

Momento!, Sourat Films & Sindibad Films present



Route 181

Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel

A film by Michel Khleifi & Eyal Sivan

English-language Press-pack

(Digital photographs will be provided on request)

Contact Information:
LES FILMS SERENDIPITY SARL
email: contact@lesfilmsserendipity.com
<http://www.lesfilmsserendipity.com>

Or

Sindibad Films Limited, 5 Princes Gate, London SW7 1QJ, UK
Tel: + 44 207 823 74 88, Fax: + 44 207 823 91 37
Email: info@sindibad.co.uk , <http://www.sindibad.co.uk>

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Route 181 - Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel

A film by
Michel KHLEIFI & Eyal SIVAN

Route 181 offers an unusual vision of the inhabitants of Palestine-Israel, a common vision of a Palestinian and an Israeli. For more than a year now, Khleifi and Sivan have dedicated themselves to producing what they consider a cinematic act of faith: a film co-directed by a Palestinian and by an Israeli.

In the summer of 2002, for two long months, they travelled together from the south to the north of their country of birth, traced their trajectory on a map and called it Route 181. This virtual line follows the borders outlined in Resolution 181, which was adopted by the United Nations on November 29th 1947 to partition Palestine into two states. As they travel along this route, they meet women and men, Israeli and Palestinian, young and old, civilians and soldiers, filming them in their everyday lives. Each of these characters has their own way of evoking the frontiers that separate them from their neighbours: concrete, barbed-wire, cynicism, humour, indifference, suspicion, aggression...Frontiers have been built on the hills and in the plains, on mountains and in valleys but above all inside the minds and souls of these two peoples and in the collective unconscious of both societies. With Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel, Michel Khleifi and Eyal Sivan take us on a disorientating journey across this tiny territory with vast ramifications.

Route 181 - Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel will be broadcast by Arte on Monday 24 novembre 2003, in the "Grand Format" slot, a few days before the 56th anniversary of Resolution 181.

The film will be previewed at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France on Monday November 3rd and will be issued on DVD towards the end of the month, with added elements.

Route 181 follows the borders drawn up by UN Resolution 181 which was adopted by the UN on 29th November 1947 to separate Palestine into two states- one Jewish and one Arab. 56% of the territory was attributed to the Jewish minority while 43% was given to the Arab majority, with a small central area given over to international supervision.

This theoretical border, which was presented as a «solution», led to the outbreak of the first Arab-Israeli war and to a conflict, which remains far from resolved.

55 years later, the journey of these two filmmakers along "route 181" traces a border which never actually existed.

The film is divided into three chapters - the South, from the port city of Ashdod to the frontiers of the Gaza Strip; the Centre from the Jewish-Arab city of Lod to

Jerusalem; and the North from Rosh Ha'ayn, near the new separation wall, to the Lebanese borders.

Both filmmakers are convinced that the situation in the Middle East is an ideological/pathological construct made by men, which can therefore be unmade by them.

Their journey was peripatetic and led them to the most arbitrary of encounters. No appointments were organised beforehand, no personalities contacted, no "official" interlocutors.

Armed only with authorisations to film, they stopped and filmed!: anonymous Israelis and Palestinians who speak of their lives, their experiences, their situations, their personal memories and understandings of what is happening around them today. These people speak also of tomorrow and what could become of them and their country.

Michel Khleifi and Eyal Sivan wanted to take this journey together to listen with the ears of the other and to come nearer, each with the help of the other, to those whom fear usually keeps apart.

To understand. To convey what is desired and experienced!; distinguish people's dreams from political projects!; hear what one wants to forget; listen to the other - this is how this journey in search of a possible peace and a life together has the qualities of an initiation.

In their project notes, the two filmmakers write:

"Despite the tribal allegiances imposed on us, which we reject, and armed with our common experience, we decided to return to our country. By doing so, we wanted to unveil the geographic and mental reality in which the men and women of Palestine-Israel are living today.

The demarcation line of the Partition Plan for Palestine, drawn up and voted by the UN in 1947, was the starting point of our film. For us, it represented both a documentary challenge and promises of a rich human adventure.

