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Film festivals and wars: 2025 – The year of double standards

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Introduction

Taking film festivals as ‘sites of memory’, this article uses 2025 as the point of departure to compare how the leading European film festivals – Berlin, Cannes, and Venice – have responded to the conflicts in Ukraine and Palestine. [1] [#_edn1] Since the establishment of the world’s first film festival in Venice in 1932, film festivals have operated in a reciprocal relationship with wars, exerting influence on them while simultaneously being shaped by them. When Russia attacked Ukraine in 2022, the Cannes, Berlin, and Venice film festivals expressed their solidarity in a prompt, loud, and unambiguous manner. This was most visible through Ukrainian president Zelenskyy’s online addresses at the opening ceremonies of each of these festivals (2022-2023). In contrast, it was not until two years into Israel’s aggression on Gaza, in 2025, that a few more substantial activities addressing the genocide appeared in these three festivals, as for instance Cannes’ tribute to Gazan photojournalist Fatma Hassouna (1999-2025). [2] [#_edn2] Year 2025 is pivotal in terms of global war-related

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politics: from Trump's return to office in January; to antiwar, pro-Palestinian, protesters being arrested globally; to Spain's sanctions on Israel and the European Commission's declaration of famine in Gaza in September; to the Trump administration's peace plan and ceasefire in October, and to regular violations of the ceasefire starting only a few days later.

Within this context, this article examines the 2025 interplay between global politics and war-related film festival actions. From Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony to cultural policy studies, contemporary scholarship largely agrees that cultural institutions cannot be separated from their political influence. [3] [#_edn3] The analysis takes into account that film festivals are highly visible cultural events, which are experienced by audiences in the present, and documented for the future through catalogues and press materials, media coverage, and critical discourse. As such, they actively participate in the formation of public opinion and cultural memory around key issues of our past and the present. [4] [#_edn4] Within this, wars represent one of the major phenomena that societies seek to understand, as they are among the most consequential events shaping human existence. Their consequential character derives from the fact that they profoundly affect all dimensions of human life – economic, social, environmental, and ultimately, life itself. Drawing on historical wartime precedents at the Venice, Cannes, and Berlin film festivals, the article explores divergences in festival practices when addressing the occupation of Ukraine as opposed to the occupation of Palestine. Some of its central questions are: Why have these institutions unanimously supported Ukraine but tended to assert neutrality in the context of Gaza, and what makes this stance problematic? Why do Ukrainian

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studies gesture
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reality war workshop

victims seem to be more 'deserving' of film festivals' solidarity than Palestinian victims? To what extent does pro-Palestinian activism highlight the insufficiency of institutional festival actions in support of Palestine, and reveal tensions between filmmakers, including high-profile actors and organisers?

Film festivals' engagement with political conflicts has been examined primarily within scholarship on the Cold War, which constitutes the largest body of literature addressing their relationship with international politics. [5] [#_edn5] With regard to armed conflicts, several studies have discussed the origins of the Venice and Cannes festivals in the context of the Second World War. [6] [#_edn6] Other studies have explored the local festival landscape during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. [7] [#_edn7] Within a growing body of scholarship on wartime Ukrainian cinema, in 2022 Skadi Loist and Marijke De Valck organised a roundtable discussing the war's early effects on Ukrainian film festivals. [8] [#_edn8] Regarding Palestine, existing scholarship has largely focused on grassroots and activist events. [9] [#_edn9] By contrast, critical academic engagement on major festivals' responses to the conflicts in Ukraine and Palestine remains limited. In the historical overview "'Words Matter": Film Festivals and Territorial Conflicts', I briefly contrast responses to the invasions of Ukraine and Gaza. [10] [#_edn10] By juxtaposing the case studies of Ukraine and Palestine this article (developed within the project 'Film Festivals and War: A Fe-Male Perspective (1939-present)' [FESTWAR FM [http://www.unive.it/festwar-fm]]) [11] [#_edn11] adopts a previously unexplored analytical perspective, offers contemporary insights into the role of festivals in creating cultural memory of war, and adds to recently-developing scholarly

conversations on the silence around the Palestinian issue. [12] [#_edn12]

By comparing the support afforded to Ukrainian and Palestinian victims, the article does not suggest that the two conflicts are equivalent in their nature. Although both invasions emerged from colonial projects, the one in Ukraine involves two sovereign states and thus constitutes a war, in which these states are using their military capacities – one to attack, and the other to defend itself. By contrast, the assault on Gaza involves a state deploying its full capacity (an entire state apparatus with its military, technological, economic, and media structures, and the support of their allies) on an isolated territory lacking comparable means. As a result, its population, indigenous and civilian, has been subjected to sustained targeting and elimination in a prolonged period of several years, without the ability to defend itself. [13] [#_edn13] Regarding terminology, I use the term genocide in line with the scholarly perspective shared by leading genocide, Holocaust, and legal scholars, as formalised in the International Association of Genocide Scholars' (IAGS) Resolution on the Situation in Gaza (2025). [14] [#_edn14]

Film festivals as sites of memory and (political) influence

Top management figures of the Berlin, Cannes, and Venice film festivals made several claims throughout 2025 painting these institutions as sites of political neutrality. Responding to journalists' questions on global geopolitics and Palestine, they described the festivals that they respectively run as places of 'inclusiveness and openness' (Berlinale director Tricia Tuttle, 2025), [15] [#_edn15] and not 'a partisan stage for one side or the other' (Venice Festival director Alberto

Barbera, 2025), [16] [#_edn16] stressing that their core mission is to keep the 'spotlight on films and those who make them' (Cannes Festival President Iris Knobloch, 2025). [17] [#_edn17] Given that film festivals are complex events of considerable social, economic, and political influence, with a substantial historical record of political engagement during diplomatic crises and wars, these statements are difficult to sustain.

The influence-generating capacity of Europe's three major film festivals is shaped by their ability to bring together filmmakers, media representatives, industry professionals, and political stakeholders within a shared public space of high visibility and prestige. [18] [#_edn18] This influence can be divided into three categories, each linked to a specific sub-space of festival functioning: 1) what appears on the screen (films and their narratives); 2) what is performed in front of the cameras (public statements and symbolic gestures made by festival guests and organisers at press conferences and on the red carpet); and 3) what unfolds behind-the-scenes (professional exchanges that shape the industry without directly engaging the audiences). Related to the first category, the central element of festival impact is the notoriety it confers on selected films: screening at Berlin, Cannes, or Venice generally improves a film's prospects for further festival circulation and distribution and guarantees heightened media visibility. Thus, the narratives forged by films screened at these festivals gain prolonged visibility, while the festival label, signalling selection or award, confers institutional legitimacy on these narratives. Related to the second category, the images produced on the red carpet and statements made by festival officials and guests are typically widely circulated through mass media, which brings them visibility and,

often, legitimacy. Finally, related to the third category, film festivals are not merely spaces where general audiences come to watch films; they are also industry gatherings where networking plays a central role, and where future projects are negotiated – the Cannes film market is the world's largest gathering of film professionals, attracting over 15,000 participants from 140 countries annually. [19] [#_edn19]

