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Covering Israel, the Middle East and the Jewish World

Lives behind the lens

Israeli filmmaker Eyal Sivan, 26, has lived in Paris for the last five years in what he calls a *"voluntary exile"* from his homeland. Born in Haifa and raised in Jerusalem, he identifies with the extreme left of the Israeli political spectrum. In 1981, he was one of a group of 27 high school students who declared that they would refuse to do their army service; he avoided prison after being given a psychological deferment. Sivan went on to direct the television ads of the Jewish-Arab *Progressive List for Peace* party in the last Knesset election campaign.

He will be returning from his "exile" to present at the festival his second film, *Izkor, The Slaves of Memory* a documentary about both the Jewish collective memory of persecution and suffering, and how, in Sivan's perception, the Israeli establishment cultivates this through the educational system and exploits it for political purposes.

In April 1990, Sivan and his film crew followed five Israeli schoolchildren during a month full of commemorative days, including Passover, Memorial Day and Holocaust Remembrance Day, documenting how these events were presented to them and how they responded. Sivan tries to prove the existence of a linkage between what maverick Prof. Yeshayahu Leibowitz calls in the film *"the slavery of memory"* - how from early childhood Israelis are exposed to an educational system that mythifies the Jewish history of suffering - and the way they later justify a certain type of behavior toward Palestinians.

"Izkor," says Sivan, *"is not just an attack on the Israeli education system but on Zionism's ideological roots. I'm not against memory, but we can't just remember what the others did to us; we've also got to remember what we've done, and we're doing, to others."* Sivan rejects accusations that he is anti-Israeli. Although married to a French woman, he hasn't applied for French citizenship. *"I visit Israel three to four times a year, I make films about it. I want this country to continue existing because I love it, with all my criticism. I just make a distinction between Zionism and the State of Israel; I think Israel can exist without Zionism. And one day,"* he adds, *"they'll say proudly that only Israeli democracy could have produced citizens like me - who spit in its face."*

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