

A LOOK AT THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE PROCESS AND THE LAND ISSUE IN THE DOCUMENTARY *PROMISES* (2001)

Claudinei Lodos

ABSTRACT

The peace process between Israelis and Palestinians, which occurred in the 1990's, is depicted in the American documentary *Promises* (2001). The issue of land appropriation is highlighted in the film through both Arabian and Jewish children's voices while debating about their rights of belonging. In this article, we demonstrate the representation of the conflict through the documentary, highlighting the land problem, and considering the historical contextualization of the period in which the documentary was produced.

KEYWORDS

Palestine; documentary; Israel; conflict

UM OLHAR SOBRE O PROCESSO DE PAZ ISRAEL-PALESTINA E A PROBLEMÁTICA DA TERRA NO DOCUMENTÁRIO *PROMISES* (2001)

RESUMO

O processo de paz entre israelenses e palestinos, ocorrido na década de 1990, está representado no documentário estadunidense *Promises* (2001). A questão da posse da terra apresenta destaque no filme através das vozes de crianças árabes e judias que debatem sobre os seus direitos de pertencimento. Neste artigo, demonstramos a representação do conflito pelo documentário, destacando a problemática da terra e considerando a contextualização histórica do período em que o documentário foi produzido.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Palestina; documentário; Israel; conflito

INTRODUCTION

The US documentary *Promises*, released in 2001, presents as background the historical context in which the peace process between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples occurred. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how the issue of land tenure, which has permeated the conflict in the region since 1948, is debated in this documentary during the period in which the peace process was in force. The documentary directs the debate of the irreconcilable issues through the voices of children, Arabs and Jews, who present discourses through the lens of religiosity.

Promises was shot in the Middle East and produced in the United States, so, we sought to question the implications stemming from the place of production to understand how the documentary articulated the opinion on the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. The film presents a history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and seeks to debate, through interviews and testimonies, the most burning questions about the conflict. The documentary is not a synthesis of the conflict, but its viewer can see the tensions that are part of this society, through its voice, which refers to the construction of both the image and the film narrative.

THE DOCUMENTARY *PROMISES*

Promises was produced in a partnership with the Independent Television Service (ITVS)¹, a major US broadcaster. The production began in 1995 until 2001, when the documentary was released at the Rotterdam International Festival. *Promises* was directed by Justine Shapiro, host of the *Globe Trekker* travel series, during this period; B.Z. Goldberg², Jewish-American and journalist during the first *intifada*³ (1987-1993), and Carlos Bolado, Mexican filmmaker. In the documentary, Goldberg claims to be Jewish but not practicing Judaism. Also protagonist of the plot, he highlights his Judeo-American identity and claims to be fluent in Hebrew and Arabic, because he studied in Israel as a child.

The documentary states that the children from Palestine had something to say about the *intifada* and the peace process. It is in this perspective that Goldberg and the production team select seven children living in and around Jerusalem – among them Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews – to take part in the production of this documentary. Yarko and Daniel, of West Jerusalem (Israeli sector); Mahmoud, from East Jerusalem (Palestinian sector); Shlomo, of the Old City (Jewish quarter); Sanabel, of Zakarieh, however, a resident of a Refugee Camp in Deheishe (West Bank); Moishe, of Beit-El, a Jewish settlement and Faraj, also of Deheishe.

This film production presents, through testimonies and interviews, the discourse of children living in Palestine. The problem of the conflict is made explicit in the production of this documentary, its observation making possible to assess the questions concerning the conflict that remain burning due to the perpetuation and irreconcilability of the it. In short, they are: the question of the land and to whom the right of ownership is given; religious life of the peoples, Arabs and Jews; security of both peoples who transit in Palestine; borders and its enlargement; force of the Israeli army and the Palestinian resistance. All these issues are discussed through the narratives of these children who “act” their own history.

¹ In the 1990s, according to Roger Parry, ITVS was one of the major broadcasters, alongside the BBC, the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and NBC, which defined the industry (Parry, 2012, p. 279).

² B.Z. Goldberg also participated in pacifist organizations such as the Israeli Army, the Toyota Group (Japan) AT & T, MIT, Columbia University, The Interfaith Committee on the Middle East and Solidarity (Poland). In the period of the first *intifada*, he returned to Jerusalem to report the event for Reuters TV, the BBC, NBC, CNN and NHK (Japanese TV). Retrieved from <http://www.promisesproject.org/credits.html>

³ In December 1987 the first Palestinian popular uprising broke out as a result of Israeli oppression and occupation. This uprising became known as the first *intifada* and lasted until 1993 (Pappé, 2008, p. 274).

Regarding ethnicity⁴, the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict demarcates the ethnic differences that have been established between the two peoples throughout the process, from the identities built up in the relations between the “I” and the “Other”, as the one that opposes it. Poutignat and Streiff-Fernart (1998, p. 123) say that researchers share the idea that “belonging to a group implies the existence of a category of excluded”. In this regard, we consider that the Israeli identity – from the founding of the State of Israel – and the awareness of an Arab-Palestinian identity that flourished in the struggle against the Zionist occupation, constitute a scenario of dispute explicitly addressed by the question of ethnicity. The authors further point out that ethnicity “at the same time as affirming a collective self denies a collective Other. Its main characteristic is the emergence of an awareness of separation and forms of interaction that can only arise in a common social context” (Poutignat & Streiff-Fenart, 1998, p. 124).