The influence that film festivals produce by the constellation of these elements – films, public statements, networking, and media reporting – exceeds the immediacy of the event itself, persisting over time by default of cultural memory creation. According to Jan and Aleida Assmann, the concept of cultural memory refers to the collective understanding of certain events that outlives the generation that experienced them. [20] [#_edn20] As high-status events that leave durable traces in catalogues, print materials, and media coverage, film festivals generate images, narratives, and forms of legitimacy that participate in shaping collective understandings of major political events both in the present (by participating in forming public opinion) and across generations (by participating in forming cultural memory). Bearing in mind that public opinion and cultural memory of political events that concern society as a whole (such as war) is inevitably political in nature, this means that film festivals, as one of the drivers in their formation, also assume a political role. Furthermore, the three festivals have a strong historical record of acting as politically-charged, not neutral places, as outlined below.

Film festivals as political spaces: From the Second World War to Ukraine

The political dimensions of Europe's three dominant film festivals have been evident since their emergence and closely linked to histories of diplomatic and armed conflicts. When the Venice Film Festival was established in 1932 as the world's first such event, it quickly became a platform for fascist propaganda, a role it maintained throughout the 1930s and during the Second World War, until 1943. [21] [#_edn21] Cannes Film Festival was started in 1939 to counterbalance this propaganda, but its first edition was interrupted by the Second World War. The event resumed only after the war's conclusion in 1946, as yet another example of war's influence on the development of the film festival phenomenon. [22] [#_edn22] Founded in 1951, the Berlinale was also started amidst political turbulence, in the context of the city and the world divided by the Cold War. [23] [#_edn23] Against the backdrop of global polarisation, Europe's three major film gatherings gradually positioned themselves as sites of cultural diplomacy, a dynamic that has been extensively examined in scholarly research. [24] [#_edn24] Within this, several anti-war protests took place in relation to the war in Vietnam, most notably the interruption of the Berlinale in 1970 due to disagreements surrounding the antiwar film O.K. (Michael Verhoeven, FRG, 1970). [25] [#_edn25] When war in Yugoslavia broke out in 1991, the Venice, Berlin, and Cannes film festivals responded by having a limited circulation of Serbian films under sanctions and by keeping them, mostly, out of competition (1992-1995). [26] [#_edn26]

When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 each of the three festivals immediately expressed unconditional support for Ukraine as the attacked party. As the highest possible political acknowledgement, they all invited the Ukrainian

President to make a video address at their opening ceremonies. Zelenskyy appeared in Cannes (2022) and Berlin (2023) through a live link, and through a recorded message in Venice (2022), making the first documented example in the history of the three festivals of a president of a foreign state delivering a speech in their opening ceremonies. Dressed in military style outfit – an olive-green T-shirt (Cannes and Berlin) and dark sportswear (Venice) and framed by national flags – Zelenskyy's appearance underscored his role as the leader of a country at war, thereby making the festivals' gesture an explicit positioning within the conflict. In addition, all the three festivals issued official statements in March 2022, extending their support for the people of Ukraine and condemning Russian aggression. [27] [#_edn27] Aiming to help the country's war-torn film industry, Cannes' Marché du film featured the programme 'Ukraine in Focus' (2022-2023). [28] [#_edn28] Venice Film Festival established a Ukrainian Day – an annual special event of roundtables and business networking organised 'to manifest the festival's solidarity' (2022). [29] [#_edn29] As yet another gesture of political symbolism, this initiative was announced on 24 August, which is Ukraine Independence Day. [30] [#_edn30] In 2024 the European Commission Vice President Věra Jourová opened Ukrainian Day with a highly political speech reminding of the need to 'do all we can to support [Ukraine]', including both providing creative support and weapons. [31] [#_edn31]



Fig. 1: Screenshot from UA TV's broadcast of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's address at the 2022 Venice Film Festival.

In its first edition following the start of the invasion, in 2023, the Berlinale organised a 'Demonstration of Solidarity with Ukraine'. This red carpet event marked the war's first anniversary, and gathered together Ukrainian filmmakers, Ambassador Oleksii Makeiev, and representatives of the Molodist (Kyev) and the Odessa film festivals. [32] [#_edn32] In 2025 solidarity activities included special programmes 'Three Films for Ukraine' held on the opening day of Cannes, [33] [#_edn33] and 'Ukraine on Screen: The Social Impact of Cinema' held within the European Film Market, Berlinale's major industry meeting. [34] [#_edn34] Additionally, films about Ukrainian independence and war have been continuously present at all three festivals. To mention but a few, the fiction film *Forever-Forever* (Anna Buryachkova, UKR/HOL) about a group of youngsters in Kyev in the 1990s was nominated in the *Orrizonti* section in Venice (2023); the docudrama *Photophobia* (Ivan Ostrochovsky, Pavol Pekarčík, SVK/UKR/CZE) about a family hiding from bombs in the subway won the *Europea Cinemas Label Award* in Venice (2023); the documentary *Militantropos* (Simon Mozgovyi, Yelizaveta Smith, Alina Gorlova, UKR/FRA) about the realities of war was shown in the programme *Quinzaine des cinéastes* in Cannes (2025); the documentary *When Lightning Flashes over the*

Sea (Eva Neymann, UKR/DEU) about life in war-torn Odessa was selected at the Berlinale Forum (2025). Concurrently, Russian films have had a limited festival circulation, despite the Venice, Cannes, and Berlin festivals' announcements that they would not exclude them entirely. [35] [#_edn35]

The three festivals, thus, have clearly assumed political roles and demonstrated that they have continuously been operating as political actors rather than neutral cultural spaces. Yet, despite the historical record of their political activity and influence, since the beginning of Israel's full-scale invasion of Gaza in October 2023, their top management representatives have been either vocal about film festivals allegedly being spaces of political neutrality, or they have been embodying this position in action without naming it as neutrality per se. This is best exemplified by Venice film festival director Alberto Barbera's 2024 statement for Deadline:

Have you seen any major film festival 'take a side' in this conflict? We are a space open to everyone and to people with different political views. We show films that highlight different views on all sorts of issues. I don't want to take sides, and I can't make such public statements for the festival in my role as festival director. I have my own personal views. [36] [#_edn36]

In 2025 this approach resulted in each of the three festivals receiving an open letter criticising both theirs and global passivity. In January, the BDS movement, Filmmakers for Palestine, and Strike Germany urged a boycott of the 2025 Berlinale due to 'art-washing the German state's partnership in genocide'. [37] [#_edn37] In May more than 350 international filmmakers published

an open letter on the eve of Cannes, condemning the killing of Fatma Hassouna and demanding to ‘act before it’s too late’. [38] [#_edn38] In August, 943 film industry professionals gathered under the name Venice For Palestine (V4P) demanded that the Biennale clearly condemn the genocide. [39] [#_edn39] This development stemmed from the vagueness of the three festivals’ initial responses to Israel’s aggression observed throughout 2024, as outlined below.



