. 4 (2017): 417-34.
[65] Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, and Barbara Creed, *Feminist Film Theorists* (London: Routledge, 2006).
[66] French, *International Perspective*, 28-29.

compilation film," which usually encompasses compiling previously produced or found footage, was Soviet filmmaker Esfir Shub, who released her movie *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* in 1927. The only known silent film made in Columbia, *Gold Platinum*, was by Kathleen Romoli in 1932, an expatriate American living there.

Women have also been contributing both intellectually and creatively to documentary filmmaking. For instance, film editor, director, and archivist Elizaveta Svilova has made extensive collaborations to documentary films with her husband Dziga Vertov from the 1920s through the late 1940s.[67] Her contributions were significant to global film history, given that Vertov's "film theory and practice focused on montage as the fundamental guiding force of cinema." Svilova further contributed as an editor to her and her husband's groundbreaking experimentation, which significantly advanced the early principles of cinematic montage or what later became known as "editing" in filmmaking. [68]

Women added their creative touch and meaningfully collaborated with their husbands in the field of documentary filmmaking as editors, writers, and publicists. This was not uncommon, as women did not have as many opportunities to enter the field independently. Feminist scholar Shilyn Warren outlines these contributions in her book *Subject to Reality: Women, and Documentary Film*, where she re-examines women's roles in many successful documentaries that men directed. Among these documentaries was *Nanook of the North* (1922) by Robert Flaherty, widely considered the first documentary that influenced later films.[69]

Warren notes that as much as *Nanook of the North* is a documentary that brought aesthetic reverence to real-life scenes, the film had a powerful impact on its audience. The director manipulated audiences into believing that the dramatic story of an indigenous man surviving the brutality of nature is a faithful representation of Inuit life near the Hudson Bay in the early 1920s. Moreover, the film was the first of its kind to bring a non-Westerner alive on the screen and depict the subject with such sympathy and humanity. In contrast to the other pioneer, Dziga Vertov further notes that Flaherty specifically signals the documentary's ethnographic and gendered origin.[70] Warren's interest was to study the contributions of Flaherty's wife, Frances, specifically, with regard to the documentary.

[67] Lilya Kaganovsky, "Film Editing as Women's Work: Ėsfir' Shub, Elizaveta Svilova, and the Culture of Soviet Montage," *Apparatus: Film, Media and Digital Cultures of Central and Eastern Europe* 6 (2018).
[68] French, *International Perspective*, 17.
[69] Warren Shiloh, *Subject to Reality: Women and Documentary Film* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2019).

Flaherty's biographer describes Frances as the "significant architect" of her husband's career through her writing, editing, and work as his publicist. Despite the problems associated with this type of representation in general, Frances had an influential role in shaping the representation of *Nanook of the North*'s subjects by promoting it as "genuine," "true," and "simple." This partially signals her gendered contribution to the ethnocentric worldview that shaped Flaherty's work. Warren further notes that Frances's work is under-recognized in documentary studies, which focuses predominantly on the contributions of male directors.[71]

In the 1940s and during World War II, women were presented with specific opportunities to take on key creative roles. For example, Japan's first female director, Tazuko Sakan, directed ten documentaries on the wartime conditions in Manchuria between 1936 and 1944 to showcase women's perspectives at the time. However, after the war and during peacetime, she could no longer find work as a director, and her role was reduced to scriptwriting. The decrease in such opportunities happened to many women after World War II due to the return of men to work and the decline in demand for documentaries.[72]

During the 1950s, women's contributions to filmmaking were more restricted. In addition, these years were marked by conservatism in some Western states, which gave rise to feminist activist films. For instance, Jill Craigie was a British documentarian who made a film *To Be a Woman* in 1951 to push for equal pay for women at work. Women filmmakers attempted to influence the representation of women, although few would refer to themselves as feminists. By the end of the 1950s and early 1960s, women filmmakers were interested in experimental and avant-garde documentary films, which were film genres that emphasized the artisanal basis without regard to the structures of traditional narrative cinema. Avant-garde films were often produced to critique dominant, classical Hollywood cinema. Among the filmmakers of avant-garde films was French filmmaker Agnes Varda, who was interested in the female gaze. Her films mainly examined the construction of female identity outside the narrow confines of the male gaze.[73]

Another feminist cinematographer, Zoe Dirse, used her camera and worked on a documentary film to showcase how all gazes could be female. Her documentary film *Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives* (1992) tells the stories of older lesbians coming out in the 1950s, where all the gazes of the movie are female. Dirse argues

[71] Shiloh, *Subject*, 37.
[72] French, *International Perspective*, 19.
[73] Ibid., 20.

that when deliberately shifted from male to female, the gaze allows women to view themselves not as objects of male desire but female desire.[74]

In Africa, Beti Ellerson asserts how documentary films made by women filmmakers have gained excellent visibility at international film festivals and cultural venues worldwide. She argues that African women have made significant contributions to cinema due to a global interest in sharing cultures through the moving image and the evolution in dialogic exchanges that these films invoke in such media. She further asserts that the knowledge transmitted through documentaries from generation to generation of African female filmmakers can help them draw essential lessons from their elders, as documentaries can delve into topics close to the heart and look at them from different angles.[75]

In the Middle East and North Africa, the political events since the Arab Spring began in 2011 have further affected female documentarians in the region, urging them to create politically engaged documentaries.[76] For example, in Tunisia, the pioneering autobiographical documentarian Nadia El Fani has made documentaries that are politically outspoken and critical of Tunisia's political system. Her documentary *Ouled Lenine* (2009) interrogates her family's past and questions the present.

In another film of hers, *Laïcité Inch'Allah* (2012), the documentary was filmed partially in French as well as in Darija (the Tunisian Arabic dialect), where people were interviewed about their personal views on the consumption of alcohol in Ramadan. Through the film, she attempts to reflect the religious and political hybridity of Tunisia itself, putting her own personal perspective in an increasingly regional and global context socially, politically, and also religiously. This chapter highlighted some historical beginnings of women's access to documentaries in different parts of the world, including the Middle East. The focus of the next chapter is on introducing and providing an overview of the three main documentaries that are the focus of this thesis.

[74] Zoe Dirse, "Gender in Cinematography: Female Gaze (Eye) Behind the Camera," *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 3, no. 1 (2013): 15-29.
[75] Bei Ellerson, "African Women and the Documentary: Storytelling, Visualizing History, from the Personal to the Political," *Black Camera: The Newsletter of the Black Film Center/Archives* 8, no. 1 (2016): 223-39.
[76] Faizal Khan, "Arab's New Spring of Successful Women Directors," *The Economic Times*, December 8, 2018, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/arabs-new-spring-of-succcessful-women-directors/articleshow/67002863.cms?from=mdr.

Chapter 2: An Overview of Documentaries on Palestinian Women

This chapter describes a few documentaries depicting Palestinian women directed by female filmmakers. Before providing an overview of the main filming techniques, I introduce each of the three documentaries and address the main synopsis, events, and certain scenes from each. The documentaries discussed are *The Judge* by Erika Cohn, *Naila and the Uprising* by Julia Bacha, and *What Walaa Wants* by Christy Garland.

***2.1 The Judge* (2017) by Erika Cohn**

The Judge is an hour-long documentary film that depicts the life and work of Palestinian Judge Khouloud El Faquih, the first woman to be appointed as a judge in the sharia courts of the Palestinian territories in Ramallah.[77] This documentary was directed by American filmmaker Erika Cohn in 2017 and offered insight into the judge's fight to achieve justice for women.

Overview of Scenes

In the opening scene, El Faquih is shown heading with her children to a neighbor's or family member's house. She provides counsel to a woman regarding domestic violence and what a wife can do legally to obtain a divorce in such a case. We see then the judge in her private courtroom as she takes on the case of a woman demanding alimony from her husband, whom she was in the process of divorcing. Cohn follows El Faquih around her workplace as she attends a roundtable discussion with several women. She discusses the importance of changing stereotypical images of women's roles in schools and society.[78]

Filming Techniques

Cohn interviews a prominent member of the Muslim community who is against women becoming judges in Islamic courts, Sheikh Hussam Eddine Affani. She also interviews former chief justice Sheikh Tayseer, who supported the appointment of El Faquih as a sharia judge.[79] In parallel to showing these two sheiks and their different stances, Cohn films

[77] *The Judge*, directed by Erika Cohn (2017; the United States, Idle Wild Films), documentary.
[78] Cohn, *The Judge*.
[79] Ibid.

passersby on the streets of Ramallah, where her crew asks Palestinian men and women about their different opinions about women becoming sharia judges. Cohn also includes an interview with a female marriage officiant, which is a job that is traditionally occupied position by men.

The scenes of the film alternate between showing El Faquih in her private home as she prepares food with her husband and children in the kitchen and showing scenes of her in the courtroom handling different cases. Cohn also goes to the home of Sheikh Tayseer's first wife, where we see him in the garden with his wife and daughters, drinking coffee. Sheikh Tayseer is then interviewed alone in his home and asked why he married more than one woman, but we do not see him answering. Instead, Cohn's camera interjects shots of Sheikh Tayseer in his home with El Faquih in her home. Through a voiceover, viewers hear the judge expressing her opposition to polygyny, as she believes it was a more appropriate practice in the earlier years of Islam but not as necessary in modern times.[80]

Cohn also documents the setbacks that El Faquih faced in her career as a judge when she was demoted to carry out administrative work. She was not given any cases after witnessing a violent incident of a woman being killed by her mentally ill husband outside her office. Cohn shows the judge narrating these events as tears well up in her eyes. The circumstances and storyline of this specific case were highlighted in the film. The judge took action to hold the chief of justice accountable for what happened as he disregarded El Faquih's recommendation to provide psychological help to the man discussed above. As such, Cohn emphasizes through her film that El Faquih experienced setbacks in her work due to her having spoken up about corruption in the political system.[81]

Toward the end of the film, Cohn shows viewers El Faquih's aspirations to become chief of justice one day, and her position as a sharia judge was restored once a new chief of justice was appointed. Cohn includes scenes of El Faquih taking a protégée, which aims to become a judge, and viewers also see scenes where five newly appointed judges were selected, primarily men. The film then ends with a scene of El Faquih's protégé passing her exam to become a newly appointed sharia judge.[82]

[80] Cohn, *The Judge*.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

2.2 *Naila and the Uprising* (2017) by Julia Bacha

Overview of Scenes

Naila and the Uprising is an hour-long documentary created by Brazilian filmmaker Julia Bacha in 2017 and was shot in the West Bank. This documentary recounts the remarkable story of Naila Ayesh, an active student organizer in Gaza in the 1980s.[83] Naila spent years advocating for Palestinian women's economic independence under Israeli occupation. The film opens with a shot of one of Ramallah's busy streets in the West Bank, and viewers are shown Naila with her son, Majd, as she shows him photos of himself as a baby.

