

## Film Review: The Unique Importance of the Documentary Film No Other Land

Reviewer: Robin Andersen

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In one sequence of the film, *No Other Land* (directed by Basel Adra, Hamdan Ballal, Yuval Abraham, and Rachel Szor, 2024), a bulldozer is seen hovering, just about to demolish a woman's house when she screams, "My daughters are still in there!" The Israeli soldier pushing her out the door says coldly, "It doesn't matter." It's a moment of heartless cruelty, in a film whose watching may best be described as bearing witness.<sup>1</sup>

The film tells the story of Palestinians living under the violence of Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) in the mountainous village of Masafer Yatta in the southern West Bank. Though the people of Masafer Yatta have been living in this village for generations, the settler colonial state now considers the population's presence there to be illegal. The film offers a glimpse—captured with filmic intensity when Israeli soldiers attack—of what it's like to live in a place being relentlessly destroyed by an occupation force.

There are a number of anomalies associated with *No Other Land*, from its making to its release and distribution, its enthusiastic reception and subsequent influence, the debates it provoked, and the ongoing nature of its relevancy.

Basel Adra is a Palestinian activist, who for years has been documenting the destruction of his village, and this makes the film Basel's story as well. The merger between protagonist and place is evident throughout the film. Sequences of Basel as a child, the son of an activist who owned the only gas station in the area, are combined with shaky, hand-held segments when Adra runs towards Israeli soldiers, shouting at them while holding up his phone. Basel's bravery is undeniable as the film lays bare the divide between the humanity of the villagers and the inhumanity of the soldiers who are seen shoving and mistreating women, even older women, and entire families weep as their homes are crushed. As bulldozers destroy houses Palestinians shout, "Aren't you ashamed? If this was your home, how would you feel?" The evil of this

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<sup>1</sup> Shiela O'Malley, "No Other Land," [RogerEbert.com](https://www.rogerebert.com), November 1, 2024.

process is embodied in the villainous brute of a man named Ilan who oversees the demolitions as he hides his eyes behind mirrored sunglasses—he just doesn’t care.

By bringing the humanity of Palestinians onto the screen, the film shamed US and Western establishment media portrayals for the deeply dehumanizing coverage of Palestinians both as victims in the West Bank and of Israel’s genocidal violence in Gaza.<sup>2</sup> Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese slammed western media, calling for investigations into how they have portrayed and dehumanized Palestinians to such devastating effects.<sup>3</sup> The film would win an Oscar for a story told through the eyes of Palestinian protagonists, in a chronicle of Israel’s occupation and violence, thereby shattering a pro-Israel media frame that had, for 17 months of genocide, silenced Palestinian voices, told Israeli stories, repeated Israeli talking points, and gave credibility to their denials and justifications for genocide since October 2023.<sup>4</sup> In August 2025, FAIR revisited the leaked memos at the *New York Times* that prohibited journalists from using “genocide” and “ethnic cleansing” at a time when it could have made a difference.<sup>5</sup>

The erasure and censorship of Palestinian voices was also evident in Mid-October 2024, when Netflix removed 19 films by Palestinian filmmakers, or about Palestinian stories, from the streaming platform. The decision not to renew the licensing of Palestinian stories led to a coalition of human rights groups demanding that Netflix executives renew the licensing deals and reinstate the 19 Palestinian films.<sup>6</sup> Their letter read, “Palestinians are experiencing extraordinary suffering, and Netflix should be doing everything it can to share Palestinian stories with the world. Instead, Netflix has allowed nearly its entire library of Palestinian films to disappear.”<sup>7</sup> The films were not reinstated.

### **The Awards and the Film’s Distribution**

It was four in the morning in the West Bank when word reached Masafer Yatta that “No Other Land” had won Best Documentary Feature for 2024 at the Academy Awards. A social worker in the Hebron Hills recalled the shock and amazement among the Palestinian community there.<sup>8</sup>

Before Hollywood’s Academy of Arts and Sciences voted to award *No Other Land* the Oscar, the Independent Documentary Association IDA presented the filmmakers with the Courage Under Fire Award, for documentarians who display “conspicuous bravery in the pursuit of truth.” This award also recognized the dedication to freedom of speech, “represented in its aspects of the crafts of documentary filmmaking

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<sup>2</sup> Robin Andersen, “Bolstering Genocide: News Abuse in Corporate News Coverage of Israel’s Attack on Gaza,” *State of the Pree Press 2025*, (Eds.) Shealeigh Voitl and Mickey Huff, et al., Seven Stories Press: 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Francesca Albanese, [Twitter/X](#), August 2, 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Robin Andersen, *The Complicit Lens: US Media Coverage of Israel’s Genocide in Gaza*, OR Book with the Institute of Palestine Studies, April 2026

<sup>5</sup> Ari Paul, “NYT Suppressed Genocide Discussion When it Could Have Made a Difference,” [FAIR](#), August 4, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Etan Vlessing, “Netflix Responds to Activists Criticizing Palestinian Films Removal: Those Licenses Have Now Expired,” [The Hollywood Reporter](#), October 25, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> [Freedom Forward](#), “Netflix: Reverse Deletion of 19 Palestinian Films (Letter),” March 25, 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Kat Grimmett, “Despite Oscar Win for Best Documentary, ‘No Other Land’ Still Hasn’t Found a Large US Distributor,” [Prizm](#), March 11, 2025

and journalism, above all else even their own personal safety.”<sup>9</sup> The filmmakers no doubt deserved such an award, for at any moment one of them could have taken a bullet from an Israeli settler or IOF soldier. Yet in full view they continued to point their lenses at the armed aggressors. Filmed between 2019 and 2023, it was finished just before October 7.

