

# Orthodox Jew Reflects on 'Ridiculous' New Netflix Series

People have been talking about a new “hit” Netflix series, *The Girl From Oslo*, with enough positive reviews that we decided to watch it. Having seen it, I’m not sure why anyone is saying anything other than it’s ridiculous.

Here’s the story on one foot: Pia, a young Norwegian tourist, has been kidnapped by ISIS in Sinai, along with an Israeli brother-sister with whom she is traveling. ISIS threatens to murder them and tries to negotiate their release for ISIS prisoners, conveniently, in Israel and Norway. Pia’s mother, Alex, immediately flies to Israel, as any concerned mother would do, to try to free her daughter, using her no-less-convenient connections in both Israel and Gaza that she made during her undetermined role in negotiating the Oslo Accords. We learn that an Israeli security minister and Orthodox Jew, Arik, is Pia’s biological father and that Pia has come to Israel to find him. In desperation, Alex employs backstabbing negotiating tactics, playing the Israeli security minister (and father of her child) off the leader of Hamas and vice versa, completely disregarding the implications of the collateral damage on the lives of the people with whom she’s interfacing or the consequences in their respective communities. Ultimately, Pia goes free.

It’s one thing to dramatize stories, whether based on reality or not, and another to make up an overreaching and immature storyline, along with completely implausible plots and characters. Did I already say it was ridiculous? True, in recent years, Israel has produced some outstanding dramatic shows, from *Shtisel* to *Fauda* and *Tehran*. Signifying what’s a real hit, the Israeli production company that makes *Fauda* was

just sold for millions, and the show's fourth season is set to release soon. I really hope *Tehran* will come back soon for a second season, which was interrupted by the pandemic.

Putting high hopes on the wave of genuine Israeli hits, *The Girl From Oslo* is a hybrid Israeli-Norwegian production that just doesn't work. It's worse than another never-thought-of hybrid: encrusting a good piece of Norwegian salmon in falafel mix and deep-frying it, though I suspect that now some will try that.

There are so many things wrong with this series. To me, the most telling of how detached from reality the series is was a scene in an underground Hamas prison cell. To make the facility look authentically run down, even besieged, one of the walls' peeling plaster reveals a brick foundation behind it. Anyone trying to produce a series that depicts authenticity in Israel should know that it's rare to use brick. Most construction involves poured concrete. Hamas certainly does not import red brick for its underground bunkers and terror tunnels. Exposing red brick walls exposes the writers' and directors' complete detachment from reality. And it just gets worse.

Generally, the dialogue is silly and the acting mediocre. Rather than having meaningful dialogue, too often one character simply interjects a stilted verbal cue to prompt the made-up point the writers are trying to reach. It's really too bad the local high school drama class was not available. The writing and acting would have been dramatically better than that of this so-called hit.

It's entertaining that in a few instances, some of the characters seem to be magically transported between Jerusalem and Gaza, and Oslo and Jerusalem, in real time as if they were next door. This gives new meaning to a previous TV hit's mode of transport, "Beam me up, Scotty." Captain Kirk and Spock would be proud.

The key pillar of the plot is that Pia ostensibly comes to Israel to find her biological father. Even Spock would see the illogic that in the search for her father, Pia would take a detour to Sinai with an Israeli brother and sister where they are kidnapped by ISIS. Naturally.

Adding to the ridiculousness, there's simply nothing real about how the respective spouses of the two lead characters, Arik (Orthodox Israeli Jew) and Alex (Norwegian mother), react after suddenly learning of their spouses' affair and Oslo love child.

I'm not a terrorist and I don't play one on TV, but the fantasy continues in how the wheelchair-bound Hamas leader Bashir responds to two of its members straying to support ISIS and then coming back to loyalty in Hamas. Typically, Hamas traitors end up lynched or with a bullet in the head. But Bashir is in a forgiving mood. Praise Allah.

It's also ludicrous that Leila, the wife of a presumably martyred Hamas member, was ever part of the Palestinian Arabs' negotiating team in Oslo. Hamas was not only not part of that process but rejects it, and the Palestinian Arab leaders of the time would not have selected a Hamas leader's wife to be in Oslo. But as long as the writers take us down that path, it makes complete sense for Leila (who notes that she's lost her faith) to become Hamas leader Bashir's representative in face-to-face negotiations with Israeli security minister, Arik. If you buy all that, I have a terror tunnel I'd like to sell you.

One cannot help but wonder if the real plot of the series was to be some sort of redemption from the failed Oslo peace process.

I read criticism of the worst part of this series being "the lazy reliance on stereotypes. The ISIS and Hamas figures are flat, sinister and aggressive villains." Duh. Actually, that's the only part where there's any semblance of reality. Anyone

who thinks that a whitewashing of ISIS and Hamas as anything other than the extremist Islamic terror groups that they are is as detached from reality as the decorator of the Hamas prison cell.

What's really ridiculous is the knee-jerk projection of Gaza being under daily and indiscriminate bombing from Israel, whether as a standard policy or negotiating tactic. Almost every scene in Gaza depicts this is not just absurd but detached from reality and offensive.

Spoiler alert, *The Girl From Oslo* is not worth the time to watch, unless you like watching multi-car accidents. But with the cliffhanger ending the first (and hopefully last) season, depicting the head of Hamas calling Arik on his personal phone, this series should be buried like the dead Israeli captive in an unmarked desert grave. {eoa}

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