The documentary *Promises* deals with the frontiers built in this society, while also proposing – through the production process – the dialogue between both peoples. The peace process, in effect during the film’s production, was a weakening of the struggle of the Palestinian people, who in the 1980’s strengthened and gained notoriety inside and outside the conflict region. The pledges contained in the documentary examine the failed attempts by sectors of Israeli-Palestinian society to reach agreement and end the conflict. *Promises* sensitizes the spectator so that he enters the burning issues of the conflict, but it remains a frustrated voice among so many others that echo the end of this war.

It is worth noting that this documentary is a representation of the Palestinian struggle from a Western perspective. This implies the understanding and construction of a critical analysis pertinent to the origin of the voice of this documentary. Nichols clarifies the specificity of the documentary on the different issues of its production and points to the conception of the voice as an important element that guides and organizes the film: “the fact that documentaries are not a reproduction of reality gives them a voice of their own. They are a representation of the world, and this representation means a unique view of the world” (Nichols, 2005, p. 73).

There is an implicit relationship with the viewer in the film document, which shows the power of the film in providing a sense of witnessing events. Burke believes that “this sense of witness is illusory” and that “the director is concerned not only with what really happened but also in telling a story that has an artistic form and that can mobilize the senses of many viewers” (Burke, 2004, p. 200).

Promises portrays the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since the 1948 war. For the understanding of the film narrative, we note that the participatory mode - a category used by Nichols to specify a subgenre of the documentary - is part of the production of *Promises*. According to the author: “documentarians also go to the field; they also live among others and speak of their experience or represent what they experienced “ (Nichols, 2005, pp. 153-155).

⁴ Poutignat and Streiff-Fernart understand that the question of ethnicity entails “diverse theories” (1998, p. 120). However, the authors emphasize that the study of ethnicity consists of “inventing the repertoire of available identities in a given multiethnic situation and describing the saliency field of these identities in the various situations of contact” (Poutignat & Streiff-Fernart, 1998, p. 117).

In the film, Goldberg conducts interviews and also appears mediating dialogues between Arab and Jewish children, while also sharing his experience as a Jew who lived in the outskirts of Jerusalem and returned as a journalist during the period of the first intifada. The documentary features a quick introduction, in which the director interacts with selected children, shows the city seen from above, a map and pictures of the streets of East and West Jerusalem. After presenting the children and the places where they live, the documentary focuses the debate on the conflict based on the problems of the land and articulates the film production reproducing in the documentary what was under discussion in the period, namely, the peace process.

The spectator observes, immediately into the first scene, the shadow of some children playing on the horizontal stairs of a park, the voices of boys and girls that are lost into the sound of Bayaty music (Mansurov, 1993, track 3) and the word *Promises*, also in Arabic and Hebrew. Following the images depicting the city of Jerusalem from above, Goldberg, voiced over, states: “I think my childhood here in Jerusalem was normal, but being ‘normal’ in the Middle East means living with the war. Conflicts burst, bombs explode, people die” (Goldberg quoted in *Promises*, 2001).

The camera records, through the city of Jerusalem, in the Israeli sector, the fast food segment stores. Soon after, at the dawn of the day, the film presents the brothers, Yarko and Daniel, secular Jews, and then goes to the Palestinian sector, where the first interview with Mahmoud, Arab-Palestinian and Muslim takes place. Arabs and Jews, the city in its Western aspect and oriental music are intertwining elements, revealing the proximity and tensions that arise from the coexistence of these ethnic groups. Goldberg, in the introduction, emphasizes the widespread representation of the Middle East as a place of conflicts, in order to naturalize the relationship of people with the problems faced there, and it is not uncommon to point out that this story concerns their childhood. He narrates the problem of the conflict and mentions the negotiations as if the observer had preliminary knowledge of the peace process.

From Jerusalem, Goldberg heads to the occupied territories and passes easily through an Israeli checkpoint. In the constant movement of the vehicle, the subject of the camera films on the road traveled: debris, an abandoned car, the narrow road and some beautiful buildings (houses, small buildings and a church). Goldberg discusses the 1948 war and its meanings for both the Israeli people and the Palestinians.

As a result of the war [1948], 750,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from their land and became refugees. Refugee camps were opened in the neighboring Arab countries. In 1967 Israel took over the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The camps were under Israeli military occupation. In the Deheishe refugee camp, more than 11,000 Palestinians live. It is the refugees of 1948, plus their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. (Goldberg quoted in *Promises*, 2001)

In Deheishe, a refugee camp located in the West Bank, Sanabel reports the expulsion from the land and the formation of the camp. This happened, at first, in the tents

and then in small buildings. To make the discourse credible, the sequence of scenes is constructed – after Sanabel’s presentation – with a black-and-white (archival film) recording, the black-and-white field photograph, and ends with the field in the film’s production time. Sanabel’s father participated in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) as local leader and was arrested without being indicted or tried. This organization was integrated into the PLO – Palestine Liberation Organization following the 1967 episode, along with Fatah, led by Yasser Arafat, Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, branch of the PFLP, Saiqa, Syrian group, among others of lesser expression.