The film focuses on Naila's story during her early political activism in Gaza and the West Bank. She speaks of her experience being arrested and the time she spent in an Israeli jail. When she had been first arrested, she was pregnant. However, she underwent a miscarriage during her initial arrest and investigation, which was an incident that made international headlines. Bacha also interviewed two Israeli journalists who reported on the events at that time.[84]

Naila was arrested again after she had gotten pregnant for a second time, and once again when Majd was a baby. She narrates her experience of not being able to hold him as he was brought to jail to visit her. Palestinian women activists launched a petition to release Naila to be reunited with her son but failed. Eventually, they allowed the jail administration to let Naila have Majd stay with her in jail.

Filming Techniques

In the documentary, Bacha includes animated scenes with Majd's voice heard in narration. The animated scenes further depict a woman carrying her child walking and handing out leaflets during the First Intifada (uprising) between 1987 and 1993. The animations were used throughout the film to visualize past events, such as Naila's experience in jail, and to further depict the hopes and prospects of Palestinian women. We see Naila and fellow women activists speaking in conferences, urging Jewish women and mothers to join a peace process.[85]

[83] *Naila and the Uprising*, directed by Julia Bacha (2017; USA, Israel: Taskovski Films), documentary.
[84] Bacha, *Naila, and the Uprising*.
[85] Ibid.

Throughout the film, Bacha utilizes a combination of direct interviews with Naila, her husband, her son, Palestinian women detainees who were with Naila in jail, and other activists.[86] These activists highlighted the Palestinian Women's movement during the First Intifada in helping women sustain themselves economically by selling local produce as most men were deported or exiled, including Naila's husband. Bacha places Naila's storytelling at the center of the Intifada's events, and viewers are shown footage from the peaceful protests and marches of Palestinian women during the uprisings. As shots of the women holding banners are shown, Bacha interjects this with footage of the Israeli army brutally arresting protestors, including a scene of Naila being dragged away by her hair by one of the Israeli soldiers.[87]

Bacha also shows viewers the aftermath of the First Intifada, in which the women featured in the film, including Naila, spoke about how their setbacks, political contributions, and public roles were marginalized after the men returned from their exile and were released from Israeli jails. After the PA was appointed, this was also the case. The activists further speak about how they were striving to achieve social and political equality for Palestinian women, and Naila also became president of the Woman's Affair Center, an organization that encouraged women to have an income and participate in political life. The interviewees explain the new challenges Palestinian women faced and how their activism re-focused on demanding their rights from the PA, which continued to marginalize them. The film ends on an optimistic note, stating their commitment to continue the struggle against the occupation and pass it on to other generations.[88]

2.3 *What Walaa Wants* (2018) by Christy Garland

What Walaa Wants is a 1.5 hour-long documentary film directed by Canadian filmmaker Christy Garland in 2018, where she follows a 16-year-old teenager named Walaa for six years as she strives to join the PSF.[89]

[86] Ibid.
[87] Bacha, *Naila and the Uprising*.
[88] Ibid.
[89] National Film Board of Canada, "What Walaa Wants."

Overview of Scenes

The film opens with Wala's mother's voiceover discussing how she was escorting a suicide bomber to a safe place when she got arrested by the Israeli army.[90] Simultaneously, viewers are shown young 16-year-old Walaa riding a horse. Among the prisoners released in this case was Walaa's mother, Latifa, and a 15-year-old Walaa is shown expressing her happiness at her mother's release. A year later, Walaa is shown standing and listening to her mother speaking about her time in jail, and viewers are also shown Walaa as she goes out with her friends and talks about her aspirations to join the PSF and become a policewoman.

Then, Walaa is shown with her mother as they discuss a day where the PA forces raided a refugee camp, and there were clashes between residents of the camp and the PA forces. Walaa mentions how she was able to film this on her phone, and viewers are shown scenes of the footage taken from her phone of the events. Walaa has had many discussions with her family trying to convince them of her intention to join the PSF. She often voices her wish to obtain a licensed gun, which she indicates she wants more than anything.[91]

Eventually, Walaa is shown going with her mother to the PSF's office as she files her police application. Garland's camera follows Walaa throughout her time in the police academy, where she receives the military training that she hoped for. At the same time, she occasionally voices her wish to work in the field and not sit behind a desk.

Garland documented Walaa's experience in the police academy closely, as viewers are shown various scenes of Walaa during her training, interacting with peers, and being disciplined by her supervisor. In the last scene, she is shown as she is praised for her perseverance, strong personality, and the completion of her training as a policewoman. She is not shown working in the field, although a few scenes are included where Walaa listens to plaintiffs' testimonies as she sits behind a desk.[92]

Filming Techniques

Garland’s camera showed shots of the Balata Refugee Camp where Walaa and her family live. Garland also used archival footage of the public celebration of the release of Palestinian

[90] *What Walaa Wants*, directed by Christy Garland (2018; Canada, Denmark: The National Film Board of Canada), documentary.
[91] Garland, *What Walaa Wants*.
[92] Ibid.

prisoners in Nablus in a deal with Israel to exchange prisoners.[93] Through the narration of Walaa's sister, viewers are also shown the events that led to the arrest of Mohammed, Walaa's younger brother, by the Israeli army for trespassing to work in Israel. While he was being tried in court, Walaa tried to get closer to her brother. However, the soldiers blocked her path and she subsequently attacks an Israeli soldier, although no footage of these events is shown.[94] Nonetheless, Garland shows us commentary on the screen from the case built against Walaa by the Samaria Military Court in Israel. Additional scenes of Walaa and her brother playing earlier in the film are also shown. Following the attack of the soldier, Walaa was arrested and jailed for 15 days, and she spent five of those days in solitary confinement. As she was released, we see an exhausted Walaa listening emphatically to her mother's experience in jail and sharing her own experience with the family. By the end of the film, Garland's camera focuses on Walaa and follows her as she works.[95]

[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Garland, *What Walaa Wants*.

Chapter 3: Discussion and Analysis

In this chapter, this researcher discusses the three main documentaries using an empowering lens and analyzes the display of documentary feminist practices by examining the various topics that concern women that the directors have implicitly or explicitly chosen to include in their films. Utilizing the interviews that the author conducted, the usage of feminist aesthetics is highlighted to explain how the directors represented the agency of their subjects.

Feminist documentaries are created when filmmakers express feminist notions through their female gaze while advocating for their subjects' choices. French notes that a feminist documentary is more likely to be interested in the female condition and offer a view of life from a female perspective. Therefore, these documentaries can potentially provide female audiences with the opportunity to relate and identify with the women they watch. Women filmmakers who use feminist documentary practices have social and political objectives in their work. They make films that are interested in showcasing the need for political transformation, addressing gender inequality, and opposing patriarchy. The aesthetic will be a feminist one, which foregrounds women's social subjectivity and is politically against patriarchy.[96]

The directors of the films discussed here provide various examples of these manifestations through their choice of subjects and each director's own subjective views, experiences, and preferences. By the subject matter discussed here, the author refers to the choice of the main subject of their films and the women's issues that they choose to highlight.

3.1 Erika Cohn and *The Judge* Documentary

In *The Judge,* Erika Cohn chose a subject who is a woman with a professional background in providing legal aid to battered women as an attorney in the criminal and sharia (religious) courts. Historically, sharia courts have only had male judges until Kholoud El Faquih challenged this tradition to become the first woman judge in a sharia court.[97] Cohn depicts the events that took place during El Faquih's first few years as a judge and documents how she navigates her position in a male-dominated environment. She further follows her as she

[96] French, *International Perspective,* 93-95.
[97] Monique C. Cardinal, "Why Aren't Women Sharīʿa Court Judges? The Case of Syria," *Islamic Law and Society* 17, no. 2 (2010): 185-214.

handles family law cases on a daily basis in her courtroom.[98] This research argues that Cohn strove to present a social agenda that highlighted a female perspective in addressing inequality, advocating change for women, and opposing patriarchy by urging for the reform of gender discriminatory laws. For example, the personal status law in the West Bank does not grant women the right to have full custody of their children when they are divorced or widowed, and there is no specific legislation against domestic violence. Such issues hinder women's equality and weaken their rights. Aside from this not being a priority for the PA, the Israeli occupation in the West Bank is also a factor that hinders women's attempts to ask for legal reforms as there is no functioning legislative body in the West Bank since politicians are regularly arrested or detained by the Israeli authorities.[99]

The scenes depicted in the film focus on the judge's role in providing women in Ramallah with counsel regarding domestic violence and enabling women to obtain a divorce and alimony in such cases. Cohn follows El Faquih around her workplace as she attends a roundtable discussion with women, where she discusses how the perception of women's roles in Palestinian society should change. Cohn points her camera at the women around the table who are asking the judge their questions regarding how to advance women's position in society. Cohn's camera also shows as El Faquih answers these questions and critiques not only the false promises made by many political parties to take women's issues into account, but also the Islamic education in Palestinian schools. She critiques school books that continue to limit women's roles by depicting stereotypical images of women just as mothers and homemakers in the illustrations.