Fig. 2: Venice for Palestine (V4P) activists at the 2025 Venice Film Festival. Courtesy of V4P.

The problems of our time

While the three festivals display notable differences in how they conceive political neutrality, they converge on one central point: all have refrained from issuing an explicit statement condemning the genocide of Palestinians (and naming it as such). Given that the conflict escalated in late 2023, any official response could have been expected either during their 2024 editions, or in the form of exceptional statements released in late 2023, similar to those they published when Russia invaded Ukraine. [40] [#_edn40] However, no such gesture was made, and the three festivals instead aligned with the ambiguous politics of the European Union. While

all the major states immediately condemned the Hamas attacks, reactions to Israel's aggression against Gaza ranged from Emmanuel Macron's calls for ceasefire to Giorgia Meloni's demands for the respect of international law – coupled with confirmations of Israel's right to 'self-defence' – to Olaf Scholz's opposition to immediate ceasefire. [41] [#_edn41]

Simultaneously, the media space has been saturated with polemics over whether the situation in Gaza constitutes genocide. [42] [#_edn42] Historically, the application of the term has been contested across different contexts, from Croatian fascist crimes against the Serbian population in the Second World War, to those committed by Serbian forces in Bosnia in the 1990s. This contestation stems from two main factors. The first is political, as the designation of genocide entails significant reputational consequences. The second is legal, since the classification of a crime as genocide requires both committing the crime, and the presence of a demonstrable genocidal intent, which can be difficult to prove. However, in the case of Gaza, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) immediately confirmed the risk of genocide and demanded Israel to comply with the 1948 UN Genocide Convention. [43] [#_edn43] In doing so, the Court advanced the Convention's preventive purpose, given that comprehensive legal proceedings may extend over years. Despite the ICJ being the sole legal body competent to determine state responsibility for genocide, certain governments – such as the UK and Germany – have contested the use of this term. Paradoxically despite the ICJ and humanitarian consensus on Gaza, the media and political environment have remained fragmented. This fragmentation makes it difficult for cultural

institutions to assess the consequences of taking a clear position, as it may entail the loss of support from governments, partner organisations, and audiences. Mirroring this context, the three festivals' leading figures did express their concerns about the events in the Middle East; however, their statements were marked by a lack of precision, shifting of focus, and, in the case of the Berlinale, formal distancing from calls for ceasefire, in line with Germany's position. Taken together, these elements produced an ambiguous discourse with no clear position that lies at the intersection of state pressure, media confusion, economic concerns, and the long history of Western institutions' neglect and denial toward the suffering of the Other when not politically expedient. [45] [#_edn45]

One of the main features of this discourse is the use of broad and unspecific language. Barbera's introductory text to the 2024 Venice festival expresses concerns about 'everything that is happening [...] in the world', 'the problems of our time', 'endless conflicts', 'unexpected tragedies', and 'frightening explosion of bloody armed conflicts', without a single mention of Palestine. [46] [#_edn46] The programme included Israeli films *Of Dogs and Men* (Dani Rosenberg, 2024) and *Why War* (Amos Gitai, 2024), which prompted an open letter by 300 filmmakers demanding their exclusion. [47] [#_edn47] The docudrama *Of Dogs and Men* follows a teenage girl who returns to her kibbutz shortly after the Hamas attacks looking for her dog. This choice prompted a question from the audience that I witnessed regarding whether the festival considered it appropriate to screen a film centred on such a marginal event like a search for a missing pet, at a time when thousands of Palestinians in the same area are being murdered and starved to death on a daily basis. A brief round

of applause from part of the audience was quickly eclipsed by louder boos from others. Barbera responded to the polemics by expressing his understanding for the 'painful position of the population there', but added that the festival would never withdraw a film 'on ideological grounds'. [48] [#_edn48] Similar to Barbera's introductory text, the Berlinale host Hadnet Tesfai omitted references to the location or national identity of the victims in her question, 'What do we want a film festival [...] to be in times when innocent civilians are losing their lives?' [49] [#_edn49] Formulated in this way, these statements leave it to the audience to identify the victims and conflicts being referenced, stripping those affected of their nationality and origin – elements that are crucial for identifying and understanding the concept of genocide, which constitutes a crime 'committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group'. [50] [#_edn50] In the case of the Berlinale, by having a Black woman deliver this statement, the festival projected an image of inclusivity, while actually excluding racialised victims from the discourse.

A recurring pattern through which the impression of neutrality is produced is accentuating that civilians are suffering in both Israel and in Gaza, as well as in the world, suggesting an equivalence. Berlinale Executive Director Mariëtte Rissenbeek concluded her 2024 opening speech by situating the genocide within a global context of military, social, political, and environmental crises in Ukraine, Iran, Sudan, and Turkey. [51] [#_edn51] Rissenbeek said that the festival 'explicitly takes stand against discrimination and any kind of hatred, no matter if it is antisemitism or anti-Muslim hatred'. [52] [#_edn52] Her placing of the genocide within a broader landscape of

contemporary tragedies may serve to underscore that other crises should not be neglected in the public discourse. Nevertheless, such framing overlooks Israel's colonial history, a historical context that is more relevant for understanding the contemporary situation in occupied Palestine than its association with some contemporary crises, such as the earthquake in Turkey. Neglecting the pre-2023 history results in imprecise interpretations of contemporary conflict, creating an impression that it started with the Hamas attack on October 7. [53] [#_edn53] This is reflected in Alberto Barbera's response to a question by Deadline journalist Andreas Wiseman about whether he acknowledges the lack of support for Palestinians:

I think we've seen many Pro-Palestinian demonstrations all over the world, but hardly any for the hostages. We must not forget the massacre that took place which sparked this conflict. Of course, I understand [...] the awful, painful position of the population there, especially the children. It's hard to even think about it. What Netanyahu is doing in Gaza is a war crime, and so was October 7... [54] [#_edn54]

