Camden Dean's excellent paper, written for WR 100: "Global Documentary," explores the destructive role that cameras play in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He focuses on the Academy Award-nominated documentary *5 Broken Cameras* (2011), which tells the story of a Palestinian farmer who films his fellow villagers' protest against the Israeli wall erected on their land. We studied this film at a poignant moment in the semester. The Israel-Gaza conflict had ended four months earlier. And we had just studied *One Day in September* (1999), which revisits the 1972 Munich Olympics, where 11 Israeli athletes and trainers were taken hostage and then killed by Palestinian terrorists—an event largely streamed on live television.

The assignment's sole requirement was that students pose and answer a question about any of our semester's documentaries. After presenting an outline of his ideas and receiving feedback from the class, Camden began to write. Many of our theoretical readings helped to shape his ambitious argument—Jean Rouch on cinéma vérité, Michel Foucault on the Panopticon, Susan Sontag on the desensitizing effect that images engender. While drafting his essay, however, Camden started to question the direction of his argument and wondered whether he should abandon it. Peer reviewers stepped in to offer just the right kind of feedback, inspiring the counterarguments that frame his position for a skeptical reader and motivating him to keep going. Camden's ability to view the role of cameras in the West Bank from multiple angles gives his essay its rhetorical force and judicious tone. It was a pleasure to work with him on this essay and to read it again all of these months later.

— Marisa Milanese

WR 100: Global Documentary

When given the opportunity to write a paper addressing any of the films covered over the course of the semester, I knew that mine would address *5 Broken Cameras*. The in-class discussions regarding the film followed the familiar narrative of "Israel does evil things to innocent people," one that I have heard countless times throughout my life as a Muslim-American. With a chance to address the issue, I was able to question this train of thought in a way that identifies yet another issue that is overwhelmingly overlooked: people act differently when they know they are being watched. With more inspiration streaming in from the NSA scandal and the Edward Snowden leaks, I aimed to expose what could be yet another issue in Israel and the West Bank, and to offer possible steps toward sustainable peace in the region. This paper allowed me to be a contrarian, while still attempting to bridge a substantial gap between these nations.
— Camden Dean

Camden Dean

Exposure and Retaliation: Searching for Peace in the West Bank through *5 Broken Cameras*

Guy Davidi and Emad Burnat's documentary *5 Broken Cameras* (2011) chronicles the life of one of the filmmakers, the Palestinian Emad, along with the rest of the people of Bil'in, his village in the West Bank. The villagers struggle against Israeli settlers who construct apartment complexes that encroach upon the Palestinians' land. Emad uses his camera as a source of not only what he calls physical "protection" against the Israeli soldiers who disrupt the protests, but also emotional protection, since the process of filming "heals" the Palestinians of their emotional scars (*5 Broken Cameras*). Although the opposite appears to be true—many instances throughout the documentary indicate that Emad's filming makes him a target for violence—his film's use for emotional healing and its ability to "boost morale" (*5 Broken Cameras*) for those under oppression show just two of the ways that cameras have become a vital part of the conflict in the West Bank. The camera's value permeates the borders of the Middle East as well, as footage can help Palestinians gain political support from sympathetic viewers in the West. Ultimately, however, cameras appear to have created an arms race of sorts: no one wins, and the footage loses its potential for change. With repeated exposure to images of the conflict, viewers become desensitized to them. And by using cameras in the search for much needed peace and stability in the region, Emad creates an additional source of contention as Israelis become hostile to the origin of footage, and in similar cases they retaliate with cameras of their own. Two people staring at each other through camera lenses with the intent of protecting themselves ultimately create an even larger divide between themselves and their ostensible opponents.

