




**71<sup>e</sup>** Internationale  
 Filmfestspiele  
 Berlin  
**Forum**

# THE FIRST 54 YEARS

An Abbreviated Manual for Military Occupation

A FILM BY  
**AVI MOGRABI**

LES FILMS D'ICI PRESENTS "THE FIRST 54 YEARS — AN ABBREVIATED MANUAL FOR MILITARY OCCUPATION" A FILM BY AVI MOGRABI PRODUCED BY SERGE LALOU CAMILLE LAEMLE ANNIE OHAYON-DEKEL  
 COPRODUCED BY ELINA POHJOLA LEILA LYYTIKÄINEN HEINO DECKERT AVI MOGRABI CINEMATOGRAPHER PHILIPPE BELLAÏCHE & TULIK GALLON EDITOR AVI MOGRABI SOUND JOONAS JYRÄLÄ & DOMINIQUE VIELLARD  
 COLORIST IDO KARILLA PRODUCTION MANAGER NICOLAS LEBECQUE A PRODUCTION LES FILMS D'ICI IN COPRODUCTION WITH 24IMAGES ARTE FRANCE CITIZEN JANE PRODUCTIONS MA-JA-DE PRODUCTIONS AND AVI MOGRABI  
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A FILM BY AVI MOGRABI

2X52' & 110' - France, Finland, Israël, Germany - 2021

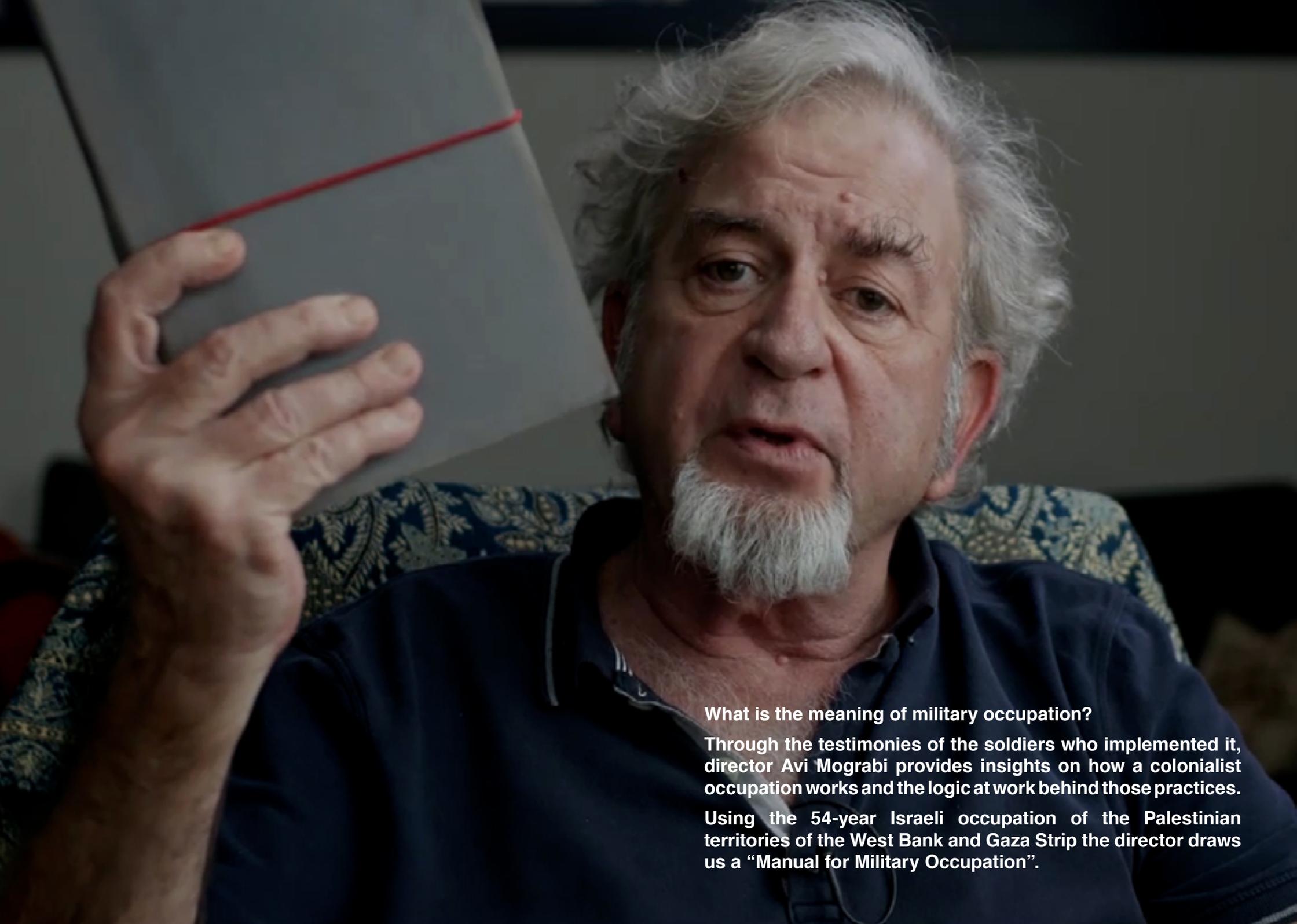
## INTERNATIONAL SALES

The Party Film Sales  
9, rue Ambroise Thomas, 75009 Paris  
01 40 22 92 15  
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## PRESS

Chloé Lorenzi & Audrey Grimaud  
Makna Presse  
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**What is the meaning of military occupation?**

**Through the testimonies of the soldiers who implemented it, director Avi Mograbi provides insights on how a colonialist occupation works and the logic at work behind those practices.**

**Using the 54-year Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip the director draws us a “Manual for Military Occupation”.**



## SYNOPSIS

“Military occupation” is an abstract term, open to mistaken interpretation. What does “occupation” imply? What does it mean for people living under occupation? What means must be employed so that occupation can be implemented?

This film instills meaning in the term “occupation” in the form of a “manual for military occupation” derived from the testimonies of those people who implemented it in practice. Director Avi Mograbi hosts the viewers in his living room and provides insights to how a colonialist occupation works, the logic behind the practices that it produces and the different modes of thought needed to be applied at different situations in order to maintain it. In his presentation Mograbi is using the 54-year Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a case study.

The occupation as we see it is like a creature with an infinite number of heads. Each head is a good person, who served in the Israeli army and was stationed in the Occupied Territories, where he completed the missions imposed on him, and ultimately believed that he was taking part in fulfilling Israel’s conception of security. Almost every Jewish Israeli served in the army and played a part, whether directly or indirectly, in the day-to-day maintenance