



Kino Ken screened an Israeli documentary film recently at the 2015 Pittsburgh Jewish Film Festival at the Manor Theater in Squirrel Hill. Here is his review of CENSORED VOICES.

Israel / Egypt / Jordan 1967 / 2015 black-and-white and color 84 minutes
live action feature documentary in Hebrew and English with English subtitles
kNow Productions / Filmstiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen / Sundance Institute
Documentary Fund Producers: Hilla Medalia, Melanie Andernach, Knut Losen,
Daniel Sivan, and Neta Zwebner-Zaubert

12 of a possible 20 points

*** of a possible *****

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

Points:

- Direction: Mor Loushy
- 1 Editing: Daniel Sivan
- 0 Cinematography: Avner Shahaf
- 0 Lighting
- 1 Written by: Mor Loushy, Daniel Sivan
- 2 Interviewers: Amos Oz and Avraham Shapira
- 2 Music: Markus Aust
- 2 Research
- 1 Sound Design and Editing: Yosi Appelbaum Sound Mixer: Stefan Korte
- 1 Creativity
- 2 Insightfulness

12 total points

When the Israeli army proactively attacked troops of its neighbors in 1967, military brass and politicians had no idea what long-term consequences would result. CENSORED VOICES explores responses of young men thrust into their first combat assignments during the 1967 Six-Day War. Rapidly defeating opponents, Jewish troops faced unnerving decisions about how to deal with captured civilians and Arab soldiers. Receiving orders to humiliate them thoroughly was dehumanizing. Even worse, a philosophy receiving wide promotion espoused killing anyone, armed or unarmed, who might pose a future threat. Exigencies of war pardoned stark murder. Just think about what Arab troops would have done had they been victors. Got the picture?

Contrasting joyous public celebrations disseminated through mass media with private tape recordings of disclosures by new veterans returned to home kibbutzes, CENSORED VOICES enables listeners to experience the unattractive underbelly of winning a war. Authors Amos Oz and Avraham Shapira, both struggling with second thoughts about their countrymen's conduct, brought reel-to-reel tape recorders to these villages and encouraged soldiers who had participated in the recent conflict to reflect upon what they had seen and heard. Involvement could be anonymous, if preferred. Resulting material, seventy percent suppressed by government authorities, forms the basis of this current documentary. Soldiers whose thoughts were preserved on tape were encouraged by filmmakers to revisit their testimonies, using events transpiring over the course of forty years to modify, reinforce, or abjure initial comments.

Most elect to corroborate previous remarks, making them prophetic at times. Several perceive occupations of the Sinai, West Bank, and Gaza as provocative to Palestinians, a cancer debilitating and corrupting their own nation. From it derive hatred of the dispossessed, a sense of cumulative injustice spurring terrorism and intifadas. There seem two separate Israels developing within a single territory, each detesting and menacing the other, pursuing different cultural, religious, and political objectives.

Forty years later, after the country's greatest military triumph, there is still no homeland security, no cooperation between refugees and settlers, no offer of compensation for homes destroyed and lands appropriated by brute force.

Holocaust victims appear in reversed roles, eliminating or imprisoning others who do not share their faith or ancestry. The violated have become themselves agents of sanctioned persecution. This is morally uncomfortable to some, evidenced by statements made here by Israeli freedom fighters themselves. Living does not presuppose learning.

No one seriously questions the original necessity for striking first at enemies determined to impose death on neighboring Jews. It is rather the manner of dealing with such a threat that eludes ethical justification. Warriors cannot simply shed humanity when placed in battlefield situations. They are not mere pawns operated mindlessly by officers. Nor are politicians who resort to violent solutions of social dilemmas exonerated from charges of jettisoning moral scruples. What would be patently wrong if enacted against Jews should also be indefensibly criminal when applied to non-Jews. Otherwise, the result is a single government practicing two sets of contradictory law enforcement principles and creating new opponents in the process.

It's obvious to most interviewees continued occupation of annexed land is not going to generate peaceful coexistence. One points out succinctly that things are not as important as people. Even sacred sites are not so holy as to justify killing to control them. Places can be recovered. Human lives, once lost, cannot.

Much archival footage used is extremely low definition. Lighting and photography depend for effectiveness on conditions of origin. These are outside powers documentary film compilers can exercise. Poor quality sources yield third-rate footage. So editing options are limited, though the ability to slant content right or left politically is unimpaired. Hardcore militarists and religious zealots be advised: there is little present here to fortify extremist positions.

All interviews conducted seem to have been spontaneous. Opinions expressed were unofficial, not always worded for optimal verbal coherency, subject to potential misinterpretation. They were not authoritative. Personal, individual, colored by shocking occurrences still fresh in memory, these

outpourings of sublimated feelings were vented less than three weeks after conclusion of combat. Peace had formally arrived in their country. Nonetheless, inside individuals conflict still raged. Torments from conscience could not be so readily brushed aside.

Markus Aust counterpoints bubbly songs of triumph with lengthier passages of ominous tenor, clarifying ongoing tension between propagandizing rhetoric molded for popular consumption and private suppressed misgivings.

Likewise, the role played by reportage in oversimplifying complex issues is pivotal, tragic, often relentlessly partisan. This is highlighted through adroit editing of news transmitted during six days of war and their immediate aftermath.

Sound, like lighting, hinges upon environment. Wisely, film editor Daniel Sivan ducks wartime chaos, selecting source recordings that communicate ideas fully. Subtitles assist considerably in clarification.

CENSORED VOICES is notable for four strengths: pointed verbal material, depth of research, insightfulness about characters gripped by stresses of war, and juxtapositions of jubilation with regret. Due to subject matter, obscenities, and very mature themes, it's suitable only for mature adult audiences.

Encourage area theaters to program this significant documentary. It will certainly engage audiences in intense, informed discussion after screenings.

April's Manor Theater presentation culminated in an informative panel discussion by four special guest speakers. These included a chaplain serving veterans and Hilla Medalia, one of the documentary's producers.