

The 2024 Golden Globes: Some legitimate awards handed out, but a shameful silence on Gaza genocide

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The 81st Golden Globes ceremony was held Sunday night in Beverly Hills, California, and broadcast on CBS. The organization that had conducted the awards ceremony since its founding, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (HFPA), was disbanded in June 2023, after a scandal with both genuine and, one suspects, manufactured elements. Inevitably, claims about the need for greater “diversity” helped along the demise of the HFPA.

The “new management” is no improvement whatsoever. The Golden Globes are now the property of Eldridge Industries and US billionaire Todd Boehly. The company, as part of a joint venture with Penske Media, controls the *Hollywood Reporter*, *Variety*, *Rolling Stone*, *Billboard* and *Deadline*, the principal publications reporting on Hollywood and the film industry.

In any event, the body of 300 international journalists (from 75 countries, “47 percent female and 26.3 percent of the group identify as Latinx, 13 percent as Asian, 11 percent Black and 9 percent Middle Eastern,” as the new Golden Globes leadership boasts) made some reasonable choices given the possibilities available.

However, utter silence on the ongoing genocide in Gaza, one of the great war crimes of our time, overshadowed and tainted the event. Not a single presenter or award winner had the courage to utter a word about the Israeli mass murder of Palestinians, backed to the hilt by the Biden White House and the other great powers.

No doubt, the Golden Globes organizers warned and threatened every participant in regard to the impermissibility of opening his or her mouth about any “controversial” subject. Hollywood is subject at present to an extreme form of self-censorship, as the studios, networks and talent agencies do everything in their power to muzzle the widespread opposition. However, that is no excuse. Speaking out against outrageous crimes against humanity is the elementary responsibility of any artist who desires that humanity take his or her efforts seriously.

The hypocrisy of the organizers is magnified by the fact that Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky was able to deliver a lying defense of the US-NATO war at last year’s ceremony. Opposition to Israel’s homicidal drive is identified by the Hollywood establishment with “antisemitism,” but the presence at the 2023 Golden Globes of the head of a regime infested with *genuine* antisemites and fascists did not disturb anyone’s sleep.

As for the awards themselves, Christopher Nolan’s

Oppenheimer deservedly received eight nominations, and won in five categories: best drama film, best directing (Nolan), best male actor (Cillian Murphy), best male supporting actor (Robert Downey Jr.) and best original score (Ludwig Goransson).

Also quite properly, HBO’s *Succession*, a scathing portrait of a media dynasty and its internal and external discontents, had received nine nominations. In the end, it collected the best television drama series award, along with best male actor in television (Kieran Culkin), best female actor (Sarah Snook) and best male supporting actor (Matthew Macfadyen).

Veteran Japanese animator-filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki’s *The Boy and the Heron*, set during the Second World War, received the award for best animated film. The work is based on the 1937 novel by Genzaburo Yoshino, a critic of war and capitalism, who was imprisoned in 1931 for his involvement with socialism.

Beef, about the series of traumatic events set in motion by a “road rage” incident, won in the three categories in which it was nominated, “Best Limited Series, Anthology Series or Movie Made for Television,” best male actor in such a series (Steven Yeun) and best female actor (Ali Wong).

The Netflix series is intelligently and stylishly done. At its best, it suggests something about the immense tensions that dominate life in the US, which transcend race and ethnicity. Here the characters are primarily Asian American. Yeun plays a small contractor beset by financial and family problems, while Wong, in somewhat more prosperous conditions, also experiences anxieties and pressures that only the super-rich in America can avoid. *Beef* has been overvalued in some quarters. It is not socially hard-hitting, aside from satirical swipes at billionaire investor Jordan Forster (Maria Bello), and tends to play repeatedly on a number of the same notes, but its genuine strengths undoubtedly include the performances by Yeun (*Minari*) and Wong.

The Golden Globes voters also had the good sense—or taste—to largely exclude *Barbie* (Greta Gerwig), *Maestro* (Bradley Cooper) and *Killers of the Flower Moon* (Martin Scorsese), all of which were nominated in numerous categories, in their final selections.