The response reframes the journalist's question on support for Palestinians by introducing October 7 into the narrative. It presents the October 7 and post-October 7 events in a simplified causal logic whereby one gives rise to the other, rather than situating them within a prolonged and complex history of colonialism and systemic oppression conducted by the state of Israel in the concerned territory. Genocide scholar Donald Bloxham explains that the 'narrative of "Seventh of October as Zero Hour"' represents 'decontextualized contextualization' that ignores

prior dehumanisation of Palestinians which influenced both October 7 and its aftermath. [55] [#_edn55] The result is a distorted representation of October 7 as a rupture, rather than a continuation of longstanding dynamics of state violence, resistance, and terrorist violence in the region. Moreover, the attempts to assert neutrality by emphasising the tragic nature of both Gaza and Hamas massacres are analytically problematic. While the losses and pain suffered by those affected are unmeasurable on a personal level, the two cases are not comparable in structural terms, because one constitutes an attack by an organised armed group, and the other one a state's operation. Barbera's statement generates an implicit equivalence between the two events despite profound differences in their causes, structures, methods, duration, and the scale of victimhood. In the absence of a condemnation of the genocide of Palestinians, this framing ultimately reinforces, even if unintentionally, the Israeli government's official narrative of self-defence (broadly accepted by the Italian government, even if contested in its legality). [56] [#_edn56]

The interplay between local politics and film festival action is particularly evident at the Berlinale, as Germany's strong pro-Israel stance is reflected in heightened pressure on the festival to align with the government's position. After its 2024 edition, the festival publicly distanced itself from remarks by the Israeli/Palestinian filmmaking duo Yuval Abraham and Basel Adra. In their award acceptance speech for the documentary *No Other Land*, Abraham and Adra called for an end of apartheid and inequality and urged Germany to stop arms exports to Israel. [57] [#_edn57] In a striking distortion, in response to their speech, Mayor of Berlin Kai Wegner wrote on X that

‘There is no place for antisemitism in Berlin’, while Federal Commissioner for Culture Claudia Roth declared that she only clapped for the Jewish-Israeli and not the Palestinian filmmaker. [58] [#_edn58] Subsequently, the festival published a communiqué describing the award winners’ remarks as one-sided individual opinions that did not reflect the festival’s position. [59] [#_edn59] Although the communiqué’s language conveyed an impression of neutrality, the act of distancing itself constitutes a political gesture of pro-Israeli positioning and not of neutrality. Furthermore, the communiqué includes an explicit condemnation of the Hamas attacks, but no equivalent condemnation of Israel’s invasion of Gaza. [60] [#_edn60] The political pressure on the festival continued, as in April 2024 the newly-appointed director Tricia Tuttle was called before the German parliament’s Committee for Culture and Media to outline the steps she intended to take to prevent such incidents happening in the future. Seven months later, in November, in their contentious Antisemitic Resolution, the parliament portrayed the Berlinale as antisemitic, thus further condemning its 2024 award ceremony and putting open political pressure on free speech within the festival space. [61] [#_edn61]

Operating in the less restrictive political environment in France, the Cannes Film Festival initially attempted to maintain a position of neutrality by adopting the strategy of shifting the focus. Concluding his remarks at the press conference announcing the 2024 event, festival director Thierry Frémaux stated that the team’s intention was for the festival to be ‘peaceful, harmonious, joyful and generous and to talk only about cinema’. [62] [#_edn62] He also stressed that films were selected based on their quality

(only), and not on their political agenda. [63] [#_edn63] The selection is indeed a complex process that is shaped by several factors, including whether the quality of the submitted films meets the standards of these festivals, as reflected in Frémaux's statement. [64] [#_edn64] Selection therefore operates through both bottom-up (production quality) and top-down dynamics (programmers' choices).

By contrast, the publication of a statement condemning the invasion or inviting a Head of State to give a speech depends solely on the decisions of the festival management itself. This is an entirely top-down process, and in that sense it is independent of any external offer. The failure to implement this top-down process by the three festivals in the context of the Gaza genocide stands in stark contrast with their respective responses to the war in Ukraine, which was characterised by: 1) immediacy (Zelenskyy was invited by all the three festivals in their first editions after Russia attacked); 2) clarity of terms regarding the type of war, its location, and violations of international law (e.g. Berlinale's statement condemning 'Russia's ongoing war of aggression, which violates international law') and; 3) open assumption of the festival's political position (e.g. Frémaux's statement: 'This is the position of the festival – showing absolute and non-negotiable support for the Ukrainian people and their representatives'). [65] [#_edn65]



Fig. 3: Public intervention by the crew of *Butterfly Vision* (dir. Maksym Nakonechnyi) at the 2022 Cannes Film Festival, displaying a banner in which they characterise Russian war crimes in Ukraine as genocide. EPA.

Diplomacy, neutrality, or lack of solidarity?

As mentioned earlier, in 2025, the contrast between the three festivals' response to the invasions of Ukraine and Gaza prompted various pro-Palestinian activists and filmmakers to publicly demand a clear response to the genocide. By the start of the year Netanyahu had already been placed on the International Criminal Court's wanted list for war crimes and crimes against humanity, and numerous organisations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, had identified genocide in Gaza. [66] [#_edn66] This alone formed a solid (legal) ground for institutional condemnation, by festivals as well as any other institution. However, despite these legal and humanitarian assessments, 2025 unfolded as a year of contradictions. In September, Portugal, France, Luxembourg, and Malta recognised Palestine, bringing the number of EU states that do so to fifteen, which is a move of significant symbolic value. Yet, the EU continued its trade association with Israel, which is materially a more consequential action, while some states, such as Germany, continued the supply of arms. [67] [#_edn67] Donald Trump described Gaza as a real

estate opportunity, exposing the grotesque, neocolonial, and capitalist logic of his administration's alignment with Israel. [68] [#_edn68] The US introduced sanctions against UN Rapporteur Francesca Albanese immediately after she published the report 'From Economy of Occupation to Economy of Genocide', which listed companies profiting from the genocide and exposed corporate underpinnings of the absence of support for Palestinians. [69] [#_edn69] With no comprehensive sanctions against Israel, civil society initiatives intensified, including two major humanitarian flotillas attempting to deliver aid. Both were illegally intercepted in international waters with no consequences for Israel. Meanwhile, peaceful protesters have been detained, particularly in Germany and the UK, under accusations of endorsing terrorism, while Israel continued to participate in the Eurovision Song Contest despite several countries withdrawing in protest. [70] [#_edn70] Europe's major film festivals became a part of this contradictory landscape, by incorporating an increasing number of films about the situation in Gaza, while continuing to refrain from positioning their institutions.