of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. There have been many generations of laborers who did the dirty work, who learned the trade and passed it on to one another, from father to son, so that the next generation would know how to grease the cogs of military control. A miniscule group of them appears in this film and breaks down this service into daily activities. These are testimonies and not opinions. The witnesses in this film do not describe their thoughts or positions concerning what they did. They simply talk about what they did and about the actions that they were required to participate in, so that the occupation could exist then and continue to exist into the future. Not one of these activities is essential to the persistence of the occupation, but together, they constitute the occupation’s very essence.

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My films tend to get complicated and even when my intention is to make a very simple film, many times things get tricky. *The First 54 Years*: An abbreviated manual for military occupation was supposed to be a very simple film: a collection of soldiers' testimonies spanning 54 years of Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The testimonies are taken from the archive of "Breaking the Silence" an organization of Israeli veteran soldiers who have taken upon themselves to expose the inner workings of the occupation machine to the Israeli public. The film was originally titled *The First 54 Years* and the subtitle was added later.

At first I was convinced that indexing the testimonies within a logic of internal connections would be enough to tell the story of what is probably the longest occupation in modern history. I thought that the compilation of one testimony after another would autonomously bring forth the meaning of occupation: what it means to be an occupier, what it involves to sustain an occupation, and what kind of system the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories find themselves living under. It was clear to me from the outset that I would concentrate on actions, deeds, commands and mechanisms as the soldiers describe them, rather than on their reflections about these deeds.

But as editing progressed, I realized that I had to develop a framework that would contain the deeper meaning of this huge enterprise, the largest the State of Israel has undertaken in its 73 years of existence. After all, I do not assume that Israel's purpose is solely to cause suffering to the Palestinians. It was clear to me that in order for my project to be complete, I had to connect the

very strong body of testimonies with some logic that would allow a deeper understanding of the reasons for the longevity of the occupation and the unlikelihood of its ending in the foreseeable future.