Maestro did not win any awards, while Native American actress Lily Gladstone was rewarded as best female actor in a motion picture for Scorsese’s film (and hers was the only tolerable leading performance). *Barbie* took the award for best original song, performed by Billie Eilish, and also triumphed in the new

and thoroughly cynical category of “best cinematic and box office achievement.” The award was invented to reward films that achieved “a box office receipt total/gross of \$150 million, of which \$100 million must come from the U.S. domestic box office, and/or obtain commensurate digital streaming viewership recognized by trusted industry sources,” according to the Golden Globes officialdom.

Emma Stone was voted best female actor in a musical or comedy for *Poor Things*. Yorgos Lanthimos’ film took the honor for best musical or comedy film. Paul Giamatti earned the award for best male actor in a musical or comedy for Alexander Payne’s *The Holdovers*, while Da’Vine Joy Randolph won for best female actor in a supporting role in any motion picture for the same work. *The Bear*, the comedy-drama about a chef who returns to run his family’s sandwich shop in Chicago, won several awards as well.

Overall, vulgarity, identity politics and self-involvement dominated much of the Golden Globes ceremony, including comic Jo Koy’s relatively witless opening monologue. Clothes, jewelry and accessories take on an unfortunate life of their own at these events. Such ceremonies bring out the worst, most backward traits in the Hollywood community. It is revolting, as Forbes reports, that the total value of possible “items and experiences” included in the gift bags offered to winners and presenters was \$500,000. “Recipients can expect a Metier Marrakech brown suede bag, and they may select from options including a five-day luxury yacht charter in Indonesia, a session with a celebrity tattoo artist and private classes with culinary experts.”

Such opulence is not decisive in and of itself, but the pressures of celebrity and wealth are bound up with the inability of any performer at Sunday’s ceremony to express criticism of the crimes in Gaza and the role of the US, or say anything about anything. Recipients tediously read out, and this is a fairly recent development, a list of industry or family “thank-yous.” The self-involvement and self-congratulation reach dangerous levels.

To be deprived of a spot in the limelight is the equivalent of death for far too many American “celebrities.” A McCarthyite atmosphere certainly exists, with the media ready to denounce and big companies prepared to punish the actor, writer or director who steps out of line. Again, however, that is no excuse.

As we argued recently:

There is far too much silence in Hollywood on the Gaza question. No doubt there is widespread opposition there, as there is everywhere. But the campaign of intimidation has had its impact. John Cusack, Susan Sarandon and certain others have distinguished themselves by taking principled stands. Too many, however, are keeping their heads down, no doubt worried about their celebrity and careers. They need to understand there are more important things than keeping one’s job.

In the future, we will all be asked: What were you doing when these Nazi-like crimes were being committed? To remain quiet is to accommodate oneself to the notion that art is a toy for one’s personal diversion or that of the ruling classes. No artist oriented to the sufferings, hopes and

struggles of the working class, in the US or anywhere else, can refrain from protesting, from crying out in outrage.

There were individuals present Sunday night who both know what is taking place in the Middle East and have felt some responsibility to express opinions in the past.

After all, Brian Cox, a leading actor in *Succession*, for example, distinguished himself in December by reciting a poem online written by Refaat al-Ar’eer, the Palestinian poet and academic, killed in a targeted assassination by the Israel Defense Forces. Cox’s reading was viewed some 13 million times. Nominated for a Golden Globe this year, Cox, who did not attend the ceremony, lost out to Culkin.

None of Cox’s co-stars present Sunday, including award winners Culkin, Snook and Macfadyen, made any comments of substance. Nor did Will Ferrell, a presenter and one of *Succession*’s producers. No one associated with *Oppenheimer*, which deals with the most ominous question of modern life, its possible extinction through nuclear war, spoke up about any subject. Mark Ruffalo, a critic of US foreign policy, on hand to receive an award as part of the cast of *Poor Things*, made no comments to the media at any press gathering.

The situation risks confirming Mark Twain’s sardonic observation that in the US “we have those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience and the prudence never to exercise either of them.”

To resist the immense pressure would have undoubted consequences. John Cusack, Susan Sarandon, Melissa Barrera, Jenna Ortega and a handful of others have shown courage, but as *Rolling Stone* headlined a piece in late November, “In Hollywood, Criticizing Israel’s Assault on Gaza Comes With a Price.”

But such a stance would also be welcomed by millions throughout the world, including in the film and television industry itself, with genuine gratitude and admiration. That is the path that serious artists must take.



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