



**SHEFFIELD DOC/FEST 2021**

# The First 54 Years

+ *Pre-recorded Q&A*

‘Military occupation’ is an abstract term, open to mistaken interpretation. What does ‘occupation’ imply? What does it mean for people living under occupation? What means must be employed so that occupation can be implemented?

This film instils meaning in the term ‘occupation’ in the form of a ‘manual for military occupation’ derived from the testimonies of those people who implemented it in practice. Director Avi Mograbi hosts the viewers in his living room and provides insights to how a colonialist occupation works, the logic behind the practices that it produces and the different modes of thought needed to be applied at different situations in order to maintain it. In his presentation Mograbi is using the 54-year Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a case study.

The occupation as we see it is like a creature with an infinite number of heads. Each head is a good person, who served in the Israeli army and was stationed in the Occupied Territories, where he completed the missions imposed on him, and ultimately believed that he was taking part in fulfilling Israel’s conception of security. Almost every Jewish Israeli served in the army and played a part, whether directly or indirectly, in the day-to-day maintenance of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. There have been many generations of labourers who did the dirty work, who learned the trade and passed it on to one another, from father to son, so that the next generation would know how to grease the cogs of military control. A miniscule group of them appears in this film and breaks down this service into daily activities. These are testimonies and not opinions. The witnesses in this film do not describe their thoughts or positions concerning what they did. They simply talk about what they did and about the actions that they were required to participate in, so that the occupation could exist then and continue to exist into the future. Not one of these activities is essential to the persistence of the occupation, but together, they constitute the occupation’s very essence.

## **Director’s Statement**

My films tend to get complicated and even when my intention is to make a very simple film, many times things get tricky. *The First 54 Years: An Abbreviated Manual for Military Occupation* was supposed to be a very simple film: a collection of soldiers’ testimonies spanning 54 years of Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The testimonies are taken from the archive of ‘Breaking the Silence’, an organisation of Israeli veteran soldiers who have taken upon themselves to expose the inner workings of the occupation machine to the Israeli public. The film was originally titled *The First 54 Years* and the subtitle was added later.

At first I was convinced that indexing the testimonies within a logic of internal connections would be enough to tell the story of what is probably the longest occupation in modern history. I thought that the compilation of one testimony after another would autonomously bring forth the meaning of occupation: what it means to be an occupier, what it involves to sustain an occupation, and what kind of system the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories find

themselves living under. It was clear to me from the outset that I would concentrate on actions, deeds, commands and mechanisms as the soldiers describe them, rather than on their reflections about these deeds.

But as editing progressed, I realised that I had to develop a framework that would contain the deeper meaning of this huge enterprise, the largest the State of Israel has undertaken in its 73 years of existence. After all, I do not assume that Israel's purpose is solely to cause suffering to the Palestinians. It was clear to me that in order for my project to be complete, I had to connect the very strong body of testimonies with some logic that would allow a deeper understanding of the reasons for the longevity of the occupation and the unlikelihood of its ending in the foreseeable future.

The vast majority of the testimonies deal with local events which in themselves do not reveal the general impetus that led to their formation. The single incident of imposing a curfew, erecting a checkpoint, detaining someone or restricting movement does not usually indicate the broader end which it serves.

Thus was born the Abbreviated manual for military occupation – a kind of instruction manual for operating a military occupation that deals not only with the 'how' but also with the 'why' of these provisions: what general purpose does this or that mechanism serve, and what is the occupier's motivation when imposing a particular system of laws and rules on the inhabitants of the occupied territory?

It was clear to me that no one who had been part of the system that created and set the rules of the occupation would agree to collaborate with this project and honestly reveal the logic behind the huge machine of the occupation. I therefore had no choice but to take upon myself the role of representing the enormous system known as the Israeli occupation.

#### **Avi Mograbi**

**Breaking the Silence** is an organisation that has been collecting and publishing testimonies of IDF soldiers who served in the occupied territories since its establishment in 2004. We have taken upon ourselves to inform the public about the reality we were an integral part of in order to bring an end to the occupation.

The act of breaking one's silence and going against the grain is never easy in any context. In Israel, criticising the occupation is seen as almost sacrilegious and Breaking the Silence testifiers have paid a heavy personal price for talking about what enforcing military rule over a civilian population looks like. And yet, this is a small price to pay in order to bring an end to a reality of perpetually ruling over the lives of millions of people against their will through the use of military force.

*The First 54 Years* is a work that carries deep historical significance, but also serves as a reminder that, after over half a century of sending soldiers to occupy the territories, there is a potential silence breaker in almost every Israeli household today. Mograbi's film therefore sheds light not only on the historical events that have taken place over the years Israel has been an occupying power, but also on the character and nature of the occupier, giving a human face to the perpetrators and examining their actions as individuals working as part of a system of oppression.