The Berlinale did not issue any statements asserting their neutrality, but they did not issue any statements condemning the genocide either. The delicate position of being held accountable both by government authorities for too much support for Palestine and activist groups for lack of support for Palestine prompted the festival's new team to create a 'FAQ: Dialogue and Exchange' page on their 2025 website. [71] [#_edn71] The page focuses entirely on the scope of free speech in the context of German support for Israel, addressing questions such as: 'How does the Berlinale's handling of freedom of expression

comply with German law?', and 'What has Berlinale learned from last year's controversy at the closing ceremony?' While the question of whether the festival has introduced bans on clothing and symbols of solidarity with Palestine is answered with a clear no, the remaining responses offer a textbook example of diplomatic ambiguity. Notably the question whether certain terms and political expressions are prohibited received no definite answer; instead, readers are reminded that the slogan 'From the River to the Sea...' requires 'particular care' and that its use has, previously, led to legal prosecution. Examining this diplomatic language, it is striking that the festival used its online space to claim that it remained a site of free speech, not by exercising that freedom (e.g. by showing solidarity with Palestinian victims), but by emphasising the rhetoric of free speech while addressing Palestine only indirectly. If, amid multiple pressures, the FAQ page aimed to demonstrate both legal compliance (to the government) and institutional integrity (to the audiences), it instead exposed the festival's inability to challenge the government under which it operates and on which it financially depends. [72] [#_edn72]

Within this context of constraints even the most influential guests exercised particular caution in formulating their public statements. During her acceptance of the lifetime achievement award actress Tilda Swinton delivered a speech in which she condemned apartheid and colonisation without naming any country. This restraint is consistent with the comments she made the following day at a press conference, where in response to a question from Haaretz journalist Shany Littman she stated that she opposed not only the war in Palestine but all ongoing wars. [73] [#_edn73] Although this explanation clarified that

the way her speech was formulated was in line with the message she intended to convey, it was also in line with the limitations imposed by the German government. While the 2025 Berlinale was officially framed around freedom of expression, that freedom was constrained by potential legal repercussions under the controversial German law that bans anti-Semitic statements, but which is frequently interpreted to include criticism of Zionism. [74] [#_edn74] As a result, speech may be free, yet only insofar as it avoids critique of Israel's actions, ultimately narrowing the space of expression and undermining the very principle it seeks to uphold. This is evidenced by the fact that the Hong Kong filmmaker Jun Li sparked a police investigation because at the premiere of his film *Queerpanorama* he read a pro-Palestinian statement from actor Erfan Shekarriz who boycotted the festival. [75] [#_edn75]

The biggest, although incomplete, step toward the condemnation of the genocide was made at the 2025 edition of Cannes. Jury president Juliette Binoche devoted her opening speech to the memory of 25-year-old photojournalist Fatma Hassouna, protagonist of the documentary *Put Your Soul on Your Hand and Walk* (Sepideh Farsi, FRA/PAL/IRN, 2025). The film, selected by the independent section L'ACID, is composed of WhatsApp video conversations between Fatma and the filmmaker; it offers a window onto a destroyed Gaza. Fatma, a flamboyant, multi-talented young woman, shares her experience of death, hunger, and restricted mobility as she navigates the city in search of an internet connection in order to sustain these conversations, that to her represent a window into the world. On April 16, a day after it was announced that the film was selected for Cannes,

the Israel Defence Forces murdered Fatma and her entire family in a targeted bomb attack. This development caused the issue of the genocide to enter this festival directly, as it could no longer be construed as a distant event. The filmmaker confirmed that Fatma expressed her desire to attend the festival. [76] [#_edn76] However, she was directly prevented from doing so by Israel, first by being blocked in Gaza and then by being killed. Despite this causality, both Binoche's speech and the tribute published on the festival's website carefully avoided attributing any responsibility for Fatma's murder to Israel but instead described her as a victim of a 'missile' (Binoche) and 'violence' (website tribute) whose origin is not specified. [77] [#_edn77]

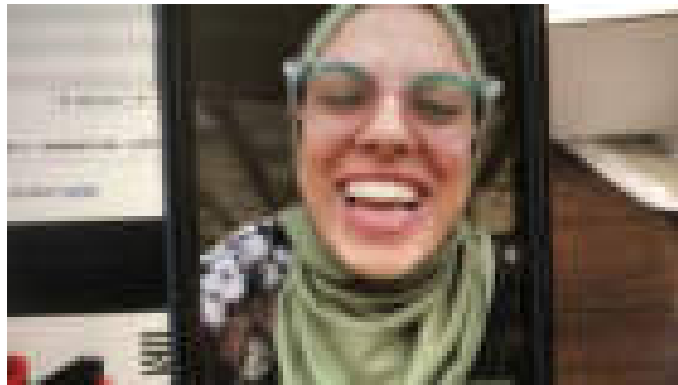


Fig. 4: Genocide victim Fatma Hassouna in the documentary *Put Your Sole on your Hand and Walk* (Sepideh Farsi, Cannes Film Festival, 2025).

Farsi's participation at Cannes improved the genocide's visibility, but the festival still did not articulate a response that was as explicit as they did with regard to Ukraine, and the discourse of alleged neutrality did not cease to exist. For instance, it is reported that staff received an internal protocol demanding them to remain politically neutral while on the job. [78] [#_edn78] Festival President Iris Knobloch said in an interview with *Variety* that while the filmmakers and films may express political messages, 'the

festival itself does not take political positions'. [79] [#_edn79] Similarly, Thierry Frémaux claimed that the festival 'has always been political due to the films that it programmes', yet that 'speaking of politics should be reserved to artists'. [80] [#_edn80] By separating the festival's positioning from that of its featured filmmakers, the Cannes leadership are pushing the notion of the political to an individual and personal sphere. Yet, when a film is screened at a festival, it is placed outside of the filmmaker's personal sphere and becomes part of a curated programme that collectively produces a political message.

To ensure that no political acts beyond the institution's control occurred, the Festivalgoers' Charter forbade expressing political views on the red carpet. [81] [#_edn81] This, again, stands in contrast with how the red carpet was previously mobilised to express support for Ukraine; in 2022 the festival approved the crew of Butterfly Vision (Maksym Nakonechnyi, UKR/CZE) to hold a banner stating 'Russians kill Ukrainians. Do you find it offensive and disturbing to talk about this genocide?' To date the ICJ has not identified a genocide against Ukrainians. Nevertheless, the festival organisers authorised the banner, whereas in the case of Palestine, despite ICJ and dozens of organisations having confirmed a genocide by 2025, the institution has been reluctant to use this designation.

In August, Venice Film Festival also addressed the conflict through its film selection but avoided it through its official statements. This ambiguity resulted in a series of protests demanding the festival to be clear and more courageous. On 23 August, in their open letter, filmmakers gathered into the group Venice for Palestine (V4P) stressed the need to 'interrupt the flow of indifference' and

reminded the festival of their ‘duty to amplify the stories and voices of those who are being massacred’. [82] [#_edn82] At a protest staged on the festival’s opening day, 27 August, the V4P spokesperson Marina Vergnano stated that ‘the role of institutions must be to take a position’. [83] [#_edn83] On 30 August, in the antiwar march ‘Stop The Genocide – Free Palestine’, several hundred people walked from central Lido to the festival venue. [84] [#_edn84] Amid these protests Barbera’s discourse evolved from the formulation ‘everything that is happening in the world’ used in his 2024 introduction to a more precise expression of ‘sadness and suffering vis-a-vis what is happening in Gaza and Palestine’, thereby rendering the genocide marginally less abstract by naming its location. [85] [#_edn85] However, this discursive shift was accompanied by a refusal to disinvite actors Gerard Butler and Gal Gadot from *In the Hand of Dante* (Julian Schnabel, 2025), who have publicly supported Israel, arguing that the Biennale is ‘a place of openness and debate that does not censor anybody’. [86] [#_edn86] This approach reiterates the stance of alleged neutrality articulated in 2024, treating all positions as equivalent, and thereby failing to grant Palestinian victims recognition proportionate to the scale and exceptional nature of the crimes committed against them.