The PLO was committed to ideas aimed at the liberation of the Palestinians, and so it emphasized the return of exiled Palestinians to the territories occupied by Israel. At first, the focus of the organization was national liberation rather than national independence. This position was reversed only with the Declaration of Independence of Palestine in 1988. In part, the first alignment did not extend to Palestinians living in the occupied territories, such as the “Land Family”, for example a group of remaining Palestinians. According to Said, “its action was driven by the imperative to remain on the ground, strengthening the cohesion of the community, accommodating itself to the Israeli political system and yet fighting for equal rights”. However, many Palestinians recognized the PLO as the “only political hope”. According to Said, the PLO transformed the once-passive Palestinian into a “politically participatory being”. Israel identified the organization with terrorism and only recognized it as a representative of the Palestinian people on the eve of the Oslo agreement (Said, 2012, p. 154).

It is still at dawn that Sanabel’s family heads to the Ashkelon prison in Israel. The journey that takes the family into meeting the father lasts more than four hours, in addition to the long waiting time. The visit takes only half an hour. Goldberg reports that he made a request to visit Sanabel’s father but was denied because the Israelis considered him a “security risk” and so only the family could visit him. For Sanabel, the Jews appropriated the land belonging to the Palestinians and arrested her father. She does not conceive of peace at this point in history. Goldberg points out in the film that the PFLP, of which her father was a local leader, was not in line with the peace agreement. This reveals that the PLO, led by Yasser Arafat, was not bound by the agreement’s guidelines. Sanabel, from a political perception of the conflict and engaged in the Palestinian cause - participated in the traditional dance group aimed at “telling the story of the refugees”, celebrating in this way the Palestinian resistance. She experienced the pain of her father’s distance, but strengthened herself in the struggle for an independent Palestinian country.

THE LAND ISSUE IN THE DOCUMENTARY

The Zionist slogan created at the end of the nineteenth century, “a land without people, for a people without land” (Said, 2012, p. 11), presents a problem in which the children of the film insert themselves. The right to belong is discussed in the film by Jews – orthodox and secular – and Palestinian Arabs. The religious aspect is evidenced

in the words and practices of the Jerusalem boy, Mahmoud, but does not appear in the speeches of Deheishe's children. It is evident that each of them, Jews and Arabs, represents a position committed to their place of influence. On this issue, the documentary opens the debate and allows children to express themselves; for this, the first to speak about the right to own the land is an orthodox Jew, who presents the Zionist argument based on the Torah:

when an Arab sees me, he thinks I was the one who took his land. They think that the earth is theirs, and us, that it is ours. We know it's ours. (...) I'll find it, do not worry [open the Torah]. Because God did not give this land to Israel and Abraham many times. He only gave it once. And because of this one time, this land is ours. (Moishe Bar Am quoted in *Promises*, 2001)

In the film, Moishe's argument is interspersed with the statements of Mahmoud, Shlomo, Yarko, Sanabel and Faraj. For this discussion, we intend to oppose the words of both boys practicing both Jewish and Islamic religion: Moishe and Mahmoud. The first is the resident of the Jewish settlement, Beit-El, located in the vicinity of Jerusalem. The second, Mahmoud, is the son of an Arab merchant. His father has a coffee shop in the Muslim quarter of the ancient city of Jerusalem. In his presentation, the movie shows the store and Mahmoud working on it, then it is possible to locate the store on a narrow, busy street. He leaves the store after carrying a cart of coffee packets through the streets of the neighborhood. The camera films: some Israeli soldiers; walls painted with some figures, whose colors represent the flag of Palestine; men and women wearing the traditional dress of the Arabs; and closes in the image of a Christian edifice.

The Jews say that this is their land. How can the land be theirs? If the land is theirs, why does the Qur'an say that Muhammad fled from Mecca to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem? Then Jerusalem is ours! The Arabs! (...) It is not of Israel, it is of the Arabs. It's ours. This land is mine! I was born and raised here. You have no right to take the land. (Mahmoud Mazen Mahmoud Izhman quoted in *Promises*, 2001)

This decisive problem, expressed in Mahmoud's words, guides the actions of people living in this segregated society. In Jerusalem, the architecture of the city evokes the faith of the three "great monotheisms", namely: Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Armstrong, 2001. p. 9). Moishe and Mahmoud have no doubts about their rights of belonging in this land, Moishe knows the Jewish scriptures, just as Mahmoud is also educated in the principles of Islamic faith. The documentary features a scene in which Mahmoud is in a class at the Islamic School for Boys in Jerusalem. The class discussion is about freedom in view of the situation of the Palestinians in that locality. The teacher asks the boys questions, including: "Do you like freedom? Do the children of Palestine live in freedom?" (*Promises*, 2001). He continues his reasoning by saying that many Muslims cannot go to Jerusalem to pray and therefore are deprived of their freedom. Mahmoud goes to the painting and draws a picture depicting the Palestinian uprising. Mahmoud draws a child with a stone in his hand and

another crying because he lost his mother. The reaction of the children is almost always identified with the stone.