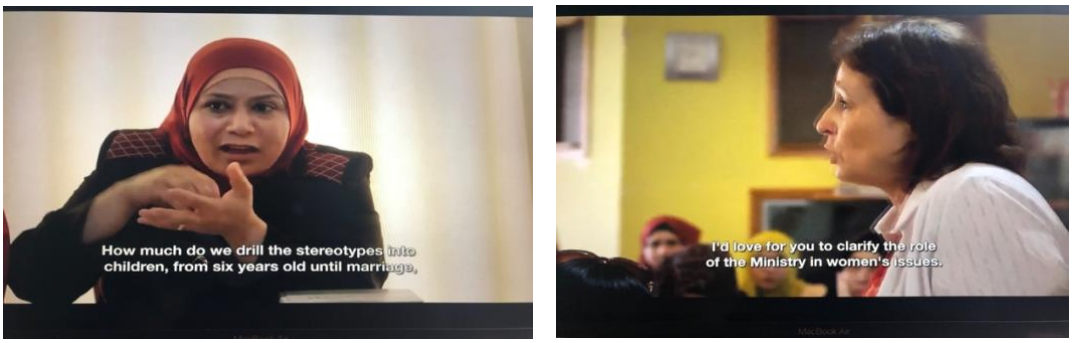

Figure 1: Scenes from the Judge's Roundtable Discussion with Palestinian Women.

[98] Cohn, *The Judge.*
[99] See, for example, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/aug/21/israel

A documentary with feminist practices can be identified in how the filmmaker tells a story, what he or she points the camera at, and what the points of interest are. Although women filmmakers create all kinds of documentaries, they are often very interested in the social and familial impact of situations even when covering conventionally "male" topics, such as war or violence. Thus, while there is no limit to the subjects they may be interested in, strong themes are often found in women's work that demonstrate an interest in women's issues. This could also include demonstrating women's success in forming political movements, using collective action at the local level to achieve change, challenging problematic social systems and structures, and promoting alternative ways of thinking about entrenched social practices.[100]

In *The Judge*, Cohn also decided to include people's patriarchal perceptions regarding a woman being a sharia judge. This is evident in her inclusion of interviews with religious leaders (sheikhs), laypeople from the streets, cafes, and shops of Ramallah, and those opposing or supporting the appointment of El Faquih. Sheikh Hussam Eddine Affani, who was against women becoming judges in sharia courts, was interviewed, as well as former chief justice Sheikh Tayseer, who supported the appointment of El Faquih as a sharia judge from the beginning. When El Faquih told him of her aspirations, he was first surprised. However, she did her own research to prove that the Hanafi *madhab*, one of the four major Sunni schools of law (which Palestinian sharia courts also adhere to), does not explicitly prohibit women from becoming sharia judges. He was convinced by her argument and encouraged her to take the exam to become a sharia judge. In 2009, she and another woman in the West Bank passed two judicial exams, successfully becoming the first women to do so.[101]

To give a more rounded representation of El Faquih's life, that does not focus solely on her at work, Cohn's camera alternates between showing the judge in her private home with her husband and children in the kitchen preparing food and scenes of her in the courtroom handling different cases. Cohn's objective of telling El Faquih's story in particular, aside from creating a portrait of her as a person and documenting her life in a one-hour documentary, was also to make sure to represent the different aspects of her life. During this researcher's interview with her, she noted "You know, this film could have been many hours because she

[100] French, "International Perspective," 97.
[101] Cohn, *The Judge*.

sees so many cases. The selected cases were meant to represent the different aspects of her life and the cases that she sees on a daily basis."[102]

Cohn's expressed intent was to capture El Faquih on film in all spheres of her life, which was necessary for Cohn as a filmmaker to capture her essence and not just portray her one-dimensionally through her work.[103] It was essential for her that viewers would *see* and *feel* as they watched El Faquih on the screen, as she represents more than just her work in the courtroom. This resonates with French's argument that women directors employing the female gaze enable viewers to step into the shoes of their on-screen subjects through the camera frame. Cohn concurred that she thinks "it is essential to show the world that powerful women leaders are also family members, also have passions outside of work, and are not defined by one aspect of their life."[104]

Furthermore, Cohn was interested in giving additional context to El Faquih's story by drawing parallels between how perceptions of women in positions of power are equally criticized or debated not only in Palestine but in other places as well, including Cohn's native United States (US). According to Cohn, "the same conversations that were happening in Palestine, are the same conversations that were happening in the US during the Hilary Clinton campaign: The woman is too emotional to lead. The same kind of criticism that El Faquih faced is not unique to Palestine; it is the same here in the US. So it was very important to me to show that diversity of perspective."[105]

Depicting El Faquih's challenges as a female judge, where she occupies a position of power in a male-dominated environment, and where religious patriarchy still prevails, Cohn captures El Faquih's setbacks in these conditions. Cohn's camera shows this part of El Faquih's story, where the subject herself narrates the events that led to her demotion because of an incident that happened in her office. By including El Faquih's voiceover, including in her replaying the events of a violent death of a woman seeking a divorce from her husband, Cohn's point of interest is not only to highlight the social issues women face, but also to showcase the implications this had on the judge through her demotion to handling administrative tasks. According to Cohn, "…it was one kind of the most important moments of her story, to show the kind of pressure that she is under, and also how it became a political

[102] Interview with Erika Cohn, December 17, 2021.
[103] Interview with Erika Cohn, December 17, 2021.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.

issue with Sheikh Youssef and everything that followed after…it happened in a key moment in her story where everything changed as a result of that."[106]

Cohn also goes to the home of Sheikh Tayseer's first wife, where she interviewed him alone in his house. When he was asked why he married more than one woman, Cohn's camera interjects shots of Sheikh Tayseer in his home with El Faquih in her home, where she voices her opinion of polygyny. Cohn's choice to include El Faquih's voiceover after Sheikh Tayseer is asked about – but does not respond – to why he married more than one wife symbolizes the complexity of this particular issue across the Middle East in general. In an interview, Cohn states:

> I think it was more to show the complexity and the nuance of this with Sheikh Tayseer; I think for many people for Sheikh Tayseer having multiple wives feels contradictory for the fact that he is also a feminist. We are all human beings full of contradictions, which may not contradict them. Still, it is an important part of the story to show because just because he can be a feminist does not necessarily rule that out as vice versa.[107]

Cohn perceives Sheikh Tayseer to be a feminist. When asked about this in a follow up question, she confirmed that she had never asked him if he identifies as one or if he would agree with the label when she spoke to him. However, she believes that if someone champions women, as he did for El Faquih from the beginning of her career as a judge, and has helped to achieve gender justice in the workplace, then that is someone she would consider a feminist.[108]

3.2 Julia Bacha and *Naila and the Uprising* Documentary

Bacha's documentary centers around chronicling the real-life journey of Naila Ayesh, a key figure in the First Intifada, as she spent years advocating for Palestinian women's economic independence under Israeli occupation by boycotting Israeli goods and focusing on local produce.

Bacha started conducting research for the film in 2013, knowing that she wanted to tell a story of civil resistance during the First Intifada. Her team conducted pre-interviews with activists and organizers and were constantly pointed in the direction of women leaders who had, for the most part, organized clandestinely. Naila was one of many such women, where her story of activism, imprisonment, miscarriage during her arrest, her husband's

[106] Ibid.
[107] Interview with Erika Cohn, December 17, 2021.
[108] Ibid.

deportation, and caring for her one-year-old son in prison encapsulated much of the Palestinian woman's burden at the time.[109] The documentary combined interviews, powerful animation, and footage to illustrate the story captured in *Naila and the Uprising*. Bacha focused on Naila's story during her early political activism in Gaza and the West Bank in 1982 and on Palestinian women's activism and solidarity, which led to the launching of a petition to release Naila to be reunited with her son but failed. However, eventually, the jail administration allowed Naila to have her son stay with her in jail.[110]

The subject matter is about highlighting a story of a Palestinian activist in a complex political event at the time of the First Intifada in December 1987, where Palestinians engaged in non-violent uprisings and demonstrations against the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. These uprisings began at the grassroots level as young refugee Palestinians, including women and other masses, congregated. Later, they became under the control of Palestinian leaders who formed the Unified National Command of the Uprising, which had ties to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Palestinian women groups joined strikes and boycotts in order to win Palestinian self-rule.[111] This movement was largely led by women, even though the overwhelming images from these uprisings are of Palestinian boys throwing stones at Israeli tanks. Women such as Naila launched mass demonstrations, labor strikes, and put real economic and international pressure on Israel. Palestinian women organized economic cooperatives, mobile health clinics, and underground schools for other Palestinians.[112]

Bacha's point of interest was to disrupt the dominant narrative of the top-down political lens that is often used to view Palestine- Israel, where the focus is on violent acts committed chiefly by men. This documentary had a central focus to show the rich history of unarmed civil resistance, often with women at the helm, thus highlighting these women's lesser-known stories.[113]

Throughout the film, Bacha utilizes a combination of direct interviews with Naila, her husband, her son, and Palestinian women detainees and activists. These activists highlighted the Palestinian Women's movement during the First Intifada of 1987-1993 and how they sustained themselves economically by selling local produce as most men were deported or

[109] Correspondence with Julia Bacha (questionnaire), December 16, 2021.
[110] Bacha, *Naila and the Uprising*.
[111] Joost R. Hiltermann, *Behind the Intifada: Labor and Women's Movements in the Occupied Territories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).
[112] Correspondence with Julia Bacha (questionnaire), December 16, 2021.
[113] Darraj, "Palestinian Women," 25-36.

exiled, including Naila's husband. Bacha places Naila's storytelling at the center of the Intifada's events, and viewers are shown footage from the peaceful protests and marches of Palestinian women during the uprisings as shots of the women holding banners are shown.[114]

Bacha's interest through showing such footage, using animation, and conducting interviews was to show the aftermath of the First Intifada, where the highly active women faced setbacks and saw their political contributions and public and social role marginalized after the men returned from their exile and were released from Israeli jails, including after the PA was appointed.[115]

In answer to a questionnaire, Bacha discusses how difficult it was to film this documentary because, as a filmmaker, she is more accustomed to having a camera in her hand and filming scenes in real-time.[116] This was not the case here, as the First Intifada movement was clandestine and was not documented by Palestinians themselves. Bacha mentioned that with the story of the women, even in societies that might not be as traditionally patriarchal as Palestinian society is, women's contributions generally do not get documented during protest movements as those wielding cameras typically focus on men. Therefore, half of the story is missing from historical accounts, and through her film, Bacha aspired to make up for this missing part.[117]

In this documentary, Bacha attempted to not only tell the story of women's role in the national uprisings but to represent these women's struggle to achieve equality for all Palestinian women.[118] The interviews with women that she carried out also revealed the inequalities that Palestinian women faced through the PA after its establishment, where they were not included in this process. For example, in the laws set by the PA, for a Palestinian woman to obtain a passport, she would need the consent of a legal male guardian.