The vast majority of the testimonies deal with local events which in themselves do not reveal the general impetus that led to their formation. The single incident of imposing a curfew, erecting a checkpoint, detaining someone or restricting movement does not usually indicate the broader end which it serves.

Thus was born the Abbreviated manual for military occupation - a kind of instruction manual for operating a military occupation that deals not only with the "how" but also with the "why" of these provisions: what general purpose does this or that mechanism serve, and what is the occupier's motivation when imposing a particular system of laws and rules on the inhabitants of the occupied territory?



It was clear to me that no one who had been part of the system that created and set the rules of the occupation would agree to collaborate with this project and honestly reveal the logic behind the huge machine of the occupation. I therefore had no choice but to take upon myself the role of representing the enormous system known as the Israeli occupation.

*Avi Mograbi*

## BREAKING THE SILENCE

Breaking the Silence is an organization that has been collecting and publishing testimonies of IDF soldiers who served in the occupied territories since its establishment in 2004.

We have taken upon ourselves to inform the public about the reality we were an integral part of in order to bring an end to the occupation.

The act of breaking one's silence and going against the grain is never easy in any context. In Israel, criticizing the occupation is seen as almost sacrilegious and Breaking the Silence testifiers have paid a heavy personal price for talking about what enforcing military rule over a civilian population looks like.

And yet, this is a small price to pay in order to bring an end to a reality of perpetually ruling over the lives of millions of people against their will through the use of military force.

*The First 54 Years* is a work that carries deep historical significance, but also serves as a reminder that, after over half a century of sending soldiers to occupy the territories, there is a potential silence breaker in almost every Israeli household today.

Mograbi's film therefore sheds light not only on the historical events that have taken place over the years Israel has been an occupying power, but also on the character and nature of the occupier, giving a human face to the perpetrators and examining their actions as individuals working as part of a system of oppression.

*Avner Gvaryahu*  
*Executive Director of Breaking The Silence*



Avner Gvaryahu

# CONTEXT

It has been 54 years since Israel first occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Some 5 million Palestinians now live in the Occupied Territories, under Israeli military rule. Of these, 2 million live in the Gaza Strip, where they have been under total siege for the past 13 years. Consecutive Israeli governments on the right and the left have tried for years to conceal the crude seam connecting Israel to the territories. They have attempted to leave their own people and the rest of the world with the impression that the occupation does not exist, as if they can keep a people almost equal in number to their own citizens under a regime of occupation, without basic rights, and still be considered a democracy. Most of all, Israel has made an enormous effort to deny and conceal the prime motivation of this occupation, the wish to appropriate the land. They have succeeded to the degree many young Israelis now challenge the geographical and historical fact that the West Bank and Gaza Strip are not integral parts of Israel and that control of these areas is subject to the laws of warfare, as defined by the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949).

Soldiers on the ground do not determine policy. They do not decide what particular territory or other should be held, which population should be placed under sanction, or whether Jewish settlements should be established on lands seized in violation of international law. Nor do they set the orders for opening fire on Palestinians, who dare to raise their heads defiantly and actively oppose an oppressive regime. They do not determine what methods and mechanisms will be used to make the lives of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories intolerable and encourage them to leave their homeland. On the other hand, soldiers play an important role in carrying out

decisions made by the government or military command. It is they who put these government decisions into practice on a daily basis and introduce the nuances to these routine acts that make the lives of Palestinians intolerable. Carrying out these orders encompasses a whole separate world of understanding, interpretation, creativity, inventiveness, subjectivity and human decisions by the soldiers tasked with fulfilling them. They must draw on all of this to implement the spirit of the orders they are given.

*The First 54 Years – an abbreviated manual for military occupation* is a film that focuses on video testimonies shot by Breaking Silence researchers that cover the period from 1967 until now.

