

***Since You Left (2005)***  
***Private (2005)***

By Tina Ottman

*Since You Left* IMDB ref: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0758049/> listed as *Min Yum Mahrucht* (**Arabic title**) (also known as *Since You've Left* and *Since You've Been Gone*)

**Director/ Writer: Mohammad Bakri**

Languages: Arabic, Hebrew

*Note: the film is not on general release, but is available through the actor/filmmaker's website: <http://mohammadbakri.com/news.php?lang=en>*

It is a remarkable fact among Israel's leading writers and performers, Palestinian Arabs show a strong presence, suggesting that it is often through art that the oppressed may best negotiate a way to coexistence and dignity. In the world of theatre and film, two names spring immediately to mind, one Muslim and the other Greek Orthodox Christian: Mohammad Bakri and Makhram Khoury (winner of the Israel Prize).

The former came to Japan in 2006 to present his one-hour autobiographical documentary film, *Since You Left*, an elegiac work which maintains an internal monologue with Bakri's beloved late mentor, the writer Emil Habibi, another Israeli Prize winner, best known as author of *The Secret Life of Sa'id the Pessoptimist*, the darkly funny satire about the life of the Palestinian Arab, which has also been adapted for the stage. (Bakri, who has made the role of Sa'id his own over the decades, performed it in Tokyo and Kyoto in Arabic, with Japanese subtitling.). Born into a Protestant Christian family, Habibi was a leader of the Palestine Communist Party and later Knesset member for the Israel Communist Party, before breaking off to found another party, Rakah.

Against the backdrop of the Second Intifada, *Since You Left* is a soul-searching questioning of the vision of coexistence in which Habibi and Bakri had so strongly believed. In particular, the film focuses on the fight to lift the ban in Israel of Bakri's controversial humanitarian documentary *Jenin, Jenin*, made, according to Bakri, not as propaganda for the outside world, but to awaken the consciences of his countrymen: Israelis. The documentary pointed the camera at residents of the West Bank refugee camp, who recount their experiences of April 2002, when the Israeli military entered Jenin camp in search of militants and were engaged in a fierce armed battle that resulted in massive destruction and a sombre loss of life, the extent of which remains disputed

since the camp was closed off to the outside world for weeks<sup>1</sup>.

*Since You Left* documents how the quest to lift the ban on *Jenin*, *Jenin* exposes Bakri to public vilification and humiliation; by the time he wins the battle<sup>2</sup>, the war is lost, since although the Israeli courts have finally upheld freedom of expression, most Jewish Israelis do not want to see the film, and it cannot be screened anywhere: he and family members are reduced to selling the documentary on the streets (a segment which produces surprisingly glorious black humour, as Bakri's camera captures a range of quirky characters).

At the same time, the filmmaker's credibility is thrown into further disarray as some members of the Bakri family are imprisoned for allegedly taking part in the suicide bombing of a bus at Meron Junction (Tzomet Meron, August 4, 2002<sup>3</sup>). Confronting further bitter vilification through the association with terrorism, the family talk on camera openly at their despair, dismay and utter rejection of involvement in such violence.

A postscript: Listeners to *Democracy Now* can hear an interview with Bakri<sup>4</sup> in which he reveals that he currently faces yet another legal action based on *Jenin*, *Jenin*, brought by five soldiers who partook in the IDF battle in Jenin. (News of the action was reported back in 26 February, 2003<sup>5</sup>, but is only now coming to trial.) If convicted, Bakri faces imprisonment. Clearly, an unfinished story.

**Also strongly recommended: Saverio Costanzo's award-winning drama *Private* (2005), starring Mohammad Bakri as Mohammad, the schoolteacher-father of a family whose house is occupied without warning by Israeli troops for use during a military operation. Confined to one floor of their home while the soldiers are**

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<sup>1</sup> "At least 52 Palestinians, of whom up to half may have been civilians, and 23 Israeli soldiers were dead. Many more were injured. Approximately 150 buildings had been destroyed, and many others were rendered structurally unsound. Four hundred and fifty families were rendered homeless. The cost of the destruction of property is estimated at approximately \$27 million," *Report of the Secretary-General prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution ES-10/10*, 30<sup>th</sup> July 2002.

<sup>2</sup> *Israel's Court Defeats Film Ban*, 31 August, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/3613658.stm>. Retrieved 23 July, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> For reports in English on this, see <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Communiques/2002/ISA+and+Israel+Police+arrest+two+Israeli+citizens.htm>; [http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000\\_2009/2002/8/August%204-%202002-%2013%20dead%20in%20a%20day%20of%20terror](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2002/8/August%204-%202002-%2013%20dead%20in%20a%20day%20of%20terror). Retrieved 23 July, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=07/06/22/1458237&mode=thread&tid=25>. Retrieved 23 July, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/2802947.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2802947.stm). Retrieved 23 July, 2007.

**upstairs, the family is torn apart by tensions, as Mohammad urges them to refuse to leave and to hold out despite overwhelming fear.**

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