

A fateful vision of the Gaza Strip

SURREAL: A GLANCE AT A LAND THAT NO LONGER EXISTS

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In December 2003, Ariel Sharon, then Prime Minister of Israel, announced his plan for a unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza strip.

The small piece of land, about 360 square kilometres, was home to 8.500 Jewish settlers and 1.3 millions Palestinians.

Forty years of colonialism sponsored by the Israeli government was about to be destroyed. Officially, the evacuation of 21 villages and the displacement of an unknown number of inhabitants was supposed to increase the security of residents of Israel, relieve pressure on the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and reduce friction between Israelis and Palestinians.

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By mid-July 2005, Erez T Yanuv Barzilay, an Israeli filmmaker now living in Vancouver, famous for documentaries on humanitarian situations, went with a friend to the Gaza Strip for a farewell visit.

This was just a month prior to the withdrawal and a year prior into the Israeli invasion in the summer of 2006.

On their journey, they met Jewish settlers, as well as Palestinian youngsters and immigrants from elsewhere, invited in Israel to replace the Palestinians with whom the Israelis used to live and work “peacefully.”

They drove through a land surrounded by barricades and electronic fences, with Israeli forces in an area where the frontiers are still to be defined. They saw a population denying its imminent departure, villages waiting for their death.

It could have been a political movie.

Instead, the former Israeli, while keeping a Jewish perspective, made a movie about humanity that went beyond national beliefs.

As a result, the film leaves us with more questions than answers. How could the Israeli settlers be prepared for this withdrawal?

Erez T Yanuv Barzilay escaped from the tricks of making a movie about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and refused to take a political stand, only questioning the Israeli government for the decision to build the villages decades before.

If the two producers—Barzilay and Dror Marcus, his Israeli friend from Cambodia, who took digital images inserted in the movie—fail to present a clear answer, their work is well-documented and gives an excellent background to anyone who follows this ongoing conflict from the outside.

It would be a shame not to mention Ben Euerby’s work on the film’s music. The Vancouver composer created an introspective atmosphere as important as the images themselves.

And now, a year after the withdrawal, what remains of these villages? According to the filmmaker, nothing. The Israeli government destroyed some. The Palestinians destroyed the others. Erez T Yanuv Barzilay has his reasons to condemn the Palestinians for this destruction. The Palestinians have theirs. Here begins, again, the political debate. u