

Jewish actors, directors and others campaign in defense of filmmaker Jonathan Glazer and against Israel's Gaza genocide

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A group of more than 150 Jewish actors, writers, directors and other artists have issued an open letter defending British filmmaker Jonathan Glazer. The writer-director became the target of a vicious, McCarthyite smear campaign due to comments he made, questioning the official pro-Israeli narrative in Hollywood, at the March 10 Academy Awards ceremony.

The open letter's signatories include actors Joaquin Phoenix, Debra Winger, Frances Fisher and Elliott Gould, directors Mike Leigh, Todd Haynes and Joel Coen, writers Tom Stoppard and Wallace Shawn, musician Boots Riley, film critic David Ehrlich and others. The letter asserts that the attacks on Glazer "have a silencing effect on our industry, contributing to a broader climate of suppression of free speech and dissent, the very qualities our field should cherish." It points out that "artists of all backgrounds have decried the killing of Palestinian civilians. We should all be able to do the same without being wrongly accused of fueling antisemitism."

Glazer received the honor for best international feature film for *The Zone of Interest*, which treats the commandant of the Auschwitz death camp and his family. On stage at the ceremony, before an international audience of tens of millions, Glazer emphasized that the film's representation of "dehumanization ... at its worst" was not merely directed at the past, but also the present.

The filmmaker explained that he and his colleagues rejected the attempt to have their Jewishness and the Holocaust itself "hijacked by an occupation which has led to conflict for so many innocent people. Whether the victims of October 7 in Israel or the ongoing attack on Gaza—all the victims of this dehumanization—how do we resist?"

This was enough to spark a hysterical attack by pro-Zionist forces in the US and elsewhere, sensitive to and

frightened by the growing opposition to Israel's policies of mass murder in Gaza. Some 1,000 Hollywood nobodies signed a wretched, dishonest letter denouncing Glazer, claiming among other things that "Israel is not targeting civilians. It is targeting Hamas." This is an absurd, brazen lie, and virtually every thinking person on earth knows it. The recent deliberate murder of World Central Kitchen aid workers, bringing food to the starving, was only the latest attack in months of Nazi-like Israeli bombings of residences, hospitals, schools, libraries, mosques, universities, shelters, aid convoys and food lines.

As we commented March 19, in response to the reactionary, pro-genocide "Hollywood professionals" letter:

[Israel] has initiated a conscious, planned-out campaign of ethnic cleansing and genocide, aimed at annihilating or driving out the Palestinian population of Gaza. This is recognized by aid agencies, human rights organizations and even news media throughout the world. The gangster-fascists in the Netanyahu cabinet have hardly made a secret of it.

The "professionals" letter takes umbrage at Glazer's use of the word "occupation," in regard to Israeli operations, which, again, is a fact almost universally recognized by international public opinion. The reference to "an indigenous Jewish people" is factually fanciful and provides a glimpse of the ultra-right character of these people.

Since that letter, various voices have been raised in defense of Glazer. Playwright and screenwriter Tony Kushner, when asked on March 20 about the awards ceremony speech, responded that Glazer's words were an "unimpeachable, irrefutable statement." According to *Variety*, "Asked if he identified with the speech, Kushner answered, 'Of course. I mean, who doesn't? What he's saying is so simple. He's saying: Jewishness, Jewish identity, Jewish history, the history of the Holocaust, the history of Jewish suffering must not be used in a campaign of—as an excuse for a project of dehumanizing or slaughtering other people.'"

"This is a misappropriation," Kushner went on, "of what it means to be a Jew, what the Holocaust meant, and [Glazer] rejects that. Who doesn't agree with that? What kind of person thinks that what's going on now in Gaza is acceptable?"

Veteran British filmmaker Ken Loach, a longtime advocate for the Palestinians, recently told *Variety* that he had "great respect" for Glazer, insisting that the director was "very brave" for making the comments at the awards ceremony. "And I'm sure he understood the possible consequences, which makes him braver still, so I've got great respect for him and his work," he explained.

Loach acknowledged that Glazer had come under attack for his remarks, but noted that the younger British filmmaker had also received "lots of support from many, many Jewish people who said it breaks the stereotype that all Jewish people support what Israel is doing, because clearly that's not the case."

In another indication of broad opposition among actors and filmmakers to the Gaza genocide, the virtual Cinema for Palestine campaign auction, organized in support of Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP), has raised some £117,000 (US\$150,000) so far. The online auction, scheduled to run from April 2 to April 12, has received gifts or donations from numerous actors and directors, which are offered for sale to the public to raise funds.

The list of donors includes Leigh, Loach, Tilda Swinton, Brian Cox, Ramy Youssef, Peter Capaldi, Maxine Peake, Imelda Staunton, Joseph Quinn, Joanna Hogg, Aimee Lou Wood, Stellan Skarsgård, Andrea Riseborough, Annemarie Jacir, Emma Seligman, Juliet Stevenson, Tessa Thompson and Shane Meadows.

Glazer himself pledged two signed film posters for both his films *The Zone Of Interest* and *Under The Skin*. Spike Lee donated a framed and signed poster for his film *Malcolm X*, while, according to *Deadline*, "Olivia Colman has pledged a personalized video message,"

"Susan Sarandon is offering the chance to discuss your favorite Susan Sarandon film on Zoom with her alongside a signed *Rocky Horror Picture Show* t-shirt" and "[director] Paul Mescal has pledged a signed *Aftersun* poster."

Cox donated house seats for a production for Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* and a "meet and greet" with the actor himself. That raised £1,000. Singer Annie Lennox's handwritten lyrics to "Sweet Dreams" brought £7,700. Actress "Rebecca Hall will read to you (or your kids) a bedtime story"—price £425. A poster for the 2020 film *Supernova*, signed by Colin Firth, Stanley Tucci and director Harry McQueen, went for £350. "A chat with [blacklisted actress] Melissa Barrera, the bravest woman in Hollywood," was purchased for £2,194.

One of the chief differences between the recent open letter by Jewish directors and actors and the "Hollywood professionals" statement last month denouncing Glazer is that the former includes individuals with actual artistic talent and ability. Leigh, Stoppard, Coen, Gould, Haynes, Shawn, along with documentarian Amy Berg, actor-comic David Cross, directors Nicole Holofcener and Seligman, represent something substantial.

The growing isolation of the pro-Israeli crowd, even among Jewish artists, is a telling indicator of more general political and cultural changes occurring in the US.

Obviously, the artists by and large still fail to work through the logic of their own criticisms and draw sharp, far-reaching conclusions about Zionism and about Israel as an illegitimate state, but an unmistakable radicalization is occurring.



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