The festival’s most significant contribution toward making the genocide visible was the screening of the docudrama *The Voice of Hind Rajab* (Kaouther Ben Hania, TUN/FRA), about a five-year old girl murdered together with her family as they were trying to flee Gaza. The film uses the authentic audio recording of Hind’s emergency call to paramedics. Stranded in their car among the corpses of her family members, she is calling for help that never comes, because the paramedics

were also murdered trying to reach her. The film was received with a standing ovation that lasted almost half an hour (24'), during which the crew and many audience members were visibly crying. Such intense emotional reactions indicated not only the impact of the film itself and the heaviness of the crime, but also pointed to how little has been done to render the Gaza genocide visible and, crucially, to make it stoppable.

The contradictions between films presented, statements left unsaid, and unmet industry demands for a clear position reveal that, notwithstanding their differences, the three festivals share a common logic. They all carefully avoided any stance that might jeopardise their present or future relations with their respective governments and with pro-Israel companies or offend audiences and (prospective) partners in support of Netanyahu's politics. Simultaneously, they all did just enough to be able to claim that they have 'always been against this', should that be the desirable position in the future. [87] [#_edn87]

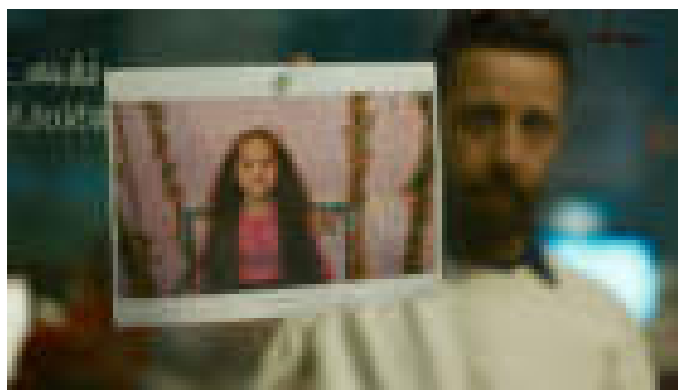


Fig. 5: Genocide victim Hind Rajab in the feature film *The Voice of Hind Rajab* (Kaouther Ben Hania, Grand Jury Prize, Venice Film Festival, 2025).

Conclusion

As demonstrated, Russia's invasion of Ukraine elicited an immediate, direct, and unified response from Europe's three major film festivals, all of

which clearly assumed their pro-Ukraine position. By contrast, the victims of Israel's invasion of Gaza received no comparable support, despite the variations in the three festivals' responses that largely mirrored their respective political contexts. The Berlinale appears the most constrained, shaped by Germany's alliances with Israel and instrumentalisation of historical responsibility for the Holocaust. In the less restrictive, yet still ambiguous, contexts of France and Italy, the Cannes and Venice festivals introduced Palestinian victims into the festival space through selected films and tributes but remained institutionally reserved. This lack of solidarity was camouflaged behind claims of neutrality, which distanced these festivals from the political roles they have historically fulfilled. The contradictions of this approach became particularly obvious in 2025, as by then the world's leading legal and humanitarian institutions had confirmed a genocide in Gaza – yet the three festivals withheld their condemnation despite the industry's appeals.

By presenting their festivals as spaces of 'dialogue' between two equal sides, contemporary festival leaders attempted to provide an image of neutrality and institutional objectivity. However, the role of film festivals is not to be objective, because they are neither courts nor news media. Their role is inherently political, and their actions are political whether they acknowledge this or not. This means that by adopting a so-called position of neutrality they acted politically, by being complicit in sustaining the status quo. The Israeli invasion's asymmetrical and colonial character, together with an unprecedented scale of civilian casualties, heightens cultural institutions' responsibility to assume their political roles and influence. By giving unconditional

support to Ukraine and publicly condemning Putin's politics and not doing the same for Palestine, the three festivals contributed to the construction of public opinion and cultural memory of the Gaza genocide as an event of lesser importance on a global scale, despite it being one of the major human tragedies in modern history. This also contributed to a hierarchical framing of victimhood in which Ukrainian (and Israeli) victims are treated as first-class victims and Palestinian victims as second-class, an approach which normalises the idea of violence against the 'Other'.

Finally, why did the Palestinians not receive the same treatment as Ukrainians? What motivations outweighed potential reputational damage for these film festivals within their own industry, which openly called for a clear position? No single explanation applies uniformly across the three festivals, nor can it be reduced to a single factor within each institution. Beyond the Global North's longstanding institutional neglect toward the suffering of the Global South, and the burdens of Europe's Holocaust legacy under Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Vichy France, the three festivals' positioning emerged at the intersection of several factors: a polarised media landscape; political pressures; and commercial considerations which altogether make taking sides appear risky.

Film festivals depend on public funding and on sponsorship agreements, which implies a collaborative relationship with funding bodies that institutions are generally careful to preserve. [88] [#_edn88] This means that a loud and unconditional condemnation of the genocide could be costly for these festivals, not only because of the positions of their respective governments, particularly Germany, but also because of the interests of the corporate actors

that contribute to festival functioning through potential sponsorship agreements. Thus, the Berlin, Cannes, and Venice festivals' responses to the genocide illustrate the dual nature of film festivals as sites of influence. They simultaneously produce influence and are spaces upon which influence is exerted. The resulting position emerges at the intersection of the views of the festival leadership, the films produced and selected, national and global political realities, and relations of economic power and dependency. The interplay of these factors produced a paradoxical outcome: it is not the genocide itself that is treated as controversial, but rather the act of publicly condemning it. When bearing in mind this paradox and its continuation at the 2026 Berlinale, we revisit Barbera's question: 'Have you seen any major film festival "take a side" in this conflict?' It seems that the more accurate question to ask is: 'Have you seen any major film festival take a risk in this conflict?'

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[2] [#_ednref2] See below on the use of the term genocide.

[3] [#_ednref3] Gramsci 2011 (orig. in 1947); Bennett 2013.

[4] [#_ednref4] Halbwachs 1950; Assmann, J. 1995; Assmann, A. 2006.

[5] [#_ednref5] Kötzing 2013; Moine 2014; Razlogova 2015; Kötzing & Moine 2017; Jelenkovic 2022.

[6] [#_ednref6] Pisu 2016; Loubes 2016.