Toward the end of the film, with these interviews of women, Bacha's storytelling through the film shifts the focus to voicing the views of Palestinian women who were crucial organizers during the political turmoil.[119]

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[114] Bacha, *Naila and the Uprising*.
[115] Correspondence with Julia Bacha (questionnaire), December 16, 2021.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Aviva Stahl, "Forgotten Histories: Women of the First Intifada: An Interview with Julia Bacha, Director of Naila and the Uprising," *Jewish Currents*, July 6, 2018, https://jewishcurrents.org/forgotten-histories-women-of-the-first-intifada.
[118] Correspondence with Julia Bacha (questionnaire), December 16, 2021.
[119] Bacha, *Naila and the Uprising.*

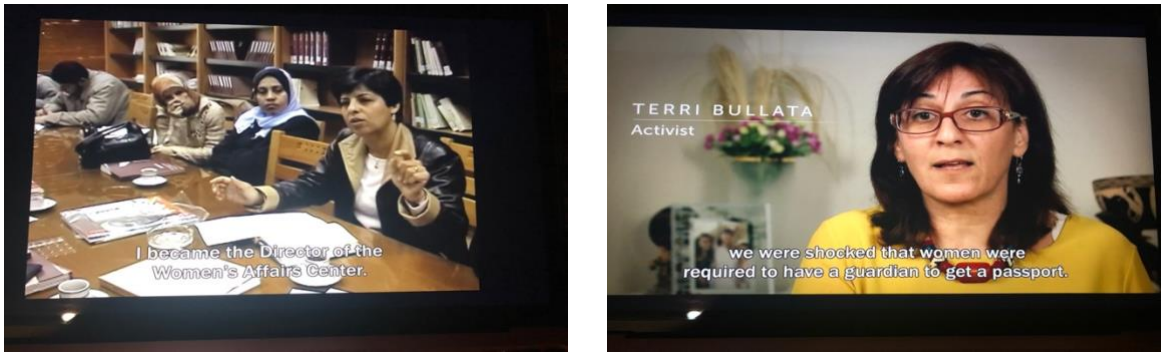

Figure 2: Scenes from Naila and the Uprising

Bacha shows viewers footage of Naila as she became the active president of a Woman's Affair Center, an organization that encouraged women to have an income and participate in political life. The interviewees explain the new challenges Palestinian women faced and how their activism re-focused on demanding their rights for equality from the PA. The women featured in Bacha's film have stated that they are still committed to the struggle against the occupation and will pass it on to other generations. They also reaffirm that women will not be completely free if their society continues to subjugate them.[120]

3.3 Christy Garland and *What Walaa Wants* Documentary

In *What Walaa Wants*, Garland's choice of subject is Walaa Tanji, a girl from Balata Refugee Camp in Nablus, Palestine, and her ambitions to become a police officer. Garland was invited to travel to the West Bank with a small group of female videogame designers who were conducting a series of workshops at various locations to teach young girls how to design their games. Garland was filming these workshops then and considering making a film there. The Balata Refugee Camp in Nablus was the last stop in the tour, and that is the location at which she met Walaa. She was one of the students in the class, and Garland described her as the first person anyone would notice, as she was clever but rebellious, finished her exercises quickly, and was cracking jokes – where the other girls seemed either entertained, annoyed, or intimidated by her.[121]

Garland mentioned that initially, Walaa was not open to the idea of having a film made about her.[122] The reason why this was the case inspired the early focus of the film, which is that her mother, Latifa Abu Draa, had within the previous six months, been released from an Israeli prison after serving a sentence on the charge of terrorism-related activities.

[120] Bacha, *Naila and the Uprising.*
[121] Correspondence with Christy Garland (questionnaire), December 6, 2021.
[122] Ibid.

She had conspired to bring a bomb into a nearby settlement and gotten caught before anything happened because she was working with a conspirator. After serving eight years of a 25-year prison sentence, she had been released in a well-publicized trade of over 1,000 Palestinian prisoners for a single captured Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit.[123]

At age 16, Walaa seemed to be struggling with the new reality of having her mother home. Garland notes that, of course, she had missed her terribly during the half of her life that her mother had been in prison. She also includes footage of 13-year-old Walaa speaking on television about how she misses her mother. After her mother's release, Walaa was navigating a new relationship with a mother who had been forever changed by her prison experiences.[124]

What sparked Garland's interest in documenting Walaa's journey was her mother's story and the fact that Walaa had grown up separated from her for a lengthy time. In addition, she was interested in exploring Walaa's ambition to become one of the few women on the Palestinian police force. According to Garland, "…her mother and brother, and the other men in the family were certain to oppose it… I thought there might be an interesting story to follow about a young woman trying, against considerable obstacles on all levels, to chart her path."[125]

Garland captures Walaa having many discussions with her family, trying to convince them of her goal to join the Palestinian police force, and she often voiced her wish to obtain a licensed gun as she wanted to work in the field. Garland also points her camera to Walaa and her mother sitting in their living room, as she tells her mother that her dream is to join the police force. Her mother jokingly assumes that when Walaa joins the academy, she will meet a man, get married, and become a stay-at-home mother. Walaa is shown passionately refusing this idea and telling her mother that she does not want to get married, and instead of having an oppressive guy telling her every day to cook, clean, and pick up the kids, she would be happier to work for the Palestinian police force and receive a salary.[126]

[123] "Remembering the Gilad Shalit Prisoner Exchange Deal," *Middle East Monitor*, October 18, 2020, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20201018-remembering-israels-gilad-shalit-prisoner-swap-deal/.
[124] Garland, *What Walaa Wants*.
[125] Correspondence with Christy Garland (questionnaire), December 6, 2021.
[126] Garland, *What Walaa Wants*.

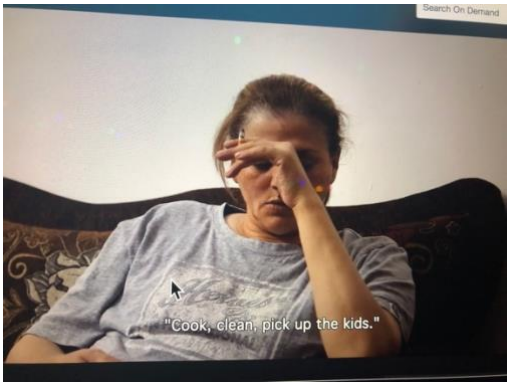

Figure 3: Scenes from What Walaa Wants

As Walaa eventually manages to join the Palestinian police force, Garland's camera follows Walaa during her time in the academy, where she receives the military training she hoped for. At the same time, she occasionally voices her wish to work in the field and not sit behind a desk. Garland documented Walaa's experience in the police academy closely, where various scenes of her are captured during her training at the academy. This includes instances where girls and boys are training together outdoors, her interactions and confrontations with her peers, and her experiences with her superior, who disciplined her on many occasions. During the last scene, she is praised for her perseverance, strong personality, and completing her training to become a policewoman.[127]

The feminist tendencies in this particular documentary are subtly expressed through Garland's choice of specific conversation scenes where Walaa is voicing her opinions. The most notable example of a feminist interest is her main interest in Walaa as an unconventional subject with a somewhat unique goal and no distinct familial support for her to achieve it. This is unsurprising as patriarchy has conditioned women to believe that being a woman and being feminine involves embodying traditional notions of caring, self-sacrifice, and submissiveness. Conditioning young girls not to showcase their ambitions is more apparent among teenage girls, who in many cases outperform boys in school, including in the Middle East.[128]

Upon reaching puberty, girls tend to downplay their ambitions due to fears of failing or being seen as "pushy," "bossy," or a "show off," all of which are words used to keep

[127] Garland, *What Walaa Wants*.
[128] Natasha Ridge, *Education and the Reverse Gender Divide in the Gulf States: Embracing the Global, Ignoring the Local* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2014).

female ambition in line.[129]Ambition is perceived as a necessary "sin" to challenge patriarchy, as Egyptian-born scholar Mona Eltahawy notes. She argues that patriarchy wants women to be *less* than, and having ambition means being *more* than. This is not necessarily only about having women in powerful positions, such as Walaa or El Faquih, but also imagining women doing things that are rarely shown. It also involves women dismantling structures that determine what women should or should not want, or what they could or could not do. Being ambitious disrupts patriarchy because ambition challenges these restrictions.[130]

Garland's documentary had set out to essentially focus on and highlight this unique female ambition that started as a teenager, and she battles many obstacles in her attempt to become a police officer, especially in her political context. According to Garland, "…These scenes give us insight into the real-life of a Palestinian girl who wants some control of her own destiny, and as with any person's life, that means battling obstacles (and getting support) from those we interact with on our journey - family, friends, and peers."[131]

3.4 Female Agency: Analyzing the "Female Gaze" of Garland, Cohn, and Bacha

3.4.1 ***Foregrounding Palestinian Female Agency***

In the abovementioned documentaries, female agency is a central theme and serves as a distinct characteristic of a feminist documentary. This is evident in the female gaze of the directors, which can be understood as the unique way each director who identifies as female inflects her own female experience or subjectivity onto the film she is making. The female gaze is also usually communicated through a female aesthetic, representing the stylistic, creative, expressive, and formal qualities of a documentary created by a woman.[132] Here, since the documentaries discussed above have feminist characteristics, the female gaze in these films is communicated through a feminist aesthetic that aims to counter patriarchy and provide the women featured with a voice.