The story of God's promise to Abraham as read by Moses grounds the Jewish belief in which Zionism ascribes meaning. The Jews, from this proposition, have a link with the land since the old days. For the Arabs, Jerusalem acquired the status of sacredness in the seventh century through the advent of Islam. In this period, according to Hitti,

the dramatic night voyage in which the Prophet is said to have been transported instantly from the Ka'ba to Jerusalem in preparation for his ascension to the seventh heaven. Having thus served as a ground station on this memorable journey, Jerusalem, already sacred to Jews and Christians, has become and has remained, after Mecca and Medina, the third of the most sacred cities for the Muslim world. (Hitti, 1948, pp. 29-30)

Mahmoud does not cite the dream of the Prophet Muhammad, but emphasizes the importance of Jerusalem for Muslims. In addition to the religiosity of these peoples – represented in the voices of these children and which, ultimately, guides the struggle of Jews and Arabs – the film, through the lens of the secular, also articulates opinion. Yarko, a secular Jew, will say this about his city: “the Palestinians are abusing! They want Jerusalem for their capital. Don't hold your breath!” For him, Israel has the right to land for having won the 1948 war.

THE PEACE PROCESS

I have proof that this land is ours, and I have the right to build in it! So let's have *peace*. We will not do any harm to the Jews or they to us. I have the right to go back to the village. (...) I want to go back to Ras Abu Ammar! If it is not in my generation, who knows, next time. One day we will free Palestine and return to Ras Abu Ammar. (Faraj Adnan Hassan Hussein quoted in *Promises*, 2001).

The Jews are still in our land, they have left no space. (...) They take the people and put them in prison. It's wrong. For me there is no *peace* now. (Sanabel Hassan Abd'el Jawad quoted in *Promises*, 2001).

In the late 1970s, following the Camp David agreement (1979), it was believed that the road to peace was built and that the Israelis and Arabs could at last advance negotiations on the future of Palestine. However, a number of developments have continued to frustrate the peace proposals, including the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon aimed at destroying the 1982 Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) military force and the Palestinian uprising in December 1987 – in the West Bank and Gaza Strip – known as the *intifada*. According to Morris (2014), the unleashing of these two events led to the Declaration of Palestinian Independence, written by the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish

and translated into English by the American intellectual, Edward Said. This Palestinian document points to the *intifada* as an “irreversible revolutionary impulse”⁵ for the history of that Arab people, who once fought for the liberation of the Palestinians and at that the moment starts to emphasize the discourse of national independence.

In the middle of the *intifada*, after some negotiations between the Israeli government and the PLO, on February 11, 1993 – in the city of Oslo, Norway – the Palestinian Arab leadership accepted the initial proposal for the establishment of the peace agreement. At the beginning of his term, President Bill Clinton was informed of the commitment made in Oslo through Shimon Peres’ visit to the United States at the request of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. In order to bring about an agreement, mutual recognition was necessary between the representative authorities, i.e, Israel would have to accept the leadership of the PLO as a representative of the Palestinian cause and the PLO would need to recognize the existence of the State of Israel.

Under the agreement, Israel would have to withdraw its military forces - leaving control of the territories acquired in 1967 – and disrupt the settlements, thus recognizing the Palestinian authority. Palestinians, in addition to recognizing the right to the existence of the State of Israel, would have to renounce terrorism during the war period. The guidelines for compliance with the agreement emphasized that implementation should take place gradually and both parties would have to work towards this.

The Oslo agreement marked the beginning of the peace process and the end of the *intifada* (1987-1993). In this period, from 1993 to September 2000, the territory bounded by the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea had an experience of relative peace. It is likely to infer that this was a consequence of the agreement settled in Oslo and signed at the White House, considering that the terms of the agreement were respected and observed; however, history presents another direction for this problem.

Faraj was born in the Refugee Camp in Deheishe. He does not identify himself with this locality. The place he chose to belong to is Ras Abu Ammar, an old Israeli-occupied village where his family lived before the occupation. Both Faraj and Sanabel show their discontent at remaining in Deheishe. Moishe, Mahmoud, Shlomo, Yarko, Sanabel and Faraj discuss the occupation that led to the loss of Palestinian land rights. In this discussion, there are two moments in which the word peace appears. The first is in Sanabel’s speech and the second when Faraj argues about the issue. The other children do not mention peace, although they understand the tensions relevant to this debate. It is possible to infer that production needed this debate to centralize it in the film pointing to the land question as the crucial point for understanding the conflict. In the film’s forty minutes – after the completion of the scenes that report on Sanabel’s father in prison and the beautiful image at dusk that exposes the golden dome of the Dome of the Rock –, *Promises* brings the testimonies of the children presented here and, in the middle of this discussion, leaves the observer concerning what is being discussed.

⁵ Palestinian Declaration of Independence. Retrieved from <http://vivapalestina.com.br/declaracao-de-independencia-palestina-15-de-novembro-de-1988/>

There are two issues that appear subjectively and that can be considered from the point of view of what the production of this documentary could achieve. The first is the problematic of the land, the second concerns the disputes between Arabs and Jews, with the premise of ethnicity. Both dispute the right to own land and ground this right both through the point of view of religiosity and through the history of occupation in this geographic space. After all, does the land belong to whom by right, the Arabs or the Jews? Will the peace process be successful without solving this problem? Besides Goldberg – who had memories of his childhood – Shapiro and Bolado did not share the experience of those children as to what was lived. However, the three directors were aware of the political deliberations about the recent agreement that was in effect at that time and the developments resulting from it, since it was widely disseminated by the world press. One relevant fact that is missing in the film is the attack on Israel's prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, as a form of protest for the referral of the negotiations mentioned here.