The presence of cameras in the West Bank complicates the already complex Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Over the course of sixty years, the two groups have lived a constant, and mostly violent, confrontation over land. With the help gained from its close relationship with the United States and the global support after the tragedy of the Holocaust, Israel was able to emerge as a prosperous nation in the region. Prosperity often necessitates the demand for greater resources, and Israel has continued to expand its borders, as Palestinian refugees have fled to neighboring Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Even the designated Palestinian land in the West Bank has begun to diminish, as Israel has consumed parts of this region for what it claims are rightful settlements. In *5 Broken Cameras*, the people of Bil'in find themselves confronting this predicament—how to deal with the technically illegal establishment of Israeli settlements on their land.

Emad's solution is to film. He captures the various injustices faced by the villagers: their olive trees scorched by Israeli settlers, their land cut by a so-called security wall, their people tear-gassed and beaten by Israeli soldiers. His footage becomes evidence when a villager faces legal charges in court; he and his people have done nothing wrong, and the camera proves it to be so. This is why cultural anthropologist Rebecca L. Stein classifies the use of cameras as "most necessary in sites of heightened conflict" such as these ("Viral Occupation"). Without Emad's footage, many of his friends, and even he, would face sentencing for crimes they did not commit.

Yet the footage also provides the villagers with an opportunity "to gain some distance from the events" (*5 Broken Cameras*) in a way that strengthens their resolve against oppression as their characteristically discouraging experiences are transformed into community rallying points. Emad gathers the villagers from the neighboring villages, who similarly find themselves struggling against a seemingly invincible 10-foot fence of their own, to watch the various clips of footage captured from Bil'in's own instances of resistance. The event "contributes to solidarity" (*5 Broken Cameras*) against Israeli oppression, and they are able to kindle resistance of their own. Emad's camera thus becomes an active weapon against complacency for those whose motivation is chipped away by the futility of their efforts.

Beyond the realm of the West Bank, the footage taken by Emad, and those like him, is also useful. Undoubtedly, a large portion of the footage that is captured and distributed to the outside world delivers its message by publicizing instances of purported injustices committed by one side against the other (Israelis against Palestinians or vice versa). Once people who support either side of the conflict begin to gain increasing exposure to a particularly notable event, it seems logical that they would become inclined to offer support for those in need, in tangible and intangible ways. Evidence supporting this is in great supply. A video of Palestinian farmers being beaten by four Israeli men with clubs and masked faces is one such example (Stein). Further examples are found in footage from the seven week Israel-Gaza conflict during the summer of 2014 which shows Israeli citizens taking cover from Gazan rockets, as sirens blare relentlessly. Such videos have gone viral, inspiring everything from donations to Twitter hashtags (from #IstandwithIsrael to #FreeGaza) (ABC News). Footage thus can hold some efficacy in inspiring empathy.

However, an image's ability to generate this empathy comes into question under closer scrutiny. In her book *On Photography,* Susan Sontag analyzes the usefulness of images in spreading awareness for any particular cause. In doing so, she claims that an image "cannot make a dent in public opinion" without " appropriate context of feeling and attitude" (17). In *5 Broken Cameras*, the villagers gather for a weekly protest against the Israeli wall on their land, and every time they gather, their protest is broken up by tear gas, sometimes gunfire. Emad hoped that his film would expose such injustice and gain support for himself and his people, but for the reasons that Sontag outlines, the efficacy is questionable. According to a recent World Public Opinion poll, 71% of Americans do not believe that the US should support either Palestine or Israel ("Taking Sides"). Thus, at least in the US, there is no "appropriate context of feeling and attitude" (Sontag 17) to change public opinion. While this is merely correlation, it is strong enough to be applied to this situation because it possesses parallels to examples given by Sontag herself: photographs of a skeletal, starving Andersonville prisoner of the South during the Civil War inspired no anti-war sentiment, but rather promoted the North's fight against the South. The images worked because they supported the existing sentiment for militancy against the South, but they could not create a new anti-war

sentiment—a genuinely "moral position" in Sontag's terms—as they were intended to do. Images thus "cannot create a moral position," but can only work to "reinforce one" (17). In this way, scenes from *5 Broken Cameras* are less effective at gaining support for Emad and the Palestinians in the West Bank than one may typically expect. And even for those affected by the footage, its efficacy diminishes over time. Although *5 Broken Cameras* was critically acclaimed for exposing the injustices committed against the villagers of Bil'in, these injustices become easier to watch with each successive tear-gassing at the weekly Friday protests. As Sontag would say, "[A]fter repeated exposure to images it [an event] . . . becomes less real" (20).