In *What Walaa Wants*, Christy Garland chooses to privilege Walaa's experience by filming a documentary about her life instead of a fictional film. Aside from the director being

[129] Jennifer O'Connell, "Ambition: Why is it Still a Dirty Word for Women?" *The Irish* Times, October 20, 2018, https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/ambition-why-is-it-still-a-dirty-word-for-women-1.3665720.
[130] Mona Eltahawy, *The Seven Necessary Sins for Women and Girls* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019).

[131] Correspondence with Christy Garland (questionnaire), December 6, 2021.
[132] French, "International Perspective."

a documentary filmmaker, she conveyed that she was interested in documenting the complexities of real life. She only knew how the story was beginning and not how it would end. As such, the story and exploration of Walaa's character evolved as she was making the film. According to Garland:

> A fictitious movie is a completely different kind of undertaking - you know what you want to say at the beginning with a script, but this documentary follows the complexities of real life, and my choices as a director, and what story to tell, is an evolving process of choosing what to shoot and how to follow the story - beginning with a choice not to use interviews but to bring us as close as possible to seeing Walaa's world and experiencing her life, through her eyes.[133]

Thus, this involved privileging Walaa's agency through her voice and telling her story through her own terms. As a female filmmaker, Garland was able to tell the story from as close to a young woman's point of view as possible, and she depicts Walaa's close relationships with other women that surround her, including her sisters, friends, and colleagues. She was trusted to document intimate and vulnerable scenes that a male filmmaker would not have had access to in such a context. Wherever requested, she says, she had to make and keep promises to protect the identities of women shown without their hijab. Moreover, she respected Walaa's wishes about removing or editing certain scenes she felt uncomfortable with.[134]

By not including interviews, she intended to shows and make viewers *feel* certain emotions during compelling real-life scenes. Hence, she wanted viewers to observe where Walaa was coming from, where she was headed, where she is in the pursuit of her goal, and what is going on with her growth as a person during her journey.[135]

Similarly, to Cohn, a fictitious movie would not have enabled her to authentically represent El Faquih, who entirely inspired the film. Cohn has been on a shooting hiatus for her first film and she had received a scholarship to teach documentary film practices at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.[136] One day, she was invited by a colleague to an Islamic reform meeting in Ramallah, and it was in that meeting that she met El Faquih. After the meeting, she was intrigued by her, and upon introducing herself to the judge as a filmmaker, El Faquih invited Cohn to her courtroom. According to Cohn,

> ...It was the moment that I stepped into her courtroom that I knew it needed to be a film because, as you've seen, she is part judge, part lawyer, part marital therapist and she handles somewhere between 40 to 60 cases per day and her cases are not

[133] Correspondence with Christy Garland (questionnaire), December 6, 2021.
[134] Correspondence with Christy Garland (questionnaire), December 6, 2021.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Interview with Erika Cohn, December 17, 2021.

> dissimilar from the cases that we see in a family court in the US. So at the end of that day, I said: "You know what, Judge Kholoud? This could be a film and I think that your experiences can provide a more nuanced understanding of sharia law and provide strong imagery of Palestinian women that we don't get to typically see in film and a strong image of Muslim women that we also don't typically get to see" and she said: "That is amazing because I have been waiting for such a film to come along."[137]

In this case, female agency was showcased in Cohn allowing El Faquih to tell her own story. During the researcher's interview with Cohn, she agreed that El Faquih's story could be told through a book or a fiction film. However, this particular story lends itself to non-fiction filmmaking because events were unfolding in real-time and her meeting with the judge revealed a challenge for her as a filmmaker because the judge's "… presence is unbelievable, it was challenging for me to capture her unique presence and character in a two-dimensional screen…there is no one in the world that could play Judge Kholoud. She is amazing, brilliant and unbelievable, and she has this unique presence that is very captivating and very special."[138]

As Cohn was determined to allow El Faquih to tell her own story, she followed her over a few days, and she was given access to specific spaces and interviews with people that added different layers to El Faquih's narrative. It was not as challenging for Cohn as a female filmmaker to have this access due to her gender. She notes it was the fact that she was underestimated as a woman that allowed her to access specific spaces and talk to people more openly. Where she thinks she faced challenges as a woman ended up working to her advantage:

> I think I was underestimated in terms of approaching Qadi al Qudah (Chief Justice) for permission to film in the court. I often think of women, and this is not specific to Palestine. It is specific to everywhere in the World. Often, we as women are underestimated, and I think people feel like: "Oh, what is this woman doing with a small camera? Sure she can do whatever she wants; sure this film might never see the light of day).[139]

It was helpful for Cohn to be underestimated, as if she were a man with a big filming crew, then perhaps the people she approached would not have felt as comfortable as they did, and the portrait she painted of El Faquih might not have been as nuanced.

[137] Ibid.
[138] Interview with Erika Cohn, December 17, 2021
[139] Ibid.

For Bacha, showcasing the female agency of the Palestinian women featured was done using powerful and creative animation and complementing it with excerpts from other documentaries or archival news footage, which enabled her to weave a real and emotional story about an extraordinary time.[140] The use of animation was meant to capture critical moments – which had mostly happened in the past – in poignant ways.

Bacha and her team had always worked through the lens of a documentary. Creating this film was creatively and logistically challenging because making this story visible required Bacha and her team to trace events taking place over a 30-year period.[141] Bacha's team set out to re-tell the story of the First Intifada from the perspective of the women who had guided it through its most challenging and strategic stage. Bacha's main challenge was to capture the exhilaration, fear, and inspirations that the women experienced at the time. While there was some, albeit limited visual documentation of their work, there was even less documentation of their personal journeys.[142] Her team and their work with archivists did a thorough job of unearthing unpublicized footage and media coverage of women organizing at that time. In addition, the more intimate or personal moments of their struggles were illustrated using animation. Bacha mentioned in various interviews that piecing these together, while honoring the courage and resilience of the film's protagonists, was by far the biggest challenge, but also the greatest joy.

Furthermore, for Bacha, the network and experience established over the years provided her with ample opportunities to depict these stories of Palestinian female agency. An enormous challenge she faced was gaining the trust of veteran organizers and activists. Many of these women had never shared their stories before, and sharing them now brought up painful memories and often put them in vulnerable positions. Bacha's team had been making films in the region for 18 years, and over those years, they had built a strong network of friends and allies. Their team in Palestine is deeply connected to communities that had been active during the First Intifada, which helped build trust and open doors.[143]

The female agency highlighted throughout this film and in this context was not only that of Naila herself. Bacha aimed in her film to showcase what leading roles Palestinian

[140] Correspondence with Julia Bacha (questionnaire), December 16, 2021.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Correspondence with Julia Bacha (questionnaire), December 16, 2021.

women have been invisibly occupying in the social and political life, as opposed to the traditional ones that dominate international representations of Palestinian (and other Arab) women. She intended to demonstrate how Palestinian women are active in public life and have played leading roles in resisting the Israeli occupation. She hoped these examples of Palestinian female agency, as shown in this story, would spark people's curiosity and interest in learning more.

In her answers to the questionnaire sent to her by this author, she noted that being a woman director undoubtedly influenced her relationship with the female subjects in her film in the sense that it allowed her to become closer to them.[144] Bacha raised two young children when making this film, which she explains brought up many emotions, including painful ones. She knew that was the experience of many women who saw the film. Furthermore, that was a connection point between herself and many of the women that she and her team interviewed. She noted that most of the interviews with the female characters in her film were conducted in peoples' homes because, in her experience, people felt more comfortable speaking in a familiar setting rather than in a studio.[145]

Bacha's choice of including interviews with Naila's husband and son provided essential perspectives on her role as a wife and mother. Her son had also never really heard her story before, so hearing directly from him about his pride in his mother was, in Bacha's opinion a powerful contribution to the narrative.[146]

3.4.2 Cohn, Bacha, and Garland as Agents of Change

French argues that women documentarians can be seen as agents of change. As women filmmakers, they create global opportunities for female voices and experiences to be witnessed and heard. Therefore, documentary production can be understood as a site of empowerment for women. Women documentarians have played a significant role in supporting gender equality globally through examining power relations, rights, values, and representations from female perspectives. [147]

In *The Judge,* Cohn sought to represent El Faquih during her mission to inform women of their rights and to raise awareness within her community of the need for gender equality in Palestine. Cohn's primary audience was a global one, as the filmmaker intended to

[144] Ibid.
[145] Correspondence with Julia Bacha (questionnaire), December 16, 2021.
[146] Ibid.
[147] French, *International Perspective*, 96.

provide an empowering representation of Palestinian women and Muslim women that was not typically seen in the West, especially as the film was broadcast on public television in the US in 2017-2018. However, Cohn also wanted to enable El Faquih's story to reach the latter's target audience, which are Palestinian and Muslim women, to ensure that they knew their rights. In the words of Cohn,

> It was kind of two-fold; Judge Kholoud always wanted this film to reach Muslim women to ensure that they knew their rights because it is like what Judge Kholoud like to say "It is not Islam that is the problem, it is patriarchy." We needed to reach a global Muslim women audience…Muslim men were a secondary audience, and then in terms of a Western audience, it was really to combat a possibly increasing Islamophobia to provide a more nuanced understanding of Sharia law.[148]

Besides providing an empowering representation of Walaa as a young Palestinian girl, Garland, as a woman filmmaker, also created a feminist documentary to promote an understanding of women's contingent circumstances and reveal situations which confine women in their own cultures. Her target audience, she says, were people like her, who were accustomed to not hearing very much about Palestinians except what they see in news coverage of conflict in the ongoing cycle of violence. According to Garland,

> ... Films by and about Palestinians are not that commonly seen in North America, and although I am not Palestinian, I felt that Walaa's story was universal and relatable enough to appeal to a wide audience, yet it does not shy away from showing the complexities of where she lives. She is such a charismatic character, and there are so many aspects of her story that we can connect to the need to make your own rules, not follow your parents' expectations, her vulnerabilities as a proud young woman, and her rebelling against authority. She was strong and vulnerable, marked by trauma but incredibly resilient, proud, and insecure - all the contradictions that make for a sympathetic, interesting character who is trying to take responsibility for their own destiny but must battle obstacles within themselves and in the world; that surrounds them.[149]

Garland also chose to focus in some scenes on Walaa's brother's story as she believed that his story contrasts with Walaa's own story, and is also representative of what happens with a lot of young Palestinian men. Since there is so little opportunity for them, they often get caught up in the cycle of imprisonment that severely limits their freedom to make productive and positive choices about what to do with their lives.[150]

[148] Interview with Erika Cohn, December 17, 2021
[149] Correspondence with Christy Garland (questionnaire), December 6, 2021.
[150] Ibid.

