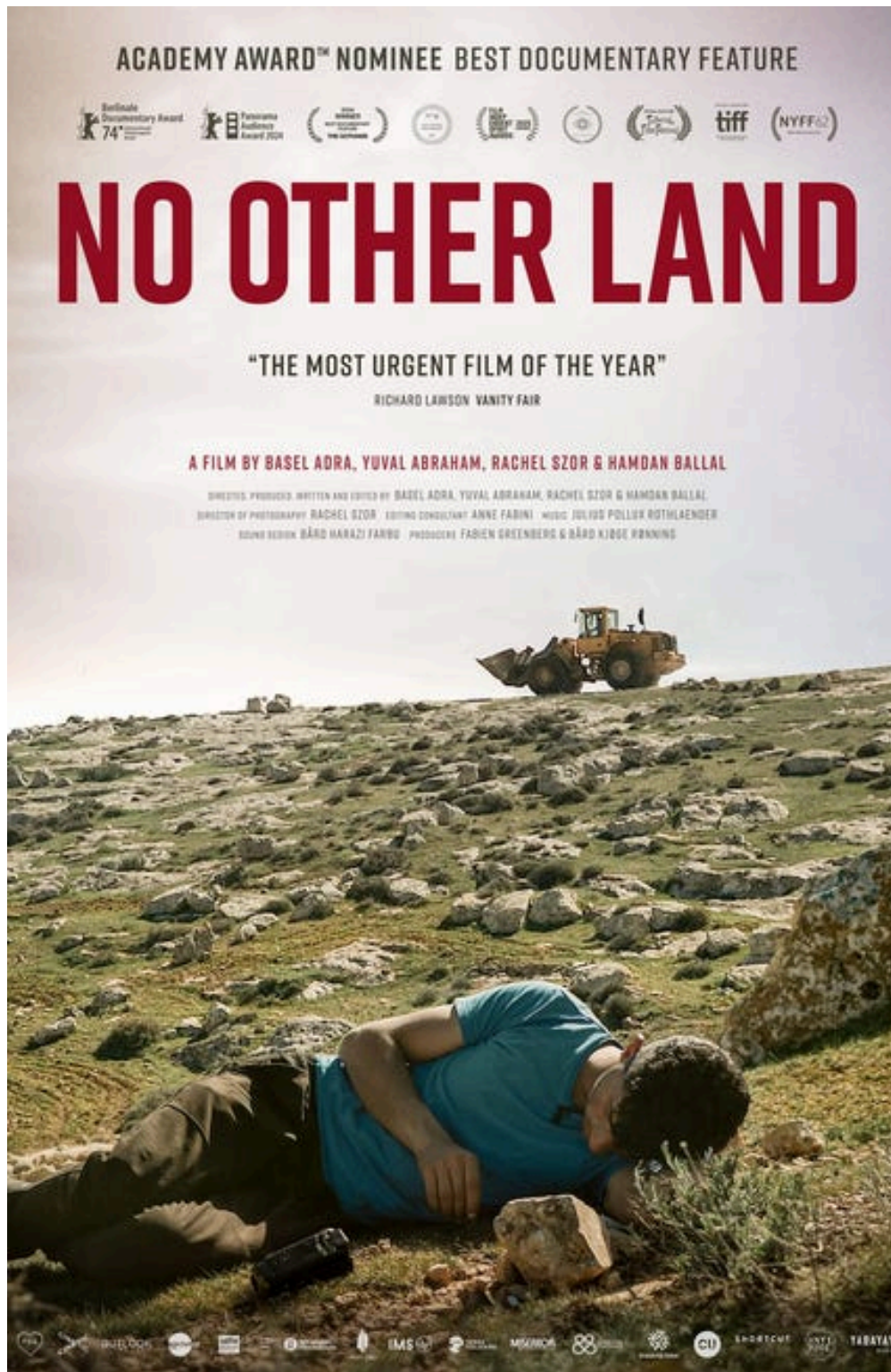


The Price of Saying Palestine

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The first time I heard the word *Palestine*, I was half-asleep on a Sunday morning. My grandfather was watching the BBC. I may have been nine or ten. Every few days something blew up in the Middle East. I remember Yasser Arafat's headscarf, the way he kissed a cheek

when he met someone. I remembered Ariel Sharon only because his name is synonymous with a brand of detergent. That's how politics entered my childhood through half-seen news images and strange associations.

