# The success of *No Other Land* and *I'm Still Here* at the Academy Awards shows growing popular opposition and radicalization

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**3 March 2025**

The victories at Sunday's Academy Awards of the pro-Palestinian *No Other Land* as best documentary and Brazil's *I'm Still Here*—which exposes the crimes of the US-backed military dictatorship in that country in the 1970s—as best international feature film are historically and politically significant. The results of the vote by nearly 10,000 Academy members unquestionably reveals a molecular process of radicalization taking place in the US and globally. Tellingly, polls indicated that the greatest interest in the upcoming Academy Awards was among 18-to-29-year-olds.

In regard to *No Other Land*, the genocide in Gaza and the current brutal, illegal expulsion of tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians from the West Bank have evoked great horror and anger. The homicidal attack on an entire population, subjected to unending violence and humiliation, by one of the most well-equipped military machines on the planet, is galvanizing wide layers of people. That sentiment is not dying down, and it will not die down, despite the best lying efforts of the propagandists of every Western power. Who can believe in a "ceasefire" and a "peace" agreed to by butchers?

In their acceptance speeches, viewed by tens of millions around the world, two of *No Other Land*'s co-directors, Palestinian Basel Adra and Israeli Yuval Abraham, decried the decades of injustice and the ongoing ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians, as well as the "destruction" of Gaza and the actions by the US government to block peace and uphold "ethnic supremacy."

The triumph of *I'm Still Here* at the Oscars last night will only encourage interest and enthusiasm for the film in Brazil itself, and beyond. Director Walter Salles' work tells the story of the disappearance of Rubens Paiva, a Brazilian Labor Party politician murdered by the military junta in the early 1970s, and the subsequent fight for justice led by his wife, Eunice Paiva (played by Fernanda Torres, nominated for best lead actress).

As the WSWS has pointed out, more than 5 million Brazilians have gone "to the cinemas to see the film, which is already the fifth highest-grossing in the country's history." Headlines noted that "Brazilians cheered" when news of the award was announced. The Associated Press reported that in Rio de Janeiro, "where Carnival parades are underway, the announcer shared the results with the tens of thousands of spectators in the crowd, eliciting shouts of joy."

In his remarks in Los Angeles Sunday, Salles dedicated his prize to Eunice Paiva, "a woman who after a loss suffered during an authoritarian regime decided not to bend, and [to] resist."

The success of *No Other Land*, which documents the criminality of Zionist "ethnic cleansing" operations in the West Bank aimed at terrorizing or driving out the local Palestinian population, has a particular weight given the hostility directed toward the film by official political and cultural circles in Europe and the US.

After the documentary was honored at last year's Berlin international film festival, the action came under immediate attack by the German media and politicians of various parties as "shameful" and "antisemitic," in spite of the fact the filmmaking team is composed of two Palestinians and two Israeli Jews. In the US, the campaign against *No Other Land* has taken the form of a "conspiracy of silence" to prevent it from being shown. Distributors and pro-Zionist elements in the film world decided it was too dangerous to allow the American population to view the cruelty and barbarism of Israeli settlers and soldiers. The film, despite the Oscar nomination and now, victory, still does not have a distributor, an unprecedented situation.

*No Other Land*, as the WSWS commented last year, directed 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.

The filmmakers, as we explained,

> 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.

The Zionist crimes in the area continue. As CNN reported Monday,

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> Hours before the film's Oscar win, residents of the West Bank area depicted in the documentary were attacked by Israeli settlers who were accompanied by Israeli forces. … Israeli soldiers detained three people in the area and settlers attacked residents of the village of Khirbet Asfi, in Masafer Yatta, throwing stones, destroying solar panels and damaging water tanks.

So do the efforts persist to suppress criticism of the murderous Israeli policies and the Netanyahu regime's US and European financiers, arms suppliers and accomplices. The expulsion of students from Columbia's Barnard College for protesting genocide, the firing of the *Palm Beach Post*'s editorial page editor over a cartoon alluding to the mass deaths in Gaza and the Trump administration's efforts to deport critics of Israel are only a few of the latest incidents.

In Basel Adra's speech Sunday night at the Oscars, which was greeted with loud applause, he observed that

> two months ago, I became a father. And my hope to my daughter, that she will not have to live the same life I am living now, always fearing—always—always fearing settlers' violence, home demolitions and forceful displacements that my community, Masafer Yatta, is living and facing every day under the Israeli occupation.

Yuval Abraham added

> When I look at Basel, I see my brother. But we are unequal. We live in a regime where I am free under civilian law and Basel is under military laws that destroy his life and he cannot control.

The honoring of *No Other Land* was rightly seen by the Zionist regime and its supporters as a slap in the face.

Israel's extreme right Minister of Culture Miki Zohar called the Academy's action "a sad moment for the world of cinema." Zohar asserted that instead of "presenting the complexity of Israeli reality, the filmmakers chose to amplify narratives that distort Israel's image vis-à-vis international audiences. Freedom of expression is an important value, but turning the defamation of Israel into a tool for international promotion is not art—it is sabotage against the State of Israel." As part of his defense of "freedom of expression," Zohar helped institute a policy in 2023 that withholds funding from filmmakers who dare criticize the Zionist state.

US pro-Zionists could not hold back their knee-jerk reactionary idiocy. Former Ronald Reagan speechwriter and George H.W. Bush administration official John Podhoretz commented, "Congratulations to HAMAS for its Oscar win. Now let's see them destroyed."

Of course, far from making any concessions to antisemitism, Academy voters also bestowed on Adrien Brody one of the body's top awards, best actor in a leading role, for his performance in *The Brutalist*, a confused film, but one in which Brody plays a Hungarian-Jewish architect, a tormented victim of a Nazi concentration camp and, ironically, an eventual émigré to Israel.

*Anora*, the Sean Baker-directed film, about a Russian-American sex worker from Brooklyn who comes up against the family of a Russian oligarch, won an armful of awards, including a record-tying four for Baker himself. The film is not the strongest effort by the director of the considerably more moving *The Florida Project*, but it has an anti-establishment edge and the final, mutual commiseration of the two characters lowest on the social totem pole no doubt resonates with audiences.

Inevitably, the Academy Awards ceremony exhibited the contradictions and peculiarities of the social layers that participate in and sustain it. There was more than enough self-congratulation and senseless glamor to go around, with the unavoidable doses of racial and gender obsession ("the first Dominican-American to win an Oscar," "the first black man to win best costume design," etc.).

Sophomoric awards host Conan O'Brien made his one foray into political commentary by "quipping" pointedly that

> *Anora* is having a good night ... That's great news ... I guess Americans are excited to see somebody finally stand up to a powerful Russian.

Veteran actress Daryl Hannah, not heard from for years and on hand to present the award for best editing, proclaimed, "Slava Ukraini!" [Glory to Ukraine!].

Given the longtime dominance of the Democratic Party and identity politics in Hollywood, the victory of *No Other Land* is all the more significant. The actual voting took place before Trump moved back into the White House, albeit the general character of his new administration was already apparent, so the award was a deliberate repudiation of the Biden-Blinken policy of arming and encouraging the Israeli mass killers. Events are cutting their way through to the consciousness of the more critical artists, as they are to advanced sections of the working class and young people in every corner of the globe.

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