The witnesses who give testimony to Breaking the Silence are the operators of the vast apparatus known as the occupation. Most of them are low-to mid-ranking soldiers. It is these ranks that carry out the orders. A few are mid-ranking officers and commanders, and an even smaller number are high-ranking officers, who were also



involved in setting policy. One thing that is important to make clear is that all of these testimonies deal with incidents that happened on the ground. They describe the orders and their implementation. Virtually none of the testimonies contains political interpretations of events or reflections on their meanings. This film deals with facts, i.e., the methods, procedures, mechanisms, practices and approaches being used, and it focuses on day-to-day operations. In short, it deals in the routine of occupation.

Testimonies by the victims of conflicts, wars, and the colonial system are rather commonplace. They are often made public in real time. Communities that struggled for their own independence or the liberation of other communities from oppression learned long ago that the international community has considerable power, when it comes to prodding violent conflicts along to their conclusion. And indeed, we frequently see testimonies from oppressed communities and from those who were victimized by violent acts committed by other communities, people who had their territory seized, who were subjected to the rule of others, and who were victims of war crimes.

All of this is true also with regard to the Palestinians, who are under Israeli occupation.

Testimonies by the perpetrators are much more rare. In most cases, it is only when wars come to an end, or when there is peace between peoples and communities that the testimonies of those who participated in the oppression begin to surface. In most cases, a process of containment or completion of the conflict is necessary before those pawns of domination and oppression can bring themselves to confess publicly about the actions, procedures, mechanisms, and approaches that they implemented in order to carry out the suppression of others. A prominent example of this is the "Truth and Reconciliation Committee" after the end of apartheid in South Africa.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not yet over. It is still being fought in all its intensity. The occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip continues unabated, and Israel is still imposing a military regime. Some 5 million Palestinians rely on this regime for even the most basic decisions, such as the right to move from place to place even

within the Occupied Territories, the right to make a living, obtain an education, and receive medical services, the right to build a home or relocate to a new residence, and of course, the right to leave the territories for other places that are not under Israeli control. In all these and more, Palestinians rely on Israel's good will.



# BIOGRAPHY

Israeli filmmaker and video artist Avi Mograbi was born in 1956 in Tel Aviv, where he lives and works to this day. Having studied art and philosophy, he gained his first production experiences working as an assistant director on commercials and feature films, while his own filmmaking career began in 1989. Since 1999, he has taught documentary and experimental film at Tel Aviv University and the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem.

Mograbi, one of Israel's most distinguished filmmakers, is known for his unwavering commitment to social, cultural and political justice in the Middle East, as well as his experimentalism and innovative contribution to cinematic language. As an engaged filmmaker, he is actively involved in *Breaking the Silence* an organization dedicated to collecting the testimonies of Israeli soldiers who served in the occupied Palestinian territories.

