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Acclaimed Gaza Drama 'The Voice Of Hind Rajab' Wearies Hollywood At U.S. Distributor: Why?

By Andreas Wiseman
October 16, 2025 7:15am

The Voice of Hind Rajab
Courtesy of Cinéma Guerrilla

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A heady cultural, non-science fic... Robert Tonnesen's festival accolades, an acclaimed director, the longest ever festival contest, and a host of a list suggestive would normally all not guarantee a movie U.S. distribution. Plenty of films this year have found a home with less in their corners.

And yet, The Voice of Hind Rajab, the Tunisia-Film Festival Tunis Lion winner directed by two-time Oscar nominee Kaouther Ben Hania, remains without a U.S. home.

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A quick U.S. sale was expected by sources at sales CAA Media Finance. This is a boom time for foreign films. We understand there have been a couple of proposals but little so far that has approached the sums for a film of this stature. The fact it hasn't sold yet has left many surprised. "Has that movie really not sold yet?" one leading producer messaged.

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The Arabic-language film, Tunisia's Oscar entry, tells the story of nine-year-old Palestinian girl Hind Rajab, who was killed by Israeli forces last year. She and her family were in a car in Gaza City when it was fired on by Israeli forces. Rajab's uncle, aunt, and three cousins Rajab and another cousin initially survived the attack and contacted the Palestine Red Crescent Society by phone from their car seeking aid. But the car was then hit forced with Rajab and the paramedics who had come to help her all dead.

The incident sparked global protests, including at Columbia University, where students renamed Hamilton Hall as Hind's Hall. In her film, Tunisian filmmaker Ben Hania recreated the original recording of Rajab's final phone call to what critics described as devastating effect.

The killings took place three months into Israel's ongoing military operation in the Gaza Strip, sparked by the Hamas-led October 7, 2023 terror attacks, which left 1,200 people in Israel dead and saw 251 people taken hostage. Israel's actions according to the Hamas-run health ministry, and Gaza is to mine, The U. N. has denounced Israel's actions as genocide. There is mooted hope today of a ceasefire and return of remaining hostages.

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The Voice Of Hind Rajab isn't a starry project, but Brad Pitt, Joaquin Phoenix, Brenda Blanco, Alfonso Cuarón and Jonathan Glazer are going heavyweights to get behind the feature as executive producers. Following a round-up stream-station at the contention Sundance Film Festival premiere, the film has gone on to play at festivals around the world, including in the U.S.

International buyers have flocked to it. Italian distributor I Wonder Pictures launched the film locally two weeks ago to a fourth-place opening and Ajam.com from pan-screens, a strong debut for a foreign language film. It has now crossed $1M and took a similar box office in its second frame to Marjan Rokhan and Colin Farrell's Iranian-set drama The Midnight Journey and Nora's Sacrier breakout Papillon.

"Buyers Are Passing Out Of Fear"

So why hasn't The Voice of Hind Rajab been picked up stateside? All three of Ben Hania's previous films get U.S. distribution from established buyers. We spoke to a dozen U.S. and international distributors, financiers and producers to get their take. None wanted to speak on the record.

One leading U.S. buyer, who expressed strong interest in the film, claimed: "Buyers are passing out of fear and/or they disagree with the film's politics. I am very surprised."

This buyer cited "a full slate" as the reason they couldn't take it on.

A key arthouse outfit explained: "We have been very interested in the movie, but it just got to the point where it seemed futile for us to make a thoughtful offer based on our calculation of what the potential was, with the expectation that a sale to a major pay-one streamer was unlikely...In addition to that, the awards season is so crowded and it is so challenging to position this film properly in such a short amount of time is very difficult."

The asking price is understood to be in the mid-six figures, which isn't an insignificant amount. And it's certainly true that the vastness of streamers is a problem for many "challenging" films these days. And yet Oscar winner Sin City: Lend, about the savaged Wael Rank, made big a million in U.S. theaters alone last year, suggesting there is an audience for Palestinian stories.

Another U.S. buyer preferred: "While everyone acknowledges it is essentially an automatic ticket to the awards race, it feels almost critical to acquit it purely for that reason. And no matter one's politics, it will be a lightning rod that will overshadow anything else a given distributor will be handling this season."

A company like Mubi would normally be a good fit. But that company has been hit by the Trump Administration's cancellation of government grants and financial backer Sequoia, a film like this could internally that existing glare or not that glare turned on the film to negative effect. Sources at the company declined to comment.

One European distributor not pointed: "For a U.S. distributor, acquiring a film like The Voice of Hind Rajab isn't just about believing in the quality of the work — it also means committing resources to defend it against inevitable attacks from multiple sides. That requires not only money for marketing and publicity, but also a team that's ready to handle controversy in a very polarized environment. Many distributors simply don't have the bandwidth or the appetite for that kind of battle."

Whose Context Is It Anyway

While there aren't many Palestinian films to see that theory against, the recent returns are mixed. No Other Land won down the self-distribution route after the filmmakers supposedly didn't get a deal they liked (despite nominations in three were offers). Cannes sing movie Once Upon a Time in Gaza hasn't found a home. Jim Sarbh's Sundance hit Sirat is sitting in dock their media cart. Waterstone's Palestinian-set Oscar-winner The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Universal's Palestinian-set Oscar-winner Chronicles of Narnia: Lion of Darkness and Thomas Daley-backed Sundance hit Marty Supreme. Only Cut Tech Inferno has a north rating on Rotten Tomatoes1, while Kino Lorber acquired Cannes documentary Put Your Soul on Your Hand and Walk about photojournalist Fatma Hassona's life in Gaza. Hassona was tragically killed by an Israeli airstrike in April 2025, shortly before the film was selected for Cannes. The Israeli company is understood to be high on the film's chances of cutting through.

