

the soldier that stopped us that evening must have become an artist by now...



it must have been 2006, during the massive war on lebanon, the israeli army withdrew all its well trained soldiers from the west bank and took them up north to the ongoing war there, and brought the newly recruited soldiers of the compulsory military service to manage the checkpoints all over the West Bank, they were young people between the age of 18-21 years old.

We were 25-26 years old when the three of us drove around the scattered villages in the north of the West Bank with our blue Fiat Uno. It was a hot summer that year, we had our cameras with us, trying to become filmmakers and photographers, not knowing where this path will take us one day.

At some point, around the evening, we got stuck in a big car traffic due to a flying checkpoint, one that is arbitrarily made by a bunch of soldiers with their jeep, it took us nearly an hour waiting to reach to the soldiers, during which we hid our cameras so they won't find them, as one can never know the reaction of the soldiers when they find cameras.

The soldiers who looked much younger than the usual soldiers we were used to, checked our ID's, checked the car, and found the cameras, "What do you do?" one of them asked in broken english, "Artists" we answered. he jumped from his post and began checking our cameras. «I want to become an artist too» he said «how did you become artists, what do you do?»



Like an older brother who is telling his younger brother about his life experience, i told him that we didn't study art, we are just trying, we go around, we photograph... «film around» Sami continued.. the soldier asked about the cameras; why are we using analog rather than digital, what do we photograph... the more we explained, the more we began enjoying the feeling of power we had over him, we relaxed, the feeling of intimidation by the gun on his shoulder resting on his chest has gone, we lit cigarettes, he spoke about artists he liked, he seemed knowledgeable of contemporary art as he spoke about his visits to Tel Aviv museums.

we got confused when he suddenly asked us about the artists we like most, I said Picasso - his name was the easiest to remember, he got a bit suspicious...

suddenly the driver behind us shouted in Arabic: <yalla... come on... its been more than an hour>, i felt ashamed, we felt ashamed... the soldier shouted on him «you move when i tell you to, go inside your car»...

he turned asking more questions, but this time we had no real answers... we wanted to go on our way too, its been more than an hour, the queue behind us was so long that we couldn't see its end... «can we go please!» Moha asked, «wait i want to ask you more about art...» «but we aren't artists» sami said... can we go please...

confused the soldier was, he gave us our IDs back, and said: «it was nice meeting you, you are my best passing people of the day, i will remember you when i study art after i finish the military service... maybe even we can do an exhibition together, about peace and coexistence...» we left, behind us there was a river of people waiting to go somewhere...



