2024 Cannes Film Festival: #MeToo shows its reactionary colors

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The sexual misconduct witch-hunt already has a great deal to answer for. However, *objectively speaking*, the activity of the #MeToo camp at this year's Cannes Film Festival, which ends Saturday, constitutes its most pernicious conduct to date.

In the face of mass murder in Gaza and unfolding world war, with the French government playing a leading role in the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine, the #MeToo activists demonstrated their indifference to mass suffering and the ongoing obsession with their own petty, selfish interests. Consciously or not, they assisted the French and Western ruling elites in "changing the subject" from Israeli genocide and the danger of nuclear war to the concerns of the complacent, affluent upper middle class.

The operation was set in motion before the festival began May 14. Various headlines suggested that this year's event would be dominated by a "new wave of allegations about #MeToo abuse." The *Guardian* breathlessly told its readers in a headline May 11 that an "'Explosive' secret list of abusers" was set "to upstage women's big week at Cannes film festival." A "dark cloud is threatening," warned (that is, gloated) the *Guardian*, "It is expected that new allegations of the abuse of women in the European entertainment industry will be made public."

The semi-hysterical article referred to widespread "rumours" of this secret list, including the names of "leading actors and directors, who have been abusive to women. The names … are believed to have been sent anonymously to the National Centre for Cinema in Paris, along with other leading film finance companies in France." Furthermore, preparing for this apparently devastating storm to break, "festival organisers have set up a crisis management team to respond to the accusations. Films might have to be dropped from the screening timetable if they involve implicated names."

Le Monde, the leading French bourgeois paper, ran a piece May 13 along the same lines: "Cannes 2024, an edition under the sign of #MeToo of French cinema—The Festival, which kicks off on Tuesday, begins in a climate of free speech on the issue of sexual violence in the seventh art."

In the event, the vaunted "list of abusers" never appeared and the presence of #MeToo at the 77th festival was subdued and largely centred around the showing of a 17-minute film, *Moi Aussi* (*Me Too*) directed by French actress Judith Godrèche, who has positioned herself at the head of the reactionary campaign.

According to *Le Monde*, her film makes hundreds of "witnesses" to sexual abuse "visible, men as well as women. Godrèche films them as a collective body, their silhouettes tightly packed and bundled up on a Parisian avenue while a voiceover recounts, without pausing, the traumas suffered by each and every one of them."

"Suddenly, before me was a crowd of victims, a reality that also represented France, so many stories from all social backgrounds and generations," Godrèche explained. "Then the question was, what was I going to do with them? What do you do when you're overwhelmed by what you hear, by the sheer volume of testimonies?"

What are 10,000 women murdered by Macron's ally Israel compared to this?

In February, Godrèche filed official complaints against filmmakers Benoît Jacquot for "rape with constraint," and Jacques Doillon for "rape with violence." Both claims refer to events that allegedly happened 35 years ago or more. According to the *Guardian*, Jacquot "denies committing any offences and has said that he was 'under her spell'. She claims Doillon, 80, forced her to take part in a gratuitous sex scene on his 1989 film *La Fille de 15 ans* (The 15-year-old Girl). He says she agreed to take part in the scene, in which he also acted, and he denies rape or assault."

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Godrèche “followed up her accusations a month later with a speech at France’s high-profile Cesar awards in which she claimed the film industry had been a cover for exploiting underaged actors.”

The self-obsessed, self-promoting Godrèche has created a media storm, around a host of vague claims and allegations. The only beneficiaries of her stupid antics at Cannes were the French government and its allies in Washington and Tel Aviv.

It is worth recalling that two years ago the Cannes festival was dominated by propaganda seeking to justify NATO’s war against Russia. The 2022 festival commenced with a big-screen address by Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky, who claimed that the Ukrainian army in the US-NATO-led war was striking a blow for cinema and the arts. At a gala premiere last year, the festival audience was greeted by the spectacle of a female protester covered in fake blood and dressed in the blue and yellow colours of the Ukraine flag.

Following the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian and Russian soldiers over the course of the past two years, treatment of the war was muted at this year’s festival and largely restricted to the showing of a new film by right-wing Ukrainian director Sergei Loznitsa.

Against this generally foul background, a number of courageous Palestinian filmmakers sought to draw attention to the plight of the population in Gaza under the murderous Israeli assault. Palestine, not recognised by France as a state, had no official status at the festival, but was allowed to fly its flag and share space at the Algerian pavilion in Cannes.

Unable to obtain official recognition for his project *Ground Zero*, veteran Palestinian filmmaker Rashid Masharawi set up a tent on the beach at Cannes where he showed some 20 short films made in Gaza recently by a number of different filmmakers.

According to AFP journalist Alice Hackman, the films recount “the Israeli bombardment of Gaza and ensuing humanitarian disaster from the perspective of civilians on the ground.”

> In one, a mother displaced by the conflict plops her daughter in a large white bucket and, with a clean Turkish coffee pot, gently pours water over her to bathe her. In another, a man recounts his 24-hour ordeal under rubble after the building he was in collapsed.

Masharawi, writes the AFP, “directed the 20 teams in Gaza from abroad—a process he described as ‘very, very, very difficult.’ ‘Sometimes we needed to wait one week to 10 days just to be in contact with somebody, or just to have internet to upload material,’ said Masharawi, who was born in Gaza.”

Mahdi Fleifel’s *To a Land Unknown* was the only Palestinian film screened at this year’s Cannes Festival. It is Fleifel’s first feature fiction film. He is known for his compelling documentary films, including *A World Not Ours* (2012), *A Man Returned (2016)*, *A Drowning Man (2017)* and *3 Logical Exits* (2020). The new film is a fictional treatment of the fate of Palestinians who flee a refugee camp in Lebanon only to end up stranded and desperate in Athens, the subject matter of some of his earlier, non-fiction works.

According to *France 24*, after the screening of *To a Land Unknown*, “the lead actors [Mahmoud] Bakri and [Aram] Sabbagh, both of them Palestinian, were joined by a handful of female activists on stage brandishing Palestinian flags. One of the women shouted, ‘Free Palestine.’”

France 24 acknowledges that festival organisers “have been at pains to prevent Gaza war protests from taking place on the Croisette, Cannes’ iconic seaside boulevard. The festival’s traditional red-carpet protests have been relatively subdued compared to last year’s edition,” with its ecstasies over Ukrainian nationalism and the NATO war against Russia.

On May 22, dozens of filmmakers and actors including Valérie Donzelli, Lubna Azabal and Laëtitia Eïdo attended a rally organized “by women’s group Guerrières de la Paix (Warriors for Peace) to call—‘in one breath’—for an urgent ceasefire in Gaza and the release of all remaining hostages. They held placards spelling out their demands in Arabic, Hebrew, French and English.” (*France 24*)

Australian actress Cate Blanchett, according to the French news service, “appeared to make a more subtle statement of support for Palestinians on Monday when she revealed the green lining of her black-and-white dress on the red carpet, in what was widely interpreted as a walking tribute to the Palestinian flag.”

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