

Berlin Senate website defames award-winning, Palestinian-Israeli film *No Other Land* as “antisemitic”

Stefan Steinberg
21 November 2024

Israeli director Yuval Abraham has sharply denounced the latest campaign by German authorities to stigmatise his film *No Other Land* and the filmmaker himself as “antisemitic.” *No Other Land* has gone on general release in Germany and Britain, but has only had a limited release in the US.

The film, made by the Palestinian-Israeli collective of Abraham, Basel Adra, Hamdan Ballal and Rachel Szor, recounts the brutal expulsion of Palestinian villagers from Masafer Yatta, a settlement of 19 villages south of Hebron in the occupied West Bank. It was reviewed by the WSW.

In February, *No Other Land* won both the best documentary award and Panorama Audience Award at the Berlin International Film Festival. In his courageous acceptance speech at the festival, Abraham denounced the “apartheid-like situation” prevailing in a region where he and his Palestinian co-director live in a “a land where we are not equal. I live under civilian law and Basel [Adra] lives under military law. We live 30 minutes from one another.”

Alarmed at the support won by the film at the Berlinale, leading members of the Berlin Senate went into action. Two days after the award ceremony, the mayor of Berlin, Kai Wegner (Christian Democratic Union) denounced the filmmaker’s speeches as “antisemitic.” His remarks were echoed by the Berlin senator for cultural affairs, Joe Chialo (CDU), accompanied by similar comments by leading members of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Greens in the Senate.

When asked why, at the end of the award ceremony speech, she was seen applauding, Germany’s Culture Minister Claudia Roth (Greens) disgracefully and absurdly responded she was applauding the Israeli filmmaker, i.e., not his Palestinian colleague. From the very start of the murderous Israeli invasion of Gaza, Roth has played a leading role in the government campaign aimed at gagging opposition to the genocide.

Now, as Israel extends its war of extermination into

Lebanon, the official portal of the Berlin Senate has revived its hate campaign against Abraham and his film.

On his X account Abraham wrote:

Berlin’s official city portal just wrote our film *No Other Land* has “antisemitic tendencies”. A film that won the Berlinale and was recently invited to a special screening in the German embassy in Israel. It pains me to see how, after murdering most of my family in the holocaust, you empty the word antisemitism of meaning to silence critics of Israel’s occupation in the West Bank (the topic of our film) and legitimize violence against Palestinians. I feel unsafe and unwelcome in Berlin of 2024 as a left-wing Israeli and will take legal action.

Following the vicious claims of antisemitism made against him in Berlin in February, which were immediately embraced by the far-right Netanyahu regime in Israel, Abraham revealed that he had received a series of death threats.

In response to Abraham’s criticism and his threat of legal action, the Berlin city portal, aware that its claims were baseless, rapidly took down its claim of antisemitism and issued an apology. The Senate’s campaign to deter the public from seeing *No Other Land* and deflect attention from its own and the German government’s unwavering support of the genocide being conducted against the Palestinians has collapsed like a house of cards.

The latest assault against Abraham and his film comes just one week after the German parliament (Bundestag) adopted a reactionary “antisemitism” resolution, which has been fulsomely welcomed by the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and basically adopts the latter party’s anti-Muslim program. The resolution stresses Israel’s “legitimate

security interests as a central principle of German foreign policy” and declares that one of the prime sources of antisemitism is “immigration from the countries of North Africa and the Middle East.”

The resolution reaffirms Israel’s “right to self-defence” and adopts the definition of antisemitism laid down in the reactionary International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) declaration, which equates any criticism of Israel and Israeli policy with antisemitism. The main demand in the parliament’s resolution is the denial or withdrawal of public funding from cultural projects and/or organisations that criticise the mass murder in Gaza and defend the rights of Palestinians.

Over the course of the past year, the German media has systematically defended every crime of the fascist regime in Israel while demonising Palestinian resistance. In recent weeks, the campaign of ethnic cleansing taking place in Gaza has been barely mentioned by the major news outlets.

Nevertheless, even some of these outlets felt compelled to comment on the anti-democratic background to the Bundestag resolution which, according to Deutschlandfunk was worked out “in secret” by a small circle of parliamentarians behind closed doors. Contrary to standard practice with regard to such resolutions, interested parties and civil rights organisations with their own point of view were excluded. In true neo-colonialist style, no Arab or Muslim organisations were involved in drawing up the resolution while the strong influence of pro-Israeli groups and lobbyists was very evident.

The comment by Deutschlandfunk described the role played in particular by the virulently pro-Zionist *Bild* newspaper: “The debate has long been toxic. The fear of being defamed as an antisemite and Israel-hater by the *Bild* newspaper also has an effect in politics right up to the highest echelons.”

In the event, with its antisemitism resolution, the German parliament has come down firmly on the side of the pro-Israel organisations seeking to whitewash the crimes of the Netanyahu government.

Recent months have witnessed a series of attempts to intimidate and silence critics of Israel’s genocidal policy. In October the German Society for Photography arrogantly and disgracefully demanded that the artist and award winner Shirin Abedi apologize for uttering the call “Free Palestine” during an awards ceremony.

The treatment of Abedi mirrors that of the French artist Johanna Tagada Hoffbeck who, at the start of this year was denied the opportunity to present her work at an unnamed German museum after she posted an Instagram message that also ended with the appeal, “Free Palestine.”

This was all too much for the museum management. It sent

Hoffbeck a note asserting, “As a museum that operates with public funds, we cannot and do not want to accept ... statements that go in this direction.” Museum officials continued by ominously explaining that “we are sceptical about our collaboration with you at the moment.”

The latest victim of political censorship is the British artist and author James Bridle. In June, Bridle was awarded the Schelling Architecture Foundation prize for his “outstanding contributions to architectural theory.” In mid-November, the foundation suddenly withdrew its award just days before the award ceremony was due to take place. Citing the German parliament’s antisemitism resolution, the foundation committee expressed its opposition to Bridle’s support for an Open Letter published by artists in October, which declared “we will not work with Israeli cultural institutions that are complicit or have remained silent observers of the overwhelming oppression of Palestinians.”

In a note to the *Guardian*, Bridle commented: “Although they are clearly not prepared to state it outright, the foundation’s decision is an accusation of antisemitism, which is abhorrent. It is particularly so given the organisation’s own history.”

The Schelling Architecture Foundation prize is named after German architect Erich Schelling, a member of various Hitlerite organisations between 1933-34 and 1945, who worked on the conversion of a building to be used as a Nazi publishing house in 1939.

Artists and cultural workers in Germany are already under enormous pressure due to budget cuts by the government, which has prioritised spending on war and rearmament. This pressure is now compounded by blatant political censorship.

The campaign against Abraham and *No Other Land* and other artists makes clear that, in response to the massacre of innocent men, women, children and babies in Gaza and Lebanon, the German government, the Berlin Senate and leading German media outlets are determined to silence all dissenting voices.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact