

Maragha, Musa. Interviewed 2012. Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.

I joined the Palestinian Cinema Institution in 1978, in March 1978, to be precise. That date is engraved in my mind because it coincided with the Israeli invasion of South Lebanon in response to the operation launched by Dalal al-Moughrabi. So I still remember the date. I had just come back from Germany, I had been there to read political economy but it wasn't my first choice, I just didn't know there were courses for studying cinema in Germany – or anywhere else. When there, I was surprised to discover a group of Palestinian directors and cameramen who were studying cinema as part of the same scholarship programme I was enrolled in. There were five in our group coming to study it. I tried to register with them in the course but there were no more spaces. So I decided to go back to Beirut to wait until another chance would come up to go to Germany to study cinema.

The group of five included four men and one woman: the cinematographer Marwan Salameh, the cameraman Jamal Nassar, and the directors Mahmoud Khalil, Moufid Khazendar, and his wife Maysar Abu Ali, the sister of Mustafa Abu Ali, who was the chairman of the Cinema Institute. These young people were studying cinema, so I opted to go back to Beirut and join the Cinema Institution, so I could start the subject in a practical way while awaiting an opportunity to return to Germany.

I joined the Institution in 1978, initially starting in the photography section as a photographer. We were a large section, numbering 8 or 10 people, directed by the former cinematographer Sulaf Mirsal, the first young Palestinian woman to graduate from the Higher Institute for Cinema and Photography in Cairo. However, she had suffered an injury in an accident and as a result had a disability, so could no longer work as a cinematographer. Instead, she took charge over the section, providing oversight.

I started with photographic work, and was joined by such friends as Mohammad al-Rawwas, Hassan Kharouf, Mahmoud Nawfal, Ibrahim al-Masdar. There were also two sisters who worked in dark room, whose job was to develop and print the films. I pursued this work, and then developed further, as I wished to pursue cinematography so I started working as an assistant cameraman, and was mostly accompanied by my friend, the late Samir Nimer, who was an Iraqi cinematographer working in the Palestinian cinematic field.

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The Palestinian Cinema Institution was an extension of the Palestine Film Unit, which had been established in Jordan before the September 1970 war. Their work continued after the exit from Jordan, with the establishment of the Palestinian Cinema Institution in Beirut. The Institution was led by the late director Mustafa Abu Ali. He was one of the three main founders of the Cinema Institution, along with the cinematographer Sulaf Mirsal and the director Hani Jawhariyeh, who was martyred during the mountain battles against the isolationist forces in the Antoura mountains. These three were the founders of Palestinian cinema, and they had already started work when they were together in Amman, taking footage of the revolution's activities, including demonstrations, training, and portraits of the martyrs.

Sulaf Mirsal began on documentation, and began taking portraits of Fateh central committee members, of the martyrs, and so on. This trio began to lay the foundation for journalistic work and external media, overcoming various journalistic challenges at the time. Due to the lack of equipment, they used to steal - or rather borrow- cameras or even raw film from Jordanian Television, where Mustafa Abu Ali used to work. When they suggested the idea of establishing a photography section, they found support amongst the ranks of the Fateh leadership. At the time, the late Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad) encouraged them a lot, taking up the idea, and following it until it became a reality. He himself used to love photography and owned a professional camera – it was a hobby of his, and later he even supplied the section with photographs. So when the idea was raised he was very enthusiastic.

The group began cinematic work, and the first film they made was *No to the Peaceful Solution*, which documented the demonstrations that took place in Jordan during that period – 67 or 68 – against the Rogers Plan.² Then came Mustafa Abu Ali's second film, *With Soul, With Blood*, which featured footage they took of the September 1970 massacres against the Palestinian revolution. These two films were made in Jordan. Afterwards, there was the exit to Lebanon. Once there, they had to think seriously about the idea of establishing the Palestinian Cinema Institution - there weren't enough technical and human resources, so they began to send students abroad to establish an academically trained cadre. This was the context in which the five brothers we spoke of earlier went to East Germany.

² The demonstrations in the film against the Rogers Plan took place in 1969, following the announcement of the plan on December 9th.