The real questions came much later, in college. The Holocaust. How could something so unspeakably violent have happened? How could whole societies allow it?

The Question of the Holocaust

I read Erich Fromm's *The Sane Society*. His claim was simple and devastating: societies can be sick even if they look orderly. A whole population can share the same defects —conformity, alienation, destructive obedience—and call it normal. People adapt to systems that destroy them, and sometimes even mistake these systems for health.

Fast forward to today. Gaza and the West Bank. Starvation as policy, demolitions filmed in real time, numbers of the dead updated daily. You don't need to be a Middle East scholar to see it. The evidence is everywhere.

And the question returns: how do people allow it?

Recently I watched *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), which stages the trial of four German judges after the Holocaust. The defence was that they had only upheld the law. They argued that a judge does not make laws, he only interprets them. The chief defendant, Ernst Janning, was a scholar of great repute, author of legal texts, even a drafter of the Weimar constitution. He insisted that he had never intended mass murder, that he had stayed at this post to prevent worse outcomes.

The turning point comes when Janning finally admits his guilt. He had sentenced a man to death under the racial purity laws knowing the man was innocent. Judge Haywood, the American presiding, tells him: *"It came to that the first time you condemned a man you knew to be innocent."*

What struck me was not the just the legal argument but the atmosphere of the film. The ruins of Nuremberg, the resentment of occupation, the insistence by ordinary Germans that they "did not know". The camps were there, but people focused on their own hunger, their bombed houses, their patriotism. Life went on.

That is what I keep going back to. The atrocities were known. They were visible. And yet they were allowed to continue, justified by law, by procedure, by habit. Watching the film in 2025, with images from Gaza on my phone, I realised it is the same question I have carried since college: how do people allow this?

India: Universities Under Watch

Gaza is not invisible. But each time students and academics try to say so, they are punished. A lecture, a march, a film screening, even a slogan on a wall, all treated as if they were crimes.

At IIT-Bombay, a talk by Professor Achin Vanaik on the history of Palestine was [cancelled](#). When he spoke days later at our university, the Registrar asked him to “[express regret](#)”. His comparison of Zionism and Hindutva was called “[unnecessary and objectionable](#)”. The Israeli Embassy had raised concerns.

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In [Hyderabad](#), six students were fined for organising a Palestine solidarity march. Posters were torn down. Security staff restrained them physically. The official explanation was that the event lacked permission. The students pointed out that other events, political and cultural, had gone ahead without it.

At Delhi University’s [north campus](#), a peaceful solidarity march near the Arts Faculty was disrupted. Slogans were answered with counter-slogans. Pushing and shoving followed. Police said the organisers had strayed from the permitted route. Members of the ABVP stood ready to call the protest “anti-national”.

In [Jadavpur University](#), graffiti appeared on a wall: *Free Palestine. Azad Kashmir*. Police cases were filed. CCTV footage was examined. Student leaders demanded the university take strict action so that the campus would not become a “hub of anti-state activities”.

At [Aligarh Muslim University](#), a student leader was booked by police for shouting pro-Palestine slogans during a protest. FIRs were filed under sections related to public order. A Palestinian PhD student studying at AMU lost 16 family members in an Israeli bombing. Even then, students said they feared speaking out.

At the [Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development](#), Sriperumbudur (TN), three students were suspended for graffiti slogans, including “Free Palestine” and “Jai Bhim”. One challenged the order in court. The Madras High Court stayed the punishment, calling the disciplinary process irregular and influenced by personal malice.

At [Jamia and JNU](#), planned Palestine solidarity meetings were blocked. Rooms were denied, posters were removed, and police presence was heavy. Students shifted to informal gatherings outside the gates, under surveillance.

At Delhi University again, the Standing Committee struck Palestine from the “[Psychology of Peace](#)” syllabus. The chair said the case study was “unnecessary” and suggested that students learn instead from the Mahabharata and the Gita.

In several central universities, including [AMU and Jamia](#), Palestine film screenings were cut short by sudden power cuts or cancelled with police on campus. Students described these as routine tactics to block events without leaving a written order.

