Censored Voices

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Abstract
This is a film review of Censored Voices (2015), directed by Mor Loushy.

Author Notes
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In 1967 the Six Day War took place in Israel, Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Several days after soldiers returned from the frontlines, a group went to the local kibbutz and recorded their stories. Approximately 30% of the recordings were released by the government, but the others were censored. In this extremely rare look at a generation’s response to war, we hear documentary audio recordings of the soldiers recounting the atrocities they saw on the frontlines. Soldiers talk candidly about feeling the need to portray the war positively in order to contribute to “national morale.” In turn, the soldiers decided they would “do a small service to the truth.” Using the original recordings and archival footage, this film paints a picture of the battle for the land that would become modern-day Israel from the perspective of the soldiers who were at the front lines. These recordings started as soon as the soldiers returned from war and extended over a number of days.
There are different accounts from a handful of soldiers; one remarks his surprise upon seeing the enemy and realising that they looked like “dust and ashes,” and not the enemy he had been told to expect. Others spoke of massacres taking place at the hand of Israeli soldiers after a cease fire had occurred. This is not the narrative we have traditionally heard about the Israeli army’s protection of the boundaries of Israel, and the soldiers clearly struggle with what they know to be true and what they feel is expected of them as returning heroes. The director juxtaposes the archival recordings with film of the men in the present day, yet the decision is made not to have these men speak on film. Why? Is there anything more to say? Or is this symbolic of the silence regarding the counter narratives of the Six Day War?

The film draws attention to the diversity of experience, tradition, and expression among the Jewish population of Israel. As one soldier shares a story of how a rabbi was brought in to the Temple Mount to the Western Wall to pray even while fighting was going on all around, he questions the importance of the place as he remarks that “Judaism does not sanctify spaces.” The interviewees remark that they were very uncomfortable dealing with civilians, and that there were many civilian casualties of the war; “it became something that it wasn’t in the beginning,” and “it involved expelling those that lived there.”

Others remarked that they “identified with their enemies,” and wondered if they were “doomed to live in the pauses between wars.” In thinking of war, they made comparisons between themselves and the Nazis, one calling this war a “holocaust,” and others definitely drawing parallels between this war and World War II, only this time placing themselves in the role of the aggressors.

This film will undoubtedly be controversial. To be unbiased, one should point out that these interviews are with a small number of soldiers, and that their impressions and experiences
are not necessarily found in the larger population of Six Day War veterans. But this film can contribute to an important dialogue which considers alternative viewpoints to the dominant narrative of the Six Day War.