Lead-in: This audio documentary showcases the Palestinian filmmaker community, especially women, and their struggles recording on the occupied territories. Join Noran Alaa as she interviews filmmakers Najwa Najjar and Arab Loutfi who shed light on the issue.

NAJWA NAJJAR (NN): “How could you in 1952, just four years, after our biggest catastrophe, Alnakba, how do you do cinema?” (:06)

MUSIC: FADE IN - Cover Letter by Blue dot

That was Najwa Najjar, award-winning Palestinian filmmaker who got on the phone with me from Ramallah, Palestine. Hi there, I’m Noran, I’m Egyptian, and I’m a film buff. Only 328 km from my home in Cairo lies Palestine, where in 1948, a war commonly referred to as AlNakba uprooted thousands of Palestinians from their homes after attacks by Zionist forces.

NAT SOUND: War and gunshot sounds.

Palestine has been under occupation since 1967. Of course, this impacts the creation of art, and film in specific is a critical tool of opposition. And at the intersection of two minorities in the industry, female Palestinian filmmakers are creating films that allow them to represent themselves, by themselves.

MUSIC: Volume increases then decreases (:02)

To learn more about the history of Palestinian film, I called Professor Arab Loutfi from the film department at the American University in Cairo.

NAT Sound: Phone rings

ARAB LOUTFI (AL): “Hello” (:01)

Professor Loutfi is a director herself whose worked on several films about Palestine.

ARAB LOUTFI (AL): “During the 50s, 60s, uh, we had many Arab film makers, who made films related to the Palestinian question. In the end of the eighties, more and more
a new generation of young Palestinian film makers began to make films on their own about Palestine." (:16)

NAT SOUND: Old 35mm film roll sound effect

I came into these interviews expecting to hear that these female directors would have major struggles pertaining to their gender in their male-dominated film industry. But in Palestine, things are different. When I asked Najwa if she faces any of those issues, she said;

NN: “See, I really don’t. I think they face it much more in the West. In many ways our societies are way more accepting. I've never really faced major problems as a woman ever.” (:10)

Najwa and her community had bigger things to worry about. Her films are completely shot in Palestine.

NN: “I think there's a tenseness when you shoot where you do, there's an intensity which is needed for our stories.” (:07)

MUSIC: FADE IN - Illa Villardo - Cold Case

Shooting under the occupation is the real challenge.

NN: “We are intent on making sure that Palestinians from all over the country work together. There's a policy of divide and rule. There’s a policy of keeping Palestinians apart.” (:09)

They all even have different ID colors.

NN: “Palestinians who live in the West Bank” (:02)

They have green ID cards

NN: “The one in Gaza” (:01)

They’re orange

NN: Palestinians who live in Jerusalem, who live inside 1948 (:03)

And they’re blue.
These are all different Palestinian territories. The 1948 refers to the borders drawn in 1948 after the illegal establishment of the state of Israel to redefine Palestinian land.

NN: “So the division of colors and the division of mentalities, it starts to create a different political reality for you.” (:05)

For her film Eyes of a Thief, Najwa decided to bring Egyptian actor Khaled Abou El Naja into Palestine to play her lead character, which meant an endless bureaucratic visa process.

NAT Sound: Street background sound

NN: “Khaled Abo El Naja, which was the one and only time an Egyptian star has ever been able to enter the country, um, and to be in a movie. So it was when he first came that there was, we were in Nablus and Nablus was closed off for 10 years. It had been just open I think one and a half years, two years, where people can come in and out more or less freely. And there was shooting that day. So Khaled comes out, he was like, what's this? I was like, we didn't know what to say. I was like, it's a wedding. And then at the end of the 21 days of shooting in Nablus, he comes down, he says, yeah, it's a wedding.” (:033)

NAT Sound: Palestinian wedding music and “zaghoura”

Dr Arab has a completely different philosophy. She is not of Palestinian origin, but identifies as somewhat Palestinian.

AL: “I came from south of Lebanon. From a city called Sidon. We didn’t have really Lebanon, Syria, Palestine. I mean, it was only one country and it was divided by the colonizers, with Sykes–Picot and so on.” (:11)

According to History.com, The 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, was a secret convention made during World War I between Great Britain and France for the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, ratifying Palestine as an extension of British sovereignty, which paved the way for the establishment of a Zionist state.

AL: “We believe that we are one country.” (:02)

Because of her non-Palestinian citizenship, Professor Arab refuses to visit or work in occupied Palestine.
AL: “Because I'm against any normalization with the zionist state. I don't accept the idea of recognizing them as a state because this is mean that I've recognized my stealing the land, so this is why I don't take any visa that from any zionist embassy.” (:15)

But wait..does that mean it’s unethical to make films in Palestine? Does it mean acknowledging Israel as a state?

AL: “It depends on the filmmaker position. Filmmakers who are palestinians. I think they have the right to be anywhere, it's their right.” (:06)

It’s really a matter of preference.. And it also always depends on where you’re actually from. Regardless of where they’re shot, all of these films have a common goal: to represent Palestine in a way that they want it to be seen.

NN: “Our history has been so warped and so distorted and has been told by so many others. And usually the so-called Victor is the one who rewrites history, and the oral history of people who have remained, who have lived, who have seen, their stories are important. They are witnesses, they are the ones who also write history. The people who have lived times that you haven't lived and it's, it's in order to make their stories heard and not to, to dissolve into oblivion.” (:26)

Palestinian films are on the rise, and what Najwa wants is..

NN: “I just hope they keep getting made.” (:02)

NAT Sound: Mai Masri speaking Arabic in an interview

While the industry is small, Mai Masri, another award-winning Palestinian filmmaker told Middle East Monitor in an interview in 2018 that of all the Arab cinema, Palestine is the only cinema, or the only country, that has consistent festivals everywhere in the world. It will continue to be a struggle, but all of these Palestinian filmmakers care about the same thing.

NN: “It's all reclaiming our narrative. It's all reclaiming our narrative.” (:04)

MUSIC: VOLUME INCREASE - Tillis County

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MUSIC: FADE OUT - Tillis County