**Avner Gvaryahu, Executive Director of Breaking the Silence**

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**THE FIRST 54 YEARS:****AN ABBREVIATED MANUAL FOR MILITARY OCCUPATION**

*Written and Directed by:* Avi Mograbi

*A production:* Les Films d'Ici

*In co-production with:* 24 Images, Arte France, Citizen, Jane Productions, MA.JA.DE Productions, Avi Mograbi

*In association with:* YLE

*With the participation of:* RTS, CNC

*Supported by:* AVEK, Finnish Film Foundation, Berlinale World, Cinema Fund, PROCIREP/ANGOA

*Produced by:* Serge Lalou, Camille Laemle, Annie Ohayon-Dekel

*Co-produced by:* Elina Pohjola, Leila Lyytikäinen, Heino Deckert, Avi Mograbi

*In co-production with:* Arte France, Fabrice Puchault, Anne Grolleron

*Production Manager:* Nicolas Lebecque

*Cinematographers:* Philippe Bellaïche, Tulik Galon

*Editor:* Avi Mograbi

*Colourist:* Ido Karilla

*Sound:* Joonas Jyrälä, Dominique Vieillard

France 2021

110 mins

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**EVENTS & STRANDS****Preview: Doctor Who: Dragonfire**

Sat 12 Jun 12:00

**Relaxed Screenings: The Reason I Jump**

Fri 18 Jun 14:30; Tue 22 Jun 18:10

**Woman with a Movie Camera: Wildfire**

Sun 20 Jun 18:40 (+ Q&A with director Cathy Brady); Mon 21 Jun 18:10;

Tue 22 Jun 14:40; Wed 23 Jun 20:50; Thu 24 Jun 14:45

**BAGRI FOUNDATION LONDON INDIAN FILM FESTIVAL****LIFF Opening Night: WOMB (Women of My Billion)**

+ on stage Q&A with Srishti Bakshi and film critic Anna Smith

Thu 17 Jun 17:20

**My Beautiful Laundrette**

Fri 18 Jun 20:20

**The Warrior + on-stage career interview with**

writer-director Asif Kapadia

Sat 19 Jun 20:30

**Ahimsa: Gandhi the Power of the Powerless**

Sun 20 Jun 15:00

**Searching for Happiness...**

Tue 22 Jun 20:50

**Nazarband Captive**

Wed 23 Jun 20:45

**A'hr Kayattam**

Thu 24 Jun 18:00

**The Salt in Our Waters Nonajoler Kabbo**

Sun 27 Jun 15:00

**LONDON SHORT FILM FESTIVAL****UK Competition 1: I Forgot More than You'll Ever Know**

Sat 26 Jun 21:00

**UK Competition 3: Close Quarters**

Fri 26 Jun 21:10

**UK Competition 2: The Double Life Of...**

Mon 28 Jun 17:45

**UK Competition 4: Lessons in Survival**

Tue 29 Jun 21:10

**UK Competition 5: The Devil's in the Details**

Wed 30 Jun 17:50

**SHEFFIELD DOC/FEST 2021****Opening Night: European Premiere: Summer of Soul (...Or, When the Revolution Could Not Be Televised) + pre-recorded Q&A**

Fri 4 Jun 20:15

**UK Premiere: Lift like a Girl + pre-recorded Q&A**

Sat 5 Jun 20:15

**International Premiere: My Name Is Pauli Murray + pre-recorded Q&A**

Sun 6 Jun 18:30

**UK Premiere: The First 54 Years: An Abbreviated Manual for Military Occupation + pre-recorded Q&A**

Fri 11 Jun 20:20

**Closing Night: World Premiere: The Story of Looking**

+ pre-recorded Q&A

Sat 12 Jun 20:50

**NEW RELEASES & RE-RELEASES****First Cow**

From Fri 28 May

**After Love**

From Fri 4 Jun (Q&A with director Aleem Khan and actor Joanna Scanlan on Sun 13 Jun 18:40)

**Gunda**

From Fri 4 Jun

**Fargo**

From Fri 11 Jun

**The Reason I Jump**

From Fri 18 Jun

**Nashville**

From Fri 25 Jun

**Ultraviolence**

From Sat 26 Jun

Sat 26 June 14:20 + Q&A with director Ken Fero and contributor Janet Alder

**Supernova**

From Fri 2 Jul

**Another Round**

From Fri 9 Jul

**Jumbo**

From Fri 9 Jul

**Deerskin**

From Fri 16 Jul

**Girlfriends**

From Fri 23 Jul

**Mandabi**

From Fri 23 Jul

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