

8.73x24.18	2/2	8 עמוד	haaretz-front	15/08/2016	54670150-8
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one of his shifts he successfully guided the planes to the intended targets in the southern Gaza Strip, and at the end of the shift he rested briefly in the club at the base. The TV was on and he saw the consequences of his success: destruction and dozens of people dead.

“My story boils down to a metaphorical moment during which the cold and distant representation of reality via the monitor screen was suddenly transformed to a bleeding reality,” he says. “All at once the distance collapsed under me.”

He explains that the movement “is based on three foundations: community, opposition and changing views. The community is composed of geographically-based binational groups, such as a Tel Aviv-Tulkarm group, or Be'er Sheva-Hebron, and others. The members of the groups meet regularly, the idea being to form a personal relationship – not for the purpose of meeting, but for the purpose of nonviolent joint activity against the occupation. We’re not a task force, we’re a community that will also be relevant for the transition period, when an agreement is signed between the sides.”

The movement’s best known activity is the binational Memorial Day ceremony, which takes places annually on Israel’s Memorial Day and offers a tribute to the fallen on both sides. Last year the ceremony attracted about 3,500 people, unexpectedly becoming the largest ceremony in the country.

The film devotes a lot of attention to the courage required of members of Combatants for Peace to come out against their own side. Aweida says that what really angers him is “actually the leftists on both sides who sit in their armchairs and whine. [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu came to power because you sat on your armchairs and Hamas came to power because we sat in our armchairs. We have to stop complaining and get up and do something. What will you tell your grandchildren when

they ask you, ‘Grandpa, what did you do during that terrible war?’ It’s the future that will judge us, and I want to have a good answer for my grandchildren.”

Yakovovich adds that he “doesn’t feel brave for working against the occupation. We believe that it’s impossible to be outside the cycle of violence until you take part in ending it. If you don’t take part in ending the violence, then you’re a part of it.”

Film tells of eight members of Combatants for Peace – Israelis and Palestinians.

If Apkon was looking for personal stories that represent the larger story, then Khatib’s story is definitely one of them. When he was 14, he stabbed two soldiers, was arrested, and imprisoned for over 10 years. In the Israeli prison he learned four things: hunger strikes as an option for nonviolent opposition to the occupation; the history of various conflicts worldwide and how they were solved by nonviolent means; the Hebrew language; and the Holocaust. Khatib studied Jewish history in depth, with an emphasis on the Holocaust, and upon his release he traveled to Germany to complete his education on the subject.

All this led him to the conclusion that the occupation can be ended only through nonviolent means. From there the way to becoming the executive director of Combatants for Peace was clear. “In prison I realized that the two sides aren’t going anywhere,” he says, “and if we’re already stuck with one another, then it should preferably be with love.

“On the one hand I want to have legitimacy from the Arab world for Jews to live in the Middle East, and on the other hand I want my mother to be able to visit Jerusalem without a special permit from the Israelis,” he says.

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Netta Ahituv

Towards the end of the documentary “Disturbing the Peace,” Operation Protective Edge erupts. One of the protagonists, Sulaiman Khatib, a Palestinian from Hizme in the West Bank – charismatic, oozing charm and wit, one of those characters who steals the show – arrives in Tel Aviv. Together with Assaf Yakobovich, an Israeli from Tel Aviv, he attends an antiwar demonstration in Rabin Square. They go onstage side by side and speak in condemnation of the fighting.

An angry mob gathers around them with eyes ablaze, angry at the left-wing protest taking place in front of them. This is one of the scenes in the film that is so tense it causes you to bite your nails out of concern for the safety of the main characters. It’s strange to say this of a scene about an antiwar demonstration in the heart of Tel Aviv, and particularly in a film that deals with far weightier things, such as terror attacks, terrorists, arrests, injuries and death.

But something in the tense atmosphere prevailing on all sides, and the sense that one small match would suffice to ignite the entire square and its demonstrators, and of course the fact that the film’s audience has already become strongly attached to the characters, make this scene particularly tense and moves one to pray for the two men’s safety.

This scene is indicative of the film’s magnitude. “Disturbing the Peace” manages to violate the viewers’ emotional order, to draw them into the plot and cause them to identify with the characters as though they were the heroes of a fictional thriller.

The film was made by two experienced American filmmakers. Co-director and cinematographer Andrew Young is a documentarian with a rich past, which include an Oscar nomination, two Emmys and five Sundance Festival awards. Co-director and producer Stephen Apkon is the founder and director of the Jacob Burns Film Center in Pleasantville, New York, and has produced many documentaries.

“Disturbing the Peace” tells the story of eight members of Combatants for Peace, a movement of Israelis and Palestinian founded 10 years ago by one-time



The screening of “Disturbing the Peace” on the separation wall in Beit Jala in the West Bank.

Emil Salman

Seeing the conflict from both sides of the separation wall — and on top

In its West Bank premiere, the documentary “Disturbing the Peace” was screened on the barrier separating Israel from the territory

combatants from both sides: Israel Defense Forces soldiers and Palestinian terrorists and stone-throwers. Last week the film was named Best Foreign Documentary and winner of the Audience Award in that category at the Traverse City Film Festival in Michigan, founded by the uniquely commercial American political documentary maker Michael Moore.

Receiving the prizes were Apkon and two of the movement’s founders, Chen Alon and Khatib. When I met Khatib a few days earlier, he didn’t know if he would receive a permit to leave Israel to participate in the festival.

Transformative experience

Two weeks ago there was an unusual screening of the film in the West Bank town of Beit Jala. The separation

fence in the village conceals the Tunnel Road that passes below; the fence was designed to prevent stone throwing at Israeli cars driving that route. A large square on the wall was painted white, and a projector set up opposite it. About 100 plastic chairs were arranged, but these were not enough for the Israelis and Palestinian who arrived. Many sat on the ground or stood.

Mohammed Aweida, the movement’s Palestinian coordinator, jokes that the Palestinians who came to this screening are those who were not permitted to attend the festive debut screening at the Jerusalem International Film Festival, because they are denied entry into Israel. “According to Israeli logic, everyone here is a terrorist,” he says, laughing. A glance around reveals families with children, bored teens, ordi-

nary adults – it’s hard to tell who is Israeli and who is Palestinian. The screening was attended by many Israelis as well, some of them active in the movement, some just curious.

Apkon, 54, is an American Jew who first visited Israel 40 years ago. The timing was unusual: When the plane landed in Israel the pilot announced that the hostages in Entebbe had just been released. Later Apkon lived for a year in Israel with his children so that they would get to know the

country. The film “Disturbing the Peace” was born after a meeting with Aweida, who told Apkon about “a community of people from both sides who are taking responsibility for the conflict.” Each of the positions in the movement is filled by an Israeli and a Palestinian.

Apkon says after the screening that the film draws its strength from its universal theme, stressing that separation, dehumanization, polarization, a transition to extremism and a fanatic de-

fense of national narratives are all part of an international plague. That’s why he thinks the film will speak to anyone who watches it, not only Israelis and Palestinians.

I drove from Tel Aviv to Beit Jala alongside Yakobovich, 40, a psychologist, who until a year ago was the coordinator of the movement’s Israeli side. The change he underwent is described in the film in detail. He was an Israel Air Force officer who served in a control room. On