Soon after Oslo, there were numerous indications of Israeli and Palestinian opposition forces revolting against the peace process. In February 1994, Baruch Goldstein, a Jewish fundamentalist, killed 29 Palestinian Arabs at the Ibrahimiyya Mosque in Hebron. In April, a Hamas member killed six Israelis in Afula, exploding himself with a bomb. Despite the discontent of Palestinians and Israelis, and therefore some actions aimed at undermining the peace process, Rabin followed through with the policy of seeking a solution to the conflict. According to Cohn-Sherbok, "Rabin warned that these terrorist acts would not prevent the Israeli government from seeking an agreement with the PLO" (Cohn-Sherbok & El-Alami, 2005, p. 96). On July 4, 1995, the government of Israel, represented by Shimon Peres, seeking to proceed with negotiations, met with Arafat for the adjustments of Oslo II. This agreement specifically dealt with Palestinian control in the West Bank, thus entailing the withdrawal of Israeli forces. In September of the same year, Rabin signed Oslo II.

The Prime Minister of Israel was accused by opponents of betraying his country. There were demonstrations in Jerusalem of this right wing in which they pointed to the agreement as a "betrayal of the biblical land of Israel" (Cohn-Sherbok & El-Alami, 2005, 98). A few days later, after being accused of being a traitor of the Jewish state – following a rally in support of the peace process that took place in Tel Aviv – Yitzhak Rabin was murdered by Yigal Amir, an Orthodox Jew and a student at Bar-Illan University. Due to this fateful episode and the continuity of Palestinian terrorism, the right-wing Likud party was able to elect Benjamin Netanyahu as Israel's prime minister, causing, between 1996 and 1999, paralysis in the peace process.

The Netanyahu government, "rejected the legacy of Rabin" (Cohn-Sherbok & El-Alami, 2005, p. 195) and has shaken hopes for the creation of an independent Palestinian state. The peace process that had already been weakened by the various events was cooled even further. Jewish settlements were expanded, and 1997 was marked by an increase in the number of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. In addition, Netanyahu supported the archaeological project concerning the opening of a tunnel in Jerusalem, which passed through the foundations of the al-Aqsa Mosque.

In view of these developments, President Bill Clinton invited the PLO and Israel authorities to an effective agreement after the Wye River Conference⁶, in Maryland. In addition to Arafat and Netanyahu, King Hussein of Jordan participated as a mediator in the negotiations that took place at the White House in 1998. Despite the interventions mentioned here, there was no significant progress. The following year, Ehud Barak of the Labor Party won the elections and new negotiations were held giving indications that the peace process would be prioritized. This time in another location, with the presence of the government of Egypt and Jordan – implementing the Wye River agreement – Barak and Arafat signed the Sharm al-Shaykh agreement on September 5, 1999. They agreed on the Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, in phases; the release of Palestinian prisoners; construction of the Port of Gaza and diversion roads; Israeli security and the economy of both parties.

After the 1967 war, groups of Jewish nationalists established settlements here where it was previously Arab land. A land they believe to be the biblical region of Judea and Samaria. The Israeli government supported the occupation of the territories and today there are over 150,000 settlements in the West Bank. Beit-El is one of the largest and oldest settlements. Like all settlements, Beit-El has constant military protection. (Goldberg quoted in *Promises*, 2001)

The region referenced by Goldberg was a key issue in the negotiations that led to the agreement initiated in Wye River and which was concluded in the city of Sharm al-Shaykh in the Sinai Peninsula. According to El-Alami, “Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian area would take place in three stages (from September 1999 to January 2000). There was also a verbal promise to remove areas that would still be designated” (Cohn-Sherbok & El-Alami, 2005, p. 197).

Moishe resides in Beit-El, twenty minutes from Jerusalem; according to him, the place is surrounded by Arabs. Moishe is a religious Jew. He talks about the Arab occupation and presence around the settlement with the particularity of those who know why they reside there. During the depositions, Moishe clearly marks the place of the other: “the people who fight against the Arabs live here ... this fence here separates us from that Arab village there”. These phrases elucidate that the settlement is not only a territorial division, but mainly an obstacle in the relations between peoples. Moishe further states: “I want Barak to make a coalition with the pro-settlement party. It was going to be the perfect match, but it was never going to work” (Moishe quoted in *Promises*, 2001). The peace for him was not outside the acceptable propositions; however, vacate the settlement in which he probably lived since his birth would not be palatable.

⁶ According to Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami (2005), the Wye River Conference in Maryland was promoted by US President Bill Clinton for the Israelis and Palestinians to try to “reach an agreement” (p. 96). The negotiations lasted nine days.

ZIONISM AND PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE

Refugees, do not worry! Let's sacrifice our blood! Negotiators, do not sell out! From Deheishe to Baghdad! An indestructible front! There will be no peace until the end of colonialism! We say this openly. We do not want to see Zionists! Children of the Stone! This is not peace! Let the flag flutter on high! (*Promises*, 2001)

In the hand of an elderly Arab a key is erected. Amidst a few children and many photographers, the scene soon reveals that this man is accompanied by two other Arabs of the same appearance, two with the keys in their hands and the three wearing the traditional Guthra. Men, women and children march through the streets of Deheishe. The war cries highlighted above are part of this demonstration that took place in this Refugee Camp. It is evident from these words that the PLO represented by Yasser Arafat was divided. Possibly this manifestation was articulated by the FPLP, since the father of Sanabel, in Deheishe, was local leader of this front of opposition to the Israeli occupation. They opposed the agreement that started the negotiations, denying the peace that could be achieved in this way. What is elucidated from this excerpt is that these Palestinians longed for the end of Jewish colonialism and the removal of the Zionists from the disputed lands.

