The fifth season of the Israeli series “Fauda” is currently streaming on Netflix. It follows the members of an Israeli Army commando unit working with the intelligence agency Shin Bet . Nothing contributes more to understanding the Jewish state and its people in the West and the Arab world than this series—and the current season in particular. By comparison, the uproar over the anti-Israel documentary “NAZA” is much ado about nothing.

From Sacha Wigdorovits

The Israeli documentary “NAZA” illustrates that today’s generation of filmmakers has also mastered the art of manipulation. Based on 24 anonymous interviews with (alleged?) soldiers and officers of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), the film shows how the Israeli army accepted civilian casualties in its fight against the terrorist organization Hamas during the Gaza War.

The fact that these casualties resulted from Hamas operating in the densely populated area of Gaza and deliberately using the local population as human shields was of secondary importance to the filmmakers. The same was true for the audience at the Venice Film Festival, where “NAZA”—made by two Israeli activists and funded by the left-leaning British newspaper *The Guardian*—received the longest standing ovation in the festival’s history.

However, this only proves that the largely left-wing European cultural scene frenetically applauds anything directed against the “colonial state” of Israel and against the “Zionists” (= Jews). For despite the subsequent widespread media coverage, there are so far no signs that “NAZA” will make much of a splash outside the screening room in Venice. It seems more as if, to quote William Shakespeare, much ado is being made about nothing.

“Fauda” is in the top ten in 11 Muslim countries

The situation is quite different for Season 5 of the Israeli series “Fauda,” which has been streaming on Netflix—the world’s leading streaming platform with over 300 million subscribers—since September 8. One week after its premiere, this series—which centers on an Israeli counterterrorism unit—is ranked in the top ten in 43 countries. These include many countries in the Muslim world, such as Lebanon (No. 1), Jordan and Bahrain (No. 2), the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (No. 2–3), Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait (No. 3), Egypt (No. 3–4), Morocco (No. 5), Saudi Arabia (No. 8–9), and Turkey (No. 10).

In Europe, “Fauda” is currently performing best in Greece, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Cyprus (No. 2), followed by Poland and Croatia (No. 3), France (No. 4), as well as Switzerland, Germany, and Italy (Nos. 5–6).

It’s no secret that the series “Fauda,” broadcast in Hebrew and Arabic by the Israeli television network “Yes,” has achieved a wide audience even in Muslim countries. In the past, even Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has congratulated the series’ creators—journalist Avi Issacharoff and his co-writer Lior Raz (who himself formerly served in the IDF’s “Duvdevan” special forces unit)—on “Fauda.”

The Trauma of October 7 at the Center

Nevertheless, it is remarkable that Season 5 actually breaks the previous records in the Muslim world. This is because it focuses on the massacre carried out by the terrorist organization Hamas on October 7, in which more than 1,200 people—from toddlers to elderly women—were murdered in southern Israel. This massacre is depicted in episodes 7 and 8 of the season, with an explicit note that viewers can skip these episodes without losing track of the main plot.

This main storyline revolves around the period two years later, when Israel has begun hunting down the perpetrators and is starting to eliminate them. Unlike in previous seasons of “Fauda,” the focus is not on Gaza or the West Bank, but on France. This is because many of the October 7 perpetrators have gone into hiding within France’s large Muslim community to plan another major attack on the Jewish state—an attack that the Israeli domestic intelligence service, Shin Bet, ultimately manages to prevent for the most part.

The most important thing about Season 5 of “Fauda,” however, is not this (partial) success. What matters most is that the collective trauma that has gripped Israel since October 7, 2023, is given a human face in “Fauda.” This is particularly true of the main character, “Eli,” whose wife and two children were murdered by Hamas terrorists on October 7.

Even in “Doron,” the impulsive and contradictory “hero” of “Fauda,” the deep emotional scars left by October 7 are evident: He witnesses more than 400 participants—mostly teenagers—at the Nova Festival being set on fire, raped, and shot in cold blood by Hamas, and has since suffered from post-traumatic, intermittent memory loss.

Instead of the Islamist narrative, now the Israeli narrative

Of course, it may be that certain viewers in Arab countries and in Muslim communities in Europe will cheer the atrocities committed by Hamas on October 7—which are depicted—albeit with restraint—in episodes 7 and 8. But many others will likely be deeply moved by what they see in “Fauda.” Because for the first time, they are seeing and hearing the narrative of that massacre from the Israeli perspective and through the eyes of those directly affected by it.

This is also important for non-Muslim civil society in the Western world. For in the years since the massacre in Israel, media coverage here has mostly focused on the suffering of the people in Gaza. The fact that this war was triggered by the largest pogrom in postwar history—perpetrated by Palestinian terrorists—has, however, been forgotten in many places. Or, as in the case of “NAZA,” it is deliberately ignored for political reasons.

Season 5 of “Fauda” now serves as a powerful reminder of this, showcasing the suffering that this brutal act of terrorism caused in Israel—and continues to cause to this day. This is evident not only to the audience in a single movie theater in Venice, but also to the millions of Netflix subscribers around the world.

With “Fauda,” Netflix thus fosters greater empathy for the Israeli population, which remains traumatized by the events of October 7 to this day, and does more to promote understanding of the Jewish state than any other medium has been able to do in the past nearly three years.

Sacha Wigdorovits is President of the Fokus Israel und Nahost association, which runs the website fokusisrael.ch. He studied history, German and social psychology at the University of Zurich and has worked as a US correspondent for the SonntagsZeitung, was editor-in-chief of BLICK and co-founder of the commuter newspaper 20minuten.