[7] [#_ednref7] Jelenkovic 2016, 2023.

[8] [#_ednref8] Shumylovych 2023, pp. 111-126; Loist & De Valck 2022, pp. 116-134.

[9] [#_ednref9] Friedman & Ghorbankarimi 2025.

[10] [#_ednref10] Jelenkovic 2024.

[11] [#_ednref11] Funded by the European Union (GA number: 101149227). Views and opinions expressed are those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or Research Executive Agency. Neither the EU nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

[12] [#_ednref12] Pervez 2025, pp. 1-17; Di Stefano 2025, pp. 3-11; Shakir & Govaerts & Rabiger 2025; De Vogli 2026.

[13] [#_ednref13] According to Israeli data 83% of Gaza victims are civilians:
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/21/israeli-data-shows-83-percent-of-gaza-war-dead-are-civilians-report>
[<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/21/israeli-data-shows-83-percent-of-gaza-war-dead-are-civilians-report>] (accessed on 25 January 2026).

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<https://genocidescholars.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/IAGS-Resolution-on-Gaza-FINAL.pdf>
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- [21] [#_ednref21] Jelenkovic 2024.
- [22] [#_ednref22] Loubes 2016.
- [23] [#_ednref23] Fehrenbach 2019, pp. 81-96.
- [24] [#_ednref24] See Kötzing & Moine 2017.
- [25] [#_ednref25] See Moeller 2010.
- [26] [#_ednref26] Jelenkovic 2023, pp. 301-308.
- [27] [#_ednref27] Cannes: <https://www.festival-cannes.com/en/press/press-releases/statement-from-the-festival-de-cannes-on-the-situation-in-ukraine/> [<https://www.festival-cannes.com/en/press/press-releases/statement-from-the-festival-de-cannes-on-the-situation-in-ukraine/>]; Berlin: <https://www.berlinale.de/en/2023/news-press-releases/142408.html>
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[cannes.com/presse/communiqués/trois-films-pour-l-ukraine](https://www.festival-cannes.com/presse/communiqués/trois-films-pour-l-ukraine) [[\[cannes.com/presse/communiqués/trois-films-pour-l-ukraine\]\(https://www.festival-cannes.com/presse/communiqués/trois-films-pour-l-ukraine\)\] \(accessed on 18 January 2026\).](https://www.festival-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

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<https://deadline.com/2024/09/venice-alberto-barbera-apple-wolfs-theatrical-israel-gaza-boycott-films-junkets-1236075705/>
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[37] [#_ednref37]
<https://bdsmovement.net/boycott-berlinale>
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[38] [#_ednref38] Letter:
<https://variety.com/2025/film/global/letter-about-killing-of-fatma-hassona-1236391687>
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<https://filmonizirani.net/open-letter-to-the-biennale-from-italian-and-international-cinema/>
[<https://filmonizirani.net/open-letter-to-the-biennale-from-italian-and-international-cinema/>] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[40] [#_ednref40] Berlinale takes place in February, Cannes in May, and Venice in August/September.

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<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/10/macron-says-no-justification-for-bombing-civilians-as-he-calls-for-gaza-ceasefire>
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<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/italy-demands-israel-respect-international-law-protect-civilians-says-premier/3341559>
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[44] [#_ednref44] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/09/uk-not-concluded-israel-committing-genocide-in-gaza-lammy-says> [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/09/uk-not-concluded-israel-committing-genocide-in-gaza-lammy-says>], <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/12/7/what-has-germanys-position-been-on-israels-genocide-in-gaza> [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/12/7/what-has-germanys-position-been-on-israels-genocide-in-gaza>] (accessed on 26 January 2026).

[45] [#_ednref45] For the concept of 'racism as neglect and denial' see Elias 2024.

[46] [#_ednref46]

<https://www.labiennale.org/en/cinema/2024/introduction-alberto-barbera>

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[47] [#_ednref47]

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[<https://deadline.com/2024/09/venice-alberto-barbera-apple-wolfs-theatrical-israel-gaza-boycott-films-junkets-1236075705/>] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[48] [#_ednref48] Ibid.

[49] [#_ednref49] *Italics are mine*. Opening ceremony:

<https://www.facebook.com/berlinale/videos/yesterday-at-the-opening-gala-of-the-74th-berlinale-the-hosts-hadnet-tesfai-and-/1093033388427714>

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[50] [#_ednref50] UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide: <https://www.un.org/en/genocide-prevention/definition>

[<https://www.un.org/en/genocide-prevention/definition>] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[51] [#_ednref51] See the opening ceremony footage as above.

[52] [#_ednref52] Ibid.

[53] [#_ednref53] For the region's history, see: Finkelstein 2018; Khalidi 2020; Pappé 2017;

Pappé & Chomsky 2006; Said 1992 (orig. in 1979); Bloxham 2025.

[54] [#_ednref54] Italics are mine.

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[<https://deadline.com/2024/09/venice-alberto-barbera-apple-wolfs-theatrical-israel-gaza-boycott-films-jundnkets-1236075705/>] (accessed on 26 January 2026).

[55] [#_ednref55] Bloxham 2025.

[56] [#_ednref56]

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[57] [#_ednref57] Dir. Yuval Abraham, Basel Adra, Hamdan Ballal, Rachel Szor; Oscar – Best Documentary, 2025. Abraham's and Adra's speech: <https://youtu.be/nZBbOBPLSvA>
[<https://youtu.be/nZBbOBPLSvA>] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[58] [#_ednref58] <https://www.dw.com/en/israel-criticism-at-berlinale-sparks-controversy/a-68374724> [<https://www.dw.com/en/israel-criticism-at-berlinale-sparks-controversy/a-68374724>],
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/27/german-minister-says-she-was-only-applauding-israeli-filmmaker-at-berlinale>
[<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/27/german-minister-says-she-was-only-applauding-israeli-filmmaker-at-berlinale>] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[59] [#_ednref59]

<https://www.berlinale.de/en/2024/news-press-releases/254826.html>

[<https://www.berlinale.de/en/2024/news-press-releases/254826.html>] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[60] [#_ednref60] Ibid.

[61] [#_ednref61]

<https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/136/2013627.pdf>

[<https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/136/2013627.pdf>] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[62] [#_ednref62]

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[v=eaWNx4-6vB8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaWNx4-6vB8)];

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[[https://www.liberation.fr/culture/cinema/tout-](https://www.liberation.fr/culture/cinema/tout-est-politique-sauf-le-festival-de-cannes-20240514_ZYCUHK5V7BDBFMWDT4LL6ZJVVY/)

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(accessed on 18 January 2026).

[63] [#_ednref63]

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[à-cannes-la-présence-discrète-mais-bien-réelle-](https://www.france24.com/fr/culture/20240522-a-cannes-la-presence-discrete-mais-bien-reelle-de-la-guerre-a-gaza)

[de-la-guerre-à-gaza](https://www.france24.com/fr/culture/20240522-a-cannes-la-presence-discrete-mais-bien-reelle-de-la-guerre-a-gaza)

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2026).