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One U.S. distributor contended that Hind Rajab's subject matter would be off-putting to a mass Hollywood audience: "I think in general it speaks to distributors by saying that despite the some inside the bubble of Hollywood, moviegoers don't want to be prescribed to on a topic that can really engross themselves in, if they choose to, via a variety of media from their home or on their device of choice."

They added about potential industry reservations over the film: "Hollywood is an industry in part built by Jews fleeing the Holocaust, so there being resistance to the film should not come as a surprise. The film doesn't contextualize the events depicted as part of a response to a murdering, raping, kidnapping spree of religious-motivated terrorist violence generated by the democratically elected government of a neighbor state. Hollywood is a business, and it has been usually ruined by the Hollywood industry outside of a few relatively anti-Zionist and anti-Israel actors."

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October 7 was also brought up by a Hollywood producer we spoke to: "You cannot tell a story right now of anything post October 7 without contextualizing October 7. You can't dig it in minimum 3, because it's not a small part of the context."

In response to this, a source close to the movie countered: "I think there is ideology in the suggestion that film does that addressed October 7. The heinous, unspeakable, and unjustifiable acts of Hamas on October 7 are not in the film. The region has seen a very long cycle of violence and oppression. There is a broader political conversation about what qualifies as context, but how many films about events in war land with title cards detailing the history or context of the Iraq War? Did American Sniper?"

We hear there's still a chance the film finds a buyer but at the moment there's a strange likelihood it goes down a different route even after winning a Film Lion.

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Meanwhile, the question of whether a U.S. streamer or studio would commissione The Voice of Hind Rajab today is a pertinent one. In recent years, filmmakers have expressed growing concerns about studios and streamers shying away from "challenging" material.

Twenty years ago, the political and industry landscapes were different, not without their own challenges, but different. Palestinian director Hany Abu-Assad's acclaimed and mastered psychological drama Paradise Now, about two friends who are recruited to carry out a suicide bombing in Israel, won the Foreign division Warner Independent in 2005. While there was criticism from some corners about the film's subject, Warners stood by the film, which took $5.5 million financially in U.S. and went on to win a Golden Globe and be Oscar nominated. Eight years later, the same director's similarly acclaimed film Omar, about a young Palestinian man who is forced into an informer role after being caught implicated in an Israeli soldier's death, found a home with New York-based Adopt Film whose campaign propelled it to an Oscar nomination.

America's Shift To The Right

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For a film such as Paradise Now to find a distributor today feels an outlandish notion.

Former Lionsgate film chief Patrick Wachsberger, speaking on a recent Deadline-moderated film distribution panel at the Zurich Summit, told the audience that he doubted whether in this political climate even a movie of Paradise Now and Pro Columbia could get a theatrical release.

America's shift to the right under Donald Trump is not the deep reason to Hollywood's reluctance to acquire and release The Voice of Hind Rajab. The reality where a neutral conclusion can be cooked off as following criticism from conservatives and Trump-allies. How many studio bosses have publicly lamented Trump's creation of DEI? Doing side deals with the President is now seen as a necessary evil in order to focus on "the things that matter." There's a reluctance to wade into the Israel-Hamas war, with the Israeli government and lobbying operations favorable to the President and his cohorts across agenda.

One studio boss we spoke with privately in recent weeks admitted to being "terrified" to do or say anything that might incur Trump's wrath.

This is the backdrop to a movie like Hind Rajab not getting a deal: a backdrop of increasing fear of political reprisal (see The Apprentice's journey), social media "cancel culture" and a lack of "courage" in Hollywood. It hasn't been helpful, but many co-opts will believe it's a contributing factor.

The comparison of Jimmy Kimmel, the Indictment of James Comey and the out of image in Portland and other U.S. cities is indicative of a culture in which there is growing pressure to boycott dissent against the current American administration," one festival executive lamented. "Placing a film where a director has said 'And as people leave the name of Anas Frank, they should know Hind Rajab,' is a bridge too far for that company. Tech bros are doing their best to accommodate the President; it is any wonder that tech distributors may be similarly minded given their financial survival is under even greater threat?"

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Ari Brostman on October 16, 2025 10:00 am
Wild what's it's based on real audios and powers him. Why deny film! How heartless can we be?

Anonymous on October 16, 2025 10:00 am
Oh my God, everyone relax. It hasn't sold yet because of asking price.

Anonymous on October 16, 2025 10:17 am
yes hersoo.

Anonymous on October 16, 2025 10:07 am
"The Idea of Land" has not received distribution.
"The Voice of Hind Rajab" has not received distribution.
"Sir Upon Secret" did not receive distribution.
It's hard to ignore the pattern — films that critically examine Israel or portray certain powerful groups unfavorably often struggle to find distribution.

Anonymous on October 16, 2025 10:08 am
Why Americans are like this Lazar? They should just upload it to YouTube so people can see it. It's not going to make more money at this point anyway.

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