

Israel Censored this Film. “Jenin, Jenin (2002)”. Countless Crimes against Palestinians

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Every act of censorship inadvertently achieves its opposite by drawing attention to its subject.

Last week, an Israeli court ordered the 2002 film Jenin, Jenin to be banned in Israel and all copies of it confiscated.

The film – which was directed by [Mohammed Bakri](#), a Palestinian citizen of Israel – has been the subject of censorship attempts since its release around 18 years ago.

Nissim Magnaji, a soldier who appears on archival footage in the film for just a few seconds, sued Bakri for defamation in 2016. His suit was supported by former Military Advocate General Avichai Mandelblit.

An Israeli judge ruled in Magnaji’s favor last week, ordering Bakri to pay more than \$50,000 to the soldier and another \$15,000 in court fees. Israeli government and military officials [welcomed](#) the court’s ruling.

Bakri is now planning to appeal the ruling in Israel’s highest court.

Following the court’s ruling, social media users shared links to the video and Bakri gave a number of interviews.

The Palestine Film Institute, a [body](#) that preserves and promotes Palestinian cinema, decided to make the film available to everyone. You can watch it for free at the top of this page.

Bearing witness

The film is a collection of interviews with residents of Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank following an Israeli military invasion in April 2002 that lasted almost two weeks.

The Israeli military killed at least 52 Palestinians and injured scores of others, according to a [report](#) compiled by the United Nations secretary-general at the time.

Israeli forces also shelled 150 buildings, leaving 450 families homeless. According to the report, 23 Israeli soldiers were dead by the end of the operation.

“It was not just the numbers involved that shocked the world at the time, but the brutal nature of an Israeli assault that was unprecedented even in the harsh history of the occupation,” Israeli historian Ilan Pappé [wrote](#) in *The Electronic Intifada* in 2017.

Bakri said he snuck into the camp on foot through the mountains about 10 days after the invasion to witness what Israel had done and speak to camp residents.

“I couldn’t move. I couldn’t breathe,” Bakri [told](#) his son Adam Bakri in an interview on Sunday about his emotional reaction after he first arrived in the camp.

“I couldn’t hold my body, I mean, when I saw these things around me and I smelled that smell of death.”

Little in the camp was left unscathed.

“Their bombs came down on us like water,” a young Palestinian girl tells Bakri in the film.

“I saw dead bodies, houses in ruins and undescrivable atrocities. After all I’ve been through, what will become of my life?”

The girl, who Bakri identified as Najwa in later interviews, gained notoriety for her remarkable courage and became an iconic face of the film.

The documentary-style film combines rapid-fire shots in between interviews with dramatic sound transitions for aesthetic effect. It is genre-bending. It has no voice over and it doesn’t identify anyone. Bakri, who is often shown walking away from the camera, is sometimes heard, but he never turns around.

The film does not pretend to do more than bear witness.

A technicality

The filmmaker isn’t new to dealing with censorship and lawsuits pertaining to his film.

Five soldiers sued Bakri following the film’s release accusing him of defamation. Their cases were later dismissed, because, as Bakri [wrote](#) in *The Electronic Intifada* in 2008, “I do not know them and neither are they mentioned or shown in the film.”

Magnaji tried to get the film censored on relatively similar grounds.

Magnaji appears briefly in the film with two other soldiers as a camp resident recounts how during a raid on his home, an Israeli military officer robbed him of his life’s savings that he

had set aside in the hope of having a child one day.

The elderly man recounted asking the military officer about his money. "He said, 'shut up or I will kill you,'" the man recalls, as a clip is shown of three Israeli soldiers walking near a military vehicle, including Magnaji, [according](#) to Israeli media.

Getting the film censored may provide Magnaji and his supporters in Israel's government with some temporary satisfaction.

But no amount of censorship will change the indisputable fact that the Israeli military committed atrocities in that camp and in others during the second intifada, nor that these soldiers were members of the military that has reinforced occupation and committed countless crimes against Palestinians.

No amount of intimidation will shake the legendary courage and resilience of each camp resident who witnessed Israel's crimes that month.

And no amount of lawsuits will make them forget.

That's just a truth Israel and its soldiers will have to live with.

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