At [Ashoka University](#), the student government issued a call for divestment from Israel. The demand circulated publicly but was not taken up by the administration.

Beyond India: A Global Pattern

At [Columbia University](#), dozens of students were expelled and nearly eighty punished for anti-Israel protests. Encampments demanding divestment were cleared by police.

At the [City University of New York](#), student activist Hadeeqa Arzoo Malik was suspended for leading a divestment campaign. Four adjunct professors were terminated. Faculty described it as a purge.

At [Pennsylvania's Muhlenberg College](#), tenured Jewish professor Maura Finkelstein was fired after a single Instagram repost that included the phrase "don't normalise Zionism". At [Princeton](#), Professor Ruha Benjamin was celebrated for her MacArthur genius grant award, while simultaneously being investigated for her participation in a student protest.

At [SOAS in London](#), Haya Adam, President of the Palestine Society was expelled after months of suspension, reportedly the first such case in a UK university. She called it punishment for standing against genocide.

In Paris, [Sciences Po](#) was defunded temporarily by the head of the regional council for pro-Palestine demonstrations on campus. Students were accused of being radicalised, their protests labelled antisemitic hatred.

In Australia, the [University of Melbourne](#) was found to have surveilled students through its WiFi network during a pro-Palestine sit-in. The university used location data and card photos to identify protestors. 19 students received reprimands.

In the USA again, [MIT suspended Prahlad Iyengar](#), an Indian-origin PhD student, after he published an essay that included posters from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The suspension will last until 2026. He called it an unprecedented attack on student rights.

At [Emory University in Georgia](#), a Palestinian medical student, Umaymah Mohammad, was suspended in November 2024 for refusing to remain silent. Students and faculty held a press conference calling it repression.

At [New York University](#), two faculty members were arrested at a pro-Palestine protest. Three others were declared *personae non gratae*, barred from entering university buildings.

At the [University of Sydney](#), a student leader faced disciplinary proceedings that could lead to suspension. The [new civility rules](#) that they proposed earlier this year should be interesting for students and faculty in our university.

At the [University of Cape Town](#), students erected an encampment calling for boycotts and disclosure of ties with Israeli institutions. Management eventually cleared it, removing Palestinian flags and posters.

At Harvard, an entire special issue of the [Harvard Educational Review](#) dedicated to education and Palestine was cancelled shortly before publication. Editors said it was unprecedented.

At CUNY in New York, a planned job posting for a Palestinian Studies professor at Hunter College was removed after [Governor Kathy Hochul](#) ordered it taken down. She called the language of the ad “divisive and inappropriate”.