Similarly to Garland, Bacha also believed it was crucial to reach a broad audience and shine a spotlight on the long legacy of civil resistance in Palestine, while specifically emphasizing women's leading role in it. According to Bacha, this is a period obscured by history, with fascinating and essential details omitted. Speaking on her own behalf and that of her team, she states:

> …We knew it was an important story to share with the rising generation of activists and organizers, with students and educators, policy-makers and more. It is a story we knew had important lessons for women and men alike. That is especially evident when we screen to Palestinian audiences, where both male and female audience members draw inspiration from the critical role women have played in Palestinian civil resistance.[151]

These documentaries, like others that deal with critical social issues, have an impact on the public discourse and on some practices. Thus, for instance, Bacha's film has been screened across the West Bank and Gaza and been seen by youth, women, students, educators and activists across the region. This has further opened discussions – on social media, in the news, and among families who had lived through the First Intifada – about how people can amplify women's leadership in the current context and draw on the lessons learned from that iconic time. The film has been also screened in Israel, to journalists, members of the Knesset, and young activists. Bacha mentions that:

> Israelis who have seen the film have shared that it served to reframe the activities of the First Intifada and Palestinian nonviolent organizing in a way that was both informative and inspiring. Some expressed that the discrepancy between what they understood about the uprising before and what they saw in the film was so significant that it has motivated them to think more critically about how events in the Occupied Territories are covered by the media and discussed today.[152]

To sum up, this researcher has attempted to demonstrate through the analysis of certain scenes and the discussion of the abovementioned documentaries the important role played by female-directed, feminist documentaries in Palestine. Hence, through their films, this researcher argues that female filmmakers who employ their female gaze stimulate the re-thinking of women's issues and question patriarchy in public discourses.

[151] Correspondence with Julia Bacha (questionnaire), December 16, 2021.
[152] Jana J. Monji, "Director Julia Bacha on 'Naila and the Uprising," *Age of the Geek*, March 8, 2019, https://ageofthegeek.org/2019/03/08/director-julia-bacha-on-naila-and-the-uprising/.

Conclusion

This research has set out to explore the understudied relationship between feminist documentaries, whose subjects are Palestinian women, and the female gaze. This researcher selected female documentary filmmakers and their documentaries, which depict Palestinian women, as the case study of this research. These documentaries are Erika Cohn's *The Judge*, Julia Bacha's *Naila and the Uprising*, and Christy Garland's *What Walaa Wants*, which were analyzed alongside an interview conducted with Cohn and questionnaires distributed to Bacha and Garland. The answers of the directors were analyzed to answer this paper's research question: *How can female filmmakers' gaze, when directing feminist documentaries depicting Palestinian women, lead to the critical questioning and rethinking of patriarchy in Palestine?*

Firstly, this thesis began by describing the historical background of women filmmakers globally and in the Middle East, including the contributions of feminist filmmakers. These aspects were important to highlight as they showcased how women filmmakers have utilized documentary filmmaking to ensure visibility for women and to highlight their roles in nationalist struggles, such as in the actions undertaken by Algerian women during Algeria's struggle for independence from French colonialism.

The first chapter explored women's entry and evolution in the documentary-making field, where they utilized this medium as a means to achieve visibility and reflect on knowledge that concerns women in their societies and cultures and how it impacts other generations of women filmmakers. For example, this is evident in the case of African filmmakers where the knowledge transmitted through documentaries from generation to generation of helped them reflect on essential lessons from their elders, as documentaries can delve into sensitive topics and examine them from different angles.

This chapter also outlined women directors' stance on employing the female gaze, such as that of French filmmaker Agnes Varda, whose films examined the construction of female identity outside the narrow confines of the male gaze. Another is feminist filmmaker Zoe Dirse, who used her camera in her documentary film to showcase how all gazes could be female and how when shifting from a male gaze to that of females, the gaze allows women to view themselves not as objects of male desire but female desire.

The second chapter described the main scenes of the documentaries, including issues relevant to Palestinian women in the context of each film that were the main focus of the directors. This researcher also described the main approach to the filming of their documentaries and how they choose to highlight the manifestations of patriarchy in Palestine. It also discussed certain filming techniques that allowed them to more creatively showcase women's experiences and perspectives, such as through voiceovers, use of animation, cutaways, and interviews.

The third chapter analyzed and discussed the documentaries selected as case studies for this research, including the interviews and questionnaires conducted with the directors, as well as the analysis of the relevant scenes, and the discussion of the topics they bring forward. The answers to the interview conducted with Cohn and the questionnaires distributed to Bacha and Garland have explored how these female directors have employed their gaze through feminist aesthetics to communicate their subjectivities in the films and to privilege the female experience.

These documentaries had crucial political, cultural, and social agendas to reach a broad audience and shine a spotlight on the long legacy of civil resistance in Palestine. In Bacha's case, the filmmaker intended to emphasize women's leading role in the nationalist fight for independence. For Garland, the emphasis on Walaa's life and her contingent circumstances was meant to alter the representation of Palestinian young women from being trapped in the ongoing cycle of violence, and to humanize their experience and how they too have aspirations and ambitions like Walaa. Similarly, Cohn's emphasis on El Faquih also showcases the gendered struggles faced by a sharia judge in her everyday life. Through their gaze and selective filming techniques, this researcher argues that these films contribute to the critical questioning and rethinking of patriarchy in Palestine in the following ways.

Firstly, in *The Judge*, Erika Cohn employed her female subjectivity by connecting with her subject over gender justice. Through her use of feminist aesthetics, which further guided her camera lens, she presented an empowered portrait of Judge Kholoud El Faquih that brought forth key moments of her life and career as she attempted to achieve gender justice and challenge religious patriarchy. Her work further challenged the absence of unified Palestinian laws protecting women from violence and she attempted to ensure their equal rights within the family through her judgement in court cases. By using interviews of Palestinian men and women in the West Bank, Cohn wanted to contextualize how patriarchy affects the perception of women's rights in the region, especially for Muslim women, and how El Faquih's work is meant to challenge these perceptions. Hence, by merging her vision

with that of El Faquih's, and through the multiple screenings of the film in the region and globally, Cohn's feminist film has arguably contributed to the questioning and rethinking of patriarchy in Palestine.

In *Naila and the Uprising*, director Julia Bacha communicated her female subjectivity through her experience as a mother that brought her closer to her subject Naila, who also suffered due to her activism in the First Intifada. By connecting over this as a woman director, Bacha communicated the experiences of many women who were interviewed in the film and enabled them to connect with female audiences who would watch the documentary. Bacha arguably employed a feminist aesthetic, through her filming techniques and style, to highlight the historically downplayed female agency of Palestinian women who have been the backbone of the Intifada. Thus, this researcher argues that this film gave light to these women's contributions in the social and political life, which helped not only resist the Israeli occupation but also fight to not have their activism overlooked by the male-dominated political parties in Palestine. Hence, in this way, similarly to Cohn's film, Bacha's feminist documentary also contributed to the questioning and rethinking of patriarchy in Palestine.

In What Walaa Wants, this researcher argues that Christy Garland's female subjectivity enabled her to reflect a young woman's point of view as closely as possible, as she depicted the close relationships of Walaa with other women that surround her. She was trusted to document intimate and vulnerable scenes that a male filmmaker would not have had access to, and her feminist aesthetics are evident in how she focused on privileging Walaa's agency through her own voice and by respecting her subject's own terms. By showing Walaa's own critiques of patriarchy and gender stereotypes, Garland's film may also be described as a feminist film that, similarly to Cohn and Bacha's films, encourages viewers to question and be critical of patriarchy in the Palestinian context.

In sum, the discussed documentaries emerge from the need to voice Palestinian women's agency and ambitions, as was the case in *What Walaa Wants, Naila and the Uprising*, and *The Judge*. Hence, the documentaries reflect women's solidarity to fight for gender justice in Palestine, and identify with women's suffering due to patriarchy, which also manifests in other contexts globally. From this perspective, the films demonstrate the connection between a feminist discourse embedded in documentary feminist practices and the personal involvement of filmmakers with their gaze in closely depicting their subjects' voices, concerns, and struggles in their societies. Thus, these feminist documentaries are helpful in critically questioning patriarchy and Palestinian women's life and struggle to dismantle it, directly or indirectly.

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Appendix 1

General Questions

1- Did the main character of your documentary inspire you to create your film? Or did you first decide that you wanted to create a documentary about a particular topic and then happened upon your main subject?
   a. Follow up question: Why did you choose to document this particular person’s journey?
2- Who was your target audience for your documentary (men, women, or both)? If you had a particular audience in mind, what message did you want to impart upon these specific viewers?
3- What were some of the opportunities and challenges you faced while filming this particular documentary in Palestine as a woman filmmaker?
4- Do you think that being a woman director influenced your relationship with the female subjects in your film? If yes, how? If no, why not?
5- Why did you choose to film a documentary instead of creating a fictitious movie to tell this particular story?

The Judge

1. Why did you decide to include interviews with Palestinian laypeople regarding their perspectives on women becoming judges, including that of Sheikh Tayseer and one of his wives?
2. What was the purpose of including clips of your interviews with the judge in private settings or as she interacts with her families, friends, or colleagues in the home?
3. Why did you choose to film and include Kholoud El Faqih in a multitude of situations in her role as a judge (i.e. interacting with female activists, experiencing career setbacks, implementing the law, etc.)?
4. Why did you decide to include a scene which shows the judge’s response to the incident in which a man murdered his wife outside her office?
5. Why did you decide to use the cinematic technique of including Judge Kholoud’s voiceover after Sheikh Tayseer is asked about – but does not respond – to the question of why he married more than wife?

Naila and the Uprising

1- What was the purpose of using a mix of animation and archival footage in your documentary?