[64] [#_ednref64]

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/cannes-festival-director-laments-focus-controversies-rather-than-cinema-2024-05-13>

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[65] [#_ednref65]

<https://www.berlinale.de/en/2023/news-press-releases/234882.html>

[<https://www.berlinale.de/en/2023/news-press-releases/234882.html>],

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/backstories/2>

[<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/backstories/2>] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[66] [#_ednref66] [https://www.icc-](https://www.icc-cpi.int/defendant/netanyahu)

[cpi.int/defendant/netanyahu](https://www.icc-cpi.int/defendant/netanyahu) [<https://www.icc-cpi.int/defendant/netanyahu>] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[67] [#_ednref67] According to SIPRI Germany continued the arms supply at least until August 2025. France is accused by various independent media and NGOs of delivering parts for ammunition.

<https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-background/2025/how-top-arms-exporters-have-responded-war-gaza-2025-update>

[<https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-background/2025/how-top-arms-exporters-have-responded-war-gaza-2025-update>] (accessed on 26 January 2026).

[68] [#_ednref68]

https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2025/02/06/france-announces-a-riviera-in-gaza-would-be-laughable-if-the-situation-wasnt-so-grave_6737866_23.html

[https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2025/02/06/s-announcement-of-a-riviera-in-gaza-would-be-laughable-if-the-situation-wasn-t-so-grave_6737866_23.html] (accessed on 26 January 2026).

[69] [#_ednref69] Albanese's report:
<https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/59/23>
[<https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/59/23>] ; Database of the listed institutions:
<https://law4palestine.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Database-of-Companies-Named-in-the-UN-Special-Rapporteurs-Report-on-the-Economy-of-Occupation-and-Genocide.pdf>
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[70] [#_ednref70]
<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cde6d8wyp79o>
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[71] [#_ednref71]
<https://www.berlinale.de/en/programme/faqs-dialogue-exchange.html>
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[72] [#_ednref72] Most of the festival's funding is public:
<https://www.screendaily.com/news/berlinale-looking-for-new-partners-to-beat-funding-shortfall-in-2027-and-2028-says-festival-director/5213254.article>
[<https://www.screendaily.com/news/berlinale->

looking-for-new-partners-to-beat-funding-shortfall-in-2027-and-2028-says-festival-director/5213254.article] (accessed on 4 February 2026).

[73] [#_ednref73] Swinton expressed respect for BDS and explained that she viewed her presence at the festival as more useful than her absence.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9Mqy7BNgCU)

[v=N9Mqy7BNgCU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9Mqy7BNgCU)

[[https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9Mqy7BNgCU)

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[74] [#_ednref74] Decker & Coulter 2022.

[75] [#_ednref75]

<https://theleftberlin.com/berlinale-2025-palestine-censorship-film/>

[<https://theleftberlin.com/berlinale-2025-palestine-censorship-film/>] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[76] [#_ednref76]

<https://www.leparisien.fr/culture-loisirs/cinema/festival-de-cannes/sepideh-farsi-realisatrice-du-portrait-dune-photojournaliste-tuee-a-gaza-fatma-voulait-venir-a-cannes-15-05-2025-JTLLVOMVMFF37EMEP3ZDCADSUU.php>

[<https://www.leparisien.fr/culture-loisirs/cinema/festival-de-cannes/sepideh-farsi-realisatrice-du-portrait-dune-photojournaliste-tuee-a-gaza-fatma-voulait-venir-a-cannes-15-05-2025-JTLLVOMVMFF37EMEP3ZDCADSUU.php>] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[77] [#_ednref77] Binoche's speech:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yjs5N5EV6-0>

[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yjs5N5EV6-0>]; Festival's tribute: <https://www.festival-cannes.com/en/press/press-releases/tribute-to-fatma-hassona/> [[https://www.festival-](https://www.festival-cannes.com/en/press/press-releases/tribute-to-fatma-hassona/)

cannes.com/en/press/press-releases/tribute-to-fatma-hassona/] (accessed on 5 February 2026).

[78] [#_ednref78]

<https://deadline.com/2025/05/cannes-staff-politically-neutral-letter-1236395114/>

[<https://deadline.com/2025/05/cannes-staff-politically-neutral-letter-1236395114/>] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[79] [#_ednref79]

<https://variety.com/2025/film/global/cannes-president-iris-knobloch-female-directors-trump-tarrif-1236395862/>

[<https://variety.com/2025/film/global/cannes-president-iris-knobloch-female-directors-trump-tarrif-1236395862/>] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[80] [#_ednref80] <https://www.festival-cannes.com/presse/communiqués/cannes-2023-interview-exclusive-de-thierry-fremaux-delegue-general-du-festival-de-cannes-pour-variety/> [<https://www.festival-cannes.com/presse/communiqués/cannes-2023-interview-exclusive-de-thierry-fremaux-delegue-general-du-festival-de-cannes-pour-variety/>] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[81] [#_ednref81] <https://cdn.festival-cannes.com/media/uploads/2025/04/charte-festivalier-bilingue-mep.pdf> [<https://cdn.festival-cannes.com/media/uploads/2025/04/charte-festivalier-bilingue-mep.pdf>] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[82] [#_ednref82] Ibid.

[83] [#_ednref83]

<https://www.screendaily.com/news/gaza-protests-begin-at-venice-film-festival-red-carpet/5208250.article>

[<https://www.screendaily.com/news/gaza-protests-begin-at-venice-film-festival-red-carpet/5208250.article>] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[84] [#_ednref84]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mjdlus_Bt_U
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mjdlus_Bt_U] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[85] [#_ednref85]

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/aug/27/activist-hope-to-shift-venice-film-festivals-focus-on-to-crisis-in-gaza>
[<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/aug/27/activist-hope-to-shift-venice-film-festivals-focus-on-to-crisis-in-gaza>] (accessed on 18 January 2026; italics are mine).

[86] [#_ednref86] What is at issue is Gadot's speech at the Never is Now summit (2025) and Butler's attendance at the Friends of the Israel Defence Forces gala (2018).

<https://www.screendaily.com/news/julian-schnabel-on-gal-gadot-gerard-butler-controversy-no-reason-to-boycott-artists/5208503.article>

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<https://www.screendaily.com/news/venice-head-alberto-barbera-says-festival-wont-disinvite-guests-for-political-views/5208265.article>
[<https://www.screendaily.com/news/venice-head-alberto-barbera-says-festival-wont-disinvite-guests-for-political-views/5208265.article>] (accessed on 18 January 2026).

[87] [#_ednref87] El Akkad 2025.

[88] [#_ednref88] See e.g.

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/cannes-how-event-brings-33-701590/>

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