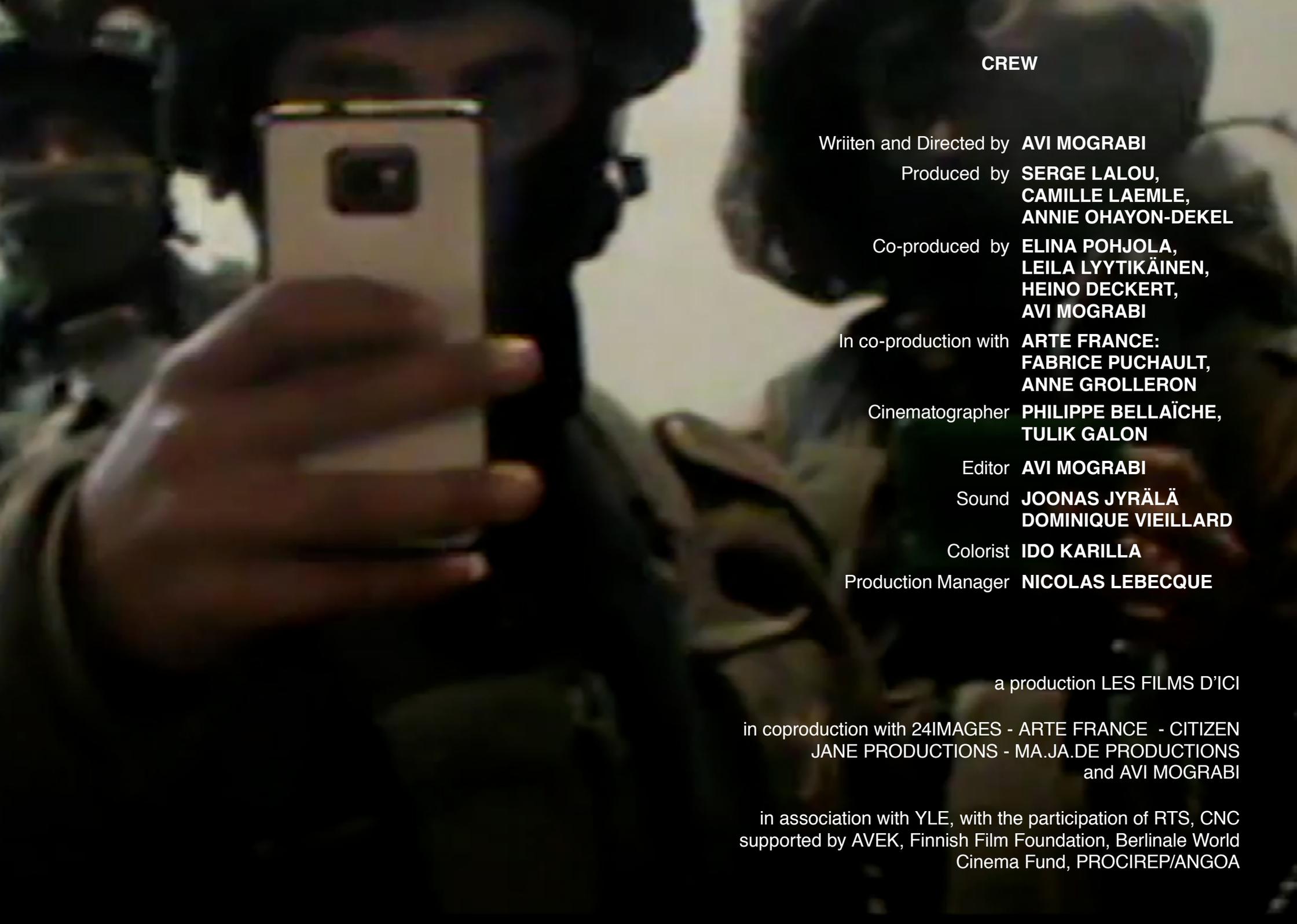
Mograbi also makes video exhibitions (The Details, in the Museo La Tertulia in Cali, Colombia and Maison des Metallos, Paris, France in 2015) and participates in many group exhibitions in the world. Le Musée du Jeu de Paume in Paris held a retrospective of his films and videos in 2015.

Avi Mograbi's documentary films have been programmed by festivals worldwide, including: Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Rome, New York, FID Marseille, Vision du Reel and San Francisco, among others.

# FILMOGRAPHY

- 2016 Between Fences - 84'
- 2012 Once I entered a Garden - 99'
- 2008 Z32 - 82'
- 2005 Avenge But One of My Two Eyes - 100'
- 2002 August - 72'
- 1999 Happy Birthday, Mr. Mograbi - 77'
- 1997 How I Learned to Overcome My Fear and Love Ariel Sharon - 61'





**CREW**

Written and Directed by **AVI MOGRABI**

Produced by **SERGE LALOU,  
CAMILLE LAEMLE,  
ANNIE OHAYON-DEKEL**

Co-produced by **ELINA POHJOLA,  
LEILA LYYTIKÄINEN,  
HEINO DECKERT,  
AVI MOGRABI**

In co-production with **ARTE FRANCE:  
FABRICE PUCHAULT,  
ANNE GROLLERON**

Cinematographer **PHILIPPE BELLAÏCHE,  
TULIK GALON**

Editor **AVI MOGRABI**

Sound **JOONAS JYRÄLÄ  
DOMINIQUE VIEILLARD**

Colorist **IDO KARILLA**

Production Manager **NICOLAS LEBECQUE**

a production **LES FILMS D'ICI**

in coproduction with **24IMAGES - ARTE FRANCE - CITIZEN  
JANE PRODUCTIONS - MA.JA.DE PRODUCTIONS  
and AVI MOGRABI**

in association with **YLE**, with the participation of **RTS, CNC**  
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