*No Other Land* garnered other prizes as well, including the 2025 Independent Spirit Award for Best Documentary, and the Jury Prize and the Audience Award for Best Documentary at the 2024 Berlin Film Festival.<sup>10</sup>

*By the time the Oscar was awarded, No Other Land* was still without a U.S. distributor, despite being the top grossing Best Documentary of all the other Academy nominees, earning over \$420,000 in deals made privately between the film makers and theaters themselves.<sup>11</sup>

The Arab Film and Media Institute co-presented *No Other Land* at the 2024 SFFILM Doc Stories with the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival. The film’s production was shared by Palestinian and Israeli directors.

### **The Collaborative Project and Its Controversy**

Though the film exposes Israeli violence against Palestinians, *No Other Land* was a collaborative effort between Palestinian and Israeli filmmakers and journalists. It was co-directed by Basel Adra, Yuval Abraham, Hamdan Ballal and Rachel Szor. After years of documenting Israel’s attacks, somewhat unexpectedly, Adra begins to partner with the Israeli journalist Yuval Abraham, who joins his fight. In an unlikely alliance with a journalist “from the other side,” the two grow closer, and the complex bond is haunted by the extreme inequality where Basel lives under military occupation, as Yuval remains free and unrestricted. The tensions are evident in the film when Yuval complains to Basal that an article he wrote did not garner as many likes as he hoped. Basal’s thinks little of his unrealistically high expectations and explains to him, now “You’re a loser.”<sup>12</sup> Yuval’s disappointment comes from a position of ease and privilege, where fighting a battle should result in an easy win. But as Shiela O’Malley argued, though their experiences are different, “Yuval’s support is authentic, and he remains at Basel’s side...they share the same goal.”<sup>13</sup>

With the film in the spotlight after the award, the partnership between Adra and Abraham became highly controversial. The organization that founded the BDS movement made a powerful argument objecting to placing Basal Adra and Yuval Abraham on an equal footing, one that seemed not to recognize the vast gaps between their experiences of oppression and privilege. When the Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) released their statement, they pointed to the film’s collaboration with Close-Up, a documentary initiative that had been denounced by hundreds of Arab filmmakers for

<sup>9</sup> [International Documentary Association](#), “Courage Under Fire Award: Directors of No Other Land 2024.”

<sup>10</sup> [Arab Film and Media Institute](#), “No Other Land Wins Oscar for Best Documentary Film.”

<sup>11</sup> Harrison Richlin, “‘No Other Land’ Wins Best Documentary Feature Oscar,” [IndieWire](#), March 2, 2025.

<sup>12</sup> Alex MacDonald, “No Other Land: An Israeli-Palestinian Duo Fight to Expose Apartheid as War Rages in Gaza,” [Middle East Eye](#), November 26, 2024,

<sup>13</sup> Shiela O’Malley, “No Other Land.”

attempting to “force the Zionist entity into the heart of the cultural and cinematic landscape of the Arab region.” The collaboration broke with the BDS movement’s “anti-normalization rules.”<sup>14</sup> Many argued that the film would likely have met with the same fate as other Gaza documentaries, such as “GAZA: How to Survive a War Zone”—that was falsely charged with being Hamas propaganda, and cancelled by the BBC—unless it had been tied to an Israeli “sponsor.”<sup>15</sup> It has long been understood that “the film industry, particularly in the United States, only opens the door to the Palestinian narrative when it involves an Israeli partner.”<sup>16</sup> To the PACBI, this too was part of the normalization process, also clarified in their statement; “It is important to recognize that Palestinians do not need validation, legitimation or permission from Israelis to narrate our history, our present, our experiences, our dreams, and our resistance, including artistic resistance, to the colonial system of oppression that denies us our freedom and inalienable rights.” But as the magazine +972 wrote, “Make No Mistake: ‘No Other Land’ is a Victory for the Palestinian Struggle.”<sup>17</sup>

These discussions were an authentic and necessary dialogue about how those in solidarity with Palestinians may best offer support for their struggle, but they were disingenuously appropriated by establishment pundits and led to coverage that framed the controversy as the film’s main talking point. For example, a Politico headline reads, “Controversial Middle East Documentary Wins Academy Award.”<sup>18</sup> Outlets such as the *Washington Post* deemed it “controversial” merely because “US companies lack the artistic commitment and political courage to distribute it.”<sup>19</sup> In general, the press downplayed the film’s portrayal of Israel’s violence and distracted from the film’s content.

