



Reviews

- Yoom Ilak, Yoom Aleik, Palestinian Refugees from Jerusalem, 1948: Heritage, Eviction and Hope

Badil Video, 1998

- Jerusalem: An Interactive Pilgrimage to the Holy City

CD-Rom, Simon & Schuster/
Tyrell, 1995

Produced by a local Palestinian human rights organization *Yoom Ilak, Yoom Aleik* is a well crafted documentary detailing the events of 1948 from a Palestinian perspective and exploring their lasting effects on the city and its Palestinian residents (past and present). Localizing the *Nakba* in the history of a particular place

makes this video especially timely and important. Working through what at this point might be called 'traditional' icons of Palestinian exilic memory-making (i.e. villagers with keys to doors that no longer exist), the high quality cinematography combined with the depth of research, the breadth of people chosen to narrate the events of 1948 and thereafter--from Dayr Yassin villagers to resistance fighters to university professors--makes for a very special presentation. The attention *Yoom Ilak, Yoom Aleik* gives to the diversity of Palestinian society makes this documentary interesting even to an audience familiar with the events of 1948. The video contrasts recollections of life in the affluent western suburbs of the city with those of villagers in areas surrounding Jerusalem, features discussions of cultural perceptions of war, and traces the effects of 1948 not only on individual lives but also on the institutional structure of Palestinian life in the city (i.e. the Khaldiyyeh Library).

The intensive focus on events in a city in a particular year constitutes both the strength and weakness of the film. For a Palestinian audience, and for those sympathetic to Palestinian rights and well-informed of the events surrounding 1948, *Yoom Ilak, Yoom Aleik* is an important contribution. But as a documentary film that intends to present an alternative interpretation, that seeks to question hegemonic ways of telling, that desires to educate and persuade, it is less successful. The video is demanding of its audience, presuming too much. By beginning with 1948, it cannot tell, except in subtle references, the complex history of diversity, tolerance, and co-existence

within the city. It also cannot convey the events that led to the dramatic growth of the Jewish population in the city and the subsequent entanglements between space, demography and history (unfortunately only alluded to by way of a mishap at the beginning of the documentary). Without that kind of engagement with the history of Jerusalem, *Yoom Ilak, Yoom Aleik* as a documentary can no doubt elicit sympathy, but diminishes its potential for persuasion.

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Odd, if not predictably disturbing, best describes the kind of pilgrimage that the reader/viewer of this CD-ROM is invited to join. Unlike other such products marketed in conjunction with the Israeli sponsored *Jerusalem 3,000* celebrations, this interactive text claims to tell a different sort of story: the history of the city from a Christian perspective. *Jerusalem: An Interactive Pilgrimage to the Holy City* is technically sophisticated, well indexed, and provides the user with a variety of paths of exploration (including one for children) of the city's past(s) and present. Whichever path the user chooses, its origin is that of Christianity's presence and entanglement with Jerusalem. Considering the focus of the CD-ROM, at first glance there is a persuasive logic to this choice of point of departure. However, the further one travels on a road marked by the complex set of relations that define Muslim and Christian control over and life in the history of the city, the more conscious one becomes of the absence, at best the very scant references to, the Jewish presence in the

city. The choice to exclude the origin story of the city, likewise, then becomes troubling by way of the assumptions that it supposes. Most CD-ROM's produced in conjunction with Jerusalem 3,000 are marked by the totalizing presence of Jewish Jerusalem at the expense of other voices and histories. The silences about Jewish Jerusalem in this Christian pilgrimage are therefore so much more glaring, to the extent that during the tour one is tempted to check the index to make sure that stable references of the history of the city (i.e. Temple of Solomon, Wailing Wall etc.) actually exist. Produced for the same commemorative context and within the same ideological space *Jerusalem* presents nothing but a mirror image of the sectarian politics--with its exclusive claims, its boundaries, its inability to perceive hybrid histories--that define dominant ways of presenting the so-called Jerusalem question.

For those users who still engage with a CD-ROM in a modernist, linear fashion and consequently take the tour of the modern city (set up separately) last, there will be few surprises. The equivalent of an older media, the coffee-table book, this tour consists of still photography contextualized through short written blurbs. The vast bulk of the tour takes place in West Jerusalem with a brief detour to East Jerusalem. The images chosen are of churches and buildings that are a product of the nineteenth-century European presence in the city. With the exception of the church of the Holy Sepulchre, Palestinian Christian life in the Old City is completely excluded. In the representation of life in East Jerusalem the Palestinian

gives way to the ethnographic 'Arab.' Colourful shots of vegetable carts, old men with their black and white kaffiyya's sitting in a cafe and so forth furnish the viewer with a familiar repertoire of Israel's own 'indigenous people'. The kind of story that *Jerusalem: An Interactive Pilgrimage to the Holy City* tells can perhaps best be grasped--and unravelled in its suggestive complexity--in a caption accompanying a photo of village women selling vegetables in the Bab al-Amoud area: '...itinerant beggars that have been here since time immemorial.'