Our aim was to break with the usual approach in which people, places or events are filmed only because they coincide with the filmmaker's ideological disposition, where nothing is really illuminated other than already familiar political discourses or clichés on what is called the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Along this demarcation line, which does not in fact exist, we wanted to film, in a particular way, men and women, places, all previously unseen. During these chance meetings, we listened together to the varying sounds of people, to their passions and disillusionment. We provoked - in us but also in our interlocutors - a relationship of love in response to a daily reality saturated with danger and overwhelmed by death. The voices of those forgotten by official discourse will we

hope, be heard - the voices of those who nonetheless constitute the majority in both societies, those in whose name wars are fought.

We wished to construct a film which resists the idea that the only thing Israelis and Palestinians can do together is fight wars until they are both driven to oblivion.'

This film does not have two points-of-view but a common one emanating from two complimentary visions. Whatever the unease which their journey may cause us, Michel Khleifi and Eyal Sivan invite us to follow in their footsteps.

1. THE SOUTH

From the harbour city of Ashdod, in the South, to the Gaza trip, then to the Centre.

ASHDOD: on the seaside, a building site in progress. Israeli foremen, Chinese workers and Palestinian (Israeli citizen) surveyors are working together.

GAN YAVNE: is built on the ruins of Barkaa village. A fruit-juice saleswoman is running a small shop on the roadside. She speaks about the right to return. Further on, the manager of a building site refuses to speak about any political issues.

KIRIAT MALAHI. In his shop, a candy salesman, a Jew from Iraq, remembers his past. He tells us with nostalgia that, in the past, there were a lot of Palestinian villages around.

SHEFIR. In front of his house, a young high-tech engineer speaks about his neighbours, workers from the Gaza Strip. His father tells the story of this village, built in 1949 by European survivors.

KIBBUTZ NEKBA. A statue, a Stalinist-looking monument and a scale model of the kibbutz in its beginning remind us of the socialist dream underlying the Zionist project.

KIBBUTZ YAD MORDECHAI. In the museum of the kibbutz, an old pioneer tells how the Palestinian inhabitants were expelled towards the Gaza Strip.

CHECK-POINTS AROUND THE GAZA STRIP. The Gaza Strip is closed to any civilian access. Some goods trucks have to wait in front of the blocked borderline. No way to cross any of the other checkpoints all around the Gaza Strip.

BARBED-WIRE FACTORY. The "concertina" is manufactured there. It is a special barbed wire with several layers, for which a patent was registered by the factory's owner. It sells very well, in Israel and abroad.

NIR AM, THE WATER RESERVOIR. On the border with the Gaza Strip, an Israeli family visits the water reservoir and contemplates the Gaza Strip, which remains closed.

NIR AM, WATER AND SECURITY MUSEUM. The retired military commandant of the Southern Region during the 1948 war is now the manager of the museum. He explains how the Negev was imposed on the UN Partition commission as a Jewish area. He concludes with his dreams for a tourist development on the frontier.

BEIT HANOUN. It is forbidden to film in the military base. But it is allowed to film the electrical fence, which surrounds the Gaza Strip. And, then, to obtain detailed explanations from the soldiers.

KIBBOUTZ NIR OZ. Not far from the frontier with Gaza, in the middle of nowhere, there is a white house that a member of Kibbutz Nir Oz wishes to transform into an art gallery. He is driving to the extreme south of the frontier, in a strange end-of-the-world landscape.

EREZ. The night falls on the deserted Erez checkpoint.

HULDA. This evening, the Herzl House is rented out for the celebration of a great wedding. On the front wall, an immense portrait of the founder of Zionism seems to observe the guests who are enjoying the party.

MASMYIEH. There is only one Palestinian family still installed in what was, before 1949, the large town of Masmyieh: an old woman and her son. She tells us: "Our house has to be demolished to allow the enlargement of the highway". But Nothing, she tells us, will force her to move.

Just next to it, there is a gas station. The walls of its cafeteria are covered with military pictures. The boss, a Jewish Yemenite woman, makes no secret about her hatred for Arabs.

GESER. On the way to the kibbutz Geser, a Jewish man from Russia regrets to have immigrated in Promised Land.

