

The 74th Berlin International Film Festival—Part 1

***No Other Land*—A courageous statement against Israel’s crimes and their defenders**

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The world premiere of the documentary *No Other Land* took place last Saturday at the Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale) to sustained applause from the audience and shouts of “Free Palestine.” The film, by the Palestinian-Israeli collective of Basel Adra, Hamdan Ballal, Yuval Abraham and Rachel Szor, recounts the brutal expulsion of Palestinian villagers from Masafer Yatta, a settlement of 19 villages south of Hebron in the West Bank.

Adra, a young Palestinian law student who grew up and lives in the area, and Abraham, an Israeli journalist from Tel Aviv, convey the harrowing events intimately and in real time. They film everything they experience, exchange material with each other, try to spread it via social media and gain attention in the international media. They are compelled to protect themselves from the aggressive actions of the Israeli army and the fascistic settler militias allied with it. Friends and relatives help repeatedly to hide them and their footage.

Anyone opposing the evictions is mercilessly attacked. Adra’s cousin is one of those. He initially survives, but is paralyzed. In a cave, he lies on a mattress on the ground, guarded day and night by his desperate mother. His fate triggers significant protests by his friends and the villagers. They demand medical help, but there is no place in a health care facility, and the family’s house and beds are destroyed. He ultimately dies, as the film reveals at the end.

After the eviction of the Palestinian inhabitants, the bulldozers come and demolish everything people need to live—their houses, their furniture, lamps, electrical equipment, sheep and chicken sheds, the power supply, roads. Shocking footage shows the destruction of a modern, well-kept bathroom by a bulldozer, followed by two or three Israeli soldiers cutting the water pipe with a saw.

The refugees find refuge in nearby caves, which date back to ancient times, with the few belongings and blankets they were able to salvage. Without water and electricity, they try to manage in the most primitive conditions, collecting wood

for heating and cooking.

Finally, the Israeli occupiers also destroy the school that the villagers built themselves after their school buses were repeatedly attacked and stopped on the way to the next town.

Friends of Adra demonstrate for a peaceful coexistence of Palestinians and Jews: “From both sides of the wall,” they sing. They refer to the high concrete wall that the Israeli regime built in the West Bank between the settler areas and the Palestinian villages, and which they are not permitted to call a “wall,” but only a “security fence.”

Abraham is allowed to move freely as an Israeli and drive his car through this military border, but the Palestinians can only do so with special permits. One group has yellow license plates, the other green. Abraham is not the only Israeli who repeatedly seeks contact with the Palestinians, as Adra later explains in an interview. But going to the area as a journalist with a camera is forbidden, and Abraham is denounced as a traitor by the Israeli authorities.

Abraham and Adra want to shake up the world with their film—in Israel as well as in Germany, the US and the other Western countries that support the Netanyahu government with weapons and money. Abraham uses his social media contacts. “I only had about 170 clicks today,” he tells his friend, disappointed. Adra encourages him: “The expulsions have been happening for decades, and you expect changes in a day.”

Later, Abraham asks his friend, “Don’t you want to leave here?” He may have opportunities elsewhere with his legal studies. Shaking his head, Adra explains that he has lost hope in the law. If he wants to work in Israel, as a Palestinian, he can only get a job on a construction site anyway. He doesn’t want to go away, he has to help his people. If they give up their land, they are lost.

“And what will you do? Build a new house, start a family?” Abraham asks further. Adra is skeptical, commenting, “Actually, just a little stability, even democracy, in order to be able to live at all.”

Adra and Abraham's idea that, by distributing the material on the Internet, they could exert pressure on the US and other Western governments that might call Israel to order, turns out to be an illusion. Their hopes for help from international media outlets are also shattered, although some reports make it onto television, and a media team is driven through the village.

One day, Tony Blair, former Labour Party leader and British prime minister, pays a visit to the affected area and the school amid great media hype. The brief film comment: his visit lasts a full seven (!) minutes. And the school and the associated village are spared from army attacks for only three days—after which they continue. Heavily armed personnel take the children out of the classrooms in the middle of class, scream at them to get them into the street and destroy the building.

At the end, in the summer of 2023—shortly before the beginning of the Gaza war—Adra's family home is also destroyed. Since October 7, the right-wing radical settler militias, with the support of the army, have been intensifying their crackdown on the remaining Palestinian residents.

In *No Other Land*, we experience a veritable battle of armed gangs beating up Palestinian residents, including many women and children, drowning out their cries of "We are human beings, we also have rights, we do not want another country" with cries of "This is our country." Army soldiers stand by and join in the coarse bellows of the far-right thugs.

The film ends on October 23, 2023, when the genocide in Gaza has already claimed thousands of civilian victims. In conclusion, the film informs us about the disclosure of a secret evacuation order by the Israeli government from 2022, "Demolition Order 1455," codenamed "Ilan" after the name of the responsible commander. It is a license for the army to expel people by force and to destroy everyone's livelihoods to create a training ground for soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces.

A fact sheet from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), dated June 6, 2022, confirms that Israeli policy and army leadership have specifically prepared this operation.

Portions of the Masafer Yatta area were already declared a military restricted area, "Fire Zone 91," in the early 1980s, but the attacks on the population after that were considered illegal, leading to international protests by UN representatives and courts in Israel itself. However, on May 4, 2022, the Israeli High Court of Justice (HCJ) declared forced evictions and demolitions of the homes legal, to create a training ground for the military.

A year later, the Israeli army, trained and brutalized in action against the residents of Masafer Yatta, launched its

ground invasion of Gaza and unleashed the ongoing genocide against the Palestinian population.

In an interview in the Berlinale Talk by radio eins, Adra and Abraham accuse the German government of supporting this genocide. When RBB reporter Knut Elstermann addresses the "horrific attack by Hamas" on October 7, which leaves "little hope" for a peaceful solution, Abraham, who himself lost friends on October 7, replies that hope for peace has declined further, especially in the 135 days since then. Israel's bombing war has now killed more than 13,000 children in Gaza, destroyed 70 percent of the homes, turned nearly two million people into refugees. "And I know that Germany fully supports this war," Abraham emphasizes, "even after 135 days ... after this total destruction!"

When Elstermann protests and points out that the German government has "provided money for the civilian population from the outset and the Foreign Minister has very often called for respect for human rights," Abraham furiously interrupts him. This only means "feeding people first and then bombarding them." As an Israeli journalist, he has spoken to over a dozen contacts in the Israeli security forces who are well informed about the targets of the bombing in Gaza.

This war "is the most brutal war in modern human history," he says, "and totally immoral." It is high time to enforce a ceasefire, "but Germany does not!"

No Other Land is a courageous and unsparing indictment of the German, American and other Western governments, whose support for Israeli crimes expresses an abysmal and fatal moral decline.

At the same time, the film collective deserves great credit for not limiting themselves to the cinematic documentation of the terrible acts of violence. They let the local people speak—the Palestinian workers, farmers, their families and also Israelis, whose disgust at the crimes of the Netanyahu government and army is increasing. As Abraham says, he feels "responsible, we pay the taxes that stabilizes this apartheid system. We are allied with the Palestinians, but they are under military law, cannot move freely, unlike me." They want to fight for a "vision of full equality and justice" for Palestinians and Israelis.

The film deserves a wide audience among workers and young people, who are also facing the destruction of their livelihoods, growing social inequality and war in other countries.



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