

On 16.11.2010 12:15, Laura Alpern sent an e-mail to Getta Neumann, expressing her opinion about the movie "Lebanon" and raising the question of reviewing this movie in the first place. Following is Laura's message and Getta's response:

Getta Neumann: Dear Laura,
I am sorry you were disturbed by my review. Besides our different views on Israel's problems and on how to deal with them, there are some misunderstandings I will try to explain.

Laura Alpern: Getta,
Why is this movie, and this war, and all of Israel's wars, and the Israeli army's comportment during all of these wars, a subject of such crucial interest, that you personally want to publicize it to a wider audience?

GN. Israel is one of my most important concerns and I think, that of Jews in the Diaspora. Literature or movies that might throw some light on the life of Israelis, on their problems and how they perceive them are for me of interest, if these sources are trustworthy and authentic.

LA. To take it level-by-level:

Why was this movie produced? The Israelis who produced this movie knew that it would sell widely and that they would gain lots of money and fame. A movie focusing on Israeli aggression is a sure seller. The fact that millions of attendees would be emotionally reinforced in their belief that Israel is the main danger to peace in the world (as they already believe, as found in survey data in Europe), did not come in their way.

GN. I have a different answer to your question. The director of the film Moaz served at the age of 20 in the army during the Lebanon war. He is a movie maker who needed a long time until he was able to put his traumatic experience on the screen. Lebanon is actually more like a documentary, like a testimony. Just like "Waltz with Bashir", also a masterpiece.

It is NOT a film on Israeli aggression. It is an anti-war movie. The Israeli soldiers are a bunch of kids, nice and warm, caught in the awful machinery of war. None of them is evil, none enjoys killing, they are nice to each other and to the enemy. (The Syrian prisoner, the Lebanese woman). I assume you saw the film, that's why I don't enter into more details. Moreover, as I said in the review, the film is not pacifist. If you are in danger, you have to shoot.

LA. Even if you personally think that the Israeli army is not worse than other armies, by your choice of the movie rather than a movie about the armies involved in any of 200 or so other recent and ongoing conflicts in the world, you are saying (or people will assume that you are saying): "this is the army that deserves everyone's attention; this army is worse than all other armies, and this war is worse than other wars."

GN. Well, you have a point here. It is the Germans' bad luck that Jews are so articulate, so artistically gifted. The Holocaust surpasses all genocides, but many Jews' talent explains to some extent the multitude of works dealing with it. The

same goes for the Israelis. They are able to put their problems, their feelings in an artistic form.

LA. In this way, you are behaving like the UN...you are singling out the Israeli army for special attention. The singling out of Israel is not innocent. Hillel Neuer pointed out in June, "To date, the 47-nation UN Human Rights Council has devoted 33 out of its 40 censure resolutions to Israel, and 6 out of its 9 special sessions dealing with countries. Killings of innocent civilians this year in Iran, China, and Nigeria continue to go ignored..."

GN. I totally agree with you. I very much admire the work of UN Watch and especially Hillel Neuer's work.

LA. There is nothing new about Israel-bashing. When I was a lot younger and started working at the ILO I thought that the ILO was struggling for human rights of workers around the world. Then during the annual International Labour Conference, I found the Daily Record of Proceedings in my in-tray and began leafing through it. I found that the three weeks of the Conference plenary sessions, with 150 countries present, were literally one-hundred-percent devoted to Israel-bashing. (This was before the US withdrawal from the ILO). It doesn't even matter if any of the accusations against Israel were "deserved." Obviously there were worse labour abuses going on at the time in some countries where trade unionists were being shot.

GN. Yes.

LA. In the UN, Unesco and other organizations, and the media, the situation has only got worse, and their aim is to challenge Israel's right to exist. At best, you are only serving to muddy the waters by bringing up issues such as the soldier's anguish when he must shoot a person who is in a forbidden zone, during curfew, or a child who has been placed on his path by enemy soldiers as a human shield.

What do you achieve by calling our attention to these images? War is ugly. We all agree on that. And sometimes the pregnant woman is actually wearing a suicide belt, the small child is a lure for an ambush, and the old man is holding an unseen grenade. The death of civilians in war is awful, but what is your point (and the film writer's point)?

Are you saying that the Israeli army is worse than other armies? This is the visual message of the film even if the verbal message is more nuanced—in the same way that the photo (faked for the French journalist Enderlin who never apologized) of the boy Mohamed Dura being "shot" was a more powerful message than any statistics proving that the number of civilian deaths caused by the Israeli army was relatively small compared to other armies.

GN. NO, the message of the film is not that the Israeli army is worse than other armies. On the contrary. I quote from what Moaz said recently:

Maoz said he was especially surprised at the response of young audiences in Europe, particularly Britain and Scandinavia. "A lot of people who saw the film [abroad] told me they were sure the Israeli soldier was a kind of killer who goes around Gaza killing children, and all of a sudden, when they see 'Lebanon,' they understand he is a person like them, thinking and agonizing over what to do, dealing with conflicts and situations forced upon him."

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/israeli-film-lebanon-up-for-six-european-oscars-1.323290>

LA. Are you saying that the US should never have entered WWII because German civilians would get hurt? If there had been films like "Lebanon" in American theaters in 1940, I am sure that the US would not have entered the war in Europe. Germany would have won the war and the remaining Jews would have perished.

GN. I don't think literature, cinema, the arts have a noteworthy influence on politics, nor on the public opinion. Neither has culture for that matter. Hitler's Germany was also the Germany of Goethe etc, you know the story.

LA. If young Israelis in large numbers refuse to join the Israeli army due to films like "Lebanon" it is entirely possible that Israel will cease to exist.

GN. In Israel, more than in any other country, you cannot suppress the truth. It is a democracy and people say what they think. Israeli mothers know exactly what their sons do on the front, and they can very well make the difference between the actions defending their country and those which could be avoided. It is not due to films like "Lebanon" that young people refuse to go to the army, but because of the lasting insecurity and the gruelling conflict that doesn't seem to have an end.

LA. The film writer and producer were probably not thinking so far ahead. Maybe their cinematic ambition was more important to them than the political manna that they are "incidentally" offering to Israel's enemies. But you, as reviewer, have choices to make that go beyond the films you review. Laura

GN. I do recommend this movie. It is powerful, authentic and very human. The main characters are shown with a lot of compassion, your heart aches for them. They are all victims of the war, without finger pointing to one or another country and its politics. I hope I made my position somewhat clearer. Getta.