2- What was the purpose of selecting neutral backgrounds or political settings during your interviews with the female characters instead of, for example, filming them in private settings or as they interact with their families in the home?
3- Do you believe that your film is showcasing what leading roles Palestinian Women have been invisibly occupying in the social and political life, as opposed to the traditional ones the world thinks every Arab woman and particularly Palestinian has?
4- Why did you choose to showcase Palestinian women's non-violent resistance in the documentary?
5- Why did you choose to interview Naila's husband and son specifically?

What Walaa Wants

1- Why did you choose to include many scenes between Walaa interacting with her family members and her peers at the academy?
2- Why did you decide to document Walaa's journey from childhood to adulthood in your film?
3- Why did you choose to include references to Walaa wanting to carry a weapon but do not include visual representations of the weapon – or of Walaa defending her brother against an Israeli soldier – in the film?
4- What was the purpose of repeating some of the scenes in the film (i.e being at home watching TV, training sessions at the academy, Walaa being at the officer's office in the academy)
5- Why did you choose to include several scenes and storylines about Walaa's brother Mohammed?

Appendix 2

A. **Transcript of Interview with Erika Cohn on *The Judge***

1. **Did the main character of your documentary inspire you to create your film? Or did you first decide that you wanted to create a documentary about a particular topic and then happened upon your main subject?**
    a. Follow-up question: Why did you choose to document this particular person's journey?

Judge Kholoud definitely inspired this film. I had absolutely no intention of making a film during that time. I was on a shooting hiatus for my first film in football. I had received a … scholarship to teach film in Israel/Palestine and continue my post-graduate research in Islamic feminism at the Hebrew University. One day, a colleague invited me to an Islamic reform meeting that was happening in Ramallah, and it was in that meeting that I met Judge Kholoud. After the meeting, I was sort of struck by her, to be honest. So I introduced myself and when she found out I was a filmmaker, she invited me to her courtroom, and it was the moment that I stepped into her courtroom that I knew it needed to be a film because, as you've seen, she is part judge, part lawyer, part marital therapist and she handles somewhere between 40 to 60 cases per day and her cases are not dissimilar from the cases that we see in a family court in the US. So at the end of that day, I said: "You know what, Judge Kholoud? This could be a film and I think that your experiences can provide a more nuanced understanding of sharia law and provide strong imagery of Palestinian women that we don't get to typically see in film and a strong image of Muslim women that we also don't typically get to see" and she said: "That is amazing because I have been waiting for such a film to come along."

2. **Who was your target audience for your documentary (men, women, or both)? If you had a particular audience in mind, what message did you want to impart upon these specific viewers?**

The primary audience was definitely a global audience: it's pretty amazing that this film was broadcasted in public US television in 2017/2018. It was really kind of two-fold, Judge Kholoud always wanted this film to reach Muslim women to ensure that they knew their rights because it's like what Judge Kholoud likes to say "It's not Islam that is the problem, it's patriarchy." It was important that we reach a global Muslim women audience. Muslim men were kind of a secondary audience and then in terms of a Western audience, it was really to combat a possibly increase of Islamophobia to provide a more nuanced understanding of Sharia law.

3. **What were some of the opportunities and challenges you faced while filming this particular documentary in Palestine as a woman filmmaker?**

I would not say that I faced a lot of challenges as a filmmaker who is a woman in general in Palestine. I mean the Palestinian feminist movement has been going on for years and has influenced the feminist movement across the rest of the world. Where I think I face challenges

as a woman ended up working to my advantage. I think I was underestimated in terms of approaching Qadi al Qudah (Chief Justice) for permission to film in the court. I think oftentimes, as women – and this is not specific to Palestine, it is specific to everywhere in the World – we as women are underestimated, and I think that people felt like: "Oh what is this woman doing with a small camera? Sure she can do whatever she wants, sure this film might never see the light of day."

I think a lot of time in obtaining access, in this case, I think it was helpful to be underestimated because I think if I would have been a man with a big film crew – often this is a budgetary issue – then perhaps people wouldn't have felt as comfortable.

4. **Do you think that being a woman director influenced your relationship with the female subjects in your film? If yes, how? If no, why not?**

Yes absolutely, gender justice was something we immediately connected over.

5. **Why did you choose to film a documentary instead of creating a fictitious movie to tell this particular story?**

I mean Judge Kholoud's story could be many things. She is writing a book, [so] it could be a documentary or a fiction film. I think this particular story lends itself into non- fiction filmmaking because things were unfolding in real-time. And when you meet Judge Kholoud, what was a challenge for me as a filmmaker was that her presence is unbelievable. It was challenging for me to capture her unique presence and character in a two-dimensional screen.

There is no one in the world that could play Judge Kholoud. She is amazing, brilliant, and unbelievable, and she has this unique presence that is very captivating and very special.

6. **Why did you decide to include interviews with Palestinian laypeople regarding their perspectives on women becoming judges, including that of Sheikh Tayseer with one of his wives?**

I think it was important to give additional content to Judge Kholoud's story, and also to be able to draw parallels. To draw parallels between Palestine and other places. You know, for example, there is a commentary about Hilary Clinton when seen [side-by-side] with her father. And the same conversations that were happening in Palestine, are the same conversations that were happening in the US during the Hilary Clinton campaign: A woman is too emotional to lead. All the same kind of criticism that Judge Kholoud faced is not unique to Palestine, it's the same here in the US as well. So it was very important to me to show that diversity of perspectives and also to show that it is not just gendered, it is not just women supporting her, and men supporting, or the women against her and the men against her. It is not gendered, it is cultural and depending on the kind of upbringing that the person had.

7. **What was the purpose of including clips of your interviews with the judge in private settings or as she interacts with her families, friends, or colleagues in the home?**

As a filmmaker, it is important to me to capture someone's essence and their personality in all spheres. If I were to just categorize me or you for example by the work you do, that is not

a full picture of who we are. So, in documenting someone's life, it is essential that we see and experience people through the human experience, and that is not just through work, we are not defined just by our work. Especially as women, I think it is very important to show the world that powerful women leaders are also family members, have also passions outside of work and are not defined by one aspect of their life.

8. **Why did you choose to film and include Kholoud El Faqih in a multitude of situations in her role as a judge (i.e. interacting with female activists, experiencing career setbacks, implementing the law, etc.)?**

In doing a portrait of one person and in documenting someone's life…You know this film could have been many hours longer because she sees so many cases. The cases that were selected were meant to represent the different aspects of her life and the cases that she sees on daily basis… but it was so hard to cut it down to the film that is now because this could have been a very long film.

9. **Why did you decide to include a scene which shows the judge's response to the incident in which a man murdered his wife outside her office?**

Because it was one kind of the most important moments of her story, to show the kind of pressure that she is under. And also how it became a political issue with Sheikh Youssef and everything that followed after- I don't want to ruin the film for those who have not seen it – but it happened in a key moment in her story where everything changed as a result of that.

10. **Why did you decide to use the cinematic technique of including Judge Kholoud's voiceover after Sheikh Tayseer is asked about – but does not respond – to the question of why he married more than one wife?**

I think it was more to show the complexity and the nuance of this with Sheikh Tayseer, I think for a lot of people for Sheikh Tayseer having multiple wives feels contradictory because of the fact that he is also a feminist. We are all – as human beings – full of contradictions, and maybe for him that is not a contradiction, but it is an important part of the story to show because just because he identifies as a feminist does not necessarily rule that out and vice versa.

11. **Follow-up: You mention that he identifies as a feminist?**

You know I actually never asked him if he identifies as a feminist or if he would agree with that. I definitely think if someone champions women, as he did for Judge Kholoud from the beginning, and has helped achieve gender justice in the workplace, then that to me is a feminist, but I don't know if he would agree with that label.

B. <u>Questionnaire Answers by Julia Bacha on *Naila and the Uprising*</u>

1. **Did the main character of your documentary inspire you to create your film? Or did you first decide that you wanted to create a documentary about a particular topic and then happened upon your main subject?**
    a. Follow up question: Why did you choose to document this particular person's journey?

We started research on the film in 2013, knowing we wanted to tell the story of civil resistance during the First Intifada. During our pre-interviews with activists and organizers we were continually pointed in the direction of women leaders who had, for the most part, organized clandestinely. Naila Ayesh was one among many of those heroic women. Her story - of activism, imprisonment, the loss of her child, her husband's deportation, and the extraordinary experience of having to bring her one-year-old into prison with her - encapsulated much of the Palestinian woman's burden at the time. We were also fortunate to draw from a Finnish documentary about Naila's life by Iikka Vehkalahti called Amal, Inam, Naila which became a central source of footage in illustrating the story captured in Naila and the Uprising.

2. **Who was your target audience for your documentary (men, women, or both)? If you had a particular audience in mind, what message did you want to impart upon these specific viewers?**

As with all of our films, we sought a broad audience. Our overarching aim was to shine a spotlight on the long legacy of civil resistance in Palestine, with special emphasis on the leading role that women played. This is a period of time obscured by history, with fascinating and important details omitted, and we knew it was an important story to share with the rising generation of activists and organizers, with students and educators, policy-makers and more. It's a story we knew had important lessons for women and men alike. That's especially evident when we screen to Palestinian audiences, where both male and female audience members draw inspiration from the critical role women have played in Palestinian civil resistance.

3. **What were some of the opportunities and challenges you faced while filming this particular documentary in Palestine as a woman filmmaker?**

Our biggest opportunity was gaining the trust of veteran organizers and activists. Many of these women had never shared their stories before, and sharing them now brought up painful memories and often put them in vulnerable positions. We have been making films in the region for 18 years and over those years have built a strong network of friends and allies. Our team in Palestine is deeply connected to communities who had been active during the first intifada, and that helped build trust and open doors.

4. **Do you think that being a woman director influenced your relationship with the female subjects in your film? If yes, how? If no, why not?**

Certainly, raising two young children at the time of making this film brought up all kinds of emotions, many painful. I know that was the experience of many women who saw the film. And yes, that was a point of connection between myself and many of the women we interviewed.

