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AVENGE BUT ONE OF MY TWO EYES

**(NEKAM ACHAT MISHTEY
EYNAY)**

VARIETY JUNE 6-13 2005
(DOCU - ISRAEL)

A Les Films d'Ici, Noga Communication-Channel 8 and New Israeli Foundation for Cinema & Television production in association with Centre National de la Cinematographic, Israel Film Council, and Ministry of Education Culture & Sport. (International sales: Les Films du Losange, Paris.) Produced by Avi Mograbi, Serge Lalou.

Directed, written, edited by Avi Mograbi. Camera (color), Philippe Bellaiche; sound, Dominique Vieillard; line producers, Mograbi, Serge Lalou. Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (noncompeting), May 17, 2005. Running time: 107 MIN.

By DEBORAH YOUNG

Israeli documaker Avi Mograbi draws a potent parallel between the stories of Samson and Masada, and the anger of Palestinians humiliated by the Israeli army in "Avenge But One of My Two Eyes." Though it has no solutions to propose, the film boasts several eye-opening scenes that should earn it a prominent place among the more reflective films on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly among festivals and pubcasters.

The film is constructed around a phone call between Mograbi and a Palestinian friend. The friend insists that the army's intrusion into his daily life has become unbearable. He contends this feeling of being pushed to the wall with no way out is what makes the suicide bombers multiply.

In conjunction with this, school kids and old women are shown waiting for hours to cross isolated checkpoints. Though furious, the Palestinians appear intimidated by the soldiers' bullying. The only ones who protest, and loudly, are liberal Israeli observers on the scene and the filmmaker himself.

Intercut throughout the film are shots of American tourists visiting Masada, where, in 72 A.D., 960 Jews killed themselves rather than become slaves to the Roman conquerors.

Coached by zealous Israeli guides, the tourists relive this collective suicide. The guides intend to stoke the fires of patriotism toward the state of Israel, but the film makes a very different connection to the humiliation of the Palestinians under the Israeli yoke.

There's a similar setup with young students who know by heart the story of Samson, who brought the temple crashing down on the heads of his tormentors. Here again, Mograbi's montage skillfully questions their nationalist reading of the tale, turning it completely on its head.

Docu's one real shocker is a small concert given by an aging rocker named Kahana, who sings about Samson to foment a crowd of enthusiastic religious extremists. To the blind Samson's verse "Avenge but one of my two eyes" he chillingly adds, "...on Palestine. Revenge, revenge, revenge."

Philippe Bellaiche's handheld DV camerawork is unpretentious, often giving the impression of stolen footage captured at the risk of having the camera snatched out of his hands. Film's strength lies in its lack of superfluous commentary, letting the strong images speak for themselves.