Within the region, a camera's effectiveness can also be questioned—not just in terms of its product (its footage), but in terms of its presence. A camera is an observer, and observation can inspire vulnerability and fear. This is the premise of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon (as described by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*), an ideal architectural apparatus used to monitor prisoners and their behavior without the need for an observer. Ringed around a central tower, the cells become "like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible" (200). The prisoner, in his role as the observed, feels intentionally vulnerable and modifies his behavior, "becom[ing] the principle of his own subjection." We can see these effects in some of the Israelis captured by Emad's cameras. In one scene, Israeli soldiers insist that Emad "put the camera down," suggesting that they do not want to be seen on camera. Their reluctance to be filmed might make it easy to associate this reaction to the camera with evidence of guilt. Yet Foucault shows that this sensation of being watched causes peculiar reactions in those being observed. Thus, the aversion to the camera could form a place of self-preservation, a search for comfort rather than the concealment of guilt.

In addition, to objectively film someone without provoking them is a problematic premise by nature: it is not entirely agreed upon whether or not it is possible. Cinéma-vérité filmmaker Jean Rouch believes that the camera encourages the subject to be more self-revealing—"infinitely more sincere" (Blue 267)—and many, such as those who support Emad's footage, would agree. Documentary theorist Bill Nichols, however, believes the opposite to be true. In his discussion of the participatory mode in

documentary film (the interaction between the documentarian and their subject), he recognizes "the spectator as [a] participant" (181) in the scene captured on film. In many ways, a camera is an invasion of privacy. As G. K. Chesterton writes, "The most sacred thing is to be able to shut your own door," and so the reaction of those whose door has been forcibly opened (as is the case with many people under the scrutiny of the lens in the West Bank) can quite understandably be hostile (Chesterton 2). An example of this hostility can be seen in *5 Broken Cameras* when Emad approaches an Israeli soldier lazily slumped in the passenger's seat of an armored car while speaking on the phone. The soldier immediately becomes agitated at the sight of the camera, and grows increasingly so throughout the duration of its presence. The camera is provoking him, acting as more than a "spectator" of this reality, but also as a "participant" in it (Nichols 181).

Figure 1. Aabbas Momani/AFP/Getty Images

Larger concerns exist for cameras in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. NPR correspondent Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson addresses the lack of empathy that exists within the region, attributing it to the lack of contact between the two groups. A camera is yet another barrier to contact, for if two men are in front of each other and one of them is holding a camera (Figure 1), that interaction becomes a different thing altogether. This is why placing such importance on documenting becomes especially questionable: the region does not need any further barriers to development of a positive relationship. Proof of this position is evinced not only in the

film, but also through multiple instances in the West Bank: the first step taken before a settlement is built is to erect a wall. This wall symbolizes the divide that has been continually exacerbated by sixty years of conflict and perpetuated by each death from one side by the other's hand. As Emad fights on a daily basis for the destruction of the wall set upon his land, he figuratively erects a new one with every encounter his camera makes with his opposition.

While documenting the enemy's actions in pursuit of peace and justice may seem like the best course of action, the reverse is true in Bil'in because it simply creates another degree of separation that exists between the two neighboring groups. Empathy cannot be built without direct, human exposure to the other side. Exposure is paramount to creating a common ground upon which peace can be developed, and the camera presents an insurmountable barrier to this. The situation that exists in Bil'in is complicated when considered optimistically, hopeless when viewed pessimistically, and ultimately impossible to solve when mediated by cameras.

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