5. **Why did you choose to film a documentary instead of creating a fictitious movie to tell this particular story?**

Our team at Just Vision has always worked through the lens of documentary filmmaking. But we also saw an opportunity to use creative animation and archival footage to bring this story to life in a powerful way.

6. **What was the purpose of using a mix of animation and archival footage in your documentary?**

See above! We were very fortunate to work with an animation duo in Montreal who captured critical moments in the film in poignant ways. Complementing that with archival footage, whether the Finnish documentary or news footage, allowed us to weave an accurate and emotional story about an extraordinary time.

7. **What was the purpose of selecting neutral backgrounds or political settings during your interviews with the female characters instead of, for example, filming them in private settings or as they interact with their families in the home?**

Most of our interviews were conducted in peoples' homes because, in our experience, people feel more comfortable speaking in a familiar setting rather than in a studio.

8. **Do you believe that your film is showcasing what leading roles Palestinian Women have been invisibly occupying in the social and political life, as opposed to the traditional ones the world thinks every Arab woman and particularly Palestinian has?**

Yes, Palestinian women are active in public life and have played leading roles in resisting the Israeli occupation. We hope this story sparks peoples' curiosity and interest in learning more.

9. **Why did you choose to showcase Palestinian women's non-violent resistance in the documentary?**

Israel-Palestine is too often viewed from the lens of top-down political failure or violent acts committed mostly by men. In the meantime, behind the scenes, is a rich and storied history of unarmed civil resistance, often with women at the helm. So part of our mission is to disrupt the dominant narrative by highlighting these lesser-known stories. We were also setting out to tell the story of the First Intifada, which, even by the Israeli government's own calculations, was more than 99% unarmed.

10. **Why did you choose to interview Naila's husband and son specifically?**

We felt that Majd and Jamal could provide important perspectives on their mother/wife's role. Majd especially had never really heard her story before, so hearing directly from him about his pride in his mother was, we felt, a powerful contribution to the narrative.

C. Questionnaire Answers by Christy Garland on *What Walaa Wants*

1. **Did the main character of your documentary inspire you to create your film? Or did you first decide that you wanted to create a documentary about a particular topic and then happened upon your main subject?**
    a. Follow up question: Why did you choose to document this particular person's journey?

I had been invited to travel to the West Bank with a small group of female videogame designers, they were conducting a series of workshops at various locations, with the aim of teaching young girls how to design their own games. I decided to go with them and film their workshops, and maybe find my own film there. On the last stop through the tour, we were in Balata Camp in Nablus, and that is where I met Walaa Tanji. She was one of the students in the class, and she was the first person anyone would notice. She was clever, but rebellious and finished her exercises quickly and was cracking jokes - the other girls seemed either entertained, annoyed or intimidated by her.

Initially Walaa was not open to the idea of me making a film about her, and the reason why actually inspired the early focus of the film. Her mother, Latifa Abu Draa, had, within the previous six months, been released from prison for terrorism related activities. She had conspired to bring a bomb into a nearby settlement and got caught before anything happened because she was working with a conspirator. After serving eight years of a twenty five year prison sentence, she'd been released in a well publicized (and controversial) trade of over one thousand Palestinian prisoners for a single captured Israeli solider, Gilad Shalit.

Age sixteen, Walaa seemed to be struggling with the new reality of having her mother home. Of course she had missed her terribly during the half of her life that her mother had been in prison, and now she was navigating a new relationship with a mother who had been changed forever by her prison experiences. When Walaa secretly confesses that she wants to be one of the few women on the Palestinian police force, (and that her mother and brother, and the other men in the family were certain to oppose it) I thought there might be an interesting story to follow about a young woman trying, against considerable obstacles on all levels, to chart her own path.

2. **Who was your target audience for your documentary (men, women, or both)? If you had a particular audience in mind, what message did you want to impart upon these specific viewers?**

My target audience were people like me, who were accustomed to not hearing very much about Palestinians except from what they see in news coverage of each new conflict in the ongoing cycle of violence. Films by and/or about Palestinians are not that commonly seen in North America, and although I am not Palestinian, I felt that Walaa's story was universal and relatable enough to appeal to a wide audience, yet it does not shy away from showing the complexities of where she lives. She is such a charismatic character and there are so many aspects of her story that we can connect to: the need to make your own rules, not follow the

expectations of your parents, her vulnerabilities as a proud young woman and her rebelling against authority. She was strong and vulnerable, marked by trauma but incredibly resilient, proud and insecure - all the contradictions that make for an empathetic, interesting character who is trying to take responsibility for their own destiny but must battle obstacles within themselves and in the world that surrounds them.

3. **What were some of the opportunities and challenges you faced while filming this particular documentary in Palestine as a woman filmmaker?**

I was extremely blessed on many fronts, beginning with the trust that Walaa and her family put in me when they consented to allow me to shoot scenes with the family over the course of six years. Walaa's trust in me was crucial, and we needed to re-negotiate our relationship and our mutual reasons for making the film together several times over the years.

I was also lucky to have access to the Palestinian Security Forces Police Academy in Jericho - it was challenging but also a lot of fun to shoot there and I was so lucky to be able to put the camera right in the middle of it.

I was challenged by the fact that I was new to everything that concerns about Walaa's story - I had a very steep learning curve about the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Balata Camp where Walaa lives (and where both intifadas have been centered) and the realities of imprisonment of Palestinians and how it affects families. Also, I don't speak Arabic, so all of these challenges made this a very profound learning experience for me as a filmmaker.

4. **Do you think that being a woman director influenced your relationship with the female subjects in your film? If yes, how? If no, why not?**

Entirely, because it's a story told from as close to a young woman's POV as possible, and depicts the close relationships with other women that surround her (sisters, friends, colleagues) I was trusted to document intimate and vulnerable scenes that a male filmmaker just would not have had access to. Wherever requested, I had to make and keep promises to protect the identities of women who were depicted without their hijab and I respected Walaa's wishes about certain scenes she felt uncomfortable with.

5. **Why did you choose to film a documentary instead of creating a fictitious movie to tell this particular story?**

Because I'm a documentary filmmaker, and when I began, I only knew how the story was beginning, and not how it would end. The story and thematic focus, the exploration of Walaa's character, all of that evolved as I was making the film. A fictitious movie is a completely different kind of undertaking - you know what you want to say in the beginning with a script, but this documentary follows the complexities of real life, and my choices as a director, and what story to tell, is an evolving process of choosing what to shoot and how to follow the story - beginning with a choice to not use interviews but to bring us as close as possible to seeing Walaa's world and experiencing her life, through her eyes.

6. **Why did you choose to include many scenes between Walaa interacting with her family members and her peers at the academy?**

Because they were central to her unfolding story, about where and with whom she had been raised, and where she wanted to go. As I mention above, these scenes give us insight into the real life of a Palestinian girl who wants some control of her own destiny, and as with any person's life, that means battling obstacles (and getting support) from those we interact with on our journey - family, friends and peers.

7. **Why did you decide to document Walaa's journey from childhood to adulthood in your film?**

Because it shows, and makes us feel, in compelling real-life scenes (instead of someone telling us through an interview) where she was coming from and where she was going - the beginning, middle and end of this particular story required that span of time. Her story starts when she experiences the imprisonment of her mother, and ends when she carves out her own place in the world as a police officer, and the middle of the story covers the journey.

8. **Why did you choose to include references to Walaa wanting to carry a weapon but do not include visual representations of the weapon – or of Walaa defending her brother against an Israeli soldier – in the film?**

Walaa wants to carry a gun for the same reason that small boys all over the world like to play with toy guns and play video games that depict the use of guns, it's a symbol of power, strength and self protection.

As you also see quite clearly in the film, Walaa lives in a place where young male "martyrs" that have lost their lives resisting the occupation are depicted on posters everywhere throughout Balata Camp, brandishing weapons like AK47s - in this context guns are a symbol of strength, national pride and resistance. In Walaa's case, she has lived in a place where violence and trauma are a fact of life, and her young girl's need to one day have a gun is understandable (although not something to condone) considering that context and her own trauma and vulnerabilities.

I did actually include a visual representation of the weapon - in the scene at the academy where she is being trained to handle, aim and shoot a gun. In this scene we see that contrary to her younger fantasies about how fun, easy and cool it would be to have a gun, it's actually quite heavy and difficult for her to use - and dangerous.

Again, I chose to depict Walaa defending her brother against an Israeli soldier because it is an obvious, and important part of a story about the obstacles a young girl faces pursuing an uncommon goal in the context in which she lives. In trying to chart her own path of becoming a police woman, she her own experience in the cycle of trauma, violence and imprisonment that flows back and forth between the Palestinain and Israeli sides of the occupation - she experienced trauma because of her mother's imprisonment, and she makes it clear that she wants to avoid the same fate by becoming a police officer and having a job, but because of the context in which she lives, and the various societal, economical and political forces that affect her family, she still winds up in prison, because she is defending (or in some cases, avenging) her family. This is a common reality for many Palestinians.

9. **What was the purpose of repeating some of the scenes in the film (i.e of Walaa being at home watching TV, her training sessions at the academy, Walaa being at her superior's office in the academy, Walaa sitting alone)?**

The purpose of each scene in a film like What Walaa Wants is to either reveal character, or move the story forward. The purpose of each of those scenes is different, depending on what we know of Walaa, where she is in the pursuit of her goal and what is going on with her growth as a person during her journey. If there is repetition it is because those scenes, like many in our own everyday lives, involve finding ourselves again and again in the same location and contexts, but we as people are never exactly the same person each time because we grow and change on an ongoing basis.

10- Why did you choose to include several scenes and storylines about Walaa's brother Mohammed?

Because his story contrasts with hers and is very representative of what happens with a lot of young Palestinian men who, because there is so little opportunity for them, get caught up in the cycle of imprisonment that severely limits their freedom to make productive and positive choices about what to do with their lives. Walaa is trying to avoid the pitfalls that Mohammed encounters, and build her own life. Despite his lack of brotherly encouragement for her, they are still incredibly close, like twins, so their different paths inform each other until they converge and her love for her brother is what lands her in prison - exactly what we've watched her try to avoid for the first two-thirds of the film.