But no amount of press manipulation has stopped the truth of Israel’s genocide, that now spreads throughout the West Bank, from getting to global publics, and measures of Israel’s favorability ratings have dropped precipitously world-wide and in the US. Global publics want Israel to stop the violence.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Murder of Awdah Hathaleen by an Israeli Settler**

Israeli violence in the West Bank has intensified since the film’s release and its global recognition. In an act that told all Palestinians and the world that no one who speaks out against Israel’s violence in occupied Palestine will ever be safe, on Monday, July 21, 2025, an Israeli settler shot and killed the Palestinian activist Awdah Hathaleen who helped make the film.<sup>21</sup> Basel Adra posted, “I can hardly believe it. My dear friend Awdah was slaughtered this evening. He was standing in front of the community center in his

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<sup>14</sup> [BDS Freedom, Justice Equality](#), “PACBI’s Position on No Other Land,” March 3, 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Brett Wilkins, “BBC Rebuked for Canceling Documentary, ‘Gaza: How to Survive a War Zone,’” [Common Dreams](#), February 28, 2025.

<sup>16</sup> Samah Salame, “Make No Mistake: ‘No Other Land’ is a Victory for the Palestinian Struggle,” [+972 Magazine](#), March 7, 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Samah Salame, “Make No Mistake: ‘No Other Land’ is a Victory for the Palestinian Struggle.”

<sup>18</sup> Politico, [Twitter/X](#), March 2, 3035.

<sup>19</sup> Sonia Rao, “‘No Other Land,’ Won an Oscar Without U.S. Distribution. Now What?” [Washington Post](#), March 4, 2025.

<sup>20</sup> Robin Andersen, “Humanities Fight Against Starvation and Extermination,” [Counter Punch](#), August 15, 2025.

<sup>21</sup> Sharon Zhang, “Activist Who Helped Film ‘No Other Land’ Shot and Killed by Israeli Settler,” [Truthout](#), July 28, 2025. <https://truthout.org/articles/activist-who-helped-film-no-other-land-shot-and-killed-by-israeli-settler/>

village when a settler fired a bullet that pierced his chest and took his life. This is how Israel erases us — one life at a time.”<sup>22</sup>

In an attack reminiscent of scenes from the film, settlers stormed the village of Umm al-Khair, where Hathaleen is from, arriving on a bulldozer as they attacked homes, as the Palestinian community tried to defend their land.<sup>23</sup> The attack was caught on camera and after the shooting witnesses reported that the settler—Yinon Levi, infamous for terrorizing Palestinians—said, “I’m glad I did it.”<sup>24</sup> The police arrested a number of villagers. The following day Levi was released by an Israeli court after a judge decided that he wasn’t dangerous, and Israeli soldiers raided the tent set up as a place for mourning.<sup>25</sup> Awdah’s body was held by Israel after police-imposed restrictions on the number of participants allowed to attend his funeral, and dictates that he could not be buried in his own village. In protest, the women of Umm al-Khair initiated a hunger strike, and successfully pressured Israeli authorities to release Awdah’s body and some family members arrested after the murder.<sup>26</sup> The community continues to face the challenges of on-going Israeli escalations, land grabs and home demolitions.<sup>27</sup>

There is no happy ending to the film or its story. Even as humanity fights with compassion and solidarity with Palestinians,<sup>28</sup> Israeli attacks on the communities of the West Bank have escalated to the extent that some human rights lawyers no longer have hope that Israel will stop, or can be reformed, saying that today, Israel “is one solid mass of distilled evil.”<sup>29</sup> And in the words of UK journalist Jonthan Cook, Israel has now expanded its genocide into the West Bank. Justice has once again been delayed, while this story is still being written in struggle.

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<sup>22</sup> Basel Andra, [Twitter/X](#), July 28, 2025.

<sup>23</sup> JVP, [Twitter/X](#), July 28, 2025.

<sup>24</sup> [Al Jazeera Staff](#), “Who was Awdah Hathaleen, Palestinian Activist Killed by an Israeli Settler?” July 29, 2025.

<sup>25</sup> Hagar Shezaf and Yael Freidson, “Israeli Court Releases Settler Suspected of Fatally Shooting Palestinian in West Bank to House Arrest,” [Haaretz](#), July 29, 2025.

<sup>26</sup> Hagar Shezaf, “Dozens Attend Funeral of Palestinian Shot Dead by Israeli Settler After IDF Releases Body,” [Haaretz](#), August 8, 2025.

<sup>27</sup> Luisa Canciello, “The Women of Umm al-Khair on Hunger Strike Against the Occupation of Death,” [Security Praxis](#), December 11, 2025.

<sup>28</sup> Robin Andersen, “Humanities Fight Against Starvation and Extermination.”

<sup>29</sup> Daphna Baram and Micheal Sfar, “Observations from the West Bank: the Jewish Supremacy Monster Cannot be Contained,” [Mondoweiss](#), August 12, 2025.