Colonialism and Zionism are terms that intertwine as to their understanding on the Palestinian question. According to Said, Zionism is beneficial for the Jews, as it saved them from abandonment and anti-Semitism - in addition to re-establishing their nationality - however, to the Arabs, it became the agent of a “essentially strong and discriminatory” culture (Said, 2012, p. 81). Moreover, it is worth noting that Sephardic Jews, originated mostly in Arab and Muslim countries, could not benefit in the same way as the Ashkenazi, Western Jews. Shohat argues that Zionism, though

claims to offer a homeland to all Jews, this homeland is not open to all with the same largesse. Sephardic Jews were first brought to Israel for specific Zionist-European motives, and since they arrived there they were systematically discriminated against by a Zionism that distributed unequally material efforts and resources, always favoring European Jews, and disregarding the Orientals. (Shohat, 2007, p. 118)

Jewish colonialism is not a movement that represents Eastern peoples, much less is based on ideas from the East, but is based on European principles strongly developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some European countries in the nineteenth century dominated much of the globe politically and economically and left the model as a legacy for others that emerged in the following century: “the twentieth-century history of the non-Western world ... is therefore determined by its relations with the countries that settled in the nineteenth century as the masters of the human race” (Hobsbawm, 1995, p. 199).

Zionism, then, before being realized as the State of Israel, was a practice whose root lies in European colonialism. It is worth mentioning that this Zionism is characterized

by political and non-religious articulations, that is, although it was justified by a religious precept that holds that Zion is the land promised by God to the Jewish people, the mobilization of the Zionist movement was a political practice and appropriated a common European practice in that period. Said set out to criticize Zionism not for what it represented to the Jews, victims of anti-Semitism, but for what it caused to the Arabs natives of Palestine. Before considering it a liberating movement for the Jews, it had already become oppressive because it was engendered in the practices of Western domination. Said further points out: “imperialism was the theory, colonialism was the practice of transforming the vague and useless territories of the world into useful versions of European metropolitan society” (Said, 2012, p. 88).

THE PROMISES OF THE DOCUMENTARY

The four Israeli children chosen for the interviews and testimonies, excluding the secondary appearances, are: Yarko, Daniel, Moishe and Shlomo. In our analysis, the first two gain prominence in the film. They are secular Jews and attached to other stimuli than religion. Faraj and Sanabel, in the same way, are the prominent participants on the Palestinian Arab side. Yarko, Daniel and Faraj are sportsmen and Sanabel dancer. Sports and dance are utilized by the production to promote a meeting between them. As Faraj and Sanabel reside in the refugee camp at Deheishe, they cannot transit through the city of Jerusalem. Given this fact, Goldberg proposes a meeting in Deheishe and for this, Yarko and his brother, Daniel are the ones who should go there.

The film does not reveal the criterion used to choose the children who should attend the meeting that marks the apex of this production. It also does not tell us if everyone has been invited. In the film, the proposal of the meeting was suggested by Yarko, but it is evident that this question had already been brought up. After some scenes in which the issue is debated by the children about the possibility, Sanabel states: “no Palestinian child has tried to explain our situation to the Jews. Arabs and Jews were supposed to meet. I want the kids to meet” (*Promises*, 2001). Faraj, after being reluctant, reverses his opinion and invites Yarko and Daniel to go to the Deheishe camp. The father of the twins says he trusts Goldberg and his team, but is fearful of the meeting.

Shlomo is one of the children who does not participate in this moment of the film. Goldberg presents him as the son of a distinguished rabbi from the United States. The camera films the Jewish quarter in which Shlomo was born in Jerusalem and his father leading him to prayers at the Western Wall. The film shows the routine of this boy, orthodox Jew, and informs that his period of study is 12 hours a day. In the study practice it is common to shake one’s head, according to Shlomo (in *Promises*, 2001): “no one tells us to do this while studying, but it is said in the Gemara that the people of Israel, while studying the Torah, are like the flame of a tremendous candle” (Goldberg quoted in *Promises*, 2001) questions the boy about his faith in Judaism: “Shlomo when you meet a Jew like me, non-religious, do you think it’s your mission to bring me closer to Judaism?” In fluent English, he responds that some have this mission and others do not. That depends on God’s guidance.

In Deheishe, when the Israelis reach the meeting, the Arab children are already waiting to welcome them. After the greetings, Faraj talks to Yarko and recounts some facts about the intifada. During their explanation, the Israelis read a graffiti: “the victory is ours. The thirst of the land shall be sated with blood. Hamas” (*Promises*, 2001). When they enter the house of the Arabs the children eat, play wrestling and have fun. In this sequence of scenes it is possible to identify a scenario-location. Regardless of the differences between Palestinians and Israelis, the scene communicates harmony and communion: the meal served to the children, the respect for colleagues and the joy as the main element. At the turn of the scene, the scenery changes to an external environment, the remarkable music of Abdel Gadir Salim suggests a relaxed moment and with more freedom. Yarko takes off his shirt to play soccer. This action may mean he is disarming himself before his colleagues. The playfulness is part of a peaceful coexistence. Faraj joins him, also appearing shirtless on the scene. In the sequence, the children play with the slingshot; the object, in this case, is being evidenced as a toy and not utilitarian of the struggle of the Palestinian people.

