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## Disillusioned by War, Israeli Soldiers Muted in 1967 Are Given Fuller Voice

By JODI RUDOREN

TEL AVIV — A young Israeli soldier, fresh from the front, bluntly recounts the orders from above. "They never said, 'Leave no one alive,' but they said, 'Show no mercy,'" he explains. "The brigade commander said to kill as many as possible."

Another recalls encountering Arabs on rooftops. "They're civilians — should I kill them or not?" he asks himself. "I didn't even think about it. Just kill! Kill everyone you see." And a third makes it personal: "All of us — Avinoam, Zvika, Yitzhak — we're not murderers. In the war, we all became murderers."

The wrenching, taped testimony is not from last summer's bloody battle in the Gaza Strip but from the 1967 war, when Israel started out fighting Egypt, Jordan and Syria for

its very survival and ended up seizing the West Bank, Gaza, the Sinai Peninsula and parts of the Golan Heights. As the International Criminal Court considers a war crimes investigation in the recent conflict, a new documentary film is showcasing previously unaired admissions of brutal behavior by an earlier generation.

The film, "Censored Voices," premiered at the Sundance Film Festival on Saturday, the latest in a series of movies by leftist Israeli filmmakers who have won awards abroad by presenting harsh looks at their own society. Based on interviews that the military heavily edited at the time, it includes accounts of Israelis summarily executing prisoners and evacuating Arab villages in a manner that one fighter likened to the Nazis' treatment of European Jews.

The director, Mior Loushy, said in an interview that she was trying to revamp the prevailing Israeli narrative of triumph in 1967 in light of all that has happened since, and that the film "is very relevant for today."

But with Israel increasingly in a defensive crouch on the international stage, the film raises concerns that, viewed without consideration for the existential threat Israel faced at the time, it could become catnip for contemporary critics.

"People abroad who don't remember the way we do the circumstances of the Six-Day War will turn this into one more indictment of Israel," said Yossi Klein Halevi, whose 2013 book, "Like Dreamers," followed the lives of a group of 1967 veterans. "If there were isolated acts of abuse by our soldiers, that should

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# Soldiers of 1967 Are Given Fuller Voice

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not become the narrative about what the Six-Day War was about. Many of us here are, frankly, sick and tired of the blame-Israel-first narrative."

Asked to respond to the film, Lt. Col. Peter Lerner of the Israel Defense Forces said it was "representative of Israel's vibrant democracy, where everything can be and is openly discussed," but not particularly pertinent to current debates over military conduct. While 1967 was a war between sovereign states, Colonel Lerner noted, today Israel faces "belligerent nonstate or semistate" actors with weapons "dispersed within the civilian arena."

"Any attempt to draw similarities between the two," he said in an email, "is weak and nonrepresentative of how warfare has developed, how the battlefield has evolved and how today terrorism takes precedence over traditional warfare."

The 84-minute film had a budget under \$1 million, financed mainly by Israeli and European broadcasters and the American documentary producer Impact Partners. Interspersing the 1967 interviews with archival footage from the war and ABC News's coverage of it, it does make clear the imminent threat to Israel — and then the stunning turnabout that military historians have long considered a marvel.

Beyond the accounts of killing prisoners and civilians, perhaps the most striking element of the film is that within a week or two of the war's end, these soldiers — from Israel's socialist kibbutz movement — questioned its wisdom.

"I think that in the next round the Arabs' hatred towards us will be much more serious and profound," one says. Already ambivalent about the occupation of Palestinian territory, another worries, "Not only did this war not solve the state's problems, but it complicated them in a way that'll be very hard to solve."

As Ms. Loushy put it, "This is the story of men who went out to war feeling like they had to defend their life, and they were right, of course, but they went out in one position and came back as conquerors."

"If those voices had been published in 1967," she said, "maybe

Irit Pazner Garshowitz contributed reporting.



Mor Loushy, director of "Censored Voices," a new film about the 1967 war.

our reality here would be different."

Some of the voices were published at the time in "A Conversation With Warriors," a collection edited by Avraham Shapira that sold a stunning 120,000 copies in Israel. (The English-language version is called "The Seventh Day.") Mr. Halevi said its publication "was the moment when part of Israeli society started sobering up from the euphoria."

When Ms. Loushy, 32, tripped

**A film is showcasing previously unaired accounts of brutal experiences.**

across a copy doing research for a history paper, she was riveted by how different its tone was from the 1967 story she had learned in school. She cajoled Mr. Shapira, an aging kibbutznik and philosophy professor, to share the original audiotaped interviews that he had denied to legions of journalists and historians.

"If you listen — not hearing but listening — to the recordings, there is a symphony of sounds: There are screams, crying, real weeping," Mr. Shapira said in an interview. "They anticipated what can happen if we'll not work immediately for peace, practically to return back all the occupied territories. They express it as an

inner feeling, no politics."

He said current soldiers had told him that they found in these old interviews "a deep, personal expression of their own moral and human dilemmas."

Ms. Loushy, whose previous film, "Israel Ltd." attempted to unmask Zionist propaganda tours, listened to 200 hours of tapes over eight months, much of which the censors had blocked from publication in the book. She was deep into the project before she discovered that the film, too, would be subject to censorship, she said.

Israel forbids the filmmakers to reveal how much they were forced to change, and the military censor's office refused to discuss it.

"For us as a society to mend and to improve ourselves, we can't censor," Ms. Loushy said. "I think it's important that we look the truth in the eyes."

The film's star is the original reel-to-reel tape recorder that Mr. Shapira bought in 1967. It replays the interviews as the soldiers — now graying, wrinkled men — sit alongside, sometimes closing their eyes or cringing a bit. Only in the final few minutes do some of them speak, briefly. One says he has become "less Zionist, less patriotic, less of a believer," and another says, "I'm much more right wing than before."

Pinchas Leviatan, 73, a retired horticulturalist and teacher, said in an interview that when Ms. Loushy had come to his home and played the tape, he had not recognized the voice, "but when I heard what I said, I was sure that it was me." He had been telling the same stories to students for years.

In the film, Mr. Leviatan talks of being emotionally broken by seeing the humiliation of Egyptian soldiers after the fighting, when they "came with canteens filled with urine" and, upon being given water, "threw up on our feet and kissed us." He is one of the Israeli soldiers whose views have changed with time.

"I was convinced that the peace is coming, and maybe after the Six-Day War I was hoping that it's going to happen," he said in the interview. "I was very naïve. I participated in another five wars as a commanding officer. The fact is that during the years, I lost my belief in the possibility of getting any solution in the area."

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