Further on, a Bedouin leading his herd dreams of joining the Israeli army. In Kibbutz Geser, a group of American Protestants from Kansas plant a few olive-trees as a solidarity gesture with Israel. The ceremony is conducted by a woman rabbi and her husband, both of them American Jews.

TELGESER. From the ruins of the Palestinian village, people are able to contemplate the landscape stretching from Lod city to Jerusalem.

2. THE CENTRE

From Lod City to the Jerusalem area. Then around Jerusalem, the zone previously demarcated in the Partition plan as an "international zone".

LOD. In the Centre for New Immigrants, Russian musicians play melodies from Eastern Europe to greet new immigrants just arrived from Ethiopia who seem visibly perplexed.

LOD. In front of the town hall, a group of Jews and Arabs from the movement "Living Together" [ta'yoush] demonstrate against the demolition of houses planned for the Arab districts of the city.

At the same time, the local council discusses these demolitions. Despite permanent interruptions, an Arab local councillor tries to defend his point-of-view.

In the quarter called "ghetto", a woman who was political prisoner for years and her Jewish neighbour live side by side.

In his hairdressing salon, the old barber speaks about the expulsion of the Palestinian inhabitants of Lod (Lydd), a big Arab city before 1948.

KFAR BINOUN. On the way to Jerusalem, the ruins of the Palestinian villages are visible. In Kfar Binoun, a sculptor, son of Holocaust survivors, speaks about the

ordeal suffered by his mother during the war. For him, building his personal heaven for himself and his family is a kind of revenge.

HULDA. A guide of the Jewish National Fund welcomes the visitors to Herzl House in Hulda. Like all the Jewish villages built on the sides of the road to Jerusalem, Hulda was built on the ruins of a Palestinian village.

TO JERUSALEM. There are several military checkpoints on the road approaching Jerusalem. A Palestinian geographer explains that the settlement-building all around Jerusalem is part of a global colonisation strategy.

KALANDIA. This is the biggest military checkpoint between Jerusalem and Ramallah. This is also an opportunity to discuss with the duty soldiers about the importance of being polite.

MILITARY TRIBUNAL. A human rights Israeli lawyer defends young Palestinians accused of being suicide bombers. The court is under high surveillance. The families of the defendants are here. When the mothers try to kiss their sons, the young soldiers immediately stop them. It is forbidden to touch the defendants.

ABOU DIS. Several houses of suicide bombers' families were dynamited during the night by the Israeli army. Then, entire families find themselves out on the street. They walk through the ruins of their houses expressing their anger.

ROAD-BLOCK AL-RAM. Since a suicide-attack in Jerusalem was just announced, the zone is totally closed. A soldier spontaneously goes to the camera to give his explanations, which he wants to be transmitted all over the world.

RAMALLAH. The city is totally empty, under curfew. The Israeli army is there, controlling any movement. From his tank, the commandant speaks about literature and philosophy.

BEIT JALA. The road between Bethlehem and Beit Jala is closed. The guests of a Palestinian wedding that is to be celebrated there have to use small tracks and to climb over piles of earth.

But the military occupation is unable not prevent the wedding party from taking place.

3. THE NORTH

From the city of Rosh Ha'ain, through the separation wall, to the Lebanese border.

ROSH HA'AIN. Before 1948, Majdal Sadek was a beautiful Palestinian village. In its ruins, a Jewish Yemenite jogger runs with his dog. There, he denies totally the destruction of any village in 1948.

KALKYLIA. The highway to the North is all new, like the separation wall built on its side.

In a small archaeological place, the workers are Palestinian and the archaeologists Israeli. Next to it, workers are building the wall. They are Arab, Turkish-Bulgarian, Uzbek...

The city of Kalkylia, surrounded by Israeli positions, is under curfew.

TULKAREM. The soldiers stop a group of demonstrators from the Jewish-Arabic movement Ta'ayoush (living together). They have to cross the hills to bring food to the inhabitants of the Palestinian city under siege.

Military roadblocks are all around the city and the access is impossible.

KAKOUN, BIR SIKA. Not far from the ruins of the village of Kakoun, the mayor of Bir Sika, a Palestinian village inside Israel, talks about the expropriation of the lands of the villages since 1948.

