

## *No Other Land* (2024), by Hamdan Ballal, Yuval

Abraham, Basel Adra, Rachel Szor<sup>349</sup>

Chiara Catania<sup>350</sup>

Days and nights resemble water dripping onto your forehead: slow, relentless systematic drops of destruction until nothing remains to mourn. Your trees, precious livestock, home, and dignity are all gone. You stand still, watching your motherland bid farewell to her children, whose lives were once nurtured in the bucolic womb of Masafer Yatta. This is not a tear-jerking fictional story but a real and tangible ode to resistance, where intertwined Palestinian and Israeli experiences collaborate to give voice to the horrific theater of human rights violations in the West Bank – parallel to those documented in Gaza and Lebanon (Human Rights Watch 2024).

*No Other Land* stands out as a powerful documentary chronicling the systematic demolition of Palestinian villages in Masafer Yatta. Directed by Palestinian activist Basel Adra and Israeli journalist Yuval Abraham, along with co-directors Hamdan Ballal and Rachel Szor, the activist documentary employs first-hand testimonies to challenge decades of state-sanctioned oppression. The documentary has gained significant international recognition, winning the Best Documentary Award and the Panorama Audience Award at the Berlin International Film Festival and earning a 2025 Oscar nomination, among other prestigious accolades. Despite the film's acclaim, co-director Hamdan Ballal was attacked by Israeli settlers in the Palestinian village of Susya on March 24. Following the assault, Ballal was blindfolded and detained by the Israel Defense Forces, making his ordeal emblematic of the ongoing systemic abuses against Palestinians documented in *No Other Land*, adding yet another chapter to this harrowing narrative (Al Jazeera 2025).

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Terrified kids, fearless women, cursing soldiers, fierce bulldozers running over houses, officials stealing another family's generator, police destroying Palestinians' right to water, gunshots: this is the footage posted on social media by Adra as the occupation achieves its goal. The Palestinian journalist started recording at the age of 15, but his memory extends further as he incorporates that of his family, especially his father, an activist arrested on several occasions for protesting against the occupation – evidencing a longer history of oppression. The film opens with Adra's declaration of somber recognition: "I started filming when we started to end," he says in Arabic voiceover as the documentary witnesses a 22-year legal battle against the Israeli high court mandate of forced Palestinian expulsion in favor of a "closed area" for military training – although governmental documents reveal the real purpose of displacing Palestinian villagers for illegal Israeli settlements.

*No Other Land* represents the urgent need to denounce a story that never became past tense but has remained an eternal present since 1948. The displacement of Palestinians, together with brutal violence, is not new in history. The Zionist project of ethnic cleansing in favor of an exclusively Jewish presence in Palestine can be traced back to the 1948 Nakba. Initially, Zionist policy focused on retaliating against Palestinian attacks in February 1947. By March 1948, this approach shifted towards a broader strategy aimed at the systematic removal of the Palestinian population from the region, leading to the displacement of nearly 800,000 natives (Pappé 2006). The current situation in the West Bank represents a continuation of the 1948 Nakba, eclipsed only by major disastrous events in the Gaza Strip.

The lives of the two filmmakers illustrate the antithetical experiences of Palestinians and Israelis: Adra is confined to delimited Palestinian areas, whereas Abraham can come and go between his home and Adra's without being stopped by the police thanks to a designated colored license plate which allows him to circulate freely. In occupied Palestine, license plates are used to differentiate between Israeli and Palestinian drivers – Israeli drivers have yellow license plates, while Palestinian drivers have green license plates. This system of apartheid is evidenced by further severe movement restrictions imposed through checkpoints, roadblocks, and the separation barrier, limiting Palestinians' access to essential services, employment, and family life (Amnesty International 2022).

As the two journalists intimately discuss uncertainty about the future, their emotional turmoil is disclosed to the audience, mirroring collective reflections on hope, freedom, and justice. Their considerations and fears correspond to two contrasting attitudes: Abraham's optimism and urge to take action animate the scenes, while Adra's fatigue clings to the last piece of hope in his body, humbling the Israeli. In one scene, the Palestinian journalist smiles at his friend while driving, advising him on the power of صَبْر (ṣabr, "patience") as only natives know how long it will take to end the conflict. The Israelis' enthusiasm seems to clash with the Palestinian understanding of the harsh and long course of events: Abraham's heart is pure in intention, but he remains an outsider with a savior complex, naïve enough to think that significant changes come quickly with real commitment. In this sense, Abraham can be interpreted as the spokesperson for the common Western sentiment towards this war: wanting a final resolution as soon as possible but lacking the patience to see it through, as ironically lamented to him by Adra. The truth is that it requires a long time to end the struggle, and Palestinian resilience proves this point by fighting for self-determination for more than 77 years.

Overall, the film deeply captures the Palestinian struggle for freedom, leaving us to wonder whether its critical acclaim stems from its powerful content alone or if it partially reflects a Western desire to witness Israeli-Palestinian collaboration – a relationship that, unlike the rare friendship between Adra and Abraham, remains elusive in the broader context.

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### Notes on contributor

**Chiara Catania** is an English and American Studies student at the University of Turin. Their research focuses on post-colonial studies, with particular interest in gender studies and resistance narratives. Their bachelor's thesis, titled "*The Gender of Race in the US: Black and White Masculinities and Visual Representations in Green Book*," explored double standards in representations of Black masculinity in the United States through a case study of the film *Green Book*. They are currently developing their master's thesis, which compares colonial narratives in Israel and the United States, focusing on the myth of the promised land and the weaponization of memory to justify colonization.

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