When they return inside, the documentary points to a closure and it is noted that the sequence of images reveals peculiarities that go beyond what was possibly programmed for the scene. What is observed in the unfolding of the scenes is that the meeting in Deheishe could mean the beginning of a friendship between Palestinian and Israeli children, and this represents the climax of the whole film. However, the shooting of the scene surprises even Goldberg, who is moved by Faraj’s testimony.

This afternoon, I started thinking: B Z. is leaving soon. (speak sobbing) And now, we became friends with Daniel and Yarko. [B.Z Goldberg also cries] And they will forget our friendship as soon as B.Z leaves. And all our effort will be in vain. (Faraj Adnan Hassan Hussein quoted in *Promises*, 2001)

He opens up at this time because he knew the policy of Israeli control and the limits imposed on the villagers in the Deheishe camp. Refugee camps are part of the outcome of the 1948 war that led to the flight and expulsion of 750.000 Palestinians. In the case of Deheishe, after 1967, Israel took control, occupying militarily the field that, at the time of the film, had more than eleven thousand Palestinians. Faraj knew that the difficulties of country life would be an impediment to the continuity of the new friendship with the Israelis of Jerusalem. It is likely that at this point in time, Goldberg, the translator who mediated the dialogue and the subject-of-the-camera, came across a reality that would go beyond his efforts.

The film production, in light of this, directs the resolution of the problem of the coexistence of these peoples by means of the dialogue between the secular ones. This, ultimately, represents a proposal of distancing from the policies of the State towards the religious issues. Goldberg is not an orthodox Jew and not even an Israeli, but, as Mahmoud declared, an American Jew. The director’s perspective is already compromised with a US socio-cultural heritage. With the premise that what is produced in the Western world refers to an Orientalist perspective, there are two questions that can be raised to explain this reflection. The first concerns the Western ideology that is based on

the enlightenments⁷ and the second on the representation that is made of the portion of the world that does not fit into the first, that is, the East.

In Said's analysis of this dichotomy between West and East, one realizes that there would not be an East if the West had not invented it. Moreover, because the West has built "a cultural rival", it seeks to assert itself by belittling the image of the Other. For this author, the representations about the East appeared at the end of century XVIII and had as main objective the domination through colonization. In his words, Orientalism emerged "as a Western style to dominate, restructure and have authority over the East" (Said, 2007, p. 29).

One of the aspects of the enlightenments is the removal of the propositions based on religious principles and this idea starts from the centralization of Man as the only agent capable of solving problems. The inauguration, therefore, of secularism has roots in this period and began to guide, in the centuries to come, the practices of the Western world.

Shohat and Robert (2006) problematized the cinematographic representations of the West, considering the imbrications of neocolonial policies of the twentieth century and exposing figures and stereotypes of the represented. The central question is Eurocentrism, "a paradigmatic perspective which sees Europe as the single origin of meanings, as the center of gravity of the world" (p. 20), which establishes the place of the Other as one who may be near or far, arbitrating from its point of view. The authors:

eurocentrism purifies Western history while it treats the non-Western with condescension, or even horror. It thinks of itself on the basis of its most noble achievements – science, progress, humanism – and the non-Western on the basis of its deficiencies, real or imagined. (Shohat & Robert, 2006, p. 20)

Promises would not depart from this cultural heritage. The point is not to qualify the film as a derogatory representation of the peoples of Palestine, but to seek to understand its proposal from the perspective of both the historical context and the place of production, as an American documentary.

CONCLUSIONS

The summer of 2000 marked the end of the production of this documentary. In the following season of the same year a new *intifada* broke out in Palestine. The peace process was a moment of openness to the debate and even of loosening the positions of each side. However, there are indications that the agreement has had terrible consequences for the Palestinian people, since there has not been a proposal for reparation of the Nakba provoked by the State of Israel since 1948 through the Zionist policy of occupation of the Palestinian lands. The agreement was aimed at restoring parts of

⁷ According to Israel, there were different enlightenment proposals in the late eighteenth century, among them, the author highlights: "radical democratic Enlightenment and moderate antidemocratic Enlightenment". The first is based on reason, and the second on reason and tradition (Israel, 2013, p. 21).

occupied territories from 1967 and did not recognize the right of return for Palestinian refugees. In the late 1990s, due to political disputes, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak sought to retake the agreement that was stalled after Rabin's assassination. According to Pappé (2008), it would be a betrayal of the Palestinian people – who fought for national independence – if the proposal for the Camp David agreement in the year 2000 were approved. Arafat did not sign the agreement “and so the Americans and Israelis punished him immediately, hastening to introduce him as a warmonger”. This humiliation, according to Pappé, plus the provocative visit of Ariel Sharon to the Esplanade of the Mosques, triggered the second *Intifada* (Pappé, 2008, pp. 318-319).

The 1990s marked the time of meetings. In Moscow, Ottawa, Vienna, Brussels and Washington handshakes sought some form of reconciliation. The meeting in Deheishe - emphasized in the film - did not have the representativeness of the leaderships involved in the agreement, but it had a singular character, the agent was the future, represented by the figure of the child. The meeting of Israelis and Palestinians in Deheishe symbolized the promise of these producers who for seven years engaged the Middle East to portray the conflict and articulate opinions about it.

The participation of the children in this meeting reveals the initial design of the production. In this analytical view, the peaceful coexistence of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples would depend on the removal of the more radical positions, being represented here by the adherents of the religious doctrines of both peoples. In the documentary, the conduction of interviews and testimonies – while reflecting on the sequence of the scenes - point to these lapses. The actions that guide the abusive policy of the Arab radical wing - making terrorism a constant practice – and the insistent and permanent advance of the settlements can be framed and seen as reflections of a position based on the religious precepts of these peoples.

Promises is a voice that continues to reverberate for peace in the Middle East. In the last minutes of the film, after the children give their testimony – two years after the meeting – a burning tire runs down the street while an armed soldier watches some children confronting him with rock throwing. The conflict carries on... Finally, after the discouraging reports of the children, to the sound of “Darpa” music (Mertens, 1991, track 1), the movie shows the nursery of a maternity ward. A new hope. Newborns, children of Arabs and Jews, do not yet know about the world and its people, but are already being represented as potential agents for the resolution of a conflict that has more than a century.

This last scene is emblematic because at the beginning of the documentary, on a black screen, the new intifada is informed, putting the promises of peace in the scope of the irreconcilable, as if the documentary was in mourning for the unfulfilled promises. Thus, the film announces what was not possible in the year 2001, but remains with the proposition that the agent capable of promoting peace is the new generation of secular, who will continue to strive to dialogue with each other in the near future. According to the film, both Israelis and Palestinians should strive for a peace deal in the times to come, leaving the differences aside, especially with regard to religiosity. What the film does not point to as a determining cause is that Israel is a state, and as such, constituted

of power, and Palestine still cannot dialogue as an equal, because it does not have an autonomous space in this geography and not even the political power to do so.

Translation: Arthur Germano Santos

REFERENCES

- Armstrong, K. (2001). *Em nome de Deus: o fundamentalismo no judaísmo, no cristianismo e no islamismo*. SP: Companhia das Letras.
- Burke, P. (2004). *Testemunha ocular: história e imagem*. Bauru, SP: EDUSC.
- Cohn-Sherbok, D. & El-Alami, D. (2005). *O conflito Israel-Palestina: para começar a entender*. SP: Palíndromo.
- Goldberg, B. Z., Bolado, C. & Shapiro, J. [Directors]. (2001). *Promises* [Film]. United States of America: Promises Film Project.
- Hitii, P. K. (1948). *Os árabes*. SP: Companhia Editora Nacional.
- Hobsbawm, E. (1995). *Era dos extremos: o breve século XX 1914-1991*. SP: Companhia das Letras.
- Israel, J. (2013). *A revolução das Luzes: o Iluminismo Radical e as origens intelectuais da democracia moderna*. SP: EDIPRO.
- Mertens, W. (1991). Darpa. In *Strategie de la rupture* [CD]. Belgium.
- Mansurov, E. (1993). Bayaty [Recorded by Ashkhabad]. In Ashkhabad. *City of love* [CD]. Germany.
- Morris, B. (2014). *Um Estado, dois Estados – soluções para o conflito Israel-Palestina*. SP: Ed.Sêfer.
- Nichols, B. (2005). *Introdução ao documentário*. Campinas, SP: Papyrus
- Pappé, I. (2008). *La limpieza étnica de Palestina*. Barcelona: Crítica Barcelona.
- Poutignat, P., & Streiff-Fenart, J. (1998). *Teorias da etnicidade. Seguindo de Grupos étnicos e suas fronteiras de Fredrik Barth*. SP: Fundação Editora da UNESP.
- Ramos, F. P. (2008). *Mas afinal... O que é mesmo documentário?* SP: SENAC.
- Said, E. (2007). *Orientalismo: o Oriente como invenção do Ocidente*. SP: Companhia do Bolso.
- Said, E. (2012). *A questão da Palestina*. SP: Unesp.
- Shohat, E. & Robert, S. (2006). *Crítica da imagem eurocêntrica*. SP: Cosas Naify.
- Shohat, E. (2007). Os Sefarditas em Israel – O sionismo do ponto de vista das vítimas judaicas. *Novos Estudos*, 79, 117-136. Retrieved from <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/nec/n79/o6.pdf>

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Claudinei Lodos is a master's student in History of the Federal University of São Paulo, Brazil. He develops a research about the Palestinian issue, with an emphasis on

film analysis. He participated in the V COCAAL (Colloquium of Cinema and Art of Latin America) in 2017, and ANPUH – SP (National Association of History) in 2018, with the communication entitled “The issue of identity in the documentary *Nosotros, Ellos y Yo* (2015), by Nicolás Avruj”. He also participates in the Laboratory of Oriental and Asian Studies (LEOA), Unifesp. In November of 2018, he collaborated in the organization of the First Meeting of the LEOA entitled “Middle East: histories, conflicts and identities”. In this meeting, in addition to being part of the organizing committee, he participated as mediator of the Board: “Jewish Identity and State of Israel: debate of the film”, whose programming included the screening of the documentary *NEY* (2015) – subject of the master’s degree research – and the presence of the director Nicolás Avruj.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5054-8304>

Email: ney_lodos@hotmail.com

Address: Universidade Federal de São Paulo – Unifesp, Rua Sena Madureira, n.º 1.500 - Vila Clementino - São Paulo - SP - CEP: 04021-001, Brasil

* Submitted: 10-09-2018

* Accepted: 01-02-2019