In a nearby olive grove, inspectors of the Rabbinate inspect the harvest and ensure that it is kosher. The owner explains how he moved the borders of his land...

YAD HANA. This was a kibbutz in which all the inhabitants were members of the Communist Party. An elderly couple speak of their lost past.

EMEK ISRAEL. The night falls. The fighter planes come back to their military air base, in the middle of the Jezreel Valley. A jogger from a neighbouring kibbutz thinks that the current settlements took the place of the kibbutzim of yesterday.

YIFAT. In the kibbutz that dominates the Jezreel valley, employees of the Pioneer Settlement Museum perform a play which recounts the story of the first pioneers in front of young and old visitors.

LUBIA. A group of Israeli teenagers, protected by an armed guard, walk where the town of Lubia, now demolished, once stood.

SEJERA. The manager of the Museum of Sejera is from the United Kingdom. He describes his personal story as a continuation of the pioneers', who installed themselves next to the Arab village of Sejera, at the beginning of the 20th century.

TURA'AN. An old Palestinian woman, surrounded by her grandchildren, speaks about her expulsion from Sejera, only 4 kilometres from Tur'an, where she used to live until 1948.

With the aid of maps, a smiling geographer speaks about the colonisation and the "judeisation" of the Galilee.

NUJEIDAT. Next to the war memorial, a group of pupils discuss questions of identity.

FARUD. An old man we meet at the entrance of the kibbutz speaks in detail and without hesitation or compunction about how he took part in the expulsion of the

Arab inhabitants of the North of Palestine during the war. This operation was called "Operation Broom".

KFAR SHAMAI. A girl reads an inscription on a wall: "We had a dream. Now we have a maybe". A Jewish woman from Morocco explains how she took part, when she was a teenager, in the illegal immigration of Moroccan Jews.

MERON. In this religious place, it is always bedlam. Everything can be bought, everything sold. In a mixture of deafening sounds, young religious men dance together.

SHEFER. He is a Jew from Morocco. She is a Jew from Tunisia. Both of them live together in the nostalgia of their countries of origin. "Our youngest son died during the Lebanon War" she tells us. Beside it, they are sure that Jewish and Arab peoples can live peacefully together, like it was in the past.

LEBANESE FRONTIER. A few yards away from the frontier, two tourist guides want to know more about the film. After few explanations, they declare not to want to speak about politics.

The sun falls on the barbed wire of the frontier with Lebanon.

Michel Khleifi was born in Nazareth in the north of Palestine. He studied theatre at INSAS in Brussels where he had emigrated in 1971. He has directed and produced several documentary and feature films and has received several prestigious awards including the International Critics' Prize at the Cannes Film Festival, the Golden Shell at San Sebastian in 1987 for his film *Wedding in Galilee*.

Michel Khleifi currently teaches at INSAS in Brussels, where he lives.

TELEVISION

As Writer/Director & Producer with RTBF (Belgian TV), a series of one-hour documentaries for the weekly program "A suivre"

The West Bank, The Palestinians' hope? January 1978

Israeli Settlements in the Sinai, September 1978

Ashrafieh (co-directed with A. Darteville, First Prize of the Community of French-speaking televisions, documentary series, November 1979

Peace and the Palestinians, April 1979

The Road of El-Naim September 1981, a portrait of Naim Khader, PLO representative in Brussels, assassinated in 1981 by Mossad

FILM

As script-writer, director and producer:

Fertile Memory, Full-length documentary film, 16mm, 1980

Cannes 1981, Semaine de La Critique and several international awards

Maaloul celebrates its destruction 30' documentary, 1985

Wedding in Galilee, 110', Full-length feature film, 1986

Cannes 1987 - Quinzaine des Réalisateurs : Prix de la Critique Internationale; San Sebastian (Spain) 1987 : Golden Shell; Carthage Film Days 1988; Golden Tanit.

Canticle of the Stones, 100', Full-length feature film, 1990

Cannes - 1990 - Official Selection - Un Certain Regard ; Yamagata, Japan, Special Critics' Prize; Valencia F.F, Silver Prize.

L'Ordre du Jour, 115', Full-length feature film, 1992

Tale Of The Three Jewels, 105', Full-length feature film, 1994/5

Cannes - 1995 - Quinzaine des Réalisateurs; Isfahan 1995, Golden Butterfly

Forbidden Marriages in the Holy Land, 66 minute documentary, 1995

THEATRE

La Fuite au Paradis (Flight to Paradise) - As writer and director, for the Kunstenfestival des Arts, Brussels, Spring 1998.

For more information, please visit <http://www.sindibad.co.uk>

Eyal SIVAN

Born in 1964 in Haifa, northern Israel, Eyal Sivan grew up in Jerusalem. In 1985, he left Israel for France. He has produced and directed a number of long-format documentaries and has received several international prizes for his work. His first film, "Aqabat Jaber, a life of passage" about Palestinian refugees, received the Grand Jury Prize at the Festival Cinéma du réel, in the Centre Georges Pompidou. Since then, Eyal Sivan has been particularly concerned, through his writing, lecturing and films, in the political use of memory in Israel, civil disobedience, and the representation and manipulation of genocide. In 1993, he was invited to stay at the Villa Medici in Rome.

"AQABAT JABER, A LIFE OF PASSAGE" Documentary 81 minutes (1987)

Grand Prix du Jury, Festival "Cinéma du Réel", Paris 1987- Golden Crown at the Festikon, Amsterdam 1988 - Prix Air France & Radio France at the Rencontres Cinématographiques de Belfort, 1988 - Jury Prize (Socio-political section), International Film Festival, Oakland 1988 - Special Jury Mentio, Internationale Filmwoche, Mannheim 1988.

"IZKOR, THE SLAVES OF MEMORY", Documentary, 97 minutes (1991)

Prix Procirep & Mention Spéciale du Jury FIPA 1991 - Prix de l'Investigation, Biennale Européenne du Documentaire Marseille 1991 - Golden Lens, Tel Aviv 1991.

"ISRALAND" Documentary 58 minutes (1991)

Official Selection Etats, Généraux du Documentaire, Lussas 1991.

"ITGABER, TRIUMPH OVER ONESELF" Documentary 2 x 85 minutes (1993)

"Of Science and Of Values" et "Of Law and Of the State".

"JERUSALEM, THE BORDERLINE SYNDROME ", documentary 64 minutes (1994)

"AQABAT-JABER, PEACE WITH NO RETURN?" Documentary de 60 minutes (1995)

"POPULATIONS IN DANGER", SERIES OF 13 minute shorts (1996)

"BURUNDI, SOUS LA TERREUR"

"ITSEMBATSEMBA, RWANDA UN GÉNOCIDE PLUS TARD"

Merit Winner at the San Fransisco International Film Festival 1997, Special Mention at the Bilbao Documentary Festival de Bilbao 1997

"A SPÉCIALIST", long-format documentary 123 minutes (1999)

Official Selection, Berlin Film Festival 1999. Adolf Grimme Prize, Germany 2001, Prix de la 7ème quinzaine du jeune cinéma français, Genoa 2000, Prix du festival France Cinéma, Florence 1999

"AU SOMMET DE LA DESCENTE", Fiction 32 minutes (2001)

TV Programmes

11 TV spots for the Progressive List for Peace, Israel (1988)

Conceptualisation of a thematic evening for Arte entitled "JERUSALEM, JERUSALEMS" (1994)

Artistic director of "SCALPEL", a series of 13 45-minute documentaries for Arte (2001)

PUBLICATIONS

"ÉLOGE DE LA DÉSOBÉISSANCE"

Co-written with Rony Brauman. Published by Editions Le Pommier / Fayard

ROUTE 181
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WDR (GERMANY)

Written, directed and produced by
EYAL SIVAN & MICHEL KHLEIFI

Executive Producer
ARMELLE LABORIE

Camera
PHILIPPE BELLAÏCHE

Sound
RICHARD VERTHE

Edited by
EYAL SIVAN & MICHEL KHLEIFI

Sound Editor
SARI EZOUZ

Sound Dubbing
STÉPHANE LARRAT

Co-producers
OMAR AL-QATTAN, SINDIBAD FILMS LTD
WERNER DÜTSCH, Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln
MICHEL KHLEIFI, SOURAT FILMS SPRL
ALAIN BOTTARELLI

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