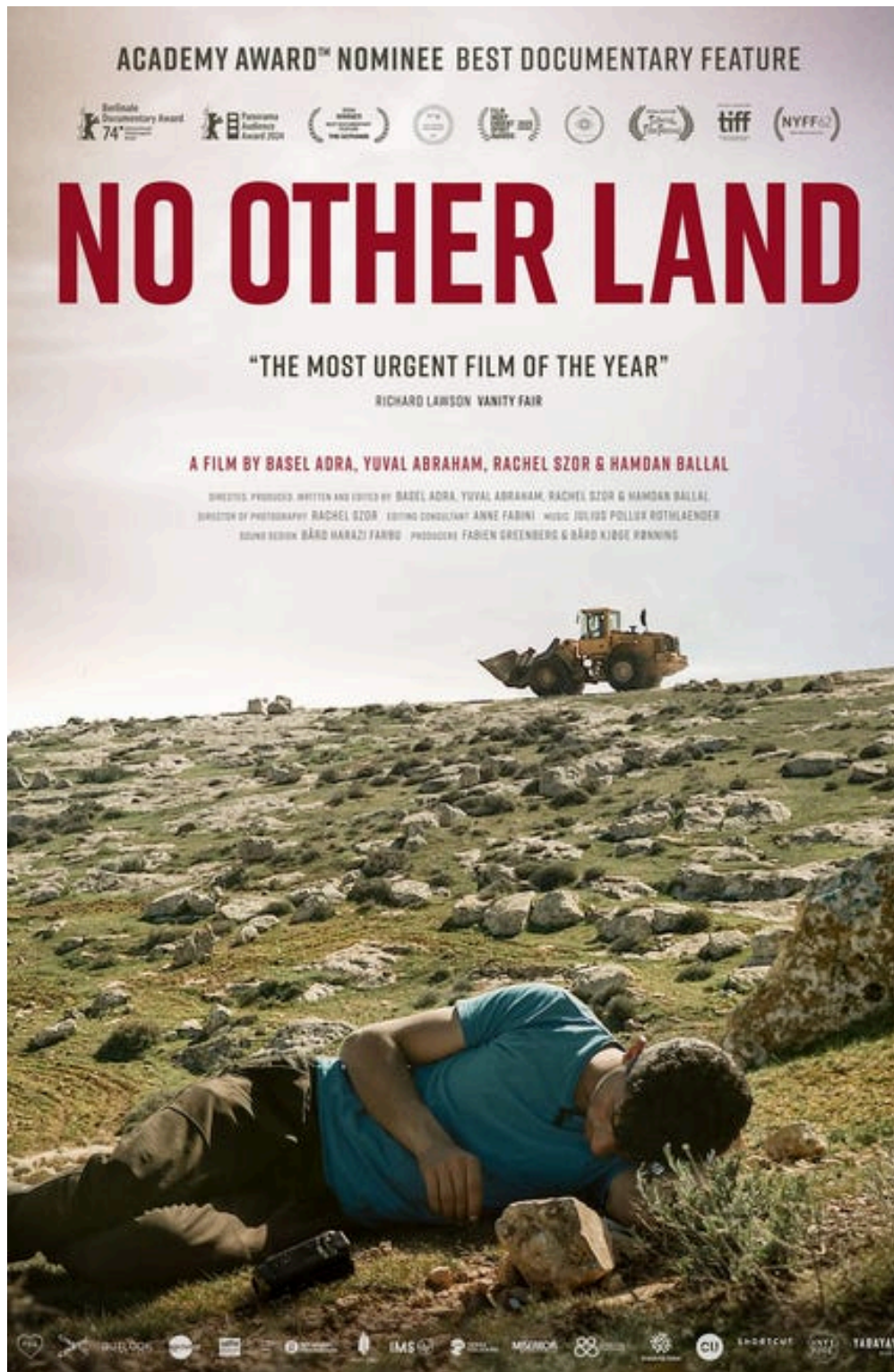
At Yale University, the status of a pro-Palestine student group was revoked after it protested the visit of [Israel’s National Security Minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir](#).

In the UAE, a PhD student at NYU Abu Dhabi was detained for a week and then deported. His act was shouting “[Free Palestine](#)” during a graduation ceremony.

In Canada, the [Higher Education Minister of Quebec](#) asked colleges to drop courses on Palestinian literature, citing campus tensions. At Dawson and Vanier colleges, syllabi were quietly altered.

Pressing Play

[No Other Land](#) won the Oscar for best documentary feature in 2025. It won in the United States, where the government arms Israel and where Palestinian voices are routinely silenced. It won in an industry that has long centred Jewish suffering but rarely shown Palestinian life.



Source: <https://thefridacinema.org/movies/no-other-land/>

The film follows Basel Adra in Masafer Yatta, a cluster of Palestinian villages in the West Bank. The Supreme Court of Israel took twenty-two years to decide their case. When it did, it authorised demolition orders, each with a name attached.

People refused to leave. They built homes at night. Soldiers came in the morning to take the materials away. An officer told Basel, "We will arrest you tonight". At two in the morning, soldiers entered his house and threw stun grenades.

In 2022, the army entered a school. Children packed their toys. The doors were locked from outside. Children escaped through a window before the school was demolished.

By 2023, demolitions came almost weekly. Wells were filled with cement. Pipes carrying water were broken. The choice was simple: endure, or leave the land forever.

The film stops in October 2023. The demolitions have not. Only weeks ago, Yuval Abraham reported that the army was raiding Basel Adra's home again.



I watched this film screened quietly, late on a Sunday night. The students who organised it were afraid, but they pressed play.

Fromm wrote that societies adapt to destruction and call it health. That is what it means to live in an insane society: the demolitions continue, the prisons fill, and most of the world moves on. The act of pressing play, then, is not just a gesture of